

Merry Chwanukkahsticevus!

Ahhh... the smell of rotting leaves combined with the steady, incessant pitter-patter of raindrops falling on dying foliage. Oh, and let's not forget the half-rain, half-mist phenomenon often lasting for days I call "mist with an attitude." Folks, welcome to Christmastime in Portland.

Growing up in a tropical country where Christmas season is no different than any other time of year (think 90 degrees heat, swaying palm trees and 100 percent humidity), I really looked forward to a white Christmas when I first arrived here. Alas, poor me—I didn't do my research well enough (mind you, these were pre-Internet days and Google was not invented yet) and moved to Portland, Ore. not realizing it doesn't snow much here. When I finally did experience my first white Christmas, I ended up hating it after only two days because Portland is one of those cities that comes to a screeching, grinding halt if as much as an inch of snow sticks to the ground.

As a child, Christmas was a novelty to me. We never celebrated it while I was growing up. Even though my parents were somewhat progressive for Asians (my father championed English over our native tongue and my mother encouraged us to pursue higher education in western countries even though she had no for-



panda say what?!

BY BENNIE TAN

mal schooling of any kind), I grew up in a very strict Buddhist/Taoist environment. Both my mom and dad were very religious and superstitious. When I mention this to people here, they don't seem to think it was that bad. However, westerners' ideas of Buddhism are very different from the actual Buddhism practiced in Southeast Asia. Over there Buddhism is cross-pollinated with Taoism and other superstitions such as animal and object worship. (Look, it's an extra large tree and it is super ugly—there must be a spirit living in it! Let's sacrifice a chicken and appease the spirit before it harms us!)

When I was 18, I converted to Catholicism—I guess it was inevitable considering I attended Catholic schools my whole life (from The Holy Rosary Kindergarten to the University of Portland, a Jesuit college). I was also hopelessly in love with a Catholic boy then so I did everything I could to be around him, including going to church. Strangely enough, I am also convinced I was "called." At the time my mother had fallen prey to an unscrupulous "medium" and was tricked into parting with a lot of money and her peace of mind. I was

young, hurt and confused and needed some answers. I was appalled at how the gods we worship can be so cruel when they should be benevolent so I "Bible-dipped" (ask God a question, close your eyes, randomly open a page in the Bible and point at a verse with your finger) and got some eerily accurate answers. Only later did I learn the Bible is chock-full of passages about a merciful and loving God, but I was in too deep.

Ironically, I was a staunch Catholic until I moved here and attended the University of Portland—which, as a Catholic college, required students to take either a theology or philosophy class every semester. In a course I took called "Science and Religion," the instructor talked about how many of the "miracles" in the Bible can be debunked with modern science. However, if we are true Christians, we should have blind faith in God and believe He is responsible for everything. This did not make sense to me. Another class I took covered the history of religions from around the world. My eyes were opened to the horrors organized religions are capable of (jihads and crusades are just beginning).

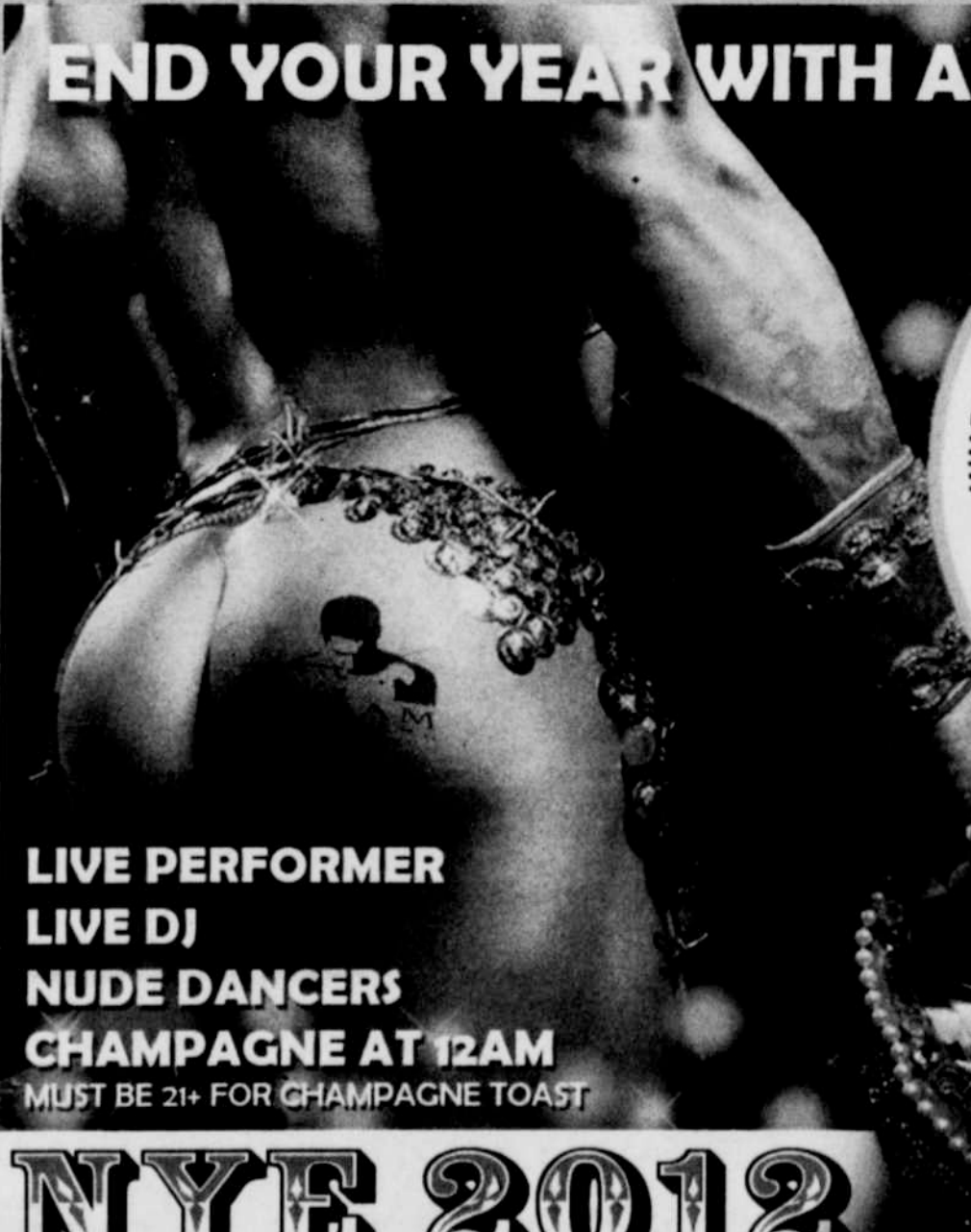
While I don't believe in organized religion, I do believe we are all here for a reason. I guess you can consider me agnostic. I don't subscribe to the belief system and dogma of any one religion but rather believe in the universal goodness of all religions.

In college, I made the mistake of wishing someone "Merry Christmas" only to offend him because I didn't realize he was Jewish. This was when I was still fresh off the boat and had not learned of the more generic and politically correct greeting of "Happy holidays." To me, Christmas never really meant the birth of Christ anyway (the Christmas we celebrate is really a pagan holiday the Catholic Church annexed to appease the pagans and help convert them), so I didn't see what the fuss was about. Christmas to me is about being around friends and family and the spirit of sharing.

After that snafu, I decided to take all good intentions of all the holidays occurring at this time of year and make it into a new greeting that won't offend anyone and is more interesting than "Happy holidays." So here it is—have a very Merry Chwanukkahsticevus everyone! ☺

In case you're wondering, it is Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Solstice and Festivus (for the rest of us). Bennie is accepting Chwanukkahsticevus wishes and gifts at pdxpandacub@gmail.com.

END YOUR YEAR WITH A BANG!



**LIVE PERFORMER
LIVE DJ
NUDE DANCERS
CHAMPAGNE AT 12AM**
MUST BE 21+ FOR CHAMPAGNE TOAST

NYE 2012

DECEMBER 31, 2011 @ 10PM

WHEN IT'S COLD IN PORTLAND, IT'S HOT AT STEAM!



**STEAM
PORTLAND**

OPEN 24HRS
CLOSED CHRISTMAS DAY

BLACKOUT MONTHLY ADVENTURE

TOP TIL THE FUN IS DONE

**GLOW STICK ADVENTURES/
RED=BOTTOM
GREEN=VERS/
BLUE TOP**

AVAILABLE AT CHECK-IN

\$13 · LOCKER/
\$22 · ROOM/
\$27 · VIDEO ROOM/
\$34 · DOUBLE/

BLACKOUT IS EVERY 3RD SATURDAY

STEAM PORTLAND • 2885 NE SANDY BLVD PORTLAND OR 97232 • www.steamportland.com • 503.736.9999

NEW MEMBERS VISIT US ONLINE FOR VIRTUAL TOUR AND A SPECIAL DISCOUNTED ADMISSION!