

Columnists

The Baird Facts: Never too early for peace and joy (and Xmas lights)

By Esther C. Baird

Fri Dec 04, 2009, 08:04 PM EST

BEVERLY, MASS. -

Well, it's full-on holiday mode here on the North Shore. Thanksgiving is over and it's officially time to put up lights, trees, garlands and tacky inflatable Santas (or at least the first three). But there are those who dive into the Christmas frenzy before Thanksgiving even rolls around. Annoying people, who blast Christmas music after Halloween, and make themselves a neighborhood nuisance with their too-early lights and Fa-la-la-la-ing when it's still autumnal outside.

I speak, of course, of Casa Baird.

I can't prove this, but I'm fairly certain we purchased the first Christmas tree on the North Shore. Home Depot opened their Christmas tree-and-trimmings sale the Friday *before* Thanksgiving. Though when we arrived that Saturday at a respectable 9:30 am, we found hardly any trees in stock and the standard bows, balls and wreaths still stacked in piles waiting to be displayed. The chainsaw to cut our stump (we did manage to snag a great Fraser) didn't work and there was no one there to "net" our tree. But lack of preparation and, I might add, holiday music, could not dampen our good cheer.

"Three 30-foot pine ropes, two hanging Christmas balls and one tree (no partridges please)," I joked merrily to the cashier.

"Hmpf" She responded in a tone that was neither jolly nor festive.

I smiled in return. It was a lovely, warm day . . . perfect for decorating.

In fact, when we arrived home and began the process of bringing 10,000 little pine needles into our living room, my neighbor came outside and rolled her eyes. "Esther, it's 55 degrees! I'm going out to buy more mums for Thanksgiving!"

Some other neighbors passed by as I was wrestling with the pine roping. "We just walked by one house that still has Halloween decorations, and one with Thanksgiving, and you're doing Christmas! What's next Easter?"

I had a piece of string between my teeth and was balanced precariously on top of my porch railing attempting to tie some unwieldy pine garland to the top of our rain gutter, but I managed to call back a hearty, "Ho ho ho!"

Because here's the thing: we travel a good bit throughout the holiday season. By decorating early, we can maximize our time oohing and aahing when the lights switch on at dusk, reading by the tree at night and smelling pine throughout the house. This year we were especially excited because we made a big switch. I've always been a strict "white twinkle light" decorator. It's tasteful, pristine and classic. But I think we can all agree that 2009 has been a long, hard year. We needed to ramp up our good cheer, and

what better way than with multi-colored twinkle lights. Cue the reds and blues and pinks and yellows and oranges and greens! There, isn't that more cheery already?

Plus decorating is a fun family experience. We all have roles. It goes without saying that I am the Christmas Director. Next, my husband is the Tree-Setter-Upper. It requires him to get covered in sap and needles and fight with our tree stand, and then to retire someplace where football is being broadcast. Our oldest daughter is the Assistant to the Director . . . all the better to properly steep her in Christmas zest and zeal. And our youngest daughter is the Nativity Set Coordinator.

We have two miniature nativity sets meant to be displayed in window sills. But our youngest eschews such a passive set up. She prefers an interactive version of the Christmas Story down on the floor beneath our tree. That way the dual Baby Jesuses can have a birthday party with the three little girls from her doll house, the occasional McDonald's Happy Meal pony and whatever Fisher Price Little People are within reach. It gets a little busy at the manger when there is such an open-door invitation. And sometimes there are occupational hazards for the floor-bound crèche participants. One Mary has disappeared (kidnapped by rogue Lego pirates?) and one king has been, well, decapitated.

"I didn't see him; I just stepped down and heard a crack!" my husband said as he handed me the head of the Frankincense King from set two.

But when all is said and done, we decorate because we love Christmas and what it means to our family. Our Nativity Set Coordinator has it right. Christmas is a celebration that any toy, or any one, can attend. Sure it gets a little chaotic. But for our family amidst the lights and pine and bows, we find the story of true peace and real joy. And it's never too early in the season for that.

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