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MY TURN

■ Wayne Chan



Holidays aren't holidays without peace, love, and an inflatable Santa

Peer pressure ... It's the single most powerful motivation to get you into the holiday spirit.

After a whirlwind weeklong trip to Europe, our family was tired but glad to be home. It was a quick trip before the end of the year, and now we could spend the last couple weeks of 2013 relaxing and gearing up for the New Year.

When we arrived home from the airport and pulled up to our driveway, I immediately noticed something that set me back a bit.

In the short week we were gone, everyone in the neighborhood had put up their Christmas lights and decorations. Well, nearly everyone.

The neighbors to the right had icicle lights along the roofline and big, shiny ornaments hanging from the trees in the front yard. The neighbors to the left had twinkling lights covering all the bushes and shrubs and artificial reindeer lined up on the driveway, some with their heads bobbing up and down.

In the middle, there was our home ... empty and dark, with only a single light glowing, that being a lamp in the house — the one I'd put on an automatic timer to turn on while we were gone. Compared to our neighbors' houses, our home looked like we had disconnected our electric service and decided to live "off the grid."

The next morning, as I was walking our dog Ally, I again noticed the holiday decorations along the street, but also observed that our home was not the only one devoid of holiday cheer. Our neighbors across the street also did not have decorations of any kind.

Let me just say that I've always loved celebrating the holidays. I love singing carols. I love watching reruns of all my favorite holiday movies. I love getting together with friends and family to laugh and celebrate. But after so many years of stringing the lights and setting up the Christmas tree, only to be followed by packing all the lights away and recycling the tree just a few short weeks later, I thought, maybe just this once we could skip that part of the holidays, especially if our neighbor across the street was thinking the same thing. We could still be jolly, even without all the bling.

The following afternoon, my wife and I attended a neighborhood holiday party. After catching up with everyone, I turned to the host of the party and decided to share my decoration-free holiday plan. I said, "You know, Mary, we just came back from our trip. We're a little tired and I decided I'm not going to decorate the house or get a Christmas tree this year."

There was a hush in the room.

"Oh ..." Mary said, with a look of grave concern.

I went on. "I mean, I normally would have put up the decorations last week, but we were gone, and if I put 'em up now, I'm just going to take them down in a couple of weeks. It's such a hassle."

The room was silent, but now people were glancing at each other, as if I had just announced plans to build a toxic waste dump in my backyard.

Mary looked at me with an intense stare and said, "Wayne, you've got to put lights up! It's the holiday spirit!"

Twenty pairs of eyes were on me. It was like they were looking at the man who cancelled Christmas.

Actually, there was one exception. My neighbor across the street, who also didn't have any decorations on his house, was there. I could see him gently nodding his head in approval, slightly gritting his teeth and clenching his fist. I knew what he was thinking.

Come on Wayne. You and me, brother. Don't give in. We don't have to put up any stinkin' lights. Stay strong. We'll get through this together. Semper fi!

We got home after the party, and I hadn't given in. We would be fine. We could still celebrate Christmas without the lights or a tree.

And then, my mom called.

She said, "Wayne, we've all decided to celebrate Christmas at your house this year. We love how you decorate the house."

The next morning, I was in the yard with my ladder, an extension cord, and 14 boxes of lights and decorations. Our home and our neighborhood, would all be merry once again.

Well, everyone except for my neighbor across the street, who glared at me as he pulled his ladder out of the garage.

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