

A Detroit Christmas Story.

A few tears ago an envelope arrived. In anticipation, I opened it rather quickly and the contents fell to the floor. As I reached down, I wondered what it was. I picked it up, removed the paperclip and.....whoa



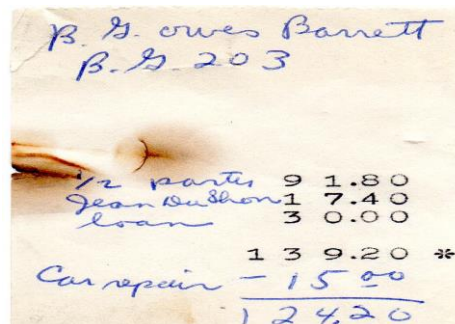
CHRISTMAS IN DETROIT 1960

Christmas in Detroit,
cold, snowing.....
Close your eyes.....
.....
.....Picture the scene



Last year, 1959 was probably one of the coldest on record with snow falls of 7 inches and temperatures of -10 degrees Celsius, but in Fahrenheit it didn't seem so cold at +14, hey, and at least it was a plus. But worse was to come. The snow was falling and it was difficult to get to the studios because Rosa Parks Boulevard was closed off again by the snow plough clearing West Grand. A few of the guys, including the yet to be discovered Supremes, lived in or around the Brewster projects or Highland Parks and found it difficult to get to West Grand during winter. The freeways got all the attention.

Berry had already paid out for a bump last week.....



They needed another hit record..... Every one counted. "We can't live off "Shop Around for long" Berry said as he welcomed the crew that made it. "Coffees all round" If I can fill the kettle thought Raynoma. It was another freezing Christmas in Detroit.

Later that day, much later...December 16th 1960.....

..... 2648 West Grand Boulevard, attic apartment sparsely furnished and the fire glowing in the dim light of the living room- cum- package and distribution area.

“Christmas is close Ray, if we don’t sit and do this tonight we’ll never have time to do it before the Christmas rush”. Said Berry “I gotta get the Contours into the studio and try and get something down on tape.”

Berry had found them through Jackie Wilson, whose cousin Joe Stubbs, was a band member. He felt the group had something and signed them to Motown earlier this year. Later in ‘61 he would cut “whole lotta woman” in 3 different styles for 3 different markets, only to fall into obscurity until picked up on the English R n B scene in the 1990’s.

Ray passed Berry back the pen, a blue pen, a one of those newish fandangle devices invented by an Argentinean guy called Biro. You could write for days without topping up the ink..... And when it ran out you got another. How good is this?

Ray screwed her face up and wiped her hands down the sides of her dress, the end was chewed, a cigarette substitute and a good one at that,

“Ray come on.....a man gotta do.....” Said Berry, smoking the pencil

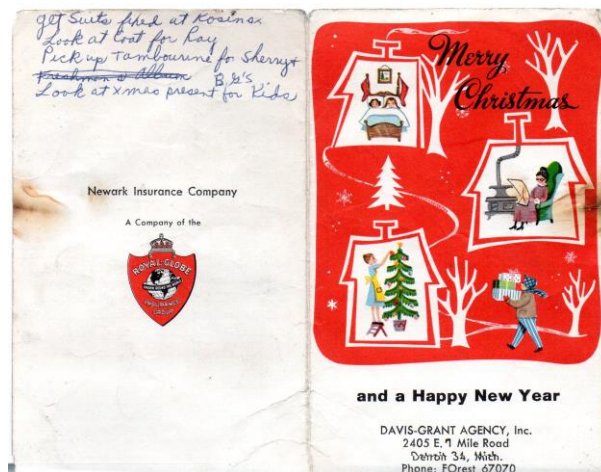
Things would be different this year I can feel it.....He thought “Just one more breakthrough like “shop around” and we are on our way”. A lot of production time had gone into this record and it had paid off. Late nights, re recording after re recording and then that final recall at 3.00 in the morning. Poor Bill, Berry couldn’t say how sorry he was, he wasn’t. It had hit written all over it, but he just couldn’t get it right. Then when he did it became their first number one. Bill had worked so hard and Berry loved him for it. These embryonic days of a friendship that would continue through the decades.



`61 would see the release of over 80 singles and introduce people like the Temptations, Jimmy Ruffin and Eddie Holland to the waiting world.

Now it was time to reward some of the team who had contributed. Who had worked hard? We all had. How do you split the reward?

Ray put the note pad on the table and looking through her handbag produced a lovely looking Christmas card, neatly decorated, and handed it to Berry. She closed the handbag and dropped it to the floor beside Berry with a sort of, “humph, maybe he’ll get me an Enid Collins or a smart Lucite for Christmas, id worked damned hard too”, she thought.



“Check this out, raggedy”. Said Ray.

“Mr Davis at the Davis - Grant insurance agency over on East Mile End Road gave me this, a Christmas list card, neat huh.”

And, now ready, they began....

“Who did the biggest sales is our first call I think and that would be the miracles” said Ray, remembering the charm of Claudette Rogers, Bobby’s cousin, as she sauntered up the front path and into the studios that summer.

“Top of the list” said Berry ‘let’s list the artists first then the gift.....”

“Oh yeh..... Like that will go down well with the people who really laid it out for us...I think mom and pops would be a good start”

“Ray.....your right, mom and pops”, a nice new suit was on the list at \$500 for pops He deserved a nice new suit. A new suit always made pops look so regal.

And a nice watch with diamonds
on for mom.....

Federal Collateral Society, Inc.
1117 WASHINGTON BOULEVARD
DETROIT 26, MICHIGAN
HOURS: 9 A. M. TO 5 P. M.
SATURDAYS 9 TO 1
SALES DEPARTMENT

WG 1-4361
SCHUBERT C. JOHNSON
IN CHARGE OF SALES

Date *Dec 24* 19 *60*
Sold to *Metown Record Corp*
2648 W. 41 St

LICENSED and BONDED TO STATE and CITY. WE LOAN ON DIAMONDS, WATCHES AND JEWELRY FROM \$5.00 TO \$10,000.00. SELL NEW AND UNREDEEMED LOANS. 35 YEARS OF EXPERT KNOWLEDGE IN DIAMOND AND JEWELRY GIVES YOU HONEST VALUE AND SAVES YOU 30% OR MORE.

STOCK NO.	AMOUNT OF SALE
<i>142969</i>	<i>239. Bupra</i>
	<i>Proc. Watch. 14K</i>
	<i>Mts. 6 Dia</i>
	<i>Spec 49 50</i>
	<i>Wgt 4 95</i>
	<i>State 1 49</i>
	<i>55.94</i>

one year warranty
except for accident

“Both sides raggedy bum, remember momma ironing the outfit’s and doing the washing”

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STOCK NO.	AMOUNT OF SALE
<i>143257</i>	<i>179. Union Ring</i>
	<i>Watch. 14K Mts. 6 Dia</i>
	<i>Spec 49 50</i>
	<i>Wgt 4 95</i>
	<i>State 1 49</i>
	<i>55.94</i>

one year warranty
except for accident

“Then

Loucy

Esther

Gwen,

so as not to do the wrong thing, both
got a nice watch like mom.

And for the lovely Anna.....

DEPT.	SALES NO.	DATE	HOW SOLD	AMT. REC'D	GIFT SALE INFO.
480	<i>23</i>	<i>12/24</i>	<i>1kg</i>		WRAP <input type="checkbox"/> BOX <input type="checkbox"/> CARD <input type="checkbox"/>
1 lounge set					25 00
1 gift box					05
tax					45
					<u>25 80</u>
PLEASE PRESENT THIS RECORD OF SALE IN CASE OF ERROR OR EXCHANGE					
43439-34					
NEGLIGEE THE J. L. HUDSON COMPANY					

A lounge robe.....

Jouyce,

Fuller,

Mickey,

next, but what.....”

said Berry

My family will be easy.....

Momma.... ... a nice
statuette was in order...and
great value at \$23

DECORATIVE CERAMICS				CUSTOMER'S VOUCHER		
SOLD TO		DATE		HOW SOLD	AMT. REC'D	AM'T OF SALE
MR. BERRY GORDY JR		12/22/46		CHG		23.23
DEPT. SALES NO. 652						
THE J. L. HUDSON COMPANY				99780-25		
DETROIT 26, MICH.						

Daddy..... A pair of binoculars was just the thing.
Kathy
Rosily,
Alice,
“said Ray

THE J. L. HUDSON COMPANY				DETROIT 26, MICHIGAN			
SOLD TO		DATE		HOW SOLD	AMT. REC'D	GIFT SALE INFO.	
MR. BERRY GORDY JR		12/22/46		CHG			
2648 W GRAND BLVD							
CITY 8							
SALES NO. 412							
STREET NUMBER							
CITY							
STATE							
APARTMENT NO.							
51597-36							
SALES NO. 412							
DATE							
HOW SOLD							
AMT. REC'D							
GIFT SALE INFO.							
WEEK							
BOX							
CARD							
51597-36							
WOMEN'S MILLINERY							
SALES NO. 412							
DATE							
HOW SOLD							
AMT. REC'D							
GIFT SALE INFO.							
WEEK							
BOX							
CARD							
51597-36							
THE J. L. HUDSON COMPANY							
DETROIT 26, MICH.							

..... For Tommy it was a hat, no
problem.
He loved his hats and great value
at \$9.35

“Family first and THEN the team”

There was such a large contingent. From the early days Wade (Johnson) had disappeared after the first recording but guys like Bill (Smokey Robinson) and Marv (Johnson) had stuck in and were getting noticed around town, nice guys within. They were stars in the making.

“We were all stars in the making”.

A nice set of luggage will do just fine for Marv.....

THE J. L. HUDSON COMPANY DETROIT 26, MICHIGAN

SOLD TO
M

MR BERRY GORDY JR
2648 W GRAND BLVD
CITY 8

APARTMENT NO.

STREET NUMBER

CITY

STATE

DEPT. SALES NO. DATE HOW SOLD DRIVER COLLECT C.O.D.

560

SEND TO
M

STREET NUMBER

CITY

STATE

APARTMENT NO.

93962-9

DEPT. SALES NO. DATE HOW SOLD

560

PLEASE PRESENT THIS RECORD OF SALE IN CASE OF ERROR OR EXCHANGE

93962-9

THE J. L. HUDSON COMPANY

The snow continued to fall as the night drew in and the list grew.

“Rags, if you are wanting the Andantes to do backup I sure ain’t got time to go shop for this”.....

‘Sure honey,’ said Berry “we’ll find someone. Hey what about the receptionist, Janie (Bradford, later helping to write MONEY)”.....let’s just get the list done. We gotta get something done in the studio, this bad weather is killing us.” Indeed the latter part of 1960 would see a very small output from MOTOWN but would really start picking up steam by March and April with over 80 releases flowing through the year.

The list of names continued to grow and the Card was filling up.
“Hey we ain’t got the kids yet and it’s full”
“Well..... turn it over and just scribble on the back” was the reply,
“And don’t forget me...” said Ray.... “And..... Berry it’s the 16th of December, time is tight so we should keep it local, we should be able to get most of it on account at Hudsons”.



“Sounds a plan ray, but that means you or me needs to get it done to sign the account”.

(Almost all of the account receipts were signed by Ray). What about the Miracles, the guys have been looking at a van to help them move around the state”

“Well think about two things Berry. One. would Shop Around have been a hit without them and Two if you think not then what can we do to keep them”.....

‘.....mmmmmm good, I like your thinking. Leave that one to me”.

Berry often thought a fleet of vans would be a good idea, but not just yet. One more million seller. A car was on the list but I suppose we will never really know if Santa delivered.

Change to Mrs. Berry

CUSTOMER'S COPY

LA SALLE Distributing Company
2021 LIVERNOIS AVE.
DETROIT 21, MICHIGAN

Diamond 1-4700

BC 08709
To Assure Proper Credit
This Invoice Number Must
Appear on All Remittances

Date: *12/23/60* 19__

SOLD TO: *MOTOWN RECORD CORP*
2648 W. GRAND BLVD
DET

Ship Via: *pu*

Customer's Purchase Order: *HW*

Cash In Advance: *HW*

Terms: NET SALESMAN: *HW*

QUAN. ORDERED	CATALOGUE NO.	DESCRIPTION	UNIT PRICE	AMOUNT
1	62002	Ronson		10 37
1	H309	HEATER		20 07
1	13214	A.P. GILBERT		13 32
1	311	Cardinal		3 21
				47 11
				1 41
				48 52

Mrs. Berry Gordy Jr.

Some other gifts included a Ronson lighter for Marvin Gay, a heater for Juanita and a Telescope for Bruce and Brian.

THE J. L. HUDSON COMPANY DETROIT 26, MICHIGAN

SOLD TO: **M** 1307-646 75

STREET NUMBER: **MR BERRY GORDY JR** APARTMENT NO. _____
2648 W GRAND BLVD
CITY: **CITY 8**

DEPT. SALES NO. **657** DATE *12/23/60* HOW SOLD *cash* DRIVER COLLECT C.O.D. ☒

STREET NUMBER: *II* APARTMENT NO. _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____

69800-23

DEPT. SALES NO. **657** DATE *12/23/60* HOW SOLD *cash* GIFT SALE INFO. WRAP BOX CARD

1 casserole 5 35
1 bar set 6 50
1 table 6 70

PLEASE PRESENT THIS RECORD OF SALE
IN CASE OF ERROR OR EXCHANGE

69800-23 *Mrs. Berry Gordy Jr.*
TABLE GLASSWARE THE J. L. HUDSON COMPANY

Within the family Gordy, Bobby and Theresa, a fantastic cook, were blessed with a casserole dish, Fuller a bar set, the list was filling up.....

There had been many in the early days, all wanted to be singers and so far only a young Mary Wells had shone brightly in the studio and Janie Bradford and Bill had, at this stage had success as writers and encouraging a young Brian Holland was not easy as the rewards were few and far between.

The offer of a credited b side sometimes worked. The number of writers grew but the rewards were for those who had made those early major contributions hence no Eddie Holland or Earl Vandyke or “Popcorn” Wylie. We must remember this is 1960 and it would be almost forty years before the Funk brothers got the credit they deserved although some like Earl, and “Popcorn” did achieve some recognition for there early work and become successful in there own right.

Money went from the customer to the till, to the production room and success seemed far away. Writing and producing your own material was a key to success that Berry had learned the hard way losing royalties and credits to a few of some of the biggest tunes of the day. Indeed writing ‘REET PETITE’ had yielded little and the success of this and the subsequent “YOU GOT WHAT IT TAKES’ had been a lessons learned



“OK SO....mom” says ray.....”hang on, do we have a budget”

“Let’s see what we need first then we can get the accountant to look at the money”

“Ok. Mom.....”

Into the night the list grew. New members needed a reward and a new drummer with a good voice, Marvin Gay, had shown promiseand a bit more ...to Loucy, Berry's sister. He had played drums with the Moonglows who had recorded Ray's favourite tune "sincerely" and so was on a winning line and a great voice to boot.....



They discussed the list.....for Berry
.....and added to the list for watches.....

Mary wells

Barney Ales

And the gifts, appropriate at the time, were listed in pen and in pencil so they were easy to change as if to cater for an afterthought. It seems strange to consider what would have occurred in those days but it would appear that, although we hear reports contrary, Berry and Ray did consider rewards to the team to a degree and one can only assume proportionate at the time.

Marvin a 10 dollar Ronson lighter and a 55 dollar watch for Mary Wells.

George and Rosemary a transistor radio. Bobby and George's kids were crossed off the list, maybe it was just getting a little out of hand especially when right at the bottom of Berry's side the Miracles "CAR" is listed, something like this would have done the job well



The car was written in pen too so mmmmmm a Caddillac, an Impala or an Edsel appear to be the cars of the day, but no receipt.....

Roslyn, a smoker, would be getting the lovely ashtray she always reached for when she came to the flat and Alice, who was always hard to buy for would get cash, "easy I know" thought Ray, "but saves a row anyhow. Juanita was always going to be hard" thought Ray, but she knew it was terribly cold in her basement flat so a nice heater would cover all the bases and a snip too at \$20.

Barrett Strong and Asa would get sweaters each, nice and warm in this winter chill she thought. A sure sign of a good gift if they wore them this winter. The kids were easier this year with growing up and school the choice would be educational, books n pens, some nice clothes, a telescope for the stargazers Bruce and Brian and a record player for all to use, but I'll give it to cliff and Kenny and we can leave them in the den.

With the list completed they went to bed. Ray turned and spooned the cold Berry, snuggling in for a few hours before the band started clumping about the basement. We was gonna be busy.

As morning broke Ray wandered off to find Janie, dishes can be done later. Instructions were given and the pair decided it would be better for both to do the shopping. "Who ever heard of a li'l ole receptionist spennin` hundreds a dollars on the likes of others" she confessed to Ray and off they headed to Detroit 26.

The Detroit chill bit hard as they crossed Woodward Ave. it was getting late and the car headlights defined another shape as it to crossed Woodward, the future mega star Diane Ross, then a petite schoolgirl with an amazing future yet to be spawned. She had just started working as a bus boy. Diane was probably the first coloured busboy at Hudsons during those days. Her time would have been spent sewing clothes, doing perms and working in the basement restaurant after school.

Later much of her spare time was spent hanging out with friends Florence and Mary at West Grand, and then as the Primettes, getting the occasional work singing back up and having minor personal success on lupine and UA backing Don Revell on "Stagger Lee". Their first release "I want a guy" would flop but time would prove Berry right when he later signed them to the label. Could Diane have served Raynoma..... A coffee maybe but these two worlds would collide and the rest would become a matter of history.

Not being able to carryout her original plan of the one stop shop Raynoma and Janie headed across to the HOUSE OF NINE for couple of skirts and a sweater handing over the \$44.23 for the three items. Time was running short as they headed for the Federal Collateral Society on Washington Boulevard for some jewellery but would have to return at

a later date as its doors were closing, “5.00 Madame, sorry” said the doorman in reply to Raynomas question, “ an 9.00 till 1.00 on satd`y too”. She would return on Christmas Eve to buy the three 14k gold watches paying both government and state taxes of \$7 on top of \$49.50 for each.

A trip to LA Salle distributing company over on Livernois Ave on 23rd December, most likely by Janie, as there is a handwritten note to advise the buyer to give “the change to Mrs Ray” she was to buy the Ronson lighter for Marvin for \$10.37, the heater at \$20.07 for Juanita and an A.C. Gilbert telescope, \$13.32 for Bruce and Brian. A.C. Gilbert were an American toy company who manufactured telescopes and the Erector set, similar to Meccano giving a frequent pleasure to the children as they grew.

Christmas, it seems, was a family and friends occasion and the Gordy house was always full of people who, at times would gather round the piano and sing along till the early hours.

This was the beginning of something rather special. Writers like Holland Dozier Holland, groups like the Four Tops and the Temptations came and went but they all had such an influence there and certainly played a big part in a company that would become the SOUND OF AMERICA and change the lives of many, influencing many and making careers of the future superstars. Connections with Playboy magazine and various other organisations were built to help it grow into a worldwide publisher of great music seeing releases in Iran, India, Greece, Argentina, Sweden and Chile.

Many would try but fail in copying this success but the music lives on.

I hope you have enjoyed this fictitious trip into Christmas 1960.

The story is purely hypothetical but based on various letters, weather research, till receipts and hand written Christmas cards and lists I have in my possession and some scanned here for you to see. Some information from both Raynomas book “Berry Motown and Me” and Berry’s book “To be loved” has been used to enhance the story which is nucleated around the Christmas list and receipts.