

Editor's notes:

During the whirl of the many Christmas functions that you have to attend, do you ever find yourself surrounded by people you barely know? And while doing the obligatory hobnobbing with them do you find yourself bereft of interesting material to share?

Fear not! We have some conversation topics for you! Did you know that playing action video games like Halo and Grand Theft Auto may improve decision-making skills, according to researchers at the University of Rochester in New York?

The scientists tested participants who played games at least five hours a week and compared them with non-gamers in a series of exercises: One involved displaying an array of dots and asking volunteers to quickly determine which direction they were moving, and another test put the volunteers in headphones and required them to identify whether a sound was heard in the left ear or the right.

In both experiments, gamers made the correct decision faster than non-gamers. In addition, when non-gamers played 50 hours of action video games, their decisions improved as well.

Researchers theorize that the brain's ability to make probabilistic inferences is strengthened by fast-paced games; strategy or role-playing games didn't produce the same results.

And if this doesn't impress, here's another one:

A new antibiotic may make you feel better-- as long as you don't think too much about where it came from. *Science News* reports that nerve tissues from *periplaneta americana* (the American cockroach) and *Schistocerca gregaria* (the desert locust) seem able to kill more than 90 percent of a strain of *E. coli* that causes meningitis and can kill some drug-resistant staph.

Scientists at the University of Nottingham theorized that cockroaches, which thrive in the filthiest environments known to humanity, might have some unique defenses against bacteria and parasites. They also noticed that soldiers returning from duty in the Middle East carried some unusual infections, but locusts in the same areas were uninfected. That led them to begin grinding up bugs.

The key bug ingredient: brains

The researchers observed that fat, muscle tissue, and blood of the bugs didn't have any effect against bacteria, but brain matter did the trick without bothering human kidney or epithelial cells.

December is a month of joy, celebration, and remembrance. Here are some special dates to remember:

Hannukah, December 2 -- The eight-day Jewish holiday begins this year at sundown, the day before December 2, because the traditional Jewish calendar begins at sunset.

Hannukah marks the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem, following victory in 165 B.C. over Hellenist Syrians who had made it illegal for Jews to worship. According to the Talmud, the Jews had only enough olive oil to keep the eternal flame in the Temple burning for a single day -- but miraculously, the oil continued to burn for eight days, during which the Jews were able to produce and consecrate fresh oil for the flame.

Hannukah is observed by the lighting of a nine-branched candelabrum, called a menorah.

First Day of Winter, December 22 -- The ancient Celts believed that on the winter solstice, the sun stood still for 12 days. To banish evil spirits and to lure the sun to return, they lit a yule log on the first day of winter and burned it for 12 hours. The winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, marks the astronomical start of winter.

Christmas, December 25 -- This Christian holiday celebrates the birth of Jesus, sometime between the years 7 and 2 B.C. The word "Christmas" comes from "Christ's Mass," a phrase first recorded in old English as Cristes maesse in 1038. Christmas began to be observed with feasts and celebrations in the Middle Ages.

New Year's Eve, December 31 -- According to some cultural historians, the tradition of kissing at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve dates back to old English and German folklore that held that the first person you encounter in the new year is indicative of the luck that awaits you in the year ahead. Over time, this evolved to people ensuring that their loved ones were nearby, and the shared kiss came to symbolize the hope that love will last throughout the year. Others contend that the kiss came about at masked balls held on New Year's Eve. The masks represented evil spirits of the old year. At midnight, the masks were removed, and revelers kissed as a way to purify the new year.

Meaning of Mistletoe

Kissing under the mistletoe originated centuries ago among the Druids of ancient Britain. As part of their winter celebration, they burned mistletoe as a sacrifice to their gods. They also hung sprigs in their homes to ensure good fortune and family harmony. Guests embraced under the mistletoe. Posted outside, mistletoe welcomed travelers.

Second chances: What would you do differently?

As we approach each coming New Year, we often look back and reflect on what we might have done differently. Some reflect on the last twelve months and express satisfaction. Others look back at their life and wonder . . . What would I change if I had my life to live over? Here are a few suggestions, attributed to the humorist Erma Bombeck:

If I had my life to live over, I would . . .

- Spend more time listening -- and less talking.
- Spend more time on loved ones -- and less on work.
- Spend more time living in my living space -- and less time cleaning it.
- Spend more time learning from the older people in my life -- and less trying to convince them I already know it all.
- Spend more time with the windows rolled down -- and less time worrying about mussing my hair.
- Spend more time using the stuff I have -- and less time collecting more.

The Tradition of the New Year's Eve Ball Drop

Millions of people around the world watch on TV as the ball drops in Times Square in New York City on New Year's Eve. This Big Apple tradition can trace its origins back to the 1800s, when sailors had no way to check the accuracy of their ships' clocks, though knowing the correct local time was essential for navigating. In 1818, a captain with the Royal Naval Academy suggested that a ball be dropped at 1:00 p.m., from a high pole each day so nearby ships could note the local time, a practice that many port towns around the world adopted. In 1904, the owners of One Time Square began holding rooftop celebrations on New Year's Eve. The ball drop to mark the stroke of midnight was added three years later.

To Our Dear Customers and Friends

As another year draws to a close, I would like to extend my sincere thanks for your friendship and patronage through the months of 2010 and to wish all of you the very best Christmas ever.

Here at Helix Courier Limited we are all looking forward to Christmas feasts, time with our families, a bit of down time after a very hectic year and a time to recharge to prepare for what promises to be a very interesting 2011.

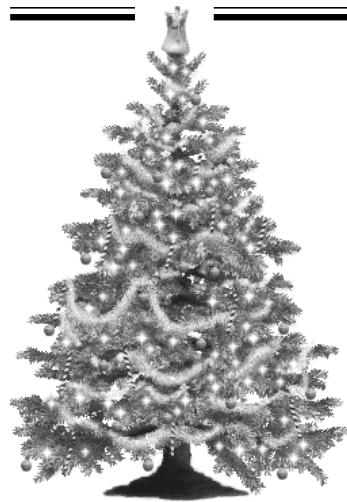
It doesn't take more than a glance at a daily newspaper and our favourite TV news program to see that the world is a complicated and sometimes dangerous and unfriendly place. We are very fortunate to live in our great country and to be able to live our lives safely and mostly on our own terms.

Please have a very safe and happy holiday! We all look forward to having everyone back with us in 2011. **Merry Christmas** and a **Very Happy New year!**

Sieg Pedde, President, Helix Courier Limited

- Spend more time sharing the burdens of those I love -- and less trying to get them to share mine.
- Spend more time participating in life -- and less watching television.
- Spend more time taking care of myself when I'm ill -- and less trying to convince myself that the world can't get along without me for even a day.
- Spend more time having fun -- and less time being practical.
- Spend more time finding joy in each moment -- and less wishing time would pass quickly.
- Spend more time on love and forgiveness -- and less on anger and insults.

Most of all, wrote Bombeck, who died in 1996, "Given another shot at life, I would seize every minute . . . look at it and really see it . . . live it . . . and never give it back."



The Story of the Christmas Tree

The ancient Egyptians and Romans would decorate their homes with evergreens on the winter solstice as symbols of fertility because the trees stayed green even in winter. In the 15th century, Germans made the trees a Christian symbol of rebirth. One legend holds that a missionary came upon a group of pagan Druids circling an oak tree, preparing

to sacrifice a young boy. The missionary chopped the tree down and a small fir sprouted in its place. He told the Druids it was a holy tree that represented peace and Christ.

Another legend tells of Martin Luther, the protestant reformer, seeing starlight shining through the branches of a fir tree. To duplicate that scene, he brought a fir into his house and decorated it with candles. Over time, other decorations, such as apples, paper chains, and wafers were added.

German immigrants brought their custom to America in the 1820s. In 1841, Prince Albert of Germany presented a Christmas tree as a gift to his wife, Queen Victoria of England, which helped to spread the tradition in England.

