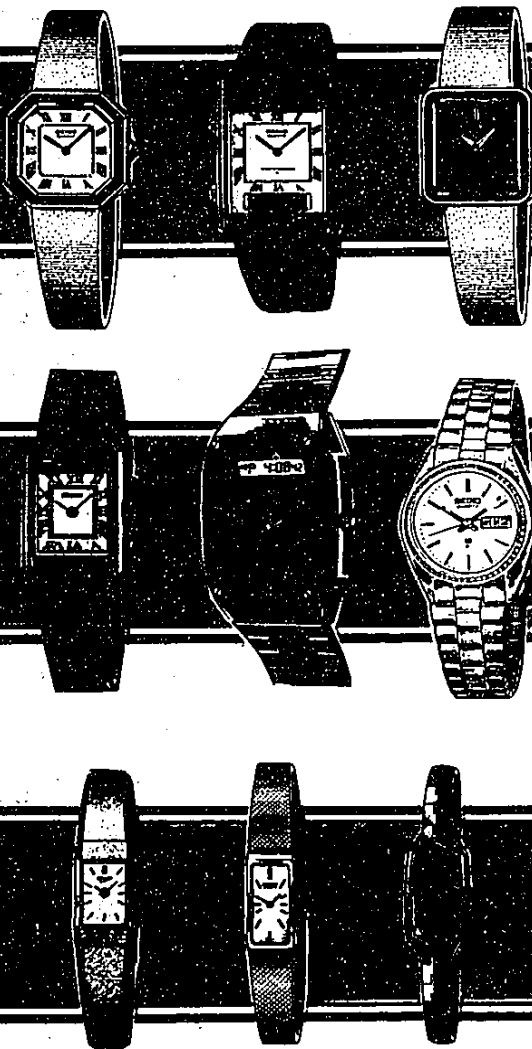



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Dear J.L. Hudson:

Where will Santa stay?

by CRAIG PIECHURA

There are undoubtedly 100 good reasons why J.L. Hudson's needs to close its downtown Detroit store. The building is old and hard to heat. Customers are few. Supporting stores like Crowley's are gone from the area. People probably prefer shopping horizontally to vertically.

But I just want J.L. Jr. to know that if and when they do close the doors of the big red store on Woodward, they'll be slamming the lid on a lot of history.

This season, most of all, is the time to appreciate the grand old department store. As a kid, and still today, I always thought of Hudson's as the place where the "real" Santa Claus stayed.

The way it was explained to me, Santa's helpers went to Sears and Federal's. Numero Uno spent Thanksgiving to Christmas Eve inside the Enchanted Forest at downtown Hudson's. I believed it because I saw the bearded gent get off his sled at the store in the Thanksgiving Day parade every year.

That's quite a public relations coup. It makes the store a public institution right up there with the annual parade, the fireworks display and the mothballed giant flag.

My grandmother used to sell millinery on the 11th floor at Hudson's before she retired. Visiting her there was always a

treat but I still think millinery is a funny name for lady's hats.

FEW PLACES, save Tiger Stadium, evoke such fond, lasting memories. The place is a sensory extravaganza.

The assault on the senses starts at the front door. Like all department stores ought to, Hudson's has revolving doors. Revolving doors scare every mother to death but delight kids who never fail to go around for an extra revolution.

After that dizzy entrance, you got a blast up the nostrils from the perfume counters near the door. It was every young boy's duty to say something like "P.U. Mom, let's go up and see the toys."

The elevator ride never failed to tickle my torso, often causing me to giggle and utter something vaguely obscene. The lady in the elevator rattled off what items could be found on what floors and then expertly pulled the brakes at the last minute.

"Please watch your step," she'd say in a friendly monotone.

PLANS FOR a downtown mall on the Kern block still are up in the air, dependent on federal grants and local matching funds.

If the mall is built, I hope it succeeds in bringing people downtown to shop. But I know it won't have touches like bronze drinking fountains.

Call me a nostalgic irrational.



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