

RANDOM THOUGHTS BY GEORGIANN POTTS

Remember true hope, peace that Christmas promises

Writer's Note: In just a few short days, it will be Christmas Eve and then Christmas Day. While this is always a very special time of the year, perhaps this one will feel just a little more special to many of us.



Georgiann Potts

As I mentioned in my last column, there are so many reasons to be grateful just now. If you are reading this — and especially if the pandemic hasn't struck you or those you love — then you are surely feeling gratitude. Most of you reading may simply be grateful that 2020 is nearly over! I think many of us feel that way.

Even under these trying, uncertain times, Christmas will still be celebrated. We may not be able to do everything that we have traditionally done, but we will all do something. And we will all find our own unique joy in this special holiday. — GP

Merry Christmas, 2020!

First recorded by Bing Crosby in 1943, "I'll Be Home for Christmas" is one of those endearing Christmas songs that nearly everyone knows. Most of us associate it with times in our lives when we — or someone we loved — couldn't be home at Christmas for one reason or another. The lyrics were written as though from a soldier were telling his loved ones that he would, thankfully, be home for the holidays. There is a caveat at the end, however, when he adds "if only in my dreams". Of course, there have been other wars, and other reasons, why being home with family and friends was not possible during a particular time.

This holiday — Christmas 2020 — will find most of us home for the holidays — just as we have been home for most of this year. For some, our homes are becoming just a bit TOO familiar as we find ourselves longing to gather with others, travel to either "old familiar" or "totally unfamiliar" places, and to finally be free of the restrictions that have become over the past ten months a way of life.

Bree Carroll, a United States Air Force spouse, wrote an interesting arti-

cle recently anticipating the end-of-year 2020 holidays. Her article, "Rethinking the Holidays: Traditions, Change are on the Table" (www.winknews.com), was a thoughtful and realistic look at the "pandemic predicament" we find ourselves in this year. Carroll wrote, "Traditions are something that we should hold dear and hold close, but also there are opportunities to do some different things and share in other people's traditions and cultures." She went on to say that this current situation doesn't have to be "a deal-breaker when it comes to holidays" if we are creative and focus on what is truly important.

Getting Creative for Christmas 2020

Clearly, this Christmas has called for most of us to dust off our creativity genes so that we can make things festive. For many, this will mean looking over our traditions and finding creative (and safe) ways to maintain at least some of them this holiday season.

It is hard to be more creative than trying to come up with 25+ different ways for an elf to appear in your house every single night from December 1st through December 24th. For the past 16 years, an idea that began with one family has literally transformed the holiday households of countless families. The idea is fairly simple — the "elf" is a special "scout elf" working for Santa Claus by visiting (i.e. scouting) homes wherein reside children who may — or may not — qualify for Santa's "nice" list come Christmas morning. One saving feature is that the children must not touch the elf or he



SAVANNAH GRAINGER enjoys holding the household's quarantined Elf while her sister, Hannah Grace Grainger, prepares to hang the art project she made with her mother as part of a fundraiser for her school.

will lose his magic causing them to fall hopelessly onto Santa's "naughty" list.

Each night the elf (by a mommy miracle, primarily) moves from place to place proving to the children when they awaken in the morning that he is "real". The creativity part got serious when the elf began doing more than just moving from one spot to the next. Over time, the elf's antics that the children awakened to see became more complex --- elf playing cards with other toys, elf in a marshmallow "hot tub", elf making a snow angel in flour on the kitchen counter — well, you get the idea.

Today there are many sources where frantic parents can find ideas for things for their short-term resident elf to do. Some local high school entrepreneurs have even created a "2020 Elf Kit" said to include everything needed to properly set up an elf for 25 nights. Even with this kind of support system out there, some parents (no doubt fed up with yet another thing to have to worry with) have just thrown in the towel, so to speak, and presented their elf inside of a jar with the lid closed and a note announcing that the poor guy is quarantined for 14 days because of his travel from the North Pole. (That knocked off all but 11 nights in just one step — not bad.) One would be hard-pressed

to find a child in America who hasn't heard about quarantining, after all.

There's More to Christmas than the Elf

The elf is relatively new to the holiday traditions game. Many of the established traditions from long ago are being followed today, though most with minor pandemic "tweaks". Going to see Santa is still being done, but now it has to be done virtually or with the child sitting on a chair 6 feet away from the jolly old guy. For the younger set who are traditionally terrified of this giant man with the white beard and very large belly, this may be actually be a blessing. Attending a Christmas Eve candlelight service can still happen many places, but only with limited in-person attendance but unlimited virtual attendance. Writing a letter to Santa is still happening, Christmas cookies are still being baked and iced, and many families will gamely don their identical Christmas pajamas on Christmas Eve. The tradition of adding a new ornament to the tree is still happening. The most popular ornaments for 2020? Anything that references COVID-19, of course!

Many are foregoing the usual large family gatherings and instead are focusing on their immediate households this year. When asked on social media what



MR. AND MRS. Claus (aka Brian and Leigh Grainger) relaxing at home just before Christmas.

Christmas at home, thankful that our incomes haven't been adversely affected and that the unexpected time spent together during 2020 has been good overall."

For Tency Tarver, the one thing that she will miss the most about not being with her family at Christmas is their traditional family photo session with her grandchildren — Henry, Mary, Tanner, Kasey, and Ashley. She hasn't seen many of them in "too long". "Pictures mean a lot to me," says Tarver — a talented photographer herself who spent years taking professional shots for others.

Even the Royals

Not even the Queen of England is exempt from changing traditions brought about by the pandemic. Certain annual events in England are marked by special appearances by the queen and her kin. Queen Elizabeth has celebrated Christmas for decades at Sandringham, her estate in Norfolk, with her husband, Prince Philip, and with as much of their family as can attend. The clan traditionally exchanges funny or handmade gifts (a German tradition) on Christmas Eve. The "walk about" to St. Mary Magdalene Church for the Christmas service on Christmas morning is a much-anticipated special opportunity for the public to see the Royals. This year, however, a quieter Christmas is in store for Queen Elizabeth at Windsor Castle. The traditional Sandringham Christmas is no more.

God Bless Us, Every One

In A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens (first published in 1843), Tiny Tim blesses the family's Christmas dinner by praying, "God bless us, every one!" By including every person in his blessing, the child reminds everyone (including Scrooge) that all should be happy and grateful at Christmas. It might be tempting to be an Ebenezer Scrooge or even the Grinch this Christmas 2020, but we should reach down deep and remember the true hope and peace that Christmas promises us, every single one. In that, we can all find joy.

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