

Sinterklass, Christkindl, St. Nicholas, and Santa Claus: I've met them all

I love Christmas. For all the usual reasons—the lights, sounds, smells, colors, and good cheer, but also because of the great memories I have of Christmastime as a child.

Christmas has always been joyously celebrated in my family. I was raised in Europe. We moved frequently as my father was not only a physician but also a diplomatic attaché, and since he was Presbyterian and my mother Roman Catholic, my brothers and I got to celebrate both traditions. On top of that, we also got to celebrate Christmas as the locals did in whichever country we happened to be living at the time.

My earliest memory is of Christmas in Holland, which seemed to last the whole month. The big celebration kicked off when Sinterklass arrived by canal boat on the eve of 5 December (at least in Wassenar, where we were living), accompanied by his trusted companion, Zwarte Piet. Together they distributed sweets and presents in little baggies to all good children. As well, the Canadian embassy in Holland always had a big celebration that began with the arrival of Santa Claus. Over the years, this resulted in my accumulating a sizable collection of little cars: first Corgis, then Matchbox, and later Hot Wheels.

I remember our huge Christmas trees with electric candles that looked real, and I remember a lot of homemade decorations, especially straw stars that we boys helped my mother make. We also had lots of Christmas baking—mince tarts, traditional Christmas pudding, and fruitcake.

On Christmas Eve my family and I celebrated in the Catholic tradition, first with a visit from Christkindl (when we received most of our presents), followed by a traditional fish



The Vienna Rathaus (town hall) hosts the Christkindl Market each year. The building becomes a giant Advent calendar in December—a new window is lit each day.

dinner and apple strudel and whipped cream dessert. We would then all attend church for the midnight service.

On Christmas day we celebrated further with turkey or goose and all the fixings followed by Christmas pudding set aflame by a match touched to the warmed cognac. We got to eat that with whipped cream, too. I think it's safe to say my mother really liked whipped cream—and so did the rest of us.

When we moved to Austria, we discovered that St. Nicholas was accompanied by Krampus when he made his rounds on the evening of 5 December. Although Krampus represents evil, he was under St. Nicholas's control—an affirmation that evil is not to have the last word.

I remember St. Nicholas and Krampus towing a sled while snow fell all around, handing out bags of goodies filled with treats from the village bakery. Unlike in Holland this was not the major gift-giving day, but it was still loads of fun. Advent played

an important role there, and in Vienna itself there was a large building that looked like a giant Advent calendar. A new window was lit each day as Christmas approached.

Santa Claus came to both the embassy and the American school my brothers and I attended. We sang carols in many different languages since there were children of more than 60 nationalities attending the school.

When we moved to Scotland we continued our previous traditions of celebrating Christmas in all its different variations, but we had little to do with Hogmanay, the celebration on the last day of the year.

When my family eventually moved to Victoria, our happy combination of traditions continued, beginning with the Advent calendar, and then the arrival of Sinterklass, St. Nicholas, Christkindl, and Santa Claus. It's no wonder I loved Christmas.

As an adult I moved to Yukon after my residency and continued with

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engaging in this type of work, especially if they are front-line firefighters working in fire suppression. This work is extremely physically demanding. Workers with mild and well-controlled respiratory disease may be able to work with few or no restrictions. Those with more advanced COPD with fixed airway obstruction or brittle asthma may be limited in their ability to do this type of work. Such cases may warrant a referral to a cardiologist, respirologist, or occupational medicine specialist.

For more information

If your patient is a seasonal wildland firefighter and you would like further information or assistance with his or her diagnosis or treatment, please call a medical advisor in your nearest WorkSafeBC office.

—Sami Youakim MD, MSc,
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A version of this article listing sources is available online at bcmj.org.

Additional reading

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many of the traditions that had left such an impression on me. I even added a new custom—a trip out to the forest in my snowmobile to cut down a Charlie Brown Christmas tree and then haul it back on the trailer. We were guaranteed snow over Christmas in Yukon.

My own children have been brought up with the same blend of traditions. And we added something else to the mix: a musical Christmas in which the family and guests each bring and play a musical instrument—we've had more than a dozen musicians.

However you enjoy this festive season, I wish you happiness and laughter, good food and good cheer, and time spent with friends and loved ones.

—William Cunningham, MD
President

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5. The Cochrane Collaboration. It is estimated that only "10% to 35% of medical care is based on RCTs." On what information is this based? Accessed 30 October 2013. www.cochrane.org/faq/it-estimated-only-10-35-medical-care-based-rcts-what-information-based.
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- Office redesign coaching to examine care services and optimize care delivery to improve access and thus improve attachment.
- Enhanced home and community care to better support chronic disease management in the community and be connected with the primary care home and family physician rather than being geographically based.

In the Cowichan Valley, attachment was explored through a patient-centric lens, and several improvement options were supported by the division and its partners. The prototype work has seen early positive results, connecting about 2000 Cowichan residents with family doctors. However, the issue of patient attachment is complex. The next step is to implement additional changes and to continually evaluate their impact in order to share the outcomes.

For more details on the Cowichan Valley Attachment initiative prototype, visit www.leadlab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CowichanAttachment.pdf.

For more information on the GPSC's Attachment initiative, visit www.gpsc.bc.ca/attachment-initiative.

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