

the painted box

by Wendy Thompson



This week, I would like to extend best wishes for 1970 to the readers of this column, particularly to those who have taken the time to phone, write, or speak to me in town, and to those who have thought of doing so. I hope the coming year will be a good one, and that all your troubles be small ones.

Can you pass this Christmas quiz?

You decorate your home with holly and sneak kisses under the mistletoe - toast your friends with a Christmas martini - take for granted that Christmas was always celebrated on December 25 - and even if you're past believing in Santa Claus, expect to see him drawn and painted as a jolly, bearded old elf. But did you ever stop to think of why you do these things?

1. How about your Christmas decorations? Know why we kiss under the mistletoe who was first to use holly in December - what holly symbolizes to Christians - from which country the poinsettia came - how the cherry tree figures in Yule lore?

Kissing under the mistletoe is said to have begun with the ancient Romans, who viewed the plant as a symbol of peace. Enemies, meeting under the mistletoe, were supposed to embrace and declare a truce. The Romans were also first to use holly at their December Saturnalia festival. But Christians also find holly appropriate because they see in it the symbolism of Christ's blood (the red berries) and His crown of thorns. The poinsettia, another holiday bloom, comes from Mexico. Joel Poinsett, first American Minister to Mexico, brought it here in 1836. The cherry tree, according to the well-known "Cherry Tree Carol", bent its boughs so that the Virgin Mary could pluck its fruit.

2. Which settlers brought Santa Claus to the New World, and which three men created today's popular image of Santa Claus? Can you name his real-life prototype?

The Dutch brought San Nicolaas (Sinter Klaas for short) to the New World; later his name became Americanized to Santa Claus. Author Washington Irving first described Santa as riding through the skies in a reindeer-drawn sleigh. Clement C. Moore described Santa as fat and jolly, with a snowy beard, in his famous poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas." Cartoonist Thomas Nast drew him that way. Santa's prototype, the real St. Nicholas, was a 4th century Turkish bishop who became a legend in his own lifetime for his generosity and his love of children.

3. How did the Christmas Toast and Wassail Bowl begin? Both were started in the same gesture by the daughter of an early Germanic chieftain on a campaign in Britain. Offering a garlanded bowl of wine to her father's princely host, she said "Wassheil," or "Here's to you." The prince responded gallantly and they were soon married.

But it wasn't until the 17th century that people called a toast a toast. The term derived from a quaint English custom of floating a piece of toast in the drink to improve its flavor. A few years later may have seen the first martini toast with the creation of Lamplighter Gin at Bromley-by-Bow. And today, after more than two centuries many holiday toasts are still proclaimed with dry Lamplighter Gin from England.

4. Christmas dates are the subject of this one: Who fixed the date of Christmas as December 25? In what century was Christmas first declared a legal holiday? Which Americans made it a crime to celebrate Christmas? When is Epiphany, and how does it fit into the Christmas calendar?

Pope Julius fixed Christmas as December 25, about the year 349 A.D. Two years later, after agreement on this date had been reached among church officials (some had favored fixing the Savior's birthday in January or March), Julius decreed that Christmas should thenceforth be celebrated on December 25. In the 6th century A.D. - the year 543, to be exact - Christmas was made a legal holiday in Rome. But 100 years before that, the Roman government had required all theatres to close on Christmas Day. The Puritans, in 1659, passed a Massachusetts law making it a penal offense to celebrate Christmas! As for Epiphany, it occurs on January 6, and marks three events in the life of Jesus: His baptism, the visit of the Wise Men to Bethlehem, and the miracle at Cana.

The party's over for some at least

You've been planning that Christmas or New Year's party for weeks and finally the big night has come. Everyone is having a wonderful time and they don't want to leave... but that is where the problem comes.

How do you get your now unwelcome guests to go home at 4 a.m. so you can clean up and get to bed?

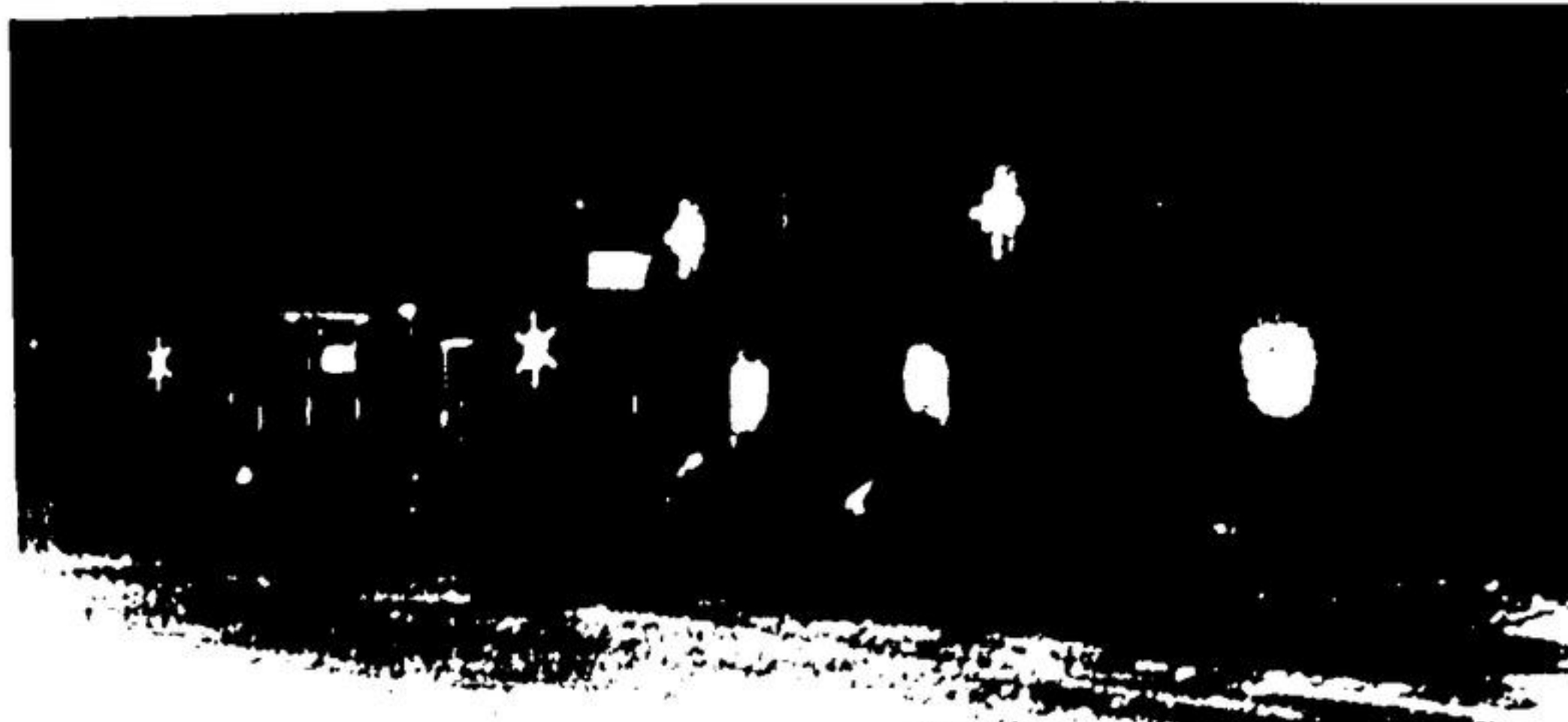
Various methods have been suggested, ranging from letting them stay until the host drops off to sleep, to politely but firmly telling them it's time to go.

Other people say the best method is to cut off their supply of Christmas cheer and let them take the hint. Another idea is to start emptying the ash trays and sweeping the floor.

One enterprising couple says they excuse themselves for a few minutes, coming back in their pajamas ready for bed. Their guests usually take the hint and depart. They say winding the clock and setting the alarm also helps dissuade the hangers-on.

A statement such as "Oh well, I can sleep in late tomorrow morning" also helps. The host can serve coffee to sober up the imbibing guests and this move usually dampens their party spirit.

All these suggestions may be a help, but if you really want to keep your friends, why not go to bed and let them finish their party until whatever hour they wish while you happily sleep and dream of sugar plums and the next day's headache?



HYDRO AT ITS burning best...decorating the Hydro Electric Commission building on Alice St. for the holiday season. (Staff Photo)

Christmas tradition

Dry tree key to safety

The evergreen Christmas tree is a firmly established Canadian tradition. The incomparable natural beauty and aroma of an evergreen is the central theme for Christmas decorations in many Canadian homes.

Although a natural Christmas tree can constitute a serious fire hazard in the home if not installed properly, with just a little extra care it can be kept perfectly safe and green.

Tests show that the difference between a safe and unsafe Christmas tree lies in the tree's moisture content, something which can be controlled quite easily.

Three simple steps should be followed for the safe enjoyment of a natural evergreen Christmas tree:

1. Do not purchase a tree that has dried out. Test the twigs and needles for flexibility. Trees that are too dry have brittle branches and shed their needles easily.

2. If you are not taking the tree into your home immediately, store it out of doors, preferably in a shady location.

3. When the tree is to be put up in your home, re-cut the base diagonally, one inch or more above the original cut. Then stand the tree in a container which is large enough that the diagonal cut on the base can be completely immersed in water. Make sure that the water remains at this level as long as the tree is in your home. For some trees this may mean adding a pint or more of water per day.

Tests have shown that a tree cared for in this manner will have a moisture content at least as high and in many cases higher than when it was originally cut down. Thus, your tree will stay fresh, green and safe throughout the entire Christmas holiday season.

present a serious fire hazard from which your tree, as well as many other household furnishings, will not be immune.

To complete your Christmas tree safety program, don't use decorations on your tree which will burn easily. Also, use only electric lighting equipment which bears the Canadian Standards Association label of approval, and make sure all wires and sockets are in proper working order.

Spraying a Christmas tree with fire-retardant chemicals is no substitute for the recommended method of recutting the base and standing the tree in water. It has also been found that placing sugar or chemical additives to the water, rather than prolonging the life of the tree, will actually reduce the tree's moisture content, shortening the length of time which it may be used in the home.



There are two important limitations on this method of Christmas tree care. A tree which is too dry when purchased will continue to dry out, even though it is placed in water. If a Christmas tree shows signs of drying out after it has been erected if the needles and twigs become more brittle it should be replaced immediately. Also highly combustible materials around the base of the tree, such as gifts wrapped in tissue paper,

Merry Christmas

Time for us to speed very warm wishes for the Yuletide Holiday to you. May your day be bright with joy and merriment shared with your loved ones. We hope you have a wonderful Christmas!

ALLAN'S COLLISION SERVICE
CREWSON'S CORNERS 853-2840

Bright HOLIDAY WISHES

Here's wishing you a holiday season aglow with all the good things that help to make our lives brighter.

GRANTS MOTORS

PEACE

May all the peace, happiness and blessings of this holy season be bestowed upon you and yours. A very Merry Christmas to one and all.

ACTON HOME FURNISHINGS

A Christmas Prayer

May the beautiful meaning of Christmas... living through the ages to inspire men everywhere... continue to live in your own heart and mind. And may your Christmas be filled with joy.

Discount Shoe Store
28 Main St. N. - GEORGETOWN

CHRISTMAS

It's time for holly and mistletoe... for fun with friends and family! Happy Holidays all!

KARL GATHOF
A B C FATHER AND SON Radio & TV Service R.R. 2, ACTON

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merry christmas

We wish you, one and all a joyous, fun-filled holiday season.

Canadian Tire Corporation
ASSOCIATE STORE
ART GORDON, Prop. ACTON, ONT.

COIN OPERATED CAR WASH

SALT IS GREAT FOR THE HIGHWAY BUT NOT FOR YOUR CAR!

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SOFSRA CAR WASH
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QUEEN STREET & CHURCHILL ROAD
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**ONE FULLY AUTOMATIC UNIT
TWO HAND WASH UNITS
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Yuletide Greetings

With deep appreciation of your loyalty and good will, we're wishing you all the pleasures of a fine old-fashioned Yule. Be merry!

Sports Corner

Merry Christmas

Bright and happy wishes are coming your way.

May your hearts be happy and your Christmas merry.

ACTON DRIVING SCHOOL