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'TIS THE SEASON... ...to lie, hide, weep, fight and run

THERE'S THIS ABSURD MYTH THAT has been around for years — maybe you've heard of it — about how the holidays are joyous occasions of eggnog and love. Please. We college students know better — the holiday break is a tortuous crucible of overinquisitive relatives and amped-up high school friends. You end up spending half your waking hours defending your lifestyle and the other half knocking back spiced rum.

December has the highest suicide rate of any month, and with good reason. You've just come off that terrifying period of accountability known as finals week when, violently and abruptly, they shut down campus and send you home to deal with your family. In your weakened emotional state, you're subjected to reunions, dinners, intense interrogations by various relatives and interminably lengthy visits with long-gone great-uncles:

"Well, nephew, I remember during the war... got these bunions, y'know... this Ted Koppel feller needs a swift kick in the — Great Balls o' Fire! Left the wife at the Wal-Mart! Go kick-start the Studebaker, boy! Who's president? Where the hell are my pants?"

The holidays are not to be enjoyed. They are to be endured. Your best bet for surviving the next few weeks is to go on the offensive. Take

this opportunity to throw a gentle spin on reality as your relatives know it. Lie like crazy. Make stuff up. Twitch a lot. It will keep them off-balance and keep you occupied.

There are a few questions you're bound to be asked, so be prepared. For example, imagine an exchange of this nature: Fragile Aunt Helen approaches you at the tree-trimming party. "How's the new apartment?" she asks.

"I date sheep."

"What?"

"The rent's cheap, Aunt Helen. I'm very happy. Thanks for asking." Wait for her to stop trembling, and excuse yourself to get more punch. For the rest

of the night, whenever she's in earshot, bleat quietly.

Everybody has a burly, sporto Uncle-Al-type guy in the family, and he will always, without fail, ask the following question: "How's the team this year, boy?" (Even if you're female, Uncle Al will say boy.) This is a good opportunity to play it up as the snot-nosed college kid. May we suggest one of the following:

— "The team? Oh, yes. That little adolescent war fantasy played out every Saturday by the boys. How droll."

— "I don't care about sports. I'm a poet now."

— "Piss off, fascist!"

If you really want to go for it, try this approach,

which I personally used in 1993 with astounding results. Show up at Aunt Gladys' Christmas Eve party in an all-black mortician's suit and heavy mascara. Wear latex gloves and refuse to eat anything that hasn't been boiled. (This is a nice touch, as it makes everyone else a little nervous about the food.) Otherwise, act naturally and engage in typical banter. When some cousin finally works up the nerve to ask about your get-up, go bug-eyed and start backing slowly across the room. Whisper in terror, "You're one of them, aren't you?" Then lock yourself in the bathroom for the rest of the night.

Remember, your job is to kill time and stay sane. Get some laundry done, maybe, or steal canned goods to bring back to school. Remain calm, stay fairly drunk and don't make any sudden moves. January will arrive in time, and with it, escape.

Then you can start planning for summer vacation.



Double Take

First-Day
Freshman —
A Haiku Series

The slow droning buzz
My stupid-ass alarm clock!
Take that, clock! Take that!

Mmm. Sleepy. Yawn. Stretch.
Nine-thirty. Nine-thirty! Damn!
My eight o'clock. Missed.

This milk's gone chunky.
Expiration dates! And so...
Water with corn flakes.

Where's Hobbes Hall? Hey, you!
Where in the hell is
Hobbes Hall?
Goddammit! HOBBS HALL!

Late to class, I sneak
Quietly to the back row.
Whoops! Tripped. Ow! Head
wound.

Hemorrhaging freely
As the ambulances wail.
Losing... consciousness....

My body... floating...
A long tunnel...
bright white light...
Bad... first day... of class....

Parliament of Crows, Carter and Coleman, Wichita State U.

