

Saturday, November 17, 2007

**Brian O'Connor**

## Don't let spending sink your holiday



This is the month in the Great Lakes when you can't escape "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald," with Gordon Lightfoot's Top 10 dirge being widely played for the anniversary of the boat's 1975 sinking on Lake Superior.

The crack Money & Life musical research team, headed by D.C. "Al" Coda, has discovered an alternate version of the song, which commemorates a more common November disaster: holiday shopping.

### **A tale of shopping woe**

It's titled "The Dreck of Edna Fitzgerald," and it goes a little something like this:

*The legend lives on from J.L. Hudson's on down of the season they call "Give-It-To-Me."*

*Your budget, it is said, always goes in the red when the stores of November turn cheery.*

*With a load of credit cards that went on and on for yards Mrs. Edna Fitzgerald did hurry.*

*Her card from J. Crew was a bone to be chewed when the "Sales of November" came early.*

The mournful ode recounts Edna's rocky Yuletide passage, as she ignores well-worn shopping advice, such as these tips from Novadebt, a national credit counseling agency:

- Decide your spending limit in advance and stick to it: Make your gift list early, set a specific amount for each gift and remain in your budget.
- Do your homework. Scope through ads and online specials and compare deals.
- Purchase gifts with cash or debit cards. If you do use credit, make concrete plans to pay off gift purchases by February, before tax time hits.
- Avoid last-minute shopping. Taking time to shop for items can eliminate desperate and often expensive choices.
- Once your list is done, stop shopping. With holiday cheer still in stores, this is often easier said than done.

Alas, the song recounts how Edna soon foundered on the rocky shoals of overspending:

*In a brightly lit mall near Detroit she came to buy slippers and useless apparel.*

*The registers chimed till they rang 29 times for each card held by Edna Fitzgerald.*

*The bills took her grin 'cause no money was comin' in and her good credit score was imperiled.*

*And because it was late she paid penalty rates for the dreck of Edna Fitzgerald.*

### **A moving melody**

As we all know, Canada's favorite folkie threw out his holiday theme in favor of one of the Great Lakes' most famous and deadly shipwrecks.

But though it hardly seems to fit among all the other Christmastime ditties, Lightfoot's song still outranks seasonal favorites such as Handel's "Messiah" and even those dogs barking "Jingle Bells."

Because, as every holiday host knows, there's nothing that clears out those last lingering guests like the first mournful notes of "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald."

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