

ON THE EDGE

Timely, thoughtful and always candid

Seasons Greetings from the Hybrids

Ah, December! This truly is one of my favorite times of the year. The lights and holiday decorations around our town, the first snowfall and sledding with the kids, the scent of potpourri at home and in stores, parties and dinners with family and friends, and that sense of completion as the business year draws to a close. And there's my favorite sign of the season...the music. As long as it's after Thanksgiving, I do find myself smiling and waxing nostalgic when those special songs play on the radio. My all time favorite is Andy Williams' timeless rendition of *The Most Wonderful Time of the Year*. How can you not smile when you hear it?!

Then there's the whole tradition of gift giving. Like everyone else, I do get a bit tired of the commercialism that has come to predominate the holidays, but I do find it easier to ignore as I get older. Hmm, wait a minute. Maybe that's by design. Now that I think about it, it's usually my wife who elects to do (gets stuck with) most the gift shopping so she most likely has a different take on this than me (sorry dear)! That not withstanding, we try not to overdo the gifts. We've long since given up on presents for all the family members and do a simple exchange on each side of the family. The kids still make out like little bandits. With doting grandparents and a December birthday for my son, our house is like Toy Central pretty much the entire month.

But, over the past decade, the season has changed for me, both in meaning and in celebration. When my wife and I got married, we knew that combining both Christian/Catholic and Jewish traditions would be an artful (most times) game of give and take. We'd made the decision up front to raise our children in the Jewish faith, so Hanukkah would be our primary celebration. But would there still be a Christmas tree (or a generic "Holiday tree"), lights outside, stockings over the fireplace, Christmas cookies or candles in the windows? The answer is "yes" and "no". And I like it like that.

Make no mistake; once we made the decision to raise our children in the Jewish faith, we eventually concluded that it did not really make sense to actively celebrate both Christmas and Hanukkah under the same roof. From the perspective of faith, a mixed message about one's own religious identity is really no message at all. And Hanukkah is what the Meshanko family practices and celebrates. In fact, both of my kids (ages 5 and 3) can recite the traditional prayers that accompany the lighting of the menorah each night - in Hebrew. We bake cookies, light scented candles and have Hanukkah decorations tucked into the different corners of our house. But when we go to visit my siblings and parents, we celebrate Christmas. Whoever is hosting Christmas Eve dinner has a tree, stockings, even more presents and all of the other trappings that accompany the holiday. And as they get older, our kids will gradually learn what beliefs Christians associate with the holiday.

My conclusion about our situation - which is far from unique - is this: It's all good. Whether we celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza, the Winter Solstice or anything else, we celebrate! And that, I believe, is our only obligation - to celebrate what is or becomes significant to us. I still get my Christmas fix by listening to songs on the radio and enjoying the Christmas trees and lights in other peoples' yards...and I don't have to take them back down afterwards! I eat

holiday cookies with abandon regardless of which tradition(s) triggered their baking, and I shop (albeit online) with the best of the would-be Santa Clauses! But I also revel in watching my children grow up in a tradition different than the one I did. Watching their young minds grow and create their own set of imprints and memories is fascinating and rewarding. The universal message that I want them to grow up with is this: December is a month of transition and celebration...period. We wish our Christian friends Merry Christmas, our Jewish friends Happy Hanukkah, and if we don't know their faith, we wish them a hearty Happy Holidays!

So, from my family to yours, Happy Holidays. May the best of 2006 be merely a launching pad for 2007...and may you find many reasons to celebrate throughout the entire New Year!