

POSSIBILITIES

unleash your imagination

—WINTER 2023

NUTS-IN-THE-SHELL

Traditions, by definition, span generations. Christmas is full of them. Some are relatively universal, some are unique to countries, or to people who share beliefs, and sometimes even to families. “We always did it this way,” takes on a different meaning at Christmas. It’s not a statement of stubbornness, but rather it’s a statement of love.

For many, Christmas just wouldn’t be Christmas without the traditions that have been handed down. We may not agree on real vs fake, but we must have a tree, and we must decorate it. We must light up our house, and apparently for some, it should be visible from space. We must exchange gifts. We must eat turkey with cranberry and stuffing. And we must set a bowl of mixed nuts-in-the-shell on the coffee table.

Ok, nuts-in-the-shell in a bowl on the coffee table may be specific to just a few of us. But nuts-in-the-shell are in fact a real Christmas tradition and many stores put them on display, along with the required nutcracker, as December approaches. There is a deep history in nuts at Christmas, although it varies greatly by country. Saint Nicholas, whom we often associate with Christmas, is said to have put nuts and oranges into the shoes of good children at his feast in early December.

Most of us are more familiar with the Nutcracker, those frankly scary looking characters from the ballet that was first performed in the late 1800s. And we all know that chestnuts are a tradition of the season thanks to Nat King Cole’s recording of The Christmas Song from the 1950s that starts, “Chestnuts roasting on an open fire.” But then, I have never seen chestnuts roasting on an open fire, or even seen chestnuts in a bag of nuts at the grocery store at any time of the

year.

Some traditions get adopted and woven into the texture of the season so thoroughly that we accept them as part of our own folklore. But in the quiet corners of Christmas, the feeling of the season comes to us in something else. Memories.

home in 1981. But every Christmas, without exception, I think about them. (Full disclosure; we have plenty of nuts without shells at all times of the year.)

When I was growing up a bowl of nuts-in-the-shell would find its way onto our coffee table sometime in December. It would be refilled regularly. Two nutcrackers (the metal lever type, not the scary guy) would be in the bowl as well. And two people would consume most of those nuts. Myself, and Mom.

Sometimes we would watch something on TV while cracking away. Sometimes Christmas music would be playing. Sometimes there was just the sound of cracking shells as we went about the task of emptying the bowl of uncracked nuts whilst simultaneously filling up a bowl of discarded shells. I went for the Brazil nuts first – the tastiest in my opinion and the most challenging to crack. My Mom seemed to go for the Hazelnuts first, and now I realize that’s probably because she knew I didn’t want them. And even though I wasn’t very adept at cracking, and pieces of cracked shell would fly literally all over the living room, Mom never asked me to be careful. That may have been because Dad did more of the vacuuming, but I think it was because she didn’t want anything to spoil this special time we had together.

Yes, nuts-in-the-shell at Christmas is a tradition, with a long but albeit inconsistent history. But for me, nuts-in-the-shell at Christmas isn’t a tradition. It’s a memory. A memory that serves as a gateway to a happy moment in time involving a young boy and his proud mother. A memory that washes over me with love from Christmas past.

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Often, traditions are more like reminders, that become requirements, making the associated work seem like a burden. But memories are like time-travel, taking us to a treasured moment so that we might live that moment again.

We haven’t had any nuts-in-the-shell around our house, well, probably since I left my parents’



In June of 2022, I took over the role of president at Bell Financial as Bill moved into ‘almost retirement’. Although I had been fully emersed in the company’s management for years, as of June 2022 there were noticeably more issues for me to address. Most have quick and easy solutions, while others just can’t be rushed. In fact, it seems that certain problems can only be solved by stepping away from them entirely. When questions have come up that don’t have easy answers, I’ve found the best way to make progress is through simply taking a break. This often comes in the form of a walk or a run to let my mind wander in whatever direction it wants. I may start designing a kid’s playhouse, or contemplate a passage from a recent book, or create a fantasy scenario where I magically figure out my golf swing and win the FedEx Cup at age 42. When I return to the problem, there suddenly appears a solution that wasn’t there before my mental sojourn. How is this possible? Well, experts say it’s the subconscious; to me it seems more like magic. Apparently, our subconscious can compute at a much higher capacity - some hypothesize millions of times quicker - than our conscious thought. If that’s not magic, what is? To unlock this cerebral supercomputer, we sort of need to turn it down, or at least step away. Relaxation, meditation, physical exercise/activity, and even daydreaming or doodling can all help stimulate the subconscious, allowing it to work things out. When I was a kid, doodling and fidgeting were frowned upon. They meant a lack of focus and were seen as obstacles for a child to overcome. Smart kids sat still, listened to the teach-

er, and took nice, neat notes. There’s likely some correlation there if we replace the word ‘smart’ with ‘academic’, but it discredits those who simply have active, distractable minds. Research now shows that fidgeting, doodling and even chewing gum (also frowned upon when I was a kid) increase the neurotransmitters that control attention span, and for some people this will improve their ability to learn. Take that, Mrs. Greenwood!

Daydreaming also got a bad rap when I was young. A distracted mind seemed synonymous with being a bad student. Yes, highly distractable students may need more time, more support, and even more supplies to reach the desired academic goals - this all presents a real challenge to those tasked with teaching such students in a traditional academic setting. However, these highly distractable students have also been found to have enhanced creativity and ultra-inventive minds that excel at innovative problem solving. I heard an expert on the subject aptly describe it as a Ferrari brain with bicycle brakes. Thankfully, the education system is doing a much better job of recognizing and accommodating students faced with this challenge.

My son Callum is a big daydreamer, just like I was at age 7. He has a hard time sitting in his desk and listening to the teacher, but also has had tremendous success building and creating in class when given open-ended problems to solve. His ambition since he was very young has been to become an inventor. We love to watch him build with Lego, create setups with his dinosaurs and animals, or re-construct



boxes and scraps into brilliant inventions. He’ll stare at a pile of virtually anything and it becomes ‘parts’ which his mind will collect with both ease and pleasure into something extraordinary. Leah, quite thoughtfully, decided to give him a bin of what I can only describe as clean garbage and called it his builder box. This has led to countless hours of creation, with the side benefit of zero cost. What a rewarding process it is to dream and create. And, probably one we should do more of as adults.

For myself, it became much easier to focus as I grew older, and I ended up doing quite well academically (certainly better than Mrs. Greenwood would have ever expected). But I still doodle, I still daydream, and I’m forever grateful for that. I’ve learned to lean a lot on my creative subconscious when faced with life’s toughest decisions and most challenging problems.

I’m confident there will be plenty more to come because I’ve kind of set it up that way (perhaps subconsciously), so that life remains interesting and challenging. Some answers will continue to come easily, and some will require me to take a mental break away from the issue at hand, to let the magic happen. It may seem counterproductive to stop working on a problem to solve it, but if you’re stuck, I suggest you give it a try.

Wishing you a wonderful holiday season.

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LIZ'S EGG ROLL IN A BOWL

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb. ground turkey breast
- 1 sweet onion, diced
- 1 tbsp sesame oil
- 1 tbsp rice vinegar
- 2 tsp minced fresh garlic
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- ¼ cup soy sauce
- 16 ounce bag coleslaw mix
- ½ cup matchstick carrots
- 2 green onions, thinly sliced
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 tablespoon hoisin sauce (optional, but recommended)

DIRECTIONS

Heat up a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add in your ground meat and cook until it's no longer pink. Then drain the meat and return it to the skillet.

Add in diced onion, sesame oil, and rice vinegar. Cook, stirring, until the onion is tender. Then add the garlic, ginger, soy sauce, hoisin sauce, coleslaw, and carrots to the skillet.

Cook, until the cabbage is wilted (6 min.) and then remove the skillet from the heat. Now you can stir in those green onions and season your dish with salt and pepper.

Enjoy!



IF NOT NOW

The definition of Entitlement in the Oxford Dictionary is as follows:

- "The fact of having a right to something; the belief that one is inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment"

I think that the term has gotten a bad rap over the years. These days it seems to mainly apply to people who think they deserve something to which they aren't entitled. In other words, an entitled person is a spoiled brat. He expects to reap the benefits of what he did not sow.

While "entitlement" is used more often as a pejorative term, I think that it should also apply to what we legitimately feel is owed to us: an entitlement to government pension benefits at retirement, for example. We've invested in it; we can expect to receive the benefit. We can be deserving of certain rights by virtue of our commitment to an employer, to a set of beliefs, or even to family. I don't believe that there's anything wrong with that, do you?

Where am I going with all this? Holiday planning, that's where. I want to plan a big holiday for when I turn sixty-five and Susie turns sixty. We will have been married for ten years and together for fifteen. So many milestones coming in the same year. I want us to travel to Italy and stay for an extended period, perhaps three weeks, a dream of mine for longer than I can remember. Susie had been to Italy before and is excited to return. Since this big holiday is still over a year away, I had lots of time to plan. So why was I feeling anxious about it?

Once the pandemic began to wane and travel restrictions eased, we all flocked to travel apps and booked trips to just about anywhere but here. The need to escape our immediate confines was so overwhelming that airports couldn't cope with the collective stampede through its terminals. We needed to travel; heck, after what we endured, we were entitled to travel.

And yet...every time I allowed myself to get excited about planning our holiday, I felt conflicted. Every reason I would present to Myself 1 about why I needed this, deserved this, Myself 2 would offer an equally compelling reason why I couldn't go, shouldn't go. "The world is in turmoil, and all you can think of is your puny needs? You're being selfish". And so on. Myself 2 was one tough customer, and Myself 1 was under duress to

convince me that caring for myself was entirely unselfish.

Despite the throngs of travelers going this way and that, I know I'm not the only one who stutter-steps

when planning a holiday. Maybe we've been through so much over the past few years that the spring in our step has gone flat. "Carefree" is a term seldom used these days. I think it has been replaced by "careful". COVID came out of nowhere, without warning. How could we be anything but careful going forward?

Fear is a harsh taskmaster. It can beat down the best laid plans until they are put off or dismissed altogether. Feeling entitled to a holiday was entirely reasonable, even healthy. Susie and I need to get away. So why was I feeling anxious about it? Maybe I'm culturally predisposed to believe that I'm not worthy of an innocent frolic now and then. Maybe I'm worried that I'm not deserving of being "carefree".

And yet...if not now, when? There will always be reasons why we can't do things; there's a never-ending supply. It's difficult to take a step forward when the default position for so long now has been to stand still, to shelter in place. Ultimately, it took a recent dinner conversation with my brother-in-law to convince me to shake free of the inertia. He's been to Italy many times and when he speaks of his travels he gets so animated that I want to yell "you had me at Tuscany!!". Susie and I need some of that.

And so, despite Myself 2 compiling a long list of reasons why I should abandon this project, I have begun my research into what our Italian adventure can look like. The more I read, the more I believe that this is going to happen.

Maybe I can remember what "carefree" feels like. I think I'm entitled to try.

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GREAT MINDS, GREAT
Thoughts

Jobs fill your pocket, but
adventures fill your soul.

Jaime Lyn Beatty

Scientists investigate that which
already is, Engineers create that
which has never been.

Albert Einstein

Carpe diem. (Seize the day.)

Horace

There is nothing in
the world so irresistibly contagious as
laughter and good humour.

Charles Dickens
A Christmas Carol

Creativity is
intelligence having fun.

Albert Einstein

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