

## The most wonderful time of the year

**T**he Christmas holidays have always been a special time of year for me, perhaps the most special. The sights, sounds, smells, and colors of the festive season fill me with a childlike sense of excitement, and the laughter of children and the coming together of family fills me with the sense of hope that the season is supposed to bring.

As children, my brother, sister, and I would spend hours staring at the blinking lights on the Christmas tree, trying to guess what gifts Santa would bring and counting down the days until Christmas morning when we would find out. Some of my fondest childhood memories are of waking up early on Christmas morning to the gifts under the tree, the coal tracked across the carpet, and the fire irons spread across the floor—all signs that someone special had indeed visited in the night. It was always a race among us siblings, fueled by excitement, to see who could open their gifts fastest—something I now watch my own children do. Once gifts were done my mother would disappear into the kitchen, savory smells soon filling the house as she cooked our traditional Christmas lunch of turkey and a glazed, clove-studded honey ham.

Christmas lunch was one of my favorite times. It brought together all immediate and extended family members, usually upward of 25 people, to gather around the table eating, laughing, and enjoying one another's company. And lunch wasn't complete without the plum pudding, stuffed with coins and set alight with brandy, with which my father once nearly burned down the house when he tripped and sent the flaming dessert across the room and into the curtains. From then on the pudding was lit at the table.

One of my favorite Christmas presents was my first bike. To add to the fun, Santa had left clues under the tree that sent me on a treasure hunt to find it hiding elsewhere in the house. But my most memorable childhood gift was an early motorized model of a Boeing 727 aircraft with blinking lights, which I received from one of my father's clients. I had never been on an airplane before and I wouldn't board my first plane until I was 19.

In South Africa Christmas falls in the heat of the summer, so hot sunny days, flowers in full bloom, meals eaten outside, and afternoon swims were the norm for me during the Christmas holidays. Snow was a foreign concept, something that I wouldn't see until

university. Little did I know that later in life I would be living in Canada looking to escape the cold of winter. My first Christmas in Canada was spent just north of the 66th parallel in a metre of snow and with temperatures of -40 °C. That one white Christmas was enough for me, and I've spent almost all of the last 27 Christmases in warmer places such as South Africa and the Canary Islands. Even the many Christmases spent in Denmark since meeting my Danish wife have always been en route to somewhere warm!

Today Christmas is a mix of old and new Danish and South African traditions. My daughters take great joy in decorating the tree, pulling out the dusty box of ornaments from my South African childhood and hanging them on its branches. Though they've spent most Christmases traveling to visit family in different parts of the world, they're looking forward to one day enjoying a Christmas in Vancouver.

Christmas is also a time to take a step back, slow down, reflect on the past year and on your hopes for the year ahead, remember good times had, and enjoy new memories in the making. So however you celebrate the holiday season and whatever the holidays mean to you, I hope you take time to relax and rejuvenate before the busyness of the new year arrives. And I hope you surround yourself with family, friends, and loved ones. From my family to yours, I wish you a happy and healthy festive season.

—Charles Webb, MBChB  
Doctors of BC President



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