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The Most Wonderful Time of the Year

By Rebekah McCloud

UCF Forum columnist

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When is the most wonderful time of the year? December — right? — despite the many people and things that try to blur the calendar.

Early October my grandson and I were shopping. As our shopping cart glided along the aisles, he excitedly exclaimed, “Look, Grandma, there’s a snowman!” He is 4 and I am nearly 15 times his age, so I was sure he had mistakenly identified Casper as Frosty. It was October and they are both white...easy mistake.

So I said, “No, it’s a ghost.”

To which he replied, “No, Grandma, he has a carrot nose. A ghost does not have a carrot nose. That would be silly. It’s a snowman.”

To my surprise, it was indeed a snowman that was accompanied by Santa, reindeer and a host of fully decorated Christmas trees. This display dwarfed the table of Halloween pumpkins, witches, spiders and skeletons, and the one next to it filled with Thanksgiving turkeys, pilgrims, cornucopias and fall leaves.

When is Christmas? Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving) usually kicks off the Christmas shopping frenzy, but this year it seems Christmas has come early. One big box store has thrown its hat into the ring by offering early Christmas layaway plans. The airwaves and Internet are full of tantalizing ads from toy makers with items to fill every child’s wish list.

When is Christmas? Boo, gobble gobble, and ho, ho, ho. Toto, I'm not in Kansas anymore. Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas — when did these three, which each used to dominate its own month, morph into what's known as the “holiday season”? Bah, humbug, I want my Christmas back.

When I was a kid, Christmas was the most wonderful time of the year. I looked forward to the sheer joy of Dec. 25. My dad was a Christmas man. Without fail, the first Saturday in December, my dad would head to the garage. He'd pull out the ladder and retrieve the box marked “Christmas lights.” He would unroll the strings of brightly colored lights, plug them in, and check for those bulbs that needed replacing. Then he'd hang them around the edges of our roof and outfit the evergreens in our front yard. These glowing orbs signaled the beginning of the Christmas season for the McCloud household.

The next day after church, the two artificial trees (one green and one silver) would emerge from the attic. While Dad and my two brothers assembled the trees, Mom, my sister and I would go through the ornaments. Those that survived a year of storage went on the trees. The casualties went into the trash.

The green tree would occupy a corner in the dining room and was decorated with ornaments my three siblings and I had made over the years. There was always a fresh string of popcorn and the tree was topped with the angel from my first Christmas.

The silver tree (made of aluminum) had a revolving color wheel that would alternately illuminate the tree green, red or blue. It always sat in the living room, strategically placed so from the outside it could be seen smack-dab in the middle of Momma's picture window. It would be decorated with shiny store-bought ornaments, garland and lights.

Once the trees were finished, there would be hot cocoa, gingersnaps and molasses cookies for all. At 8 p.m. that evening, Mom and all the children would bundle up, go outside and gather in front of the living room window. Dad would remain inside, turn off all of the lights, and plug in the Christmas tree.

After a dramatic pause, from the darkness a glittering, sparkling, twinkling tree would emerge to a chorus of oohs and ahhs and sheer joy. It never failed to thrill us.

Once back inside, Dad would remind us of the reason for the season and he would read the Christmas story. These are fond memories of Christmas, ones that I hold near and dear.

Everybody needs a little feel-good. The sheer joy of preparing for Christmas during the season of Advent is too special to commercialize. The sheer joy of waiting for Santa is too precious to my grandchildren. The sheer joy of watching holiday classics is too nostalgic to abandon. The sheer joy of hosting my family and friends is too endearing to give up. The sheer joy of watching the kindness of strangers during the Christmas season is too valuable to lose.

When is the most wonderful time of the year? December, right? Yes, for me, the most wonderful time of the year is December, not October. No matter who or what promotes Christmas in October, it's not for me. One month of celebration is special, two or three months are not.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 says there is a season for everything. Whatever one chooses to observe, be it Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Las Posadas, or another event, December is the most wonderful time of the year.

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