



Bah Humbug! Surviving the Holiday Season

By Jill Austin

These are the top ten dislikes about Christmas from a talk I did a few years ago, along with an introduction.

Some people just love Christmas—they love everything about it—the shopping, the gifts, the music, the food, and the religious stories. There is no such thing as too much tinsel or too many presents or too much Christmas cheer. If this describes you—Bless you and enjoy this next few weeks!! However, there are people who have difficulty celebrating the holiday and they do not enjoy this time of year, maybe because they don't believe in the religious stories, so the celebrations make them sad or uncomfortable. Others simply don't like the commercialization of this time of year. Other people have family issues that make this a sad or difficult time. Sometimes there is just too much activity and it leads to stress.

Here are my top ten dislikes related to Christmas:

10. Decorations and advertisements berfore Halloween—this makes the holiday a two-month endurance race.
9. Overdone house decorations—how many Santas do you need in your front yard? What happened to a little good taste?
8. Car decorations—Seems that putting a wreath on the front of the car is old style. Have you seen the antlers people are putting on their SUVs to show solidarity with Rudolph and the other reindeers?
7. Retail ads—we can't get away from Christmas advertisements of everything from the newest Chia pets to diamond rings.
6. Crowds—try to buy a simple cup of coffee or a bar of soap—crowds of happy people are jockeying for their position in line, and watch for the Christmas cheer as someone cuts you off in the parking lot to get the one space left at the store.
5. Fake war on Christmas—each year we get to hear about how people at stores should say “Merry Christmas” and not “Happy Holidays” - this is

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Bah Humbug

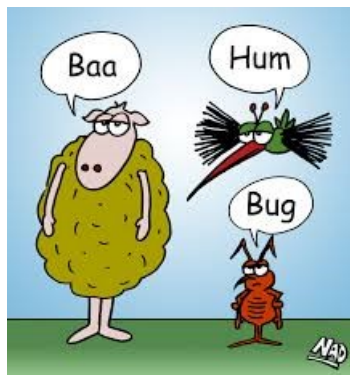
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discussed on some news channels as if is a conspiracy to take away everyone's enjoyment of Christmas—when it is really just an acknowledgement that some people celebrate different holidays at this time of year.

4. Too much to do in a short time—too many gifts to buy, recipes to cook, too many parties to attend—just too much.
3. People who just love Christmas—they wear their bells on their shoes, too much red and green, smile way too much, make too much fudge and are just generally annoying (I'm kidding to those of you who enjoy Christmas this way!).
2. Fake happiness—seems like everyone has to be happy—this is time for joy, helping others, having parties—and we must all pretend that we are so very happy about it all when no one can be happy as it seems we must pretend to be at Christmas time.
1. Stress—all of this creates way too much stress. We hope to make it December 31—seemingly the end of Christmas—when we concentrate on ringing in the New Year, singing Auld Lang Syne, and making promises to have a better year next year than this one was.

The nephew of Scrooge gave this answer to Scrooge's "Bah Humbug" comment (A Christmas Carol). He said, "But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round . . . as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers [in life], and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that [Christmas has] done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!"

Happy holidays!!



Voyager 1 Fires Engines for First Time in 37 Years

They don't build them like they used to.

I was amazed to learn that Voyager 1, which in August 2012 became the first human-made object to enter interstellar space, fired its four "trajectory correction maneuver" (TCM) thrusters for the first time since November 1980.

The spacecraft has long been using its standard attitude-control thrusters to orient itself into the proper position to communicate with Earth. However, the performance of these thrusters has been deteriorating for the past three years, so mission team members at JPL in Pasadena, California started looking for an alternative option.

A successful test was far from guaranteed. The long dormancy in deep, cold space was a potential issue, of course, but more than that the TCM were designed to burn continuously for relatively long stretches; they had never been fired in the very short bursts employed for attitude control.

The flight team dug up decades-old data and examined the software, coded in an outdated assembler language, to ensure they could safely fire the thrusters.

The plan now is to press the TCM engines into service the attitude-control role beginning in January.

"With these thrusters that are still functional after 37 years without use, we will be able to extend the life of the Voyager 1 spacecraft by two or three years," said Suzanne Dodd, Voyager project manager at JPL.

But the four TCM thrusters will likely be retired again at some point in the future. Each one requires a heater to operate, which in turn uses power. When Voyager 1's power supply gets too low, the probe's handlers will switch back to the attitude control thrusters.

Voyager 1 is powered by a radioisotope thermoelectric generator (RTG). RTGs convert the heat generated by the radioactive decay of plutonium-238 into electricity.

Voyager 1 and its twin, Voyager 2, launched a few weeks apart in 1977 to conduct an unprecedented "grand tour" of the solar system's giant planets — Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune. The spacecraft accomplished this goal, and then kept on flying. Voyager 2 is expected to join its sibling in interstellar space in the next few years, NASA officials said.

The mission team will probably do a similar TCM test on Voyager 2 at some point, but that spacecraft's attitude-control thrusters are in better shape than those of Voyager 1, according to the JPL team.



This space available

Contact the editor.

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POEM

Winter Trees
by William Carlos Williams

All the complicated details
of the attiring and
the disattiring are completed!
A liquid moon
moves gently among
the long branches.
Thus having prepared their buds
against a sure winter
the wise trees
stand sleeping in the cold.

