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EDITORIAL

Wishes for a happy New Year

As we enter 1998 we should all take a look back at the good and bad of the year past.

For conflict and bad feeling in Ontario, 1997 will be a tough one to beat. The teachers and the government neatly split the province down the middle as they made pawns of our students in their power struggle over Bill 160. The impact of the two-week teachers protest will linger through the year to come.

Also of controversy was the province's amalgamation of Metro Toronto into one megacity, and the subsequent down-loading of services to municipalities.

Yes, 1997 certainly was a controversial one.

However, we need to look at the bright side as well. As usual there were dozens of stories about people taking selfless action to help others. While it's sad we need food banks, local residents must be congratulated for their support of those less fortunate over the past year. We are indeed trying to take responsibility for our fellow man. That's a noble and compassionate pursuit which must continue in 1998.

For the New Year, it would be nice if not only citizens, but government as well, showed more feeling for all of those who live in our fine country.

We must not let greed and selfishness rule the day, and we must stand up to those who would cynically appeal to those baser instincts.

Let's remember that we're all in this together. Happy New Year.



Skull on mantel makes a real impression

Let's have a contest.

Who received the weirdest Christmas gift last week?

I don't mean the normal weird, either. We're not talking about hand-knit toilet seat covers from Aunt Marjie, car scrapers with gloves attached or electric garden hose caddies. Those types of gifts are more safely categorized as unusual. Those are gifts for people who have everything, or are purchased by people

scrambling through Canadian Tire with 25 minutes until store closing on Christmas Eve. No, I'm talking weird, here. I bet I'd win just about any weird gift contest this year.

Of course, it's all my fault. I got what I asked for. I asked for a skull. I got a skull. Naturally, now that I have the skull, I don't really know what to do with it. I know it didn't add much to the festive appearance of my mantelpiece on Christ-



Minute with Mair

Andrew Mair

mas Day. It most certainly didn't increase the appetite of our dinner guests that evening as it stared silently from its perch over the living room. In fact, it cast quite

a pall. Now, I use the word 'cast' in quite the literal sense, because, of course, it is not a real skull. It is a genuine model of a skull. Nor is it a human skull, per se. It is a cast of the La Chappelle Aux Saints man, until recently, the most complete Neandertal cranium found. It sits nicely on a resin pedestal, which is mounted on an oak platform, and there is a brass nameplate affixed to the base. It is, in my view, quite fetching. I found it on the internet while surfing through paleoanthropology sites, which happens to be a fascination of mine from childhood.

My wife bought me this oddity after I whined for a full year that no one ever got me gifts I truly wanted. She adamantly refused to purchase it at first, demanding to know what possible use it would serve. She also objected to having long-dead things in the house. As well, the item in question came from California, and is made by museum replicators, is life-size and, well, somewhat expensive. She complained that it would likely turn out to be a plastic piece of junk that would just collect dust in the basement.

I had resigned myself to getting a pair of socks, but then, on Christmas morning, Kim produced this enormous box, pleasantly wrapped and of substantial heft. I eagerly tore off the wrapping, peeled back the cardboard and in a hail of plastic shipping chips, out came my treasure, complete with ossified colouring and anatomically correct cranial fissures. Wow.

Now, of course, I will have to find some place to put it, for despite its viewing stand and nameplate, my skull still raises eyebrows. Friends from Sudbury dropped by for their first visit to our new house, and the first thing out of their mouths wasn't 'nice place' or 'Merry Christmas', but rather, 'Boy, you guys have been busy. You haven't even put away your Halloween decorations yet!'

Terrible twosome back in form

It's beginning to look a lot less like Christmas.

Poc has dislodged most of the tinsel strands from the lower portion of the tree, a growing carpet of pine needles is littering the rug and an unappetizing crust is starting to form over the bowl of Hill's Prescription Diet cat food, which has been mandated by the vet as part of Spasm's regimen on his road to recovery.

Our animal companions, who can vacuum up a third of a can of bargain basement beef 'n' tuna in less time than it takes Mike Harris to read the opening page of Mr. Silly, are strangely resistant to the subtle delights of the healthful, but somewhat malodorous, alternative.

On the plus side, the label contains not two, but three, official languages and it takes much longer to finish one can, which is just as well, given the cost.

Meanwhile Spasm, who only days ago languished sadly in dark corners, is tearing about the old homestead with renewed vigour and beginning to severely test the patience of Mr. Wallethead.

My significant other, who was sufficiently distressed by our kitty's

descent into the doldrums to overlook past misdemeanours, is once again questioning his own sanity as Spasm's return to robustness also marks his return to obnoxious feline behaviour. As the recipient of by far the largest single chunk of our Christmas expenditure, Spasm is not showing the gratitude and restraint such generosity undoubtedly merits.

So far, however, he and his cohort have failed to fell the Christmas tree and have dismantled the decorations over the fireplace only once. Their attempts to gain entry to the porch and partake of the poisonous leaves of the poinsettia have also been thwarted. Whenever kind visitors bring flowers or plants, they are relegated to the porch, the only place from which the terrible twosome can effectively be barred.

Even your correspondent, who is understandably regarded as a pushover by the young, and the

feline, has had enough of seeing beautiful bunches of flowers reduced to a handful of soggy stalks within hours of their arrival.

Despite such challenges, though, the warm glow of the season has not entirely been doused.

The telephone I gave my long-suffering spouse was warmly welcomed, even though it meant giving up his reconstituted set, which required the deft manoeuvring of a pair of tweezers to allow communication with the person on the other end.

He was equally happy to receive a smart new shirt, a warm toque, books, CDs and no socks.

Our round of Christmas visits and visitors resulted in only one embarrassing moment, the receiving of a present which had not been reciprocated.

This happens to a varying degree every year, and although I had purchased reinforcements to accommodate such a crisis, I had a hunch that most 15-year-old boys would prefer nothing to a gift pack of lavender soap.

My resolution is to do better in 1998. Happy New Year to all our readers.



Kate's Corner

Kate Gilderdale

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