

Shirley Whittington



If you plant a Christmas bulb, will you grow a Christmas tree? Of course not, but what do we really know about the custom of decorating our homes with strings of Christmas lights?

Is it true for instance, that Christmas lights were invented to serve as landing lights for smogbound Santas? (That notion just sleighs me!)

Some authorities believe that Christmas lights are what you should drink and smoke and eat from now on if you wish to enter January without terminal bloat and serious breathing problems.

Others insist that Christmas lights were invented to commemorate that part of the Christmas turkey which does not usually make it to the festive table. (This is a gut issue. Few people really like liver and lights—especially those of a turkey.)

Here's an interesting theory, advanced by the Squire. He says the custom of stringing the eaves with Christmas lights was inaugurated by the world's Head

Housekeeper as a way of ensuring that all the dead flies are annually removed from the verandah light fixtures of North America. This works at our place. We plug in the lights and harvest enough crisp little corpses out of that light globe to stuff a baseball—a fly ball of course.

Certainly the custom of decorating our houses with Christmas lights brings families together if only for a good nag and wrangle. We had, in this part of the world, an uncanny spell of balmy warmth early in December. This freakish weather nudged me into full strident cry. "Now is the time to get those lights up," I hollered. "Now—before it is so cold your fingers shatter. Get out there, my lads, and string the danged things up."

And did they? Their wills were noble, but boys will be boys and excuses flew thicker than rain drops. I gotta wash my hair. Wayne's coming over. I gotta do my homework. It's too dark out to do them now. They tried them all.

The lighter side of Christmas

What does a frustrated Organizer do? Put the lights up herself? Not this Christmas elf. I knew as soon as the mild spell passed, and the weather got icy cold and rotten, the Funny Bros, would spring into action. And they did.

But first, they tried to where me down. "Where's the ladder? Where are the extra fuses? Where are the spare bulbs?" And so on.

The lights finally went up, and a flick of a switch set the six and-a-half little bulbs gleaming weakly through the December fog. (There's something wrong with a couple of the sockets.) Now we are all sitting back waiting for the Chamber of Commerce and Community Beautification Committee award for Trying Hard and Appearing Ridiculous.

Still, the exercise of putting up the lights brought us all together, in a fractious sort of way. And tonight, someone else's outdoor light display will bring us all together for another happy time.

In a gentle country valley not far from

where we live, John and Joyce MacRae and Joyce's brother Murray create a true Christmas wonderland every year. They thread three thousand coloured bulbs through the trees that surround a small pond on their country property. When the lights go on, and are reflected in the darkly shimmering waters of the pond it's a sight to take your breath away. Going out to see MacRae's Christmas lights has become a family tradition for many families in our community, and the MacRaes do it for just one reason—to make Christmas happy and bright for others.

The MacRaes, and all the other unselfish folk who cheer the friendless, visit the lonely, minister to the elderly and ill, pack hampers for and deliver love gifts—these are the world's Christmas lights. Each selfless act lights a candle in this cold and dark world. Merry Christmas to all of you out there.

I hope you have time to give, as well as receive some Christmas light.

Bill Smiley



That was quite a pang of alarm that lurched through the country recently when Finance Minister Lalonde had the temerity to suggest that one of our great Canadian institutions, the baby bonus, was not untouchable, that he might siphon it off from those who don't need it.

Finance ministers in the Liberal government like to rattle our chain once in a while. Maybe it's just for the pleasure of hearing the great, grumbling roar that ensues. Much like a small boy teasing a big bear securely attached to a stout post, or in a cage. He can always jump back, pretending he was brave, but actually scared out of his wits at his own temerity.

Lalonde might just as well have sounded an air-raid siren; then, when the whole nation, Liberals and all, turned on him, pretended he was only kidding. Just a substitute warden who had pressed the wrong button.

MacEachin did it a year ago, in little grunts and squeaks that hinted income tax might not, possibly, at some time in the future, if the event arose, after due consideration, and with malice toward none, be indexed to inflation. That would have given the government millions and millions of funny money to play its own brand of monopoly.

He was howled at, his ancestry invoked, his

personal life scarified, and his political neck put on the block before cooler heads intervened and said he should merely be boiled in oil (cod liver, as befits his origins). "Me for the Bahamas." (where there is no income tax), was the cry.

But trial balloons have a habit of becoming lead balloons, securely fastened around your neck and mine, so keep an eye on those serpents. I don't know how you can do both, but I always liked mixed metaphors. Many a serpent has sent up a trial balloon. How about the cobra, which puffs up his neck, and then hits you when you're admiring his lack of jowls?

Anyway, a howl of rage went up from everyone, including his Liberal members, when Lalonde dared to hint that the Baby Bonus was not sacrosanct. He withdrew his heavy hand like a scorched infant.

Doesn't he know that the entire Liberal party owes its life to the Baby Bonus? Old Mac King, the most unpopular leader this long-suffering country ever suffered, saved his neck, and his party, by introducing it.

Never mind that Ann Murray, Pierre Trudeau, E.P. Taylor and Conrad Black, among other millionaires, have collected it. The Baby Bonus is one of the great bulwarks of Canadian life, and any politician who trifles

The fight has just begun

with it is risking his own political life.

Ever since its inception (conception?) the Baby Bonus has been more important in this country than a national flag, a national anthem, or a new constitution. And you don't have to be bilingual to get it.

For years, the average Canadian family has used it for something sensible, like a case of beer or a carton of fags.

Some weirdos, who didn't need the cash, actually invested it for their children's education. At five per cent. Might as well have bought some beer or donated it to the Sally Ann. Inflation swept it away. I'd hate for my children to be trying to go to university on the proceeds of their Baby Bonus. They might finish first term, first year.

Point is, that the Baby Bonus, or whatever they call it now, has always been right up there with The Long Weekend, The Five-Day Week, Only on Saturday Nights, and The First of July, in the hearts of true-blue Canadians.

Now, how long are we going to put up with this chipping away at our national institutions? At one end they're after the Baby Bonus. At the other, they've already cut off The First of July and, by some benighted process, turned it into Canada Day.

Now there's a name to send a shiver of

pride down the bowed spine of every red-blooded Canadian. Canada Day.

Just roll it around on your tongue a few times. No puking allowed. Canada Day? Try it again. Canada Day! Maybe it doesn't quite come up to Guy Fawkes' Day or Bastille Day or Washington's Birthday. But it does have a ring to it. It rings like tapping a doughnut.

You'll have noticed that France celebrates France Day, Germany, Germany Day, England, England Day, and Hayfork Centre, Hayfork Centre Day. It's only logical that our parliament, eighty per cent absent, should pass a bill to name our only national holiday, and be supported by a supine Senate, with such a striking title.

I must admit, the new name gives me a real gut feeling for my homeland. Same kind of gut feeling that an over-dose of milk of magnesia gives me.

By gad, sirs, I've fought the new flag, the metric system, the bollocks of a constitution, the national anthem, and the insolence of the women's lib movement. Am I to fight on alone? Will nobody rally to the old standards?

Next thing you know they'll be after the Old Age Pension, our last bastion of universal poverty. Wake up, before it's too late. Avanti Canadiens!

The story of the Little White Mouse

by Irma Garside

Bruce awakened. Strains of music reached his ears. Nan couldn't have gone to bed yet. He padded to the door of his bedroom, down the hall to the top of the stairs and listened. He heard no sound other than the music. She must be reading.

"I'll go down and surprise her. Maybe peek around the door and scare her."

Evergreen fragrance drifted up the stairs. Lingering in the air were spicy aromas from the Christmas baking of pies, cakes and cookies.

Quickly he slipped down the stairs, hid just out of sight beside the hall arch leading to the livingroom and peered around. Nan wasn't there, nor was Puddy.

The livingroom glowed warm and welcoming. A few orange embers still burned in the fireplace. The decorated tree made it look like fairyland. Christmas lights flickered off and on; one set remained steadily shining. Nan had said she would leave them on all night, because, really, miniature lights did not consume that much energy. And anyway, people passing in the street liked to see the Christmas display through the window.

Apparently Nan had gone up to bed leaving the stacked records to play to the finish. She had done this before, saying she enjoyed

dropping off to sleep to quietly playing music.

Bruce heard Puddy softly thumping down the stairs. She trailed into the room after him, chirring questioningly. He paused and looked at the toys on the shelves behind the glass doors. Then he sat down in the armchair beside the fire. The cat proceeded to jump up beside him and squeeze onto his lap, all the while purring loudly.

As Bruce began to think of his mother, tears came to his eyes. She had accompanied his father on a business trip. With the unexpected snow storms and Christmas connections, they would not arrive until the day after Christmas. He missed them both, although he liked visiting his grandmother.

The music played dreamily on. He turned his attention to the desk which had the toys on its shelves. Nan had the collection from once having worked with children. She had urged him to play with them any time but be sure to put them back. Only yesterday he had taken them out to people his pretend forest. He recalled the story told to him this afternoon about Clara and the toys.

The clock tick-tocked rhythmically. Puddy's purr became lower. She was falling asleep. Bruce gazed at the furry toys. Gradually they blurred and his eyes closed.

Slowly the glass doors of the desk swung

back. The animals came tumbling onto the green blotting pad, onto the lamp table, down to the footstool and onto the rug. They crowded over to a place in front of Bruce and Puddy. Immediately the wolf puppet moved forward. He was a handsome fellow with his sharp white teeth that Bruce liked to feel. Mr. Wolf drew in his lolling red tongue and began to speak.

"Tomorrow night is Christmas Eve. Yet we are very sad. Susie Mouse is missing. She disappeared yesterday. We cannot have Christmas without her."

The tiny gray mouse began to sob, "No, we cannot have Christmas without her. She's my partner for our little games and dances."

The red squirrel took his turn now. "You see, after Santa has come and left the gifts, we climb out of the cupboard and have a party."

Toady continued, "Every year since we came to this house, we have our Christmas celebration."

"But without our little white mouse we would be too sad to do anything," concluded the turtle.

Bruce's heart went out to the little animals. "Don't worry. Tomorrow we will hunt everywhere and find Susie and put her back. Puddy will be a great help because she likes

to poke her paw into all kinds of holes and corners."

"Bruce! Bruce! Where are you?" Nan's anxious voice came to him. There were hurrying footsteps on the stairs and she appeared tying her housecoat as she rushed toward him.

"Are you all right? Are you ill?"

"I'm all right, Nan. I heard the music and thought you were still down here."

Nan leaned forward and lifted Puddy out of the way. Bruce sprang up tipping the chair cushion. As he turned to adjust it, he spied the little white mouse with its pink ears.

"The white mouse! Susie Mouse! I found her."

He ran to the desk and pulled back the glass doors that oddly enough were ajar. Quickly he placed the little white mouse beside the gray one.

"There now. They'll be happy. Nan, do you want to hear about their party?"

"Party?" she asked puzzled. "Yes, but come along to the kitchen and tell me while we have hot chocolate."

The hot chocolate steamed in the cups. From the livingroom came a Christmas carol blending with the voice of the child, "And the wolf said...."

Blood donors gave from their hearts

NORTH SIMCOE BLOOD DONORS turned out in droves last Wednesday to give "the gift of life" at a Red Cross Blood Donors' Clinic in Midland.

Hosted by members of the Huronia Branch of the Red Cross, the clinic staged at the Budd Watson Gallery, was nothing short of a smashing success.

A total of 408 pints of blood was collected from the 433 donors who were processed. The clinic's target was 350 pints!

To those who hosted the clinic, to those who helped and to those who gave "the gift of life," let us say, congratulations for another job well done.