

Editor's notes:

It's probably a good thing that two of the most popular months are a half-year apart; otherwise, we would have nothing to look forward to for the rest of the year. The end of June, eagerly awaited by most school kids, signals the start of summer vacation. Now, six months later, most of us are looking forward to December. However one celebrates the season, Christmas time holds something precious and memorable for just about all of us.

Although I'm looking forward to the new year, I look back on the last twelve months wistfully. It's been a truly wonderful year for me. And of all that I'm feeling at this time of the year, gratitude is predominant.

May you and your loved ones share in all the best this Christmas and for the coming new year.

Chrystyna Pedde

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December comes from "decem," Latin for 10, because it was once the tenth month in the Roman calendar. The son of Marcus Antoninus, Emperor Commodus, tried to rename the month Amazonius in honour of his mistress (whose portrait he had painted as an Amazon), but the attempt failed.

Here are some more dates of note this month:

Bingo Birthday Month, December 1-31 -- This game was first played in December 1929 in Georgia. Historians believe it is a variation of an Italian game of chance. Originally, it was called "beano" because players used dried beans to mark their spots, but the name changed to "bingo" when an enthusiastic player mistakenly yelled it out. Today, bingo raises over \$5 billion in charitable funds each year.

St. Nicholas Day, December 6 -- In Europe, St. Nicholas is not depicted as the jolly, fat, white-haired North American Santa who wears a red suit. Instead, Europe's St. Nicholas is a tall, lean man sporting a brown beard, dressed in a long, brown robe with a gold belt.

65th Anniversary of Pearl Harbor, December 7 -- Following the 1941 attack, "Remember Pearl Harbour" was a rallying cry for the United States and its allies during World War II. This year, a public conference of survivors and scholars will be held to commemorate those involved and reflect on the lesson learned in the war. Its title and theme is "A Nation Remembers."

Gingerbread House Day, December 12 -- Gingerbread can be traced back to 11th century Europe. Food historians believe the first gingerbread house was made in Germany. The

Brothers Grimm tale of Hansel and Gretel (with the witch who lived in a gingerbread house) further popularized this architectural confection.

New Year's Eve, December 31 -- Here's a toast to the New Year:

*Here's to the bright new year;
And a fond farewell to the old;
Here's to the things that are yet to be;
And to the memories that we hold.*

Why Holly and Christmas go together

More than 400 species of holly trees and shrubs, most of them evergreen, are found in England, central and southern Europe, America, China, and Japan. Holly's hard, white wood is used for cabinet-making and ornamental carvings because it has a fine grain and polishes easily. With its glossy green leaves and bright red berries, holly is a traditional Christmas decoration. The custom actually began with the Druids, who believed that fairies played among the holly boughs.

Some stories in Christian folklore say Christ's cross was made of holly wood, and in parts of Europe the tree is called "Christ's thorn," or "holy tree." The prickly leaves are said to symbolize Jesus' crown of thorns, their perennial green colour representing eternal life. In one tradition, the berries turned from white to red to honour the drops of blood he shed.

Holly has been used medicinally as well. A tea made with holly leaves causes sweating and was used to treat bronchitis, pneumonia, influenza, and smallpox. It was believed that sniffing the juice of fresh leaves would stop a runny nose, and leaves soaked in vinegar overnight would cure corns.



Hanukkah

Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights, commemorates the rededication of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem in 165 B.C. The Greek-Syrian ruler Antiochus IV had forbidden Jews to practice their religion and forced them to worship Greek gods instead. The Greeks seized a Jewish temple and dedicated it to the worship of Zeus. This incited a rebellion led by Judah the Maccabee. Even though the Maccabees were vastly outnumbered, they were victorious. When the Jews reclaimed their temple on Mount Moriah, they relit the menorah, or candelabrum, which ritual dictated should burn throughout every night. But there was only enough oil on hand to last one night and preparing new oil would take eight days.

Miraculously, the light burned for eight days. Today, Jews light a candle each day for eight days to celebrate the event. Although Hanukkah is considered a relatively minor holiday in the Jewish tradition, its proximity to the Christmas season has increased its visibility and importance to many Jews. This year, Hanukkah begins at sundown on December 15.

Candles and Indoor Air Pollution

Burning candles can change the atmosphere of a room, literally. According to the American Lung Association, studies show that burning candles indoors helps create fine-particle air pollution. The Environmental Protection Agency notes that some candles emit significant amounts of soot, enough to cause property damage and perhaps affect your lungs. To minimize damage, the Association advises trimming candle wicks to one-fourth inch, keeping candles away from drafts, and using (and regularly replacing) good filters on your furnace.

The Nobel prize

On December 10, the Nobel Prizes will be awarded in Stockholm, Sweden, and Oslo, Norway. The prizes were created by Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite. In 1888, after a French newspaper mistakenly published his obituary, calling him the "merchant of death" because of the military applications of his explosives, Nobel decided that he wanted to be remembered for more positive accomplishments. He left millions of dollars, to be awarded in the categories of chemistry, physics, physiology or medicine, literature, and peace.

There is no Nobel prize in mathematics because, according to one account, Nobel didn't consider math a practical science that could benefit humanity. A total of 781 Nobel Prizes have been awarded, 763 to individuals (33 of them women) and 18 organizations have won Nobel Prizes. The oldest winner was Raymond Davis, who won for physics in 2002 at the age of 88; the youngest, Lawrence Braggs, was 25 in 1915 when he shared the physics prize with his father. Linus Pauling is the only person to have won two unshared prizes.

Four married couples have won the prize, five father-and-son teams, one father-and-daughter team, and one mother-and-daughter team. In 1915, Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla were offered a joint prize, but the committee rescinded the offer without explanation. Some believe that the two scientists despised each other and refused to share the honour.

The Story of Silent Night

The words to this favourite Christmas carol were written in 1816 by Joseph Mohr, a young Austrian priest. Two years later, Mohr asked a music teacher to write a guitar melody to turn the poem into a song so it could be sung on Christmas Eve at midnight Mass because the organ was not working. (Some historians say that mice had eaten the bellows.)

An organ repairman is believed to have introduced the song to other churches. Two families of travelling folk singers (much like the von Trapps of *The Sound of Music* fame) added the song to their repertoire, thus spreading its popularity.

"Silent Night" -- The Song Heard Round the World -- has been translated into hundreds of languages.

60th Anniversary of It's a Wonderful Life

Nearly everyone's favourite holiday movie, *It's A Wonderful Life*, premiered December 20, 1946. Starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed, the movie was a box office flop. It was nominated for five Oscars but won none of them, although it did win a Golden Globe award for director Frank Capra. When no one bothered to renew the copyright in 1973, television stations started broadcasting the film during the Christmas season, and its popularity skyrocketed. *It's a Wonderful Life* was voted number one in the American Film Institute's list of America's Most Inspiring Movies.

Rumour has it that the Sesame Street characters Bert and Ernie were named after minor characters in the movie (although Sesame Street producers claim it's a coincidence.) One of the most famous lines in the movie comes from Clarence, the angel: "Every time you hear a bell ring, it means that some angel's just got his wings."

Message from the Prez:

Has it really been twelve months since I wrote my last Christmas message? Can it be that on last September 4th, Helix turned 38 years old? It's a good thing I was just a kid when I started Helix, or I would be an old man now. Is age 61 old? Don't answer that!

On "Bring Your Child to Work Day," I brought my fourteen year old son, Zachary, to work. He insists that he wants to be a businessman, so I guess it's never too early for him to start learning about his daddy's businesses. My rules for him, if he wants to join me in business someday: Get a university degree and start work by doing all the jobs no-one else would want to do. I know teenagers like to change their minds every week or so, so I wonder how this will turn out.

I am grateful to our many friends, customers, and suppliers, some of whom have been with us since the very beginning. To all of you, all of us here at Helix wish you a very **Merry Christmas**, and a **Happy New Year** in 2007.

Be safe, and have a great holiday season!

Sieg Pedde