



Celebrating Christmas in All its Glory (*and challenges*)

by GAIL M. CARROLL

Well it's time to deck the halls and get ready for "the most wonderful time of the year!" Christmas in all its glory is a beautiful time. One that many of us look forward to. However wonderful though, it can come with its many challenges. How will you look after you and yours this holiday season? Here are some tips and tricks as we approach this holiday season.

First comes the preparation – Christmas shopping, decorating, travel planning and helping ourselves and our families get through all the pre-Christmas and Christmas excitement.

- As we are getting ready to shop, the key to anything is *planning*. Make a list of all the people in your family, your friends and other individuals you wish to acknowledge at Christmas.
- Remember, it is the thought that counts. Develop a realistic budget and try to stay within your budget. Al Antle of Credit and Debt Solutions of NL advises people to use a 70% rule. Spend 70% of your budget on your immediate family, 70% of the remaining funds on extended family, 70% of those remaining funds on friends and co-workers, and give the remainder to a charity of your choice.
- Whatever method you choose – do plan and do make a list!
- Keep in mind some old traditions and look at some new ones.
- If you are travelling outside the province, remember to book your travel plans early. The closer to Christmas, the higher the travel cost and the lower the seat availability.
- If you are travelling within the province by vehicle, remember to give yourself time to accommodate for the varying driving conditions. Also remember to pack a winter vehicle emergency kit that should include a blanket, flashlight, matches, a candle, bottled water, food, a shovel and remember to charge your cell phone.

Trying new ideas and changing how you do things can be fun for all and reduce stress. One idea

to make Christmas a little simpler and take some of the commercialization out of the season is to try celebrating an old fashioned Christmas. Everyone makes gifts for each other no matter how talented they are in the craft department. This includes children making handmade gifts as well. Start your gift making early, i.e. after Halloween. Ideas for gift making of all ages could include:

- Christmas decorations;
- Handmade soaps and/or candles;
- Knitted items i.e. hats, scarves, sweaters;
- Have younger children make a special painting – even finger painting for the very young. Mom or Dad could mat and frame it and you have a great gift that will be treasured forever by a grandparent or loved one;
- Bookmarks;
- Paint and shellac a ceramic Christmas ornament – you might even personalize it;
- Bake favorite cookies, squares, cakes or breads for family members who have everything or are too busy to do their own. You can be really creative here!;
- Make favorite dry recipes for cookies or pancakes. Give the gift of Christmas breakfast. Mix the dry ingredients of your favourite pancake recipe and put all of the ingredients in a mason jar, then add dried blueberries, cranberries or chocolate chips to the top, write the directions for making on a fancy card and attach it to the jar with ribbon and a small bottle of maple syrup. Decorate the jars with Christmas stickers and include a favorite tea, cider, coffee, or hot chocolate to go in a fancy gift bag (or one that you make). The theme: "Christmas Breakfast for our family and friends...made with love." It is always a big hit! (You can do the same with a favorite cookie or loaf recipe.)

Having an old fashioned Christmas can be such a hit and lots of fun. After all, the "true meaning of the Christmas Season" is giving of yourself to the ones you care about. So, whatever you do, put your heart and soul into it and be creative. No matter how big or small your gift giving budget, what people appreciate is that you thought of them. So, pace yourself

and shop, create or work to your list.

If you have a large family, some ideas you might consider...

- Have a Christmas draw (buy for the family or person you drew at your Thanksgiving Dinner);
- Have a Secret Santa;
- Make a homemade gift, give to a charity on behalf of a friend or loved one;
- Give handmade coupons for a service you could do, i.e. snow clearing, lawn mowing and errands, etc. ...many, many ideas.

Make decorating a fun time. Play Christmas music, order pizza, have cookies... make it a fun tradition. Invite friends or family over for a fun afternoon or evening of carols, tree trimming and a festive time.

Plan for your Christmas dinner early. Who is hosting? Who is cooking? Share the tasks and make it enjoyable and as stress free as possible. When celebrating in a large family share the work, help the hosts to set the table and assist with meal preparation. Make certain that those who cooked do not clean. Everyone share in the workload. Makes for far more enjoyment for all.

If Christmas is particularly stressful, you might consider changing your routine. Try booking a reservation for Christmas dinner at a hotel or favorite restaurant. Host a family potluck. Lots of fun and little stress! (Works very well, particularly if you have been indulging in many Christmas festivities and eating many turkey dinners.)

Whatever your Christmas preparations, make it fun and light.

Unfortunately, Christmas and the holiday season can come with its challenges. We have talked a little about the financial challenges and how to plan for and address some of those; however, Christmas can be a sad and lonely time of the year for some people.

For those facing challenges such as family illness or mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, grief and/or other issues:

- it is important to pace yourself. Decide how much going you want to do and how much your energy will allow.
- you can go out to Christmas dinner and decide to have a quiet few days after.
- don't allow the pressures of the season to dampen your Christmas spirit or energy. Take care of yourself and your family.
- don't be afraid to change your yearly traditions or practices. Some years are better than others at Christmas as we tend to family illnesses, hospitalizations, palliative care visits and deaths. It challenges you to be flexible and to help your family members do the same.

When you experience periods when your energy is low for any number of reasons, consider changing some of your traditions. Many times when we make decisions to take care of ourselves, helping hands arrive as other family members may decide to host one of the dinners or socials.

Energy is like money; you have to budget it and decide how you are going to spend it. Don't let the holiday season leave you feeling run down and blue. Take care of you. Pace yourself. Make sure you are getting enough sleep. If you are taking medication, don't forget to take it during the holiday season and if you are enjoying a few drinks, check to ensure the medications you are taking will not react with certain foods or drink. Keep yourself hydrated. Also, please remember not to drink and drive. Arrange for a designated driver or taxi. Have fun, get in some relaxation time and stay safe as you celebrate this holiday season. Happy Holidays!

.....
Gail Carroll is a coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for Teachers. For confidential assistance contact Gail Carroll (ext. 242) or Judy Beranger (ext. 265).