

# Mistletoe lore and tradition

Kissing beneath the mistletoe—a charming custom that virtually all of us have indulged in at one time or another.

As the Christmas season rolls around, fellows vie to hang the sprig of mistletoe from doorways, somewhat hidden from view, only to surprise an unsuspecting young lady with a kiss when she steps through the door and under the mistletoe.

Like many other Christmas traditions observed in this country, kissing under the mistletoe would seem to have originated in England. Numerous

variations of the custom existed there.

One instructed young man to pluck a berry from the mistletoe bough each time they kissed a young lady. When all the berries were gone, the kissing was over.

In many parts of England, the Kissing Bunch was popular. This was an extremely elaborate arrangement of greenery such as holly and ivy on a pair of hoops looped inside each other. Also part of the Kissing Bunch were colored ribbons, apples, oranges and paper roses, and three dolls,

representing Jesus Christ, Mary and Joseph, which were hung from inside the hoops or, on occasion, arranged in a manger scene. From the bottom of the Kissing Bunch depended a sprig of mistletoe.

The Kissing Bunch would be hung in the center of a room, and all who passed under it would earn the right to seize a kiss.

A related custom is practiced in Austria and the Alpine region on New Year's Eve. There, the local inn is decked out in greenery, and the main room decorated with a pine wreath hanging from the roof beams.

In one corner of the room, a masked man lurks. He is known as "Sylvester," appears old and hideous, and wears a wreath of mistletoe. Whenever a young man or woman passes under the pine wreath, it is Sylvester's privilege to leap out and

plant a rough kiss on the individual's cheek. However, his reign is short-lived for at midnight he is chased away—a grotesque figure of the year which is now gone.

Why all this fuss about mistletoe? What legends, hid in the mists of time, have impressed upon this parasitic evergreen which lives upon non-evergreens, and particularly the oak, an importance of this sort?

Many pre-Christian cultures have revered the mistletoe. It was probably Sir James Frazier's "golden bough," a central metaphor in classical mythology.

In Norse mythology, too, it is of central importance, for it was with an arrow made from mistletoe that the Scandinavian hero Balder was killed.

His mother, the goddess Frigga, cried passionately and, so the legend says, every one of her tears became the

mistletoe's white berries.

In order to console Frigga for her son's death, the other Norse gods decreed that mistletoe should no longer be an independent plant, but become a parasite and, instead of being the cause of woe, should be about good will—thus was born the custom of kissing underneath it.

The Druids, the Celtic priests of pre-Christian Britain, revered the holy mistletoe, which grew entwined on their sacred oak, and which they believed to contain the soul of the living oak tree.

According to Druidic legend the mistletoe, which grew out of the air itself, clung to the oak tree for support.

At the New Year, the Druids engaged in an elaborate ceremony which centered on the mistletoe. One Druid, garbed in white, would climb an oak tree and cut down a bough of mistletoe with a golden sickle.

Below the tree, to catch the mistletoe as it fell, was a white cloth, for the Druids believed that the mistletoe must never touch the ground lest it be sullied. Once this part of the ceremony was complete, two white bulls would be sacrificed, and prayers were intoned.

The Druids believed that the mistletoe had great curative powers, and called it the "all-healer." Applied to barren animals, it would make them bear young, and it was efficacious against poisons, epilepsy, consumption and the like. It was generally hung above doorways or over the fireplace.

Christian legend has it that the mistletoe, originally a free-

standing tree, was the wood used for the Cross.

However, because of the evil purpose it served it suffered the fate of becoming a parasite, never again to live independently but always to live on another plant.

Another related legend states the mistletoe, after being used for the Cross,

shrank to its lowly, shriveled state—a fit punishment for the use to which it was put.

However, it is its role as a tool of evil for the eventual attainment of good that gives mistletoe its place in myth and legend, and reinforces its importance in the celebration of Christmas.



## Newlyweds

Mr. and Mrs. Russell A. Cowan are pleased to announce the marriage of their daughter Kathleen J. Cowan to Leonard A. Doucette, son of Mr. and Mrs. T. Doucette of Newfoundland. The marriage was held Sept. 28, 1984, in St. Paul's United Church.

## You Asked Us

by  
ELI HENDRIKS-  
WITMER

**Q.** I would like to know whether Lee Majors and Gil Gerard are related. They look and act so much alike. Just wondering!

Marjorie Rivers,  
Sundre, Alberta

**A.** Wonder no more, Marjorie! I agree that Lee, 45 and Gil, 39 do bear a certain resemblance to one another. And they do "act" just about the same. They are, however, not related.

**Q.** My ladyfriend and I have just read Beyond Reason by Margaret Trudeau. We are wondering what star sign she is. My friend says Leo and I say Gemini. Please answer, as the winner (if there is one) gets treated to a

night on the town.

J.T.  
Willowdale

**A.** Sorry J.T., but I have to tell you that you and your friend are both wrong! Margaret Joan was born on September 10, 1948, and if I have my star signs straight that makes her a Virgo! Why don't you just go out anyway and split the difference!

## YMCA to close

Midland Family YMCA will be closing its doors today at 1:30 p.m., will be closed Christmas Day and Boxing Day as well as New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.

All facilities will resume full operations on Jan. 2, 1985.

We thank you all for your valued support.

Christmas is a time for caring, loving, sharing.

**MIDLAND BUILDALL**  
ASSOCIATE STORE

## Happy Holidays

Wherever you are, whatever you do, have a wonderful Christmas and thanks for your loyalty!

**Marlin Travel**

247 King St.,  
Midland 526-4201

## GREETINGS TO ALL!

May the holidays abound with all the warmth and goodness we wish for you and yours... wrapped in love and happiness.

**GAMES PLUS**

HOME COMPUTERS & SOFTWARE  
299 King St., Midland 526-2464

## Joy and peace

Let peace ring out for all this holiday season and bring the true joy of Christmas to you and your loved ones.

From the Council  
and P.U.C.  
Commission

**VILLAGE OF PORT McNICOLL**