

THE GUMSCRAPER

THE INDEPENDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL STUDENTS' NEWSPAPER

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As the last week of school before Christmas break draws to an end, we have decided to provide you with one of our rare Gumscrapers, not just to support our school's mission to abolish vandalism, but also because it is long overdue since the last issue appeared in September 2005. We recall those turbulent times with dramatic articles ("Is it my Right or my Privilege to Use the Library?") and important issues such as the 11th grade class trips and the doubled cost of photocopies. Nowadays we have less muck to rake, and have therefore decided to scrape some gum instead.

We also want to thank you for the vigorous responses to our last issue featuring the swine flu. Our Mathematik-LK-editors estimate that 76.2% of the student and teacher body was or still is infected with the virus, including 3.7% that are nearly dead (judging by the recurring names listed on the substitution board since weeks).

We challenge you to finish our Christmas puzzle while enjoying the variety of class Christmas parties, which seem to compose the major part of the last week of school. Our Handy Hyperlinks column is sure to assist those of you doomed to be working on research papers over break. We also urge you to ponder over your upcoming New Year's resolutions, as we have worked countless hours developing our own. In 2010, we hope to conduct more student directed polls, plan to kidnap and torture talented writers in return for priceless articles, and will initiate a petition concerning the installment of a vegan Dönerbude in Haus Reil, forcing Mr. Lally to change his professional attire and accent. Can you top that?

Cheers,
the Editors

An Open Letter to the President of the United States

Dear Mr. Obama,

I would like to commend you for your excellent work in promoting world-wide peace. The Nobel Prize committee chose wisely this year. I was delighted to hear that your new Afghanistan-strategy includes sending 30 000 new troops to the country. Past conflicts have truly shown us that such escalations always work. The glorious US victory in the Vietnam War could not have been achieved had the great Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon not dispatched thousands over thousands of brave US soldiers to defend our noble democratic allies in South Vietnam and fight the abominable communist aggression. As we draw parallels to Vietnam, have you considered the strategic possibilities of napalm and Agent Orange in Afghanistan? I mean, it's not like those ever harmed civilians or anything. I also urge you retain our former President George W. Bush's highly venerated policy for finding terrorists: smoke 'em out of their caves! If you send enough troops, it shouldn't take you too long to search every single one of the several million caves in the Hindu Kush Mountains. Sure, it could take a few years (or centuries), but you've got to start somewhere. Let's be optimistic here!

But despite all our noble efforts, some cynics still point out that Afghanistan's political structure is inherently corrupt. I say, let's tackle the problem like we did in the past: by pressing our Western democracy and value system onto

the Afghans! There may be a few cultural differences, but that issue should settle itself after we give them great institutions like McDonald's and Hollywood. After all, the export of democracy worked really well in countries like Colombia and Panama.

Furthermore, I applaud your refusal to sign the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction. Land mines are an absolutely necessary tool for attaining and maintaining peace and democracy! Great nations as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have proven this to the world – their mining of the border between North and South Korea has ensured peaceful and prosperous relations for the past 50 years. Sure, many people, especially children, die or lose limbs every day through land mines. But then again, life is just not fair. It may take years to de-mine former areas of conflict, but who cares? It's not like any Americans are getting killed.

I dearly hope you will take my suggestions to heart, Mr. President. With the Nobel Peace Prize in your pocket, I hope you will take all measures necessary to ensure a peaceful democratic world based on American values, which are better than all others, as history has shown. Show those fuckers who's boss! Kick some ass!

Patriotic greetings,

Noah Walker-Crawford

Christmas To Do List

Are you tired of the slushy mud we once called snow? Fed up that our Winter Wonderland is actually sinister and bland? Are you sick of how Berlin makes every advent season feel pathetic, hideous, and superfluous?

Here are some ways for you to bring back that Christmas "Vorfreude" and

enjoy the weeks thereafter, even during this most hideous time of year:

1. Bake cookies: Everyone enjoys the smell of these delicious treats! They make for perfect gifts for your friends and family and either take barely no time at all or the whole day to make, depending on how badly you want to

Christmas, continued on page 2

Christmas Special

Christmas, continued from page 1

drown the day out. This is also something you can do with that special someone: it's a cute way to bond that costs very little money.

2. Make freezer snowballs: They are just as fun to stuff down people's shirts and pants and allow you to trick them, if only momentarily, that there is snow outside.

3. Wear wooly, cozy, Christmas-style socks: No one has to see them, no one has to know, but as long as you're wearing them, they will give you that feeling. It's like wearing Superman underpants, it makes you feel stronger..

4. Drink Glühwein: You only get to once a year. So throw away that Rotkäppchen Sekt and let yourself be warmed up from head to toes!

5. Participate in winter sports: You know where to go for ice-skating, but if you don't want to ski across from the Potsdamer Platz Arkaden, get a group of friends together and go to the Harzgebirge for a weekend! A Schönes-

Wochenende-Ticket costs 37€ for up to 5 people and can get you to a small town called Braunlage, a pretty decent ski resort with a great view of the Brocken.

6. Go to the Chanukah Market: Although it's small, it's different than the same old overfilled Christmas markets. It also won't be cold, since it's inside the Jewish Museum. Something you'll want to see (and, if you're brave, taste) is their large and quite abnormal selection of mustards...

7. Build a Lebkuchenhaus: Smells great, looks great, and tastes great afterwards. Although it seems childlike, it's sure to bring back some good memories!

8. Donate to Charity: Prepare a "Christmas in a Shoebox", sing carols for Community Service, or even just smile at someone; it's bound to bring back that Christmas spirit, which is, after all, a commercialized anti-depressant during this most suicide-invoking time of year.

Carolynn Look

Handy Hyperlinks

This time around we have a wonderful list of legal online libraries for you to peruse during your copious free time in the holidays.

--<http://www.classic-literature.co.uk/>

A site that has a nice collection of well-known books in multiple languages, including all of Shakespeare's works, Charles Darwin's books, and recipes.

--http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page

Project Gutenberg is an ambitious project that aims to save a copy of every public domain book ever published online. It's a community-wide effort, as anyone can help simply by signing up and proofreading a page or two. By now they have over 30 000 books with more being added every day, ranging from Freud's psychoanalyses to fictional accounts of the witch hunts.

-- <http://sacred-texts.com/>

The Internet Sacred Text Archive is a free archive of "online books about religion, mythology, folklore and the esoteric". The site's definition of 'sacred' is rather broad and as such there are many, many books here with more being added every day, in topics ranging from African over LGBT to Zoroastrianism.

-- <http://www.bartleby.com/>

To quote the site, "the preeminent Internet publisher of literature, reference and verse providing students, researchers and the intellectually curious with

unlimited access to books and information on the web, free of charge." It's especially useful for poems and reference like looking up quotations or correct English usage. The latest featured book is Grey's Anatomy of the Human Body.

--<http://www.readprint.com/>

Over 8000 online books by over 3500 authors from Aesop to Emile Zola.

--<http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/>

This site has hundreds of classic books that 'everyone' has read in a page-by-page style that allows you to bookmark the page you were on and easily return to it later.

--<http://www.onlinebooks4free.com/>

9287 free online books in topics ranging from education over recreation to technology.

--<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/>

This site lists over 35 000 free books online and is also updated rather frequently. It also includes foreign language books and features women writers, prize winners, and banned books.

--<http://books.google.com/>

Google has finally come to an agreement with publishers, so we have another site – probably most well-known – that offers you free, legal online books to read.

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The Cynic's Dictionary

STUPIDITY

"Posting 'I am 9th to comment' on a Facebook thread."

- Stefanie Lehmann

Feeling cynical, too?

Then submit your own definitions to themuckraker@gmail.com by January 11th.

Eileen Wagner

Christmas Special

Tales from Beyond the Looking-Glass: Yule

Tales from Beyond the Looking-Glass will feature articles about non-mainstream groups of people. In the articles, I assume that esoteric beliefs and practices are real and work. Those who believe only in what science has so far been able to prove may find these articles to be rather silly and unrealistic.

This time around I'll be talking about a Neo-Pagan Midwinter festival. I will make gross generalisations, since Neo-Pagans have no one central holy book or doctrine. In fact, there is no statement one can make that would be true about all Pagan traditions. The tradition described here is most often found in Wiccan groups.

With the commercialised Christmas spirit permeating the air wherever one goes, it may be easy to forget the religious aspect of the festival. I could write about the Christian tradition, but I'm sure most of you will be familiar with it, so instead, I will concentrate on a less-known festival that also falls around this time: Yule.

Today, Yule has come to be synonymous with Christmas. However, the word originally comes from Old English and referred to a twelve-day Pagan festival. Modern-day Pagans have also adopted this term for their own, taking it to refer

to the Winter Solstice, the longest night of the year. This day falls on or around the 21st of December, depending on astrological variables.

According to many Pagan traditions, there are eight Sabbats, or holy days, spaced evenly throughout the year. These reflect the changing of the seasons and often have a specific myth about the Earth Goddess and the Sun God corresponding to every Sabbat. Yule celebrates the birth of the God and the return of the sun. There are many traditional practices surrounding this festival, most of them similar or identical to more mainstream celebrations, merely with a different symbolic meaning. Mistletoe and holly are hung as a symbol of the God and Goddess respectively, and evergreen branches or a tree represent the new life, since around this time they are usually the only green plant around. Often trees are decorated with natural materials such as apples, oranges, bags of spices or strings of rosebuds.

In the evening, the Yule log is burned to signify the rebirth of the God within the sacred fires of the Mother Goddess. A small part of it is kept until the following year, when it aids in lighting the new Yule fire, thus symbolically being reborn as well. Presents are exchanged

as a representation of the gift the Goddess gives to the earth in the form of the Sun God. Another aspect of this festival is the turn of the wheel of life – since many Pagans believe in reincarnation, the birth of the God is seen not so much as the start of life but as its continuance.

Other than that, Yule can be a quiet festival of contemplation and reflection, or it can be a joyful occasion celebrated with friends and family and including much singing, feasting, and laughing. Much like any other religious celebration, really.

For more information on Paganism and its celebrations, I suggest searching the internet for Paganism, Wicca, Yule, or Winter Solstice. There is a wealth of information to be had freely. Also, these books (in our school library) are very informative:

Drawing Down the Moon by Margot Adler

Where to Park Your Broomstick: A Teen's Guide to Witchcraft by Lauren Manoy

If you want to contact me, just send an email to endlessong@rocketmail.com.

Endless Song

The Meaning of Christmas

Have you ever felt like the effect that Christmas has lessens every year? Have you noticed that the meaning of Christmas changes as you grow older?

Christmas is the day Jesus Christ was born, and so it is a religious holiday for Christians. However, those who have everything often forget this fact. A lot of people do not go to church on Christmas, instead they spend their time giving presents, decorating the house, and eating lots of sweets. We now sing "Frosty the Snowman" or "Jingle Bells" instead of "Silent Night". Over time, Christmas has become more of a chance to celebrate than a traditional religious holiday.

Remembering the Christmases of your early childhood, you usually think back to huge family gatherings which included your close family as well as grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. You usually recall having one big Christmas meal together and unwrapping the toys you had wished for all year, then being allowed to stay up late playing with them.

Comparing these memories with this year's Christmas is almost impossible. As teenagers we have started wishing for Laptops, digital cameras, i-Phones, or clothes instead of Lego or stuffed animals. Sometimes we even receive these presents before the 24th or 25th for practical reasons. And most people now celebrate Christmas having lost the sense of its real meaning. The fact is that we have lost the excitement and faith that used to accompany Christmas.

Why is this happening? The fact that we already have everything we need is one answer. As mentioned before, the presents we were getting added to the excitement of Christmas when we were small. Now that we have pocket money and our own small part-time jobs, we are not as dependent on our parents, and when we see something we want we can buy it ourselves. Wishes are also fulfilled throughout the year by our parents. I'm sure a lot of you have found yourself wondering what you should wish for this year when asked.

A much more important issue, however, is that none of us believe in Santa Claus, or the "Christkind" anymore. No one writes letters to Santa nowadays, and every year little kids stop doing this at a younger age.

Finally, the meaning of Christmas changes once more when you grow from a teenager to an adult. You start to find more pleasure in giving presents than in receiving them. It becomes an opportunity to show the people that are close to you how much they mean to you. Grown-ups also use this "Time of Reflection" during the holiday season to think about what has become of their life and if they are happy with it.

What does Christmas mean to you? Maybe now is the time to think about it....

Ina Schmidt

Comments, Replies?

send your opinions and articles to:

themuckraker@gmail.com

Christmas Special

Fun Facts about Christmas

2 – Number of Christmas Islands: Former island Kiribati in the Pacific Ocean and a 52 square mile island in the Indian Ocean

6 – Weeks Charles Dickens worked on "A Christmas Carol"

7 – White Christmases England has known in the entire 20th century

18 – Tons of candle wax burned down in Wittenberg during one Christmas season at the time of Martin Luther

44 – Languages "Silent Night" has been translated into

364 – Gifts in the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" you would receive

2,000 – Candy canes shown in the movie "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" (2000)

4,000 – People who become ill from overdue Christmas leftovers

5,340 – Times Visa Cards are used on average every minute in the US during the Christmas buying season

8,200 – Christmas ornaments featured in the movie "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" (2000)

52,000 – Christmas lights depicted in the movie "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" (2000)

37.1 million – number of real Christmas trees bought in America each year (National Christmas Tree Association)

Origin of the name "Christmas": a contraction of "Christ's Mass."

Origin of the name "X-mas": In Greek X means "Christ."

Germany made the first artificial Christmas trees, which were made of goose feathers that had been dyed green.

Originally written for Thanksgiving, "Jingle Bells" became one of the most popular Christmas songs.

Around Christmas time diamonds are sold more than at any other time of the year.

Many cities in the US have holiday names. Some of them are Christmas, Christmasville, Noel, Holiday, Santa, Santa Claus, Saint Nicholas, North Pole, Mistletoe, Poinsettia Park, Holly, Spruce, Tannenbaum, Jolly, Joy, Hambug, Gift, Snow, Snowflake, Silver Bell, Bell, Candle, Reindeer, Antler, Partridge, Pear Tree, Swans, Star, Hallelujah Junction, Advent, Angel City, Shepherd, Eggnog, and Chestnut.

Sources:

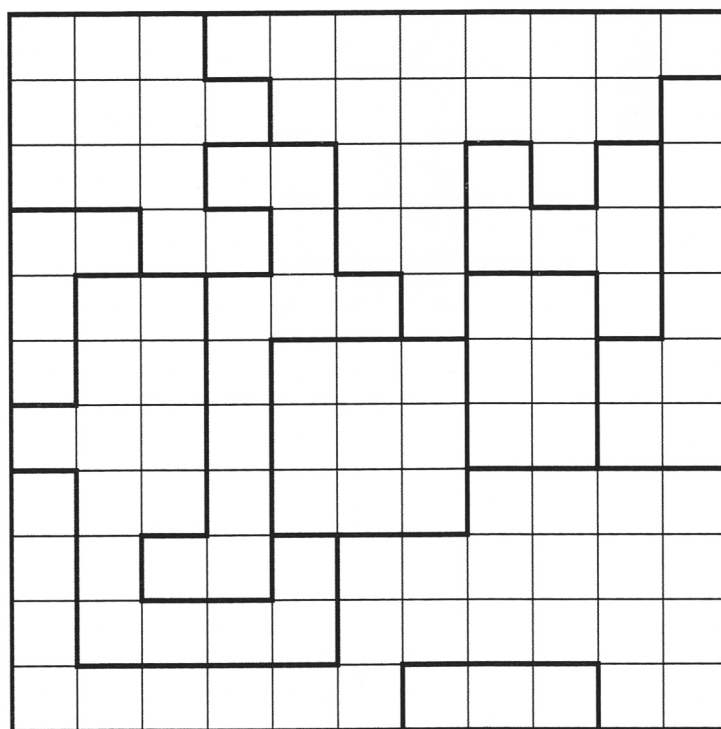
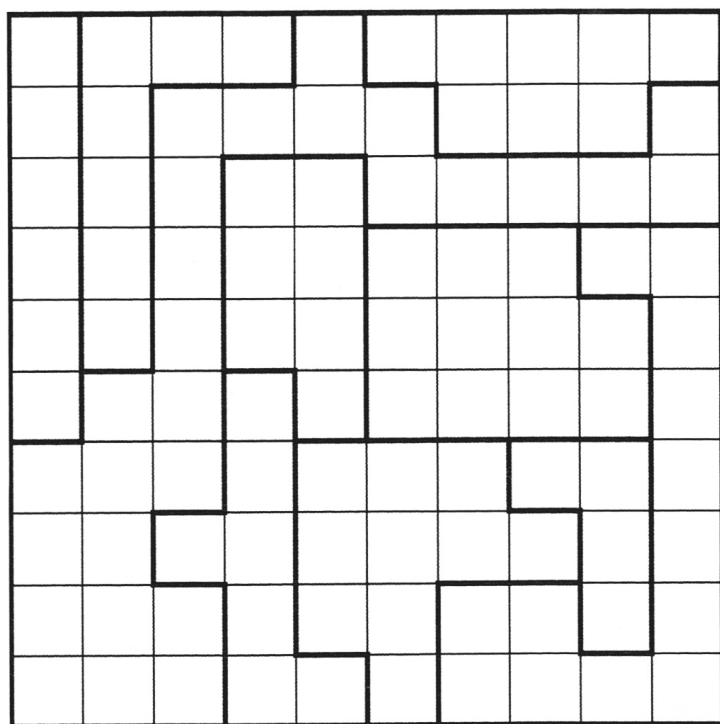
www.christmas-celebrations.com, www.corsinet.com, www.smsuspur.net, www.theholidayspot.com, www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk

Rebecca Jetter

Christmas Puzzles!!

Eileen Wagner

This is a modified version of sudoku, consisting only of stars in deformed areas. Draw two stars in every line, column and every boldly framed area. Stars may not be tangent to each other, not even diagonally. The solution will be published in the next issue. (Source: www.croco-puzzle.com).



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