

CHRISTMAS EXPERIENCES

May all your Christmases be Chocolatey

The best part of Christmas for me as a child was always the anticipation and the build up to Christmas Eve. The weeks before Christmas always consisted of advent cookies, decorations and carolling. But the one thing that excited me and simultaneously aggravated me the most were the chocolate filled advent calendars. The idea behind these calendars, besides torturing innocent young children, was to instil a sense of responsibility and discipline. Every evening my father and I would open up a window of the calendar to reveal a piece of chocolate, much to my delight. Unfortunately I was also born with a rash sense of urgency and impatience and quickly began to sneakily steal my chocolate days before the window was set to be opened. Suffice it to say I was eventually busted and my father in his disappointment discontinued the advent calendars in our home. Christmas from that point on was a dreary time that is until my father discovered Ferrero Rocher which he now gives to his adult children every year. In my book that is a definite upgrade and serves as a constant reminder during the festive season to appreciate my family and friends but most importantly the power of chocolate.

The night that stole Christmas

We lost one of our cousins on Christmas Eve last year. He and his family were driving back from a wedding when the car overturned and he was flung from the back of the truck. He died instantly and he was only six. We found out about this tragedy just as we were settling into the third course of our Christmas dinner. The phone rang and my mother answered the phone. Within a space of twenty seconds her face changed from ecstatic to hear from one of her brothers, who lived so far

away, to heartbroken distress. For my siblings and I to see our mother cry was a very rare thing and it scared us even more for not knowing what was being said on the other end of the line. Through her tears she told us that we had lost the youngest member of our family. We were heartbroken, but we were all grateful to be together and take comfort in each other. Though the rest of the evening was sombre, it was a Christmas of true meaning as we all realised how fragile life is – therefore to be treasured so.

Christmas stories

In my family, most Christmases look the same. We have Christmas lunch with the closest family and then in the afternoon we go to my grandmother with the rest of the family to celebrate together. This year however, I will not be in my snowy homeland as I am in hot Namibia. For once it feels good to leave the traditions behind and just do whatever I feel like, without any pressure. I know that my family thinks it will be empty without me, but I think that they will be even happier to celebrate Christmas with me next year. But don't get me wrong. I quite like Christmas with all its traditions. There seems to be more visiting family and friends and just enjoying each other's company over Christmas than at any other time. Where I come from this is the time for a lot of eating ginger-bread and drinking the traditional "glögg", and listen to Christmas music. This year I will however not be able to do so since I am in Namibia. It will be a nice contrast to my other cold and wintery Christmases and I am looking forward to see what it brings!

Christmas in the park

When I was eleven I still adored my father. My family isn't exactly Christian, which means I only saw the inside of a church at a wedding, funeral or when my believing extend-

ed family had something special going on like a child's baptism. For some strange reason, however, my mother thought it good to enrol my brother and me at a Christian school. So back then there was a lot of prayer and Bible teaching in my life. Due to this influence I used to pray fervently for my father. Christmas that year seemed very promising. We would go to my grandparents' house that eve to spend it with the rest of the family on Mom's side. I was so looking forward to playing with my cousins. An argument broke out while my parents were getting dressed. Dad did what he so often did. Instead of the fun and games with my cousins the three of us ended up spending that holy Christmas night in the park. My brother and I were sullen, too heartbroken to look at our mother with her swollen face, too ashamed for the hospital and her family. I no longer adored my father.

Christmas amongst the Basters

We have a farm that has been in the Beukes family for generations. Despite the feuds and other family ills we would gather yearly during the "Big Days". Nobody would miss these gatherings for anything, especially when my grandmother still lived. As a child it was the best time ever. Looking back with great nostalgia, because somehow the magic is now gone. But even then it was not the food or the gifts that thrilled me so about Christmas. It was the stories and jokes that were in full supply, the games we children played from the moment we woke up till hunger drove us home in the evenings. It was the tangible sense of belonging to these people who did these things year after year after year that made me love Christmas as I did as a child. On Christmas Eve each of the younger children would recite portions of scripture from the birth of Christ. The oldest

uncle would solemnly read from the Bible. The churchiest would deliver a message. There was so much ritual and tradition in these things it filled my heart with such a strong sense of belonging. I now look at my children and hope they love it all as I did.

Mindless Christmas

After Easter holidays, Christmas is the dumbest holiday ever. I don't have a problem with the religion and strengthening of family ties during this period. But wow! The commercial exploitation of the poor Jesus. Taking His birth and turning it into a circus with a well-insulated white guy on a sleigh, which is another fictive element, on animals we have never seen in Africa. And to top it, posing this guy with fake snow - which is yet another non-existent in Namibia - under a once again unAfrican tree. And then we have music, crazy senseless music about this guy bringing us presents through the sky or chimneys, which 99% of us don't have. I mean... are the adults who buy into this for real? The whole business is just a mindless load of stupidity.

If it's supposed to be about Jesus Christ, let it be about Jesus. Otherwise disassociate the Christ from this criminalising zombieing.

I've opted out of Christmas

When I was a little girl, Christmas was the one time I could play grown-up and help my mother out in the kitchen. All year long I would look forward to Christmas morning when I could climb up a chair and help mix salads and cake ingredients. Then my mother died. My first Christmas without her was just unbearable. I thought I would never again find Christmas joy, but my father remarried and my step-mother and I got along swimmingly. Gradually, I started to form new traditions with her and Christmas was joyful again... Then she died too. I have since decided to not have any more Christmas traditions, because the Christmas memories I have remain the most beautiful yet most painful of my life. I don't think I would be able to survive losing another Christmas tradition.

Christmas as a girl, Christmas as a woman

Growing up, Christmas (for me) used to mean new clothes (most likely a new dress), lots and lots of sweets, going to visit my grandmother in Zambia, going to church, dancing under the tree with my countless cousins and having rice with tomato sauce (that was a treat back then!) Over the years, Christmas has changed a great deal and new traditions were formed.

As I grew older, I became a part of the team that ensured that the Christmas celebrations went accordingly... This meant waking up at the crack of dawn to make sure there is a variety of food ready when the family wakes up. This meant baking a traditional chocolate and fruit Christmas cake, roasting potatoes and meats of all kinds. It also meant making sure the house was clean to receive guests, because beyond being a time for family, it is also a time where anyone can just drop by and be a part of the festivities.

