

This article appeared in Music Merchandise Review, some years back.

A Cautionary Christmas Tale

My father believed if it was in print, it must be true, and his journal readings included the *National Enquirer*. Thus sets the stage for my tale of woe.

When I was 12, I was playing trumpet in the middle-school band. One fall day my dad announced that he read that playing trumpet makes your teeth crooked. I am not making this up. He demanded I quit. I didn't want to, but then he bribed me by promising to get me a guitar in exchange. As I wasn't going to be any Dizzy or Miles anyway, I signed onto the deal.

That Christmas, I tore to shreds the wrapping of a rectangular box, revealing a small no-name acoustic guitar. Giddy, I worked at playing it. I sounded terrible. I was incapable of producing any sound that didn't vaguely remind one of a Siamese cat caught in a rusty pre-World War II meat grinder. Clearly, I didn't have what it takes to play guitar.

Flash forward six years later. I pick up guitar again—this time a 1968 Gibson semi-hollow body my brother-in-law gave me—and played. Then I realized that it wasn't *me*. It was the *guitar* I had gotten that fateful Christmas. It was a \$40 thing he picked up God knows where. I went on to play guitar in several bands and today own half a dozen of them.

I remembered that experience looking at all the really cheap guitars at the summer NAMM show. I know there is pressure to offer your customers guitars at lower and lower price points—I know that Sam's Club and other non-music outlets are now competing for those customers. But I say if you put a guitar on your floor for Christmas that you can't tune, that can't stay in tune and be strummed by untrained, uncalloused little fingers, you're doing your customers, your store, and the entire industry a disservice.

See, they won't be able to figure out that it's not *them* who can't play—it's the cheap guitar thrown together in some sweatshop overseas that is the problem. Yes, your challenge will be to convince Dad and/or Mom that while they can get a guitar that "looks the same" at MegaBox Store down the street for \$20, it's not an instrument worthy of their precious Ally or Antonio.

Or of your store's good name.