

## Editor's notes:

As a child growing up in Toronto, one of the most exciting times of the Christmas season was when my mother would take my sister and me on the Queen Street streetcar and we would ride all the way to the Eaton's store on Yonge Street. There we would press our faces against the store's huge display windows and admire the animated Christmas scenes. Each window showcased a specific scene: Santa's workshop, tobogganning on a wintry day; opening presents on Christmas day. There was fun and frolic, and especially, magic in each of those windows. Even though the holidays of my childhood were very lean, these window shopping excursions still evoke some of my happiest memories of Christmas.

May you all have warm, happy memories to cheer you, and may you look forward to creating your own special memories to share with your loved ones. Here's wishing a magical Christmas to all our readers!

*Chrystyna Pedde, Editor*

December offers many dates to celebrate; here are just a few of them:

**St. Nicholas Day, December 6** -- In Europe, St. Nicholas is not depicted as the jolly, fat, white-haired 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. He is also one of the most venerated saints of both Eastern and Western Christian churches. Little is known of his life except that he was Bishop of Myra (in what is today Turkey) in the 4th century, and from early times he has been especially noted for his charity.

**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) popularized this architectural confection.

**Saturnalia, December 17 - 23** -- This ancient Roman festival honouring Saturn, the god of agriculture, was a time for merriment and winemaking at harvest's end. Gifts were exchanged, all business was suspended, and slaves and masters reversed their roles.

**Hanukkah, Dec. 12-20.** Also known as the Festival of Lights, this Jewish holiday commemorates the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrians and the subsequent rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem.

**Christmas, December 25** -- Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, but the actual date on which he was born is not known. So for more than 300 years Christmas was observed at varying times of the year -- in January, April, even May. Finally, in the fourth century, Pope Ullius I declared December 25 Christmas Day. His reason? The date coincided with the pagan rituals of the Winter Solstice, or Return of the Sun, which the church wished to replace with a Christian celebration.

**New Year's Eve, Dec. 31.** Bid goodbye to the old year and welcome 2010.

## Great gift for snoozers

Looking for something to rouse the sleepyhead in your life? For those who just can't get out of bed without hitting the snooze button over and over again, try "Clocky." It's the brainchild of an MIT graduate student. Set the alarm for 7 a.m., and when the appointed hour arrives, Clocky, a robot-looking clock on wheels, rolls itself off the nightstand and onto the floor. Then it wanders around the room looking for a hiding place while emitting wake-up squeaking sounds. It's designed to find a new hiding place every day so that users won't know where to look -- the idea being that waking up is less trouble than finding the alarm clock. For more information, go to [www.nandahome.com](http://www.nandahome.com).

## Deck the halls with boughs of Holly

Holly, one of the most enduring Christmas traditions comes in more than 400 species of trees and shrubs. It is found all over -- in England, central and southern Europe, North America, China and Japan. Decorating with the bright red berries of holly goes back to 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 color 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 such diseases as bronchitis, pneumonia, influenza, and smallpox.



## Get a pet—your health may depend on it

No one loves you like your pet, but Fido and Fluffy may be more than just constant companions. Owning a dog or cat can actually improve your health. Here's what some experts say about the health benefits of pet ownership:

- **Blood pressure.** Simply petting your cat or dog can lower your blood pressure—and your animal's, as well. One study of New York stockbrokers, for example, found that those who adopted dogs or cats experienced better blood pressure and heart rates than those who didn't.
- **Physical activity.** Owning a dog almost forces you into taking two or three walks a day. The exercise can improve an owner's physical health and bring you into contact with fellow pet owners, relieving loneliness and stress.
- **Heart attack recovery.** The odds for surviving a heart attack seem to improve dramatically if you own a pet, and pet ownership apparently contributes to an increased one-year survival rate for people who have been hospitalized for heart problems.
- **Alzheimer's disease.** Some studies suggest that elderly people with Alzheimer's disease have fewer outbreaks of anxiety with an animal companion nearby. A dog or cat can also help relax a patient's primary caregiver, who's also at risk of stress-related ailments.

## Methods for emulating truly creative people

Creative people may not be a breed apart, but they share certain characteristics, many of which we can all put to work. To sharpen your creative skills, work on developing these traits:

**Curiosity.** Well, that's obvious, isn't it? But it's often forgotten in the rush of daily routine. Teach yourself to ask "Why?" about the issues and problems (and solutions) you encounter.

**Energy.** This doesn't mean rushing madly around chasing ideas. It does require you to put some effort into collecting facts and thinking about the problem you're trying to solve.

**Persistence.** Even the great geniuses of our time don't expect success overnight. Practice self-discipline, so you can stick to your idea until it's successful.

**Concentration.** Just as important as energy is the ability to stop and focus on what's in front of you, tuning out distractions or irrelevant activities.

**Connecting.** You've got to look for links between elements that don't appear related at first glance. Sometimes this means finding order in chaos; sometimes it means breaking down ideas to discover what they have in common.

**Playfulness.** Your work is serious, but you need to be able to stand back and adopt a naïve, even childlike attitude toward the world around you. This helps you ask questions and find connections in things everyone else takes for granted.

## What color is your message?

Colors express a multitude of emotions without a single word. Whether you're painting a sunset or designing a banner ad, consider the powerful messages these simple shades can communicate:

- **Red:** love, beauty, blood, the heart, heat
- **Orange:** energy, enthusiasm, excitement, adventure
- **Yellow:** joy, positive feeling
- **Green:** nature, hope, luck, fertility (but also jealousy)
- **Blue:** peace, faithfulness, tranquility, the ocean
- **Violet:** royalty, wealth, power
- **Pink:** gratitude

- **Brown:** earth, home
- **Black:** death, mystery, power, elegance
- **White:** innocence, purity, reverence, safety (but also death in many Eastern cultures)

## Hanukkah

Also known as the Festival of Lights, this holiday commemorates the rededication of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem in 165 B.C.E. 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. However, 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.



All of us at Helix Courier Limited wish you a safe and joyful holiday season and a very Happy New Year. All the very best to you in the coming year and thank you for your loyalty and friendship.

-- Sieg Pedde, President

# Merry Christmas!