

Christmas and New Year's Is Over! Hooray!

Shôn Ellerton, January 1, 2023

With December being, in essence, a complete month of holiday chaos, it's nice to go back to normality.



I breathe a sigh of relief the Christmas and New Year's holidays are over. Christmas is basically chaos for me and it's a time of year that I can do without. For kids, however, it is something to look forward to, and there's great pleasure to be had seeing them enjoy all the niceties Christmas has to offer. Helping me put up my trusty fake Christmas Tree I've had for years along with all its ornaments. Giving and receiving presents. Seeing the Christmas lights. Making Christmas cookies and other 'naughty' treats. Chasing Santa in his chariot down our road, courtesy of The Lions Club. Opening the next Advent Calendar door revealing what the next chocolate treat will be. And so on.

I often raise the question to other adults if they like Christmas or not. I'd say that, like me, around half of them don't like it, if not, more. Most do it for the children. As for exchanging gifts, it is quite a chore and requires a degree of planning. Making a list of who to give to. Where to shop and knowing what to give. For me, the easiest solutions are gift cards and gift baskets. Gift baskets containing wine, chocolate, cheese, or other goodies are great in my opinion. You get a variety of stuff to nibble and drink which you wouldn't otherwise contemplate on buying yourself. But, like birthdays, it's an accumulation of clutter and stuff that we either don't need, don't want, or just gets given to someone else. The classic example of Christmas presents you really want to get rid of include items which serve little or no practical purpose. For example, a very odd-shaped cheeseboard with a little statuette of Santa Claus and his reindeers in the middle of it. You can't store it anywhere in the house nor would you want to use it 364 days of the

year. It's important to keep the box intact as it's the sort of gift which gets exchanged to someone else each year. The worst offenders are, and trust me, we've had them, are perishables which have a long-gone expiry date. Money would be more useful, but that's silly as well, because we're just exchanging money with each other. Honestly, Christmas would be better without the whole rigmorole of feeling obliged to exchange gifts.

Of course, Christmas is about eating and drinking together. Not just with family, but with friends, colleagues at work, and neighbours. We dispensed with the turkey this year for a change knowing that we'll get plenty of it elsewhere. We opted for Chinese-style food including char siu slow-cooked pork ribs and my all-time favourite. Dumplings. Eating and drinking together is a great way to meet up with new people that you would not ordinarily introduce yourself to. It can get all too overwhelming and, by the second week prior to Christmas, some of us make the occasional excuse to spend a well-earned bit of 'chill time' at home.

Then there are all the Christmas events which happen in one's local neighbourhood or city. Christmas Lights pageants, Christmas carol singing at the park, and leading out of Christmas into the New Year, all the fireworks celebrations and other major festive gatherings. They all draw large crowds of people, and for those, including me, who do not like large crowds of people, do their best to get out of them. This also extends to shopping during the holidays which is, at best, a sort of purgatory of lost and confused souls bumping and shuffling around like deranged dodgem cars. Then there are the queues of people lining up to get a seat in a restaurant or simply getting an ice cream. Crowds waiting to get into a store to take advantage of some clothing sale only to find out that the only items left will either fit a midget or a hippopotamus. Those that do fit will carry some obscure message or sport some sort of bizarre embellishment or frilly feature which no one in a fit state of mind should wear in public. For me, contentment is being alone, with family or friends being on a beach, or hiking in the mountains, or just chilling out with a glass of wine at home. I don't need the zoo-like chaos.

And finally, the end of the holidays. New Year's. Some people take New Year's very seriously indeed. I've heard stories of what unearthly pranks the Scots get up to during this time of unbounded drunkenness and joviality. Like finding naked people tied up to street poles in the freezing cold. For me, New Years, essentially means nothing at all, except that I need to remember to change the year when I sign something. I'm one of these types who view time as being

continual and, in a cosmic sort of way, intrinsically tied up with space. Because the Earth completes an orbit around the Sun, it doesn't hold any massive interest to me in terms of celebrating it. Last year, which was yesterday, I was doing some painting around the house. The next year, which is today, I am still doing some painting around the house. Typical of Australia, it feels like any warm summer day as yesterday as well. The only thing which differed was having to listen to all the drunken and idiotic laughs and unbridled yelling along the street leading up to midnight shortly followed by a zombie-like procession of comatose and utterly wasted individuals heading off back home. I remember last year, listening to the wretched sound of violent vomiting near to the window where I was sleeping. Thankfully, it's once a year!

But there we have it. Christmas and New Year's holidays are over. I can now think of dismantling my Christmas Tree and stowing it away in its oblong cardboard box until the first of December. I have no New Year's resolution, nor need one. Most get broken after the first month anyway. Order is resumed. Chaos is restrained. Schedules go back to normal. No disruptions. Life is back to normal. At least, for now.