

STONEWALL BABY

Bring on the egg nog

Life with "Mr. Xmas" may bring new meaning to Christmas for this would-be Grinch

by Will O'Bryan

Some gentle families are Christmas families. Others are not, though they may still celebrate the occasion. My family wasn't a Christmas family. While we had a tree and most of the trimmings, people didn't go out of their way to stop by our house to celebrate the season.

Mr. X, my spouse, comes from a Christmas family. He grew up with midnight Mass, nativity scenes, visits to *both* sets of grandparents, Christmas dinners, Christmas breakfasts, egg nog—the whole traditional shebang.

This year Mr. X and I have reached a turning point in our domesticity. Not only will this be the first year he'll be away from his family during the holiday season, but it will be the first year he spends it with me—his new family. We won't be starting out on our own, either.

Our guests are sisters, Chris (who is a lesbian) and Jenni. Death and divorce have left them virtually family-less, so Mr. X and I are substitutes. Unlike me, Chris and Jenni are like Mr. X—Christmas traditionalists. They even go caroling.

My mother told me in 1974 that Santa Claus did not exist. I have a vivid memory of sitting on her lap as she told me. We sat together in my father's prized recliner, just next to the Christmas tree in the living room of our split-level suburban home.

She explained that some kids at school would insist that Santa was a big lie, while others would defend his existence. She didn't want me to side with the ignorant. I think I'd already figured out that Santa was a myth, and I didn't care. My family was so dys-

functional by that point that all I wanted was the loot.

The tone was set for years to come. The years I didn't want the loot, I simply wanted to get it over with as soon as possible. By the time I hit 13 we no longer went to church, so we truly strained to find *any* meaning in the act of meeting in the living room in our nightclothes to unwrap consumable crap.

I spent one post-divorce Christmas with my father. The change of scenery didn't help. He'd begun a new tradition with his new family. He made an extra special Christmas oyster stew full of love and care. Oysters had not been a problem for me before that Christmas—and have not been since—but those oysters caused an allergic reac-

tion resulting in hives and asthma that lasted three days. We nearly celebrated the birth of the baby Jesus with my premature death.

The low point in my holiday marking was during a Christmas Eve at college. A motley lump of us that didn't go home to our families had a cocktail party: The Baby Jesus Cocktail Hour. This meant drinking Bloody Marys and playing pin-the-Jesus-on-the-crucifix. (Obviously, if there is a hell, I sealed my fate that night.) Afterward, we went to a bar and played pool. Merry Christmas.

My queer life has always shunned the family-oriented holidays like Christmas. Had I been raised Jewish, or some other religion, I'm sure the situation would be similar. I like New Year's Eve and Halloween; mischief-making holidays meant to be spent away from family.

While I suppose I'm as "spiritual" as the next guy, I'm not at all religious and certainly don't wear a Christian label. But in the face of the holiday season steamroller, my divine leanings are irrelevant. Egg nog will flow with or without me. The Grinch and Mr. Scrooge couldn't stop Christmas, and neither can I.

So here comes Christmas 1996 with its heavy links to God and family, and hypocrisy be damned, I'm going out on a limb for it. This year people are coming to my house to celebrate Christmas.

To be a good host, I'm trying to find some Christmas spirit. I'm sure expectations are high. As yet, I don't even have a cookie sheet, much less green and red sprinkles. I'm not sure what Christmas means to me, either.

I know there are gay Christians, evangelicals even. The meaning of Christmas could eas-

ily be very cut and dried for them—celebrating the birth of God on earth, the founder of Christianity, the holiest person in a Christian's world... Whatever the interpretation is, it won't work for me. But I am struggling to find something I'm comfortable with.

I'm going to give Christmas the benefit of the doubt and pretend that Christmas 1996 is my first. Maybe Christmas needn't mean much more than traditions. If that's the case, I'm about to start my own. Nevertheless, I think it's important to keep Jesus in there somewhere, but I've yet to figure out where. Perhaps I'll receive some divine inspiration. Regardless, it's going to be a queer Christmas. And maybe Jesus will even be there in spirit...and pumps.



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