

## Humor Me

By Ronald P. Culberson

December 2005

(Originally appeared in the *Herndon Observer*)

### “Let it Go, Let it Go, Let it Go!”

As one who tends to be slightly rigid (which my wife says is a “gross understatement”), I understand the need for routines and traditions. But when it comes to holidays, I think our traditions have gotten a bit out of hand. Sure, I love the Russian tea cookies, the kids’ popcorn string ornament, seeing Dick Clark in Times Square and wearing red and green silk Rudolf the Reindeer underwear (OK, perhaps that’s my own personal tradition) but when the traditions take control of us, that’s when the trouble starts.

For instance, these end-of-the-year-here’s-everything-boring-our-family-has-done-over-the-past-year holiday letters need to be scaled back. Do we really need to know that little Mary moved up a grade in school after two unsuccessful tries or that the Smiths stayed at a “really nice” Holiday Inn when they attended the Buckeye County Livestock Fair over the summer? Last year, I received one of these letters from a family member who had so many “interesting” things to tell us, she wrote the letter in 3-point font! That’s smaller than the warnings on a bottle of aspirin. And in my opinion, it’s a lot less important than knowing you can hemorrhage from your eyes if you take too much aspirin (I may have misread that warning but you get the point).

(Author’s note: My family *does* send a holiday letter out every year but it’s written in such a uniquely humorous format (which my wife says is a “gross overstatement”), I am sure that the recipients want us to continue sending it. So I exempt *my* letter from this admonition because it’s funny and most of the stuff is made up anyway.

Next, we’ve got to curtail the whole gift giving tradition. Don’t you think it’s a bit odd that for Christmas, we give everybody gifts except the person whose birthday we’re celebrating? On top of that, the cost of the gifts is out of control. If we gave everyone in our immediate family a gift, it would mean 32 gifts which at nearly \$5 per gift is way outside my stingy budget. If we included aunts, uncles and cousins, it would top out at over 100 gifts. Now, think about it. If I’m not interested in their family letter, do you think I want to be getting them a gift? I think we should spend our money on more important things instead of giving dad one more power tool for that once-a-year home improvement project. I say spend the money on a down payment at the retirement home – that’s something he can use for years to come.

Instead of giving everyone in the family a gift, we’ve decided to draw names and buy only one gift each Christmas. On top of that, I’ve made it even easier by giving the men a gift certificate at Dick’s Sporting Goods and the women a gift card at Pottery Barn. Before long, I’ll just take out my wallet and hand out cash on Christmas Day.

And finally, can't we go easy on the decorations? I've seen people stringing up lights on Labor Day and seen others taking down their Christmas trees in early June. That's way outside the holiday statute of limitations. You don't see people breaking out the jack-o-lanterns before October and most people celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July on, well, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Let's make the upcoming holiday special by keeping it to 5-10 weeks. And while I'm on the decorations, there are only three acceptable light colors: red, green and white. That's it. Those blue lights specials need to stay at K-Mart.

In our house, the tree goes up 14 days before Christmas and it's down by January 2<sup>nd</sup>. The lights are white, spaced at four inches apart, and there are 176 ornaments, no more no less. Not that I'm rigid, mind you.

I'm sure many of you think I'm being a Scrooge. I'm really not. I love Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years. But I sometimes wonder if we're not missing the point. Thanksgiving is about spending time with family and being thankful for what we have. New Year's Day is about considering the year that's past and looking with hopefulness toward the future. And I think Christmas should be about humility, kindness and service, keeping it in line with the guy who made it famous – and I don't mean Santa!

Maybe we need to let go of all the holiday traditions and start from scratch. Excluding, of course, the gifts for me.

Until next time, just humor me.

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