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# \$1.49 DAY AT WOODWARD'S

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**CKNW radio station** creative director Tony Antonias wrote a catchy jingle in 1958, and even though Woodward's department store closed its doors in 1993, it's still familiar to most British Columbians who are over the age of thirty-five.

A long-time New Westminster resident, and fellow Aussie, Tony started as a copywriter at the station in 1955. He stayed there for the next forty years—to the day. Tony died in January 2019, but he talked to me about the jingle, and his career at CKNW, in 2018—on the jingle's sixtieth anniversary. He told me that the tune came about almost by accident, after he hit the key on a new typewriter and it made a loud ding—\$1.49 Day. When he hit the key again, it made another ding—yup, \$1.49 Day. Tuesday.

Tony wrote the jingle on February 17, 1958, recorded it over the Easter weekend and then Woodward's took six weeks to decide to use it. "Everybody wants to know how the \$1.49 jingle came to be," he told me. "I've scripted it and I've got it on CDs and they love hearing it."

Charles Woodward opened his store at the corner of West Hastings and Abbott Streets in 1903, turning Hastings Street into a main shopping and business centre. The store was a retailing force until its bankruptcy ninety years later. Charles's son Percival Archibald Woodward ran the Woodward's department stores for many years. Known as Mr P.A. to his employees, and Puggy to his friends, he created Woodward's famous food floor—and with it, turned the entire concept of retailing on its head. Forestry magnate and philanthropist H.R. MacMillan once called him

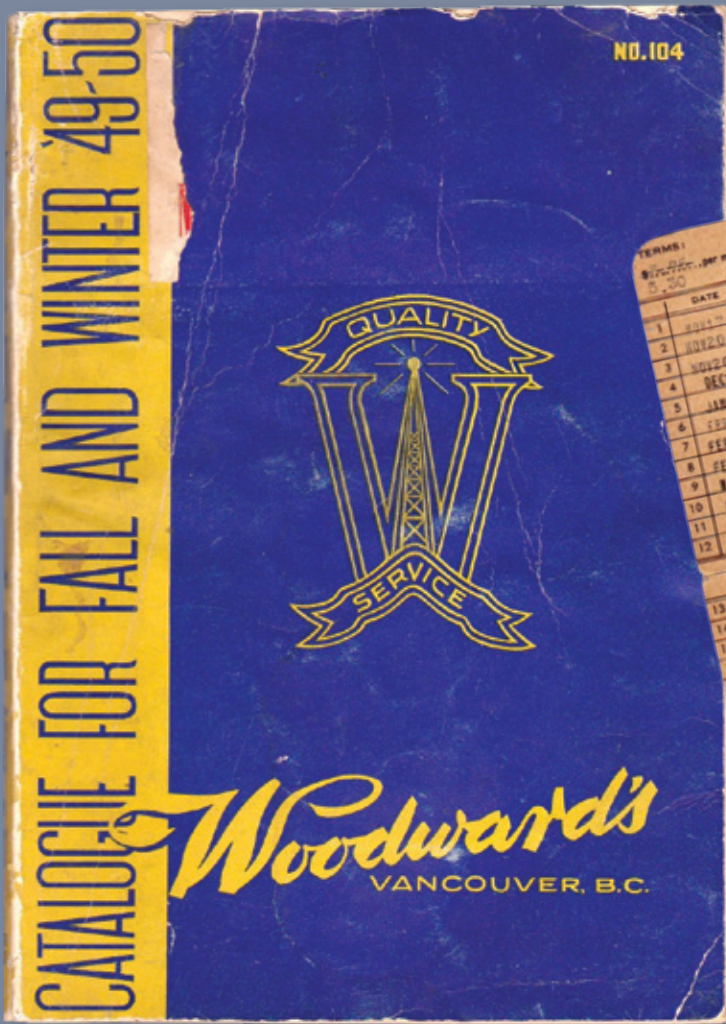
the best businessman raised on the Pacific Coast, yet he never finished high school.

It was Puggy's idea in 1927 to build a seventy-five-foot- (twenty-three-metre-) high beacon to act as a giant billboard for the store. The tower held a searchlight that threw out a two-million-candlepower beam that revolved six times a minute and could be seen from Vancouver Island. When the Second World War hit, Puggy was told to turn off the beacon because it was such a big target, and in the late

1950s, the big *W* took its place. Puggy predicted that malls were the wave of the future and was himself a driving force behind the Park Royal Shopping Centre, which, in 1950, was the first shopping mall in Canada. He was also a philanthropist with an interest in medical research and left his vast estate to the Mr. and Mrs. P.A. Woodward's Foundation when he died in 1968—ten years after Tony created the iconic Woodward's jingle.



Christmas shoppers for \$1.49 Day at Woodward's department store in Vancouver Province, Doug Todd photo



Woodward's ephemera  
Tom Carter collection

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# THE MISSING ELEVATOR OPERATORS OF VANCOUVER

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**Angus McIntyre started** as a bus driver for BC Hydro in 1969 and remembers \$1.49 Day at Woodward's store well: "Loads were heavier, and we had to make sure to have extra tokens and change ready," he says. "On \$1.49 Day, the store was just a solid mass of shoppers."

Angus also spent quite a bit of time inside the store when he wasn't on shift and got to know the elevator operators. One of them occasionally rode his bus home. "The manual elevators were in the centre of the store, and the senior operator was the starter. The starter stood at an information booth on the main concourse near the lifts, and she had a set of castanets. When she saw that a car was full, she would signal the operator with a 'clack-clack,' the gate would slide across and the doors would close. The sound could be heard above the busiest crowds on

\$1.49 Day. This was a physical job, since Woodward's elevators had to be levelled at each floor manually, and the interior gate and exterior doors opened by hand as well. Since there were windows in the doors, you could see all the people inside as the car ascended."

Jeanne Nielsen's aunt Vi was an elevator operator at the downtown Eaton's store in the late 1950s and early '60s. "She wore a uniform that had a nice pleated kilt, and I thought she looked very glamorous," says Jeanne.

The Marine Building had eight of the sharpest-looking elevator operators in town. A 1952 classified ad in the *Vancouver Sun* asked for an "elevator operator for permanent position with no Sunday, holiday or evening work. Must be single, neat, well-mannered and between the ages of 18 and 25. Excellent wages. Apply Marine

Building.”<sup>2</sup> Three years later, a reporter interviewed an unnamed manager about their “beautiful” operators. “We don’t go in for that Hollywood stuff, such as sending the operators to the hairdresser once a week on company expense—a thing that is done by some American companies,” a presumably male manager said. “All we ask is that the operators be of neat appearance and of good family and that they stick to the job. We’re not looking for girls who regard their job here merely as a stepping stone toward modelling or acting glamour.”<sup>3</sup>

Nancy Kern worked as an elevator operator at the Hudson’s Bay department store during the summer of 1968. “It was a glamorous job back then,” she says. “We had very cool white dresses with stripes and wore white gloves. They paid for us to have our hair done at the Bay beauty salon every week. I even had [US actor and singer] Ed Ames as one of my passengers that summer. I often tell my kids and grandkids that it was probably the most unique job I ever had.”

In the early 1970s, there were at least forty buildings in the city that still had operators, including Vancouver City Hall, the Hotel Vancouver, the Sun Tower and all the department stores. “Most large American cities had already automated their lifts, but Vancouver didn’t start in earnest until later,” Angus tells me.



“The operator of the elevator in the Hotel Vancouver would, at times, take off quickly, on the long ride to the roof. The feeling in the pit of your stomach was a bit like taking off in the jets of the day,” says blog commenter Terry Friesen.

Judy Truelove was a Hotel Vancouver elevator operator in the summer of 1972. “Our uniforms were an ugly olive green, and we wore white gloves,” she says. “One of the guys had long hair, so he had to wear a wig. It was a repressive atmosphere, as we were discouraged from interacting with guests or each other. Memorable guests were [tennis star] Arthur Ashe, [BC politician] ‘Flying’ Phil Gaglardi and delegates to a convention for [the religious group called] the Eckankar.”

Angus McIntyre at Kootenay Loop with the Brill trolley bus he drove on city tours on the 125th anniversary of Vancouver’s transit system

Courtesy Angus McIntyre, 2015

**RIGHT** Elevator operator at the Bay on Granville Street, 1970s

*Angus McIntyre photo*

**BELOW** A Woodward's elevator operator, early 1970s

*Angus McIntyre photo*



Angus says that the old BC Electric Railway terminal on Carrall Street had elevators that ran on 600 volts direct current, sourced from the trolley bus system. “About a dozen downtown buildings were wired into the trolley system, so if there were a trolley power failure, people would be stuck in the elevators,” he says. “The last building to use such power was the Sylvia Hotel. It converted in the 1980s.”

The last building to use elevator operators in Vancouver was the Medical Arts Building on Granville Street in 1993. Customers of the Royal Bank on Hastings Street can still ride in a hand-operated elevator to their safety deposit boxes.

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# THE WOODWARD'S CHRISTMAS WINDOWS

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**If you ask locals** what they remember about Woodward's department store, they'll probably tell you about \$1.49 Day and their annual trip to see the store's famous Christmas window displays.

When David Rowland heard that Woodward's was closing in 1993, he phoned up the manager and put in an offer for the store's historic Christmas displays. They agreed on a price, and David became the proud owner of six semi-trailer loads of teddy bears, elves, geese, children, a horse and cart and various storefronts.

In the late 1960s, fourteen-year-old David rode the bus into Vancouver from Cloverdale carrying three samples of puppets and marionettes that he had made. He walked up and down what was then Robsonstrasse trying to interest toy-store owners in buying his merchandise. "They said, 'they are nice little toys, and you

are a nice little boy, but come back when you have sold them somewhere else,'" says David. "I was about to give up and I thought, 'Well there's always the Bay.'"

David found the manager of the Bay's Toyland and put his marionettes through their paces. "A lot of people gathered and shoppers started picking up the boxes looking for prices," he says. The manager ordered fifty and had David come in and demonstrate them every Saturday. Later, he invented a coin-operated puppet theatre where you could put in a quarter and lights would turn on and music would play as puppets danced across the stage. He sold three dozen of them to shopping centres around BC. As requests came in to build Santa's castles and other seasonal structures, David's business took off.

Woodward's started getting serious about their Christmas window displays in the 1960s and sent buyers off to New York to bring back different figures. David was hired in the 1970s to create mechanical figures for Toyland and display work for their windows.

When David unpacked his newly acquired Christmas displays in the 1990s, he found at least a dozen different scenes. He looked around for a venue big enough to display them and found himself at Canada Place in downtown Vancouver. Rowland wanted to rent the pieces out, but Canada Place offered to buy them outright. "That wasn't my initial plan, but at the time I had a banker from hell and I needed some capital and so I sold a lot of it to them," he says. David couldn't bear to part with all of them, though, and every other year he sets up a few scenes in buildings around Vancouver.



**ABOVE** David Rowland with some of the Woodward's figures that he built, 1980s

*Courtesy David Rowland*



**LEFT** Every year, since 2013, Christ Church Cathedral has displayed the former Woodward's nativity scene  
*Eve Lazarus photo, 2018*