

Story evolution of “The Red Ryder Rifle”

Shep used all the mediums available to him to test and develop a story. He would tell it on his weekday show, and perhaps a limelight show in front of an audience. Then he would put it into a written form as a short story and ultimately many would end up in some form as part of a movie. The most famous of these stories is the Red Ryder BB gun for Christmas story.

December 26, 1964 – WOR Show

Shep tells of being a kid and wanting a Daisy Model 200 for Christmas. The Red Ryder model was for sissies.

His mother kept telling him – “You’ll shoot someone’s eye out”

Shep and Randy get up on Christmas morning while their parents slept. He takes the Daisy outside while Randy plays with his gifts under the tree.

The first shot ricochets, knocks his glasses off, pulverizing the lens.

Shep goes back inside, puts his glasses on the floor and Randy accidentally steps on them. “Randy! You broke my glasses!”

Red Ryder Nails the Hammond Kid – Short story in Playboy and used in the book “In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash” as “Duel in the Snow - Red Ryder Nails the Cleveland Street Kid”

In this version his teacher’s name is Miss Bodkin. Shep is now telling the story of Randy.

He leaves ‘hints’ all around the house – “Open Road for Boys” magazines with the page opened to the Red Ryder ad.

“You’ll shoot someone’s eye out” has evolved to “You’ll shoot your eye out”

The school ‘theme’ about what I want for Christmas is introduced and he receives a ‘B’

They open their gifts on Christmas Eve after midnight. Ralph gets up early before his parents and Ralphie.

The first shot knocks his glasses of into a snow bank and pulverizes the lens.

He conjures up the story of how an icicle falls, hits the barrel of the rifle and makes the gunstock bounce up hitting him in the cheek, knocking off and breaking his glasses.

“A Christmas Story” – The movie

The hints are now left in the form of a “Boy’s Life” magazine, opened to the Red Ryder ad, stuffed into his mother’s favorite magazine.

Ralphie’s teacher is now Miss Shield’s and he receives a ‘C+’ on the theme.

Everyone gets up on Christmas morning and sit around the tree opening gifts. Once the mysterious package in the corner behind the table is opened and identified as the Red Ryder, Ralphie goes outside to try it out.

The first shot ricochets hitting him in the cheek, knocking his glasses off to the ground. While trying to find them, he steps on and breaks them. He then conjures up the story about the icicle falling and hitting him.

There were other less significant changes made to the story such as the grumpy man standing in line and telling Randy - "Hey Kid, the line starts back there". This was probably added to give Shep and Leigh a presence in the movie. Also, the goofy kid standing in line was probably added to annoy an already impatient Ralphie.

This is a typical example of how Shep would tell a story once and then through the years, he would continually improve upon it never seeming to be satisfied and calling it 'finished'.

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