

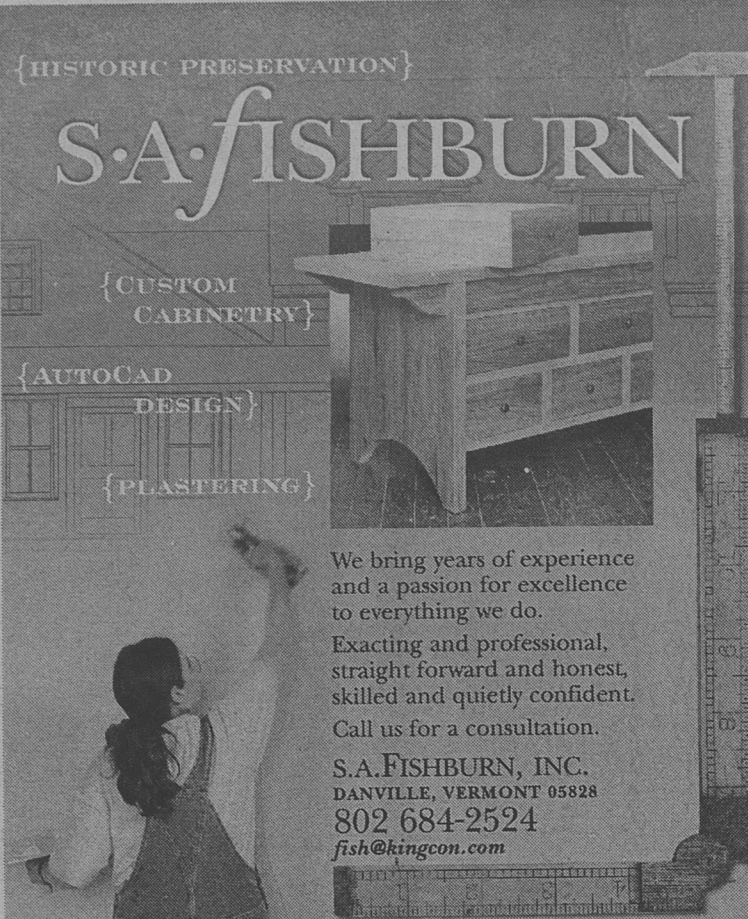
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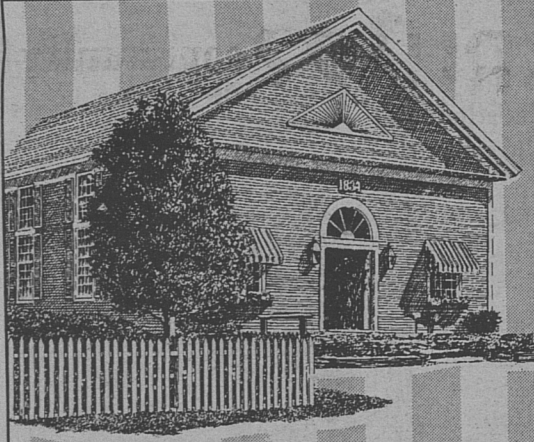
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Gay Holiday Stress Relief

BY GREG D. KUBIAK

"Son, don't forget to pack a suit. We're all going to Midnight mass this year."

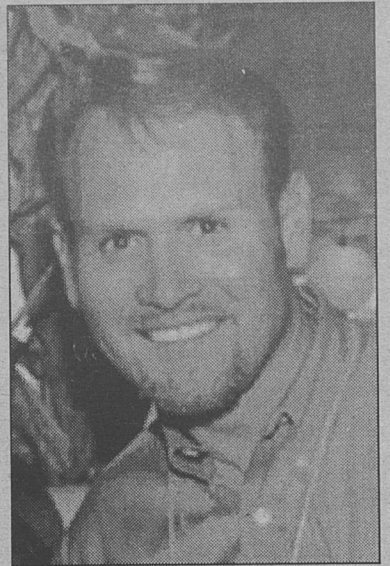
"That's great you'll be at my holiday party. You're ex, Patti, is coming with her new girlfriend, too!"

"I know you're Jewish, but the office voted to attend a Messiah sing-along for our holiday party. That's okay with you, right?"

"Honey, I hope you haven't bought me anything for Christmas yet. I was thinking we should save our money and go to Gay Ski Weekend instead."

Do these and other comments put the "stress" back in your "disSTRESS" over the holidays? Well, God rest ye merry GLBTs, you're not alone in your dismay.

This month brings about more stress and depression than any other throughout the year. From shopping, parties, overindulgence, family and shorter days, most of us need a gift certificate for psycho-therapy and a bottle of valium in our stocking more than anything else. But studies show (a.k.a., my cursory review) that possessing the gay genetic code can help you relieve the seasonal stress syndrome that wrecks havoc on straights and gays alike. Yes, research shows that within our gay chemical makeup, we have the capacity to overcome these top five contributors to a blue, blue Christmas.



From shopping, parties, overindulgence, family and shorter days, most of us need a gift certificate for psycho-therapy and a bottle of valium in our stocking more than anything else.

First off, shopping is a mandatory exercise that consumes more and more time of us consumers. But think about it. Retail and fashion are supposed to be two of our specialties. So after paring down your shopping list, enlisting the help of our brethren in the retail industry, and recognizing the real meaning of the season, shopping can be a breeze. Remember, it's not the contents or size of the package, but the sincerity of the giver that puts the spirit in the season. So, don your Gay apparel and "x" your ex's off your list.

Party invitations are more abundant during December. But whereas our straight counterparts feel this means taking a gift to the host, coming early, staying late, and ingesting every nog and Santa cookie in sight, GLBTs have a valuable, inbred sense of how to navigate the sea of the social schedule. First off, generic invitations from your offices' copier toner supply company or the couple you met in P-town or Palm Springs this year are not "must go's" — they can be "just say no's." So feel free to say "non" to that RSVP. (It's French, look it up.)

And, for those fewer gatherings that you do attend, a bottle of wine for the host and only one run at the bar and buffet will keep your seasonal stress level in check. One good trick is to plan a late work-out at the gym after the party. This will remind you not to stay too long or eat or drink too much.

This of course leads to the third greatest contributor of the holiday blues: overindulgence. The straight world gave us an over-eating Santa Claus as an example of holiday cheer. But this image is supplied by the same straight marketers who have us the Big Mac and "buy-by-the-pound" buffets.

So limit your intake at those fewer functions. And, the next time your Aunt Velma sends you homemade peanut brittle, sample on piece, write a glowing "Thank you" note, and give to rest to a homeless shelter or rest home. (Only if their dentures can handle it.) Hint, take yourself out of harm's way for such over-eating by scheduling long winter walks with a friend or work-outs into your week. It'll take the place of parties of make you feel lots better.

Family matters. It really does. But Christmas has a reminiscent way of forcing square nostalgic pegs into real world round holes. Expectations and traditions can be traps for disappointment. It took me moving 1,200 miles from my folks before my mother pardoned me from the seasonal sentence of hanging outdoor lights. As we grow older, new traditions are meant to take the place of older ones. This Christmas, surprise your family by promising a winter weekend visit in early 2002. It's a way to alter that annual expectation and make way for the new reality. It's one that your parents had to make before you came along, you know.

And finally, we all get a little blue with the shorter days less sunlight in winter. But the good news is that the solstice comes less than a week before Christmas — meaning the days will start to grow longer again and the late sun of Spring is something to look forward to. But in the meantime, remember that we are predisposed to looking good in dim bar light. We plan and dress for it throughout the year. Wear brighter colors if you must, but don't let the early sunset get you down.

So, even if you haven't been to church since John Paul was just a cardinal, you're not over Patti, you work with a bunch of Christian snobs, or you've already bought your boyfriend a \$500 Tiffany ring, just be "out with it" and have YOURself a merry little Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza or Ramadan now.

Greg D. Kubiak, author, activist and holiday analyst, writes for several Gay publications. The peanut brittle connoisseur can be reached via this publication or by e-mail, GKubiak@aol.com.