

Ready or not, here comes Christmas

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For better or worse, we are once again smack in the middle of the Christmas season. The irony is that I'm writing this on Nov. 20.

Call me crazy, but I'm one of those folks who enjoys Thanksgiving, and I don't want it sullied or diluted with all of this early Christmas stuff. Each holiday should get its moment in the sun and I resent how Christmas is always encroaching on Thanksgiving's moment.

Christmas: Tra la la la la, la la la. Here I am, ready to fill your world with cheer and goodwill!

Thanksgiving: Um, yea, but like it's only Nov. 20, and MY day is still two days away. I mean, some folks are still defrosting their turkeys. Do you think maybe we can hold off on the ho-ho-ho stuff for another few days at least?

Christmas: Figgy pudding!



JOE ROMANO
So ANYWAY

Get your figgy pudding here!

Thanksgiving: I hate figgy pudding. So do most people.

Christmas: Eggnog! Get it fresh! Eggnog and Tom and Jerry's. Chestnuts are roasting and coming right up!

Thanksgiving: Two can play that game. Get your hot, roasted turkey and dry-as-a-bone stuffing! Yams and cranberries aplenty!

Christmas: Nobody likes cranberries. I've got turkey, too! And ham, a nice honey-baked job. I'm also throwing in a roast beef!

Thanksgiving: Mashed potatoes! Fill 'em up with brown gravy! Green beans - sauteed in garlic! Hot biscuits!

Christmas: Presents! Toys,

games, new clothes! More stuff than you can shake a stick at!

Thanksgiving: No shopping for presents! No spending money! Two days off from work to just eat, drink and watch TV!

Christmas: I've got your TV right here. "A Charlie Brown Christmas!" "Rudolph!" Rankin-Bass Productions!

Thanksgiving: Macy's parade! Football!

Well, you get the idea. My point is that the regardless of the pre-season blitz, the holidays have become too much about what we feel that we NEED to do and not enough about simply relaxing and enjoying the season. We get so caught up in our self-imposed obligations that we miss out on the opportunity to actually enjoy ourselves.

I'm ashamed to admit it, but I've reached a point where I dread the holidays more than look forward to them. And that's a sad thing.

So tell me, dear Claytonites, am I the only one who feels like we need to bring the fun back into the holiday season?

Every December, I imagine getting together with friends for a leisurely cocktail, or meeting

up at a local Starbucks for a gingerbread latte (no, actually, blend of the day - no cream, no sugar). If it snowed around here, we'd join our neighbors for a sleigh ride and caroling, maybe exchange pies or something.

Instead we spend our "off hours" rushing to the mall, fighting traffic, cursing the crowds and wishing for January to just hurry up and get here already.

I won't belabor the point. It's an old song and has become a staple in many of our Christmas carol hymnals. But perhaps this column will serve as a reminder to someone other than Joe to relax and enjoy the true meaning of the season: peace on earth and goodwill toward men.

Years from now, the memories of good times spent enjoying family and friends will remain, while the gifts you fought so hard to get and paid too much for will be broken, lost or long forgotten.

Peace and Merry Christmas.

Clayton resident, Joe Romano, is a family man, a free-lance writer for hire and the Pioneer's "all around funny guy." E-mail him at jromano01@yahoo.com

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Weather folklore had basis in fact

In today's world, there are many places to find an accurate weather forecast. Newspapers, radio, TV and the Internet provide enough information to make amateur meteorologists out of all of us.

Who would even think of driving to the mountains or the ocean, or attending a sporting event without consulting a publicly available medium of weather information?

Turn the clock back a century or more, before the beginning of the information age. Our ancestors certainly had a need for weather forecasts, and day-to-day weather changes probably had more bearing on their lives than it does ours. Most families depended on farming or fishing for their subsistence, and weather is one of the primary factors in the determination of crop yields, livestock production or successful fishing voyages. What information could they have used to become amateur meteorologists?

It turns out that sayings, now considered weather folklore, were the primary tools that our not-so-distant ancestors used to

predict the weather. Some of those sayings date back to the ancient Greeks. One of the first known books containing weather lore was Aristotle's "Meteorologica." Weather lore was sometimes poetic in nature, which made it easier to pass down from generation to generation.

One of the most frequently repeated folklore sayings was:

*Red skies at night, sailors delight,
 Red skies at morning, sailors take warning.*

This statement was quite often true. When the sun set in the West and its rays reflected on clouds overhead, that was a sign that there were no clouds to the west to block the sun. Since storm systems typically move west to east, sailors could delight in the storm's passing. If the morning sun reflected off clouds and created a red sky, skies were clear in the east and cloudy in the west, the direction from which storms usually came.

Another saying that was a harbinger of bad weather was:

*When clouds look like black smoke,
 A wise man will put on his cloak.*



WOODY WHITLATCH
WEATHER WORDS

This was also a true statement since billowing, rain-producing clouds were laden with water and much darker than fair-weather clouds.

A saying that predicted fair weather went:

*When the dew is on the grass,
 Rain will never come to pass.*

Dew formed on cloudless nights with low relative humidity, resulting in strong radiational cooling. The weather pattern associated with these conditions was strong high pressure, and the chance of experiencing rain was extremely slight.

Folklore concerning the behavior of animals and insects also exhibited forecasting skills. For example, a cat frequently rubbing its face after licking its paws was considered to be a sign of fair weather. Cat fur can build up static electric charges when air becomes very dry. Cats moisten their fur to avoid

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