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of celebration, the holiday season really starts with our homage to and dispersal of the forces of madness that lurk around the peripheries of our lives.

It began with the Celts as a festival for the dead, Samhain, held, according to my *Encyclopedia Americana*, on November 1, the beginning of the Celtic New Year. (I'd always assumed Samhain was celebrated on the equinox, but if Beltane's on the 1st of May then this makes sense.) "The festival of the dead was gradually incorporated into Christian ritual. In the 9th century, a feast in honor of all the saints (All Hallows) was fixed on November 1, and in the 11th century, November 2 was specified as All Soul's Day to honor the souls of the dead, particularly those who had died in the preceding year." In medieval Europe, bonfires were lit on All Hallows Eve to ward off the mischievous elves, fairies and witches who were presumed to fly abroad that night. In the 19th century, boys and young men began to play the parts of the mischievous little folk by playing pranks...

The next day we observe nationally is Election Day, which appropriately enough dances to the tune of the earliest Tuesday in the month, and then comes the more stable Veteran's Day to remind us that some of our ancestors (and friends and relatives and, lest we forget, many many

Even in Las Vegas, by November's end and the beginning of December we've begun to need to put on a jacket or a sweater in the mornings. Joy-Lynd and I haven't had to run air conditioning for a month or so, but we delayed putting on the heat until Dec. 1st, even when it reached the low 40s some mornings.

With the fall weather, of course, have come the regular round of holidays. 'Tis the season...

It begins, I suppose, with the Autumnal Equinox, but since in our general society that is not set aside as a day

perfect strangers) put their lives on the line to ensure we have the privilege of casting a ballot.

Then we get to Thanksgiving, which is supposed to be a celebration of all our blessings. Now there's a lot of us who actually give that some thought, which is good because most of us have a tendency to concentrate most of the time on the other stuff. "Hey, I got bills to pay, man, and I'm not sure if my next paycheck's gonna cover that and the shopping I gotta do for Christmas, let alone putting together a feast for T-day."

Right. It's the kickoff for the Shopping Season. Yeah, well, the *official* kickoff; so we've all been hearing and seeing those first red and green and silver decorations and trinkets and Santa signs and whatever since Halloween, or, now, even before that.

Thanksgiving is also the day of the Big Game for many. When I was growing up in College Station, Texas, home of then Texas A&M College (it was upgraded to a university a few years after we left), football was king of the sports. On Thanksgiving it was the Aggies vs. the Longhorns (or Tea Sippers, we called'em) from Texas University. I lived a mile or so from Kyle Field, and seemingly all day, while my mother and sister and whoever worked on preparations for the dinner (I was occasionally co-



opted to stuff dates or mash potatoes or some such chore), the intermittent roars and cheers of the crowd and the thump and blast of the band would echo their way through to our neighborhood.

That is, on those years when it was a home game. However, every year, a day or two prior to the game, they held a big bonfire rally on the Aggie drill field (in those days, all Aggies, which is to say, all the students at A&M, were also in ROTC—and all male). Since we kids were not involved in the game itself, the bonfire was a big event for us. And an unhappy event for some poor farmer, whose outhouse was stolen and mysteriously wound up high above the surrounding crowd, atop the conflagration.

Some blessing for that farmer!

Part of the tradition was the tossing of Aggie confetti onto the fire, and this was pretty, as the long and seemingly endless streamers rose into the night, gleaming in the firelight. Not all of it got into the fire, of course, and the next day the drill field was strewn with toilet paper.

It was not until I moved to New York that the Macy's parade became a factor in my life. One of the first apartments I lived in when I moved there was on West 81st St., a couple of blocks off Central Park West. On my first Thanksgiving there, and fully intending to sleep late—I had no alternate plans, at least for early in the day—I was awakened at some ungodly hour by a blast of band music seemingly right outside my window. It wasn't—I was in a back apartment facing into a central atrium—but I guess the sound funneled its way through and effectively amplified itself as it reverberated off the inner court walls. So I rose and got dressed, and when I went out I found one of the bands (maybe more) deployed on 81st St. They were waiting for their turn to join the parade, which collects along CPW north of Columbus Circle. One of the TV channels usually covers the parade from that area along with several other parades from around the country. That year was, I think, the first time I ever watched any of the

Macy's Thanksgiving Parade live—I followed it on down most of but not all the way to Herald Square... a little over two miles.

I think I may have seen some of one of the parades, or tried to, one other year, with Joy-Lynd, but it was disappointing due to bad weather. She remembers it as having been bitterly cold. Most of the rest of the time, even though I could have made the subway trip downtown, I didn't, and was satisfied to watch it on the telly. Joy-Lynd and I still do that now, but it's not quite the same—you know it's on time delay, for one thing.

After Thanksgiving, of course, with the exception of those who celebrate Hanukkah (or Chanukah—which I perceive as an alternate spelling for those who want it to look a little more like Christmas), everything from that point focuses on December 25. It doesn't seem like the shopping days countdown figure is as prevalent as I remember it from years ago, but most of the radio stations offer an increasing percentage of Christmas carols and winter songs in their mix.

Has anyone else noticed that winter songs have become so attached to the holiday that they are generally exclusively played in the weeks before Christmas itself, and almost never during the remaining two and a half months of the season? Usually I hear one abortive "Let It Snow, Let It Snow, Let It Snow" or "Baby It's Cold Outside" or even "Winter Wonderland" in the week between Christmas and New Year's, and that's it. Why is that?

Somebody local is reputed to have recently observed that Christianity is all but dead. This may be a misrepresentation of the actual remark, but if not, I must point out that ignoring something doesn't make it go away. It's not what it was once; it has evolved into a myriad of denominations and sects and splinter cults, some of which bear little resemblance to what some of us may have grown up believing it to be, and some of which have hardened into a kind of living rigor mortis that to all intents and purposes might as well be dead. But the faith's not gone, and even an agnostic such as

I am must really acknowledge its pervasive presence in our society.

The religious aspect of Christmas, for instance, is not really ignored, though it's not the focus of attention that many Christians would have it be. I admire the cleverness with which many TV tales incorporate a message of peace and selfless generosity (okay, that could be interpreted as serving the sellers, couldn't it!), and sometimes they even provide a specifically religious note, in an otherwise secular milieu. Many would prefer to think of Santa and Jesus as opposite poles of the holiday field, but Saint Nicholas, while long evolved from the original, is not exactly a completely secular figure. Frosty the Snowman, perhaps... But he's not been around as long. Neither has Rudolph.

I remember Stan Freberg's classic *Green Christmas* with great pleasure. I recall even hearing it on the radio once or twice—I mean other than NPR or the Pacifica station in New York (WBAI, a listener-sponsored station). Somewhere (in storage) I have an album with *Green Christmas* on it. In the tradition of satire, it exaggerates a known folly (not to be confused with Arnie's fanzine) that has concerned people for longer than any of us have been around. Today it seems we take the commercialization of all our holidays for granted—whether or not they're literally holy days.

But, I note, if they *are* religious, then always Christian. Hmmm...

Finally... New Year's Eve. Yeah, yeah, and New Year's Day, too, but January 1's the afterthought of the holidays. It's the tail (and frequently the hair) of the dog that's been nibbling at us since Halloween. No wonder we make so many resolutions that day that we can't keep later!

But New Year's Eve—that's something else. It's the prisoner's last meal, the giddy rush into what-the-hell-let's-go-for-it! It's the scoldier's last day of leave. It's that highly reputed resort (as in last-) town, Teetering-on-the-Brink.

(I say, that does sound English doesn't it? But

we're all citizens of *this* nation!

Nation? Yeah, well the nations we all live in... It goes under different names—it's up to each of us if we live in Conster or Combi or Fasci or Rui...)

We have plenty of other interesting holidays during the year, some nationally observed and some more locally, and there are many days for special observances where it's not really treated like a holiday. March 2nd is Texas Independence Day, for instance, but when I was growing up there we were told this is not a day to take off from work but rather one in which to put in a little extra effort. I like the concept, though frankly, lazy bones that I am, I like it better to discuss than to put into practice. "You there! Put your back into it!"

I was thinking, however, that we don't really have a National Bigots Day. You know, a day for all the hate groups to get together and lavish their ire on each other instead of on whatever variety of religion or race or national origin or sexual preference is their usual focus. David Dukes could duke it out with Lyndon LaRouche and Jerry Falwell could take on Madeleine Murray O'Hare. Howard Stern could MC. The KKK and the Skinheads and the Neonazis could march down Main Street from one end of town and the Nation of Islam and the Black Panthers could start from the other end... And let's put the gay bashers in a melee with the wife beaters and those MCPs who see nothing wrong with a little sexual harassment (get Clarence Thomas and Sen. Packwood down there, folks, along with those Navy guys from Tailhook). Preferably we set that melee smack dab in the middle of the march route, just for fun. Yayusss!

I'm tempted to insert the radical Right-to-Lifers in there somewhere, the ones who use violence up to murder in behalf of their beliefs, but I'm in much too much of a quandary about that topic to feel comfortable with that one. There are probably many other groups and types that I just can't think of who should join all the others in this free-for-all. Please, feel free to make suggestions.

Apa-tizer 16 - Ken

Was Chow Fun's middle name Ho? But seriously, folks...

I remember being fascinated by the various tales of mythology, though with the exception of a volume of Norse myths that was a little too advanced for my reading skills at the time, though what I did glean from it I found fascinating (it subsequently disappeared in one of our moves), most were aimed at children... And therefore somewhat unsatisfactory. In later years, I was rarely satisfied with any of the books I found, including *Bullfinch*, and I drifted away from much exploration in the area. In the 70s I subscribed to a Time-Life collection of books on mythologies from many cultures, but, frankly, I failed to study these very deeply; I was looking for the stories, and found in-depth sociological and historical studies regarding their origins. Now I wish I had those books handy!

Implosion #25 - Arnie

Atomic-powered hektographs? Unh-uh, I don't think that even in 1945 this would have been perceived as a valid extrapolation. The bit about automatic mimeographs rings true, and I suppose their running on radioactivity could fit the naivete of the time. Was there ever really a fanzine called *Future Dimensions*? That name, at least, has almost, if not completely, a ring of authenticity.

Ray-Flections - Ray

Keep those tales a-comin! I started to note here that I didn't quite understand the use of the term counterintelligence in the context of running security investigations, but almost as soon as I formulated the question I had my answer. Obvious. I'd always pictured counterintelligence as being the stuff of 1940s films of ferreting out German and Japanese spy cells, or 50s flicks where they were Russian or traitorous Commie Pinko organizations. Lots of stealthy, back-to-the-wall, flashes in the dark stuff, with the inevitable guy-caught-in-the-middle who's found mutilated in the river, and the girl-caught-in-the-middle who has to be rescued. I never associated the guys who check out whether I once subscribed to *The Progressive* or *Soviet Life* (which I did, once—dull stuff!) with all that!

PowWow #25 - Joyce

Dunno if it's precisely a continuation of the Great Wall of China Walk tradition you mention, but the

latter-day Fanoclasts who met at Lisa Eisenberg's used to conclude those gatherings with a trek to Wo Fat's in Chinatown at some wee hour of the morning—not all that distant a trip, really, practically just across the Brooklyn Bridge. (My memory may be faulty about this.) Sometimes some would walk in good summer weather, usually they'd squeeze into available cars. I joined them once or twice, though mostly I'd commence my long subway trip home before they were ready to go.

Dither - me

For those of you who were unable to read the first page of this, the "Dramatis Personal" reminiscences are being rerun in an upcoming *Wild Heirs*, I believe...

JoHn:Re & Karla - JoHn && Karla

Though I was born in the North Carolina hill country, and we lived pretty much away from town there for the first five years of my life (we left for Arizona in 1942), I never had much influence from the backhills folk. They were there, I guess—I recall once being admonished not to walk like some of the people I used to see around me walking: a sort of lifting on the ball of the foot that gave a characteristic bounding, rise and fall effect. I don't remember seeing anyone walking that way when I returned for a summer in the late 50s.

In some ways I was discouraged from picking up too much from the locals, though I'm sure this wasn't a conscious effort. In fact it was a bit ironic. My maternal aunt Elisabeth, who had developed a strong Midwestern accent, would come to visit us and explain to me that the word "I" was *not* pronounced "ah." In contrast, my mother's other sister, Aunt Bonnie, who settled in the Boston area, had the classic "paahk the caah in the baahn" accent associated with that area. My paternal aunt Esther, on the other hand, lived on Long Island, and had picked up a local accent that included the substitution of a glottal stop for the double-T, as in "a bo'l of wa'r" (bottle of water).

My folks, who were constantly moving all around the country, bequeathed to me their highly non-regionalized mode of speech. I was once told, by someone who was proud of his ability to locate people's origins by the way they spoke, that he thought I was a naturalized citizen.

JoHn, your discussion of conspiracy theories is just part of yet another plot to discredit the whole notion that the government is brainwashing the nation. I see it all now. The truth is tantan call baka lemon ghrwsf poicin hwc y cshrfign msye, and I don't care who knows it!