

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Celebrating beyond Your Bias

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 4, 2015)

We all know each of us has our own way of celebrating the December holiday season. For so many, our pervasive “political correctness” environment, being covertly promoted if not overtly legislated, often restricts our “Oh, Oh, Oh’s” and our “Merry Christmas & God bless you.”

So, how can we celebrate the season without the “bias” of others spoiling the mood and season itself? First, I hear and read about the so-called “bias” of people in politics and the press. Whether Republican, Democrat, or Independent (if they still exist), the bias is all around us heating up the season. It makes me think that no matter the party or perspective, all have become “Bah, Humbugs!” Wikipedia actually defines bah humbug as declaring Christmas a fraud! Oh yes? Ok, wait a minute here! I may just have something to say about that!

Consider this to be my commentary on what really is “bias.” First, let’s start out at the gate with one single truth: If you are a human being, you have bias! Whether you think it is unfortunate or a blessing, you will have to dig deeper as to why you believe what you believe, and decide for yourself. Yet, that is the truth. Our own personal and professional “bias” shows in our genes, our words, our deeds, our lifestyle. Whether for

good or ill, “bias” in life comes with the territory. And there are unlimited “different strokes for different folks.” Wow, does that date me!

Again, according to Wikipedia, “Bias is a term used to describe a tendency or preference towards a particular perspective, ideology or result, especially when the tendency interferes with the ability to be impartial, unprejudiced, or objective. In psychology, cognitive bias has the tendency to interpret new information in such a way that confirms one's prior beliefs, even to the extreme of denial, ignoring information that conflicts with one's prior beliefs.

In most all definitions, they tend to lean toward the negative when referring to the term “bias” as a judgment or prejudice. I consider this unfortunate, since none of us can really get totally free from our biases or preferences in life. Why? First, we all have to make decision on what we believe and how we live our lives. And, again, because I believe we human beings are actually conceived with certain physiological “biases” that are genetically programmed into us at conception.

Yet, that doesn't mean we are stuck with them all. Much of heredity is tempered by our environment—physically, emotionally, mentally, psychologically, spiritually. At every step in life, we have the freedom to choose what we believe and how we behave. If we are really honest with ourselves, we can't just blame our parents, our circumstances, politics, the press, the weather, or even the devil (which some often do with the quip, “the devil made me do it!).

This is why I diverge from the traditional definition of “bias.” I see it as something more neutral and even positive for every human being. Again, why? To me, bias simply represents how you express your core values with each other. So, if your core values

lean Republican, you may be Republican. If your core values lean Democrat, then you may be a Democrat.

Now, for the rest of you who are such free thinkers—you just may decide to create your own mix, politically and in life—a little here, a little there. And since this is still a free nation so far, you have that inalienable right. So, go for it! For me, please consider me a “Conservative Hippie” from the sixties. This term was coined by an artisan client of mine many years back. And I felt it also fit me quite nicely. Back then, no one knew how to label me. I was an art major with a business minor, get that! It was a real “trip” integrating those two worlds in my life; but I had loads of fun doing it!

For many frustrated students and colleagues over the years, I just didn’t fit the mold, and many others didn’t either. They were perpetually curious about where I stood on any particular topic. We had many lively constructive conversations in our free speech forums until it got very ugly at times around the Vietnam War topic. When I look around me today and how some are behaving, it tends to bring back memories of those times both good and bad.

In spite of the bad times, looking back, it’s a wonderful thing to be free to know who you are; and to be able to comfortably disagree, agreeably, with those across the aisle or down the street, or on the opposite side of the world. This is a lesson I feel we will be learning again with the uncertainties and dangers before us within our nation and world. So, feel free to hold on to who you are and what you believe in expressing your “bias” as long as it holds true to your core values and your respectful treatment of other human beings with their “biases.”

You just might find common ground in your core values if you give it a chance. You just may find a way to work together on areas you both deem important for your families, our communities, our nation. You may then be able to celebrate your own season of faith, hope, and love together. Isn't that what Christmas is all about . . . Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Mankind?

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From the Heart. . .

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Celebrating Christmas with Compassion

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 11, 2015)

As mentioned in previous article, we all know each of us has our own way of celebrating the December holiday season. For so many, our pervasive “political correctness” environment, being covertly promoted if not overtly legislated, often restricts our “Ho, Ho, Ho’s” and our “Merry Christmas & God bless you.”

So, how can we celebrate the season without the more negative “bias” of others spoiling the mood and season itself? I believe Christmas time is a perfect season for celebrating not just the season but also sharing our core values, compassion, and care for others. It just may free us from the “Bah, Humbugs” of the politically correct world we live in! This just may also help others and ourselves see our core values or “bias” in a more positive light of the season.

So, as you are madly shopping for those Christmas or “Holiday” gifts for loved ones, family, and friends, maybe it’s time to include a stranger or two? Here are some possible ways to make this season ring out the true meaning of Christmas . . . *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”* (Isaiah 9:6 KJV).

- Volunteer and/or give to your local food pantry
- Visit a homeless shelter and donate blankets, gloves, socks, hats, or coats
- Donate, Volunteer for the Salvation Army (<http://salvationarmyusa.org>)
- Volunteer/donate to Samaritans Purse,
<http://www.samaritanspurse.org/operation-christmas-child/volunteer-short-term/>
- Support the USO, <https://secure.uso.org/?sc=WEBDONATION>

I am sure you have within your community and region multiple ways to reach out with compassion for others in this season. So, step out this coming week and change someone's life for the better.

As we demonstrate care and compassion to loved ones and stranger alike may those qualities attributed to the God of the universe shine through. May the words that refer to the One we celebrate (whose name is Immanuel-God with Us) call out and declare "Wonderful" miracles and wonderment for anyone that passes your way. May you find a compassionate "Counselor" at your side helping you through the good times and bad. May you personally experience the loving presence of a "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father." And may the "Prince of Peace" we call Jesus have a welcoming, resting place in your home, community this season, and on earth peace, good will toward all.

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From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



December Holiday Celebrations

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 18, 2015)

December is always filled with holiday activities we all seem to take for granted as we get in the celebrating swing. For our nation, Thanksgiving and Christmas are the main focus. However, I got curious about what holiday celebrations and remembrances happen in December all around the world. Also, I was curious about which ones have the greatest attention globally.

So, I naturally started a net search and came up with these results. One source comes from Kids' Turn Central

(<http://www.kidsturncentral.com/holidays/glossary/holidaysgloss.htm>): Advent, Chanukah, St. Nicholas Day, St. Lucia Day, Las Posadas, Winter Solstice, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Yule, Boxing Day, St. Stephen's Day, Kwanzaa, Mummering, Twelve Days of Christmas, Holy Innocents Day.

I bet you are wondering, "What in the world is Kwanzaa day?" Well, here it is. "A professor, Dr. Maulana Ron Karenga, wanted to encourage African Americans to celebrate their heritage so he started Kwanzaa in California in 1966. Traditionally beginning December 26, families exchange gifts and have African cultural feasts and festivities. The word "Kwanzaa" is an East African word which means "first fruits" and refers to the celebration of the harvest of first crops in traditional African society.

Kwanzaa is based on seven principles, collectively called Nguzo Saba, and is celebrated for seven days beginning on December 26 and ending on January 1.

Do you also wonder what is Mummering day? “Starting on Boxing Day, December 26, and through the holiday period, homes in Newfoundland, Canada are visited by neighbors dressed as mummers, sometimes known as janneys, johnnies, maskers or mumpers. They sing, dance, play music but try to disguise their voice. Although the tradition is not as popular as it once was they use to have parades and festivals for Mummering. In Philadelphia, Mummering is also celebrated on New Year's Eve.” You can learn more about other holidays at Kids’ Turn Central.

Here are other celebrations around the world you may find interesting, even fascinating. You can learn more about each holiday by visiting Time & Date (<http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/>). Notice which ones have the greatest number of countries honoring that day. Among the most celebrated is Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Mouloud (Mohammed’s birthday), and Boxing Day. Keep in mind that some countries celebrate the same holiday but on different days.

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are the most celebrated around the world. Then add the second-day or after Christmas holidays. If you wonder what is Boxing Day on Dec 26, it happens to be an old English tradition in Britain and Canada. According to Kids’ Turn Central, it is an “English custom of giving Christmas boxes containing food or money to family servants and suppliers.”

Dec 16	Victory Day	Bangladesh
Dec 16	National Day	Bahrain
Dec 16	Independence Day	Kazakhstan
Dec 16	Day of Reconciliation	South Africa
Dec 17	National Day (second day)	Bahrain

Dec 17	Independence Day (Day 2)	Kazakhstan
Dec 18	Nigerien Republic Day	Niger
Dec 18	National Day	Qatar
Dec 20	Abolition of Slavery	Reunion
Dec 21	Turkish Language Day (Turkish community)	Macedonia, Republic of
Dec 22	Asarah B'Tevet	Israel
Dec 22	Unity Day	Zimbabwe
Dec 23	Emperor's Birthday	Japan
Dec 24	Christmas Eve	Andorra, Albania, Austria, Australia, Barbados, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bulgaria, Bermuda, Brazil, The Bahamas, Canada, Congo Dem.Rep., Switzerland, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Spain, Finland, Faroe Islands, France, Ghana, Gibraltar, Greenland, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, Haiti, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, India, Iceland, Jamaica, Kenya, South Korea, Cayman Islands, Liechtenstein, Sri Lanka, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Monaco, Moldova, Macedonia, Republic of, Malta, Mexico, Malaysia, Nigeria, Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Pakistan, Poland, Puerto Rico, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Singapore, Slovakia, San Marino, El Salvador, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tanzania, United States, United States, Uruguay, Holy See (Vatican City), Venezuela, Vietnam, South Africa
Dec 24	Mouloud (The Prophet's Birthday)	United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Bahrain, Benin, Canada, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Algeria, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Guinea, Indonesia, Iraq, Comoros, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mali, Malaysia, Niger, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Somalia, Syria, Chad, Togo, Tunisia, Tanzania, United Kingdom, United States, Yemen, Mayotte
Dec 24	Prophet's Birthday	Jordan
Dec 24	Birth Date of Kim Jong Suk	North Korea
Dec 24	Milad-Un-Nabi (Holy Prophet's Birthday)	Sri Lanka
Dec 24	Unduvap Full Moon Poya Day	Sri Lanka
Dec 24	Independence Day	Libya
Dec 24	Maulid un-Nabi	Philippines
Dec 24	Washington's Birthday	United States
Dec 25	Christmas Day	Andorra, Albania, Angola, Argentina, Austria, Australia, Aruba, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Barbados, Bangladesh, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Bulgaria, Burundi, Benin, Bermuda, Bolivia, Brazil, The Bahamas, Botswana, Belarus, Canada, Congo Dem.Rep., Central African Republic, Congo, Switzerland, Cote d'Ivoire, Chile, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cabo Verde, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Estonia, Eritrea, Spain, Finland, Fiji, Faroe Islands, France, Gabon, Grenada, Ghana, Gibraltar, Greenland, The Gambia, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea,

		Greece, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Hong Kong, Honduras, Croatia, Haiti, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, India, Iraq, Iceland, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Japan, Kenya, South Korea, Cayman Islands, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Sri Lanka, Liberia, Lesotho, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Monaco, Moldova, Madagascar, Macedonia, Republic of, Mali, Martinique, Malta, Mauritius, Malawi, Mexico, Malaysia, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Nicaragua, Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Pakistan, Poland, Puerto Rico, Portugal, Paraguay, Reunion, Romania, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sweden, Singapore, Saint Helena, Slovenia, Slovakia, Sierra Leone, San Marino, Senegal, Suriname, South Sudan, Sao Tome and Principe, El Salvador, Syria, Swaziland, Chad, Togo, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tanzania, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Holy See (Vatican City), Venezuela, US Virgin Islands, Vietnam, Kosovo, Mayotte, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe
Dec 25	Quaid-e-Azam Day	Pakistan
Dec 25	Constitution Day	Taiwan
Dec 26	Boxing Day	Andorra, Austria, Australia, Aruba, Barbados, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Bermuda, The Bahamas, Canada, Switzerland, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Fiji, Faroe Islands, Grenada, Ghana, Gibraltar, Greenland, Greece, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Kenya, Cayman Islands, Liechtenstein, Lesotho, Namibia, Nigeria, Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Rwanda, Sweden, Saint Helena, Slovakia, Sierra Leone, San Marino, Suriname, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, United Kingdom, Holy See (Vatican City), US Virgin Islands, Zimbabwe
Dec 26	St Stephen's Day	Spain
Dec 26	St Stephen's Day	France
Dec 26	Second Day of Christmas	Iceland
Dec 26	Second Day of Christmas	Lithuania
Dec 26	St Stephen's Day	Luxembourg
Dec 26	Second Day of Christmas	Latvia
Dec 26	Boxing Day (bank holiday)	Malta
Dec 26	Day After Christmas	Pakistan
Dec 26	Independence and Unity Day	Slovenia
Dec 26	Boxing Day	Trinidad and Tobago
Dec 26	Day After Christmas Day	United States
Dec 26	Day After Christmas Day	United States
Dec 26	Day of Goodwill	South Africa
Dec 27	Constitution Day	North Korea
Dec 28	Christmas/Boxing Day	Australia

	Holiday	
Dec 28	Boxing Day observed	Bermuda, Ghana, Ireland, Cayman Islands
Dec 28	Boxing Day Holiday	Fiji
Dec 28	Christmas Holiday	Gibraltar
Dec 28	Boxing Day Observed	New Zealand
Dec 28	Republic Day	South Sudan
Dec 28	Incwala Day	Swaziland
Dec 28	Bank Holiday	United Kingdom
Dec 29	Birthday of Prophet Muhammad and Imam Sadeq	Iran
Dec 30	Rizal Day	Philippines

No matter which ones you celebrate or how often, December is definitely the time to celebrate life and family. We are to declare we are placed on this earth to fulfill our purpose and offer peace and possibilities for our fellow human beings at home and around the world.

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From the Heart...

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December 25 –Guess whose birthday it is

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 25, 2015)

Since this article will be officially offered on Christmas Day, December 25, let's put aside our "political correctness biases" for now to reflect and celebrate the heart of Christmas. First, let's start with the "elephant" in the room . . . among other celebrations, December is celebrated all around the world as Jesus' birthday. So, Happy Birthday Jesus!

For those who may or may not believe Jesus was a real human being walking this planet professing he was "God with us," let's at least look at a few stellar qualities Jesus brought into this world. And how could I even list them except by taking a glimpse in that big, beautifully bedecked bible collecting dust on our coffee tables or book shelves?

So, here goes. And for those who may find this brief bible lesson somewhat offensive, do I apologize? Not really. Why? Because the heart of the matter still holds true. These qualities are desired and aspired by just about every person on this precious planet of ours. No matter how old you may be, you were once a small child who needed a Mom and Dad who made this world safe and welcoming for growing up and being grateful for the chance to carry the mantle of these qualities on to their own little ones.

I believe the first quality is obvious and all others follow, as well as sustain us.

- **God is Love** = “We have come to know [by personal observation and experience], and have believed [with deep, consistent faith] the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides continually in him.”

1 John 4:16 (AMP version)

- **Freedom from Fear** = “There is no fear in love [dread does not exist]. But perfect (complete, full-grown) love drives out fear, because fear involves [the expectation of divine] punishment, so the one who is afraid [of God’s judgment] is not perfected in love [has not grown into a sufficient understanding of God’s love].” 1 John 4:18 (AMP)

- **Other qualities of Jesus = Joy, Peace, Patience/Longsuffering, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control** = “But the fruit of the Spirit [the result of His presence within us] is love [unselfish concern for others], joy, [inner] peace, patience [not the ability to wait, but how we act while waiting], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23 (AMP)

- **Forgiving** = “Be kind and helpful to one another, tender-hearted [compassionate, understanding], forgiving one another [readily and freely], just as God in Christ also forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32 (AMP)

- **Humility** = “For who is the greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.” Luke 22:27 (AMP)

- **Fairness** = “So then, in everything treat others the same way you want them to treat you, for this is [the essence of] the Law and the [writings of the] Prophets.” Matthew 7:12 (AMP)
- **Courage** = “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” 1 John 4:4 (NKJV)
- **Friendship** = “As iron sharpens iron, So one man, a friend, sharpens [and influences] another [through discussion]. Proverbs 27:17(AMP)
- **Honesty & Truthfulness** = “For we have regard for what is honorable [and above suspicion], not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.” 2 Corinthians 8:21(AMP); “Therefore, rejecting all falsehood [whether lying, defrauding, telling half-truths, spreading rumors, any such as these], speak truth each one with his neighbor, for we are all parts of one another [and we are all parts of the body of Christ].” Ephesians 4:25 (AMP)

These are just a few of the many qualities demonstrated in the life of this person called Jesus. You will find many others throughout those insightful pages, such as dependability, gratitude, responsibility, contentment, generosity, purity, confidence, encouragement, availability, attentiveness, wisdom, compassion, enthusiasm, initiative, diligence, thoughtfulness, efficient, discretion, optimism, obedience, reverence, agreeable, appreciation, commitment, communicating, creative, determination, deference, devotion, discernment, discreet, disciplined, decisive, endurance, flexibility, grace/mercy, guidance, hospitality, integrity, loyalty, persuasive, purposeful, respectful, secure, servant leadership, sincerity, success, suffering, supportive, tactful, teach, tolerant, and virtue.

Although it seems very hard at times to believe or practice them, I believe God has given us the strength to face any situation, trial, or peril. We each have the opportunity and challenge to step up to simply believe it is possible to walk this earth having these qualities deposited in us for any situation, any relationship. Consider every one of them a gift placed underneath that Christmas tree, ready to be unwrapped and put on and inside your very heart, mind, and soul. A very Merry Christmas to you all on Jesus' birthday!

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