

'Tis the season to be wary

by Dave Barry
Syndicated Columnist

'Tis the holiday season -- a time when writers openly use words like "'tis" and even "'twas"; a time when throngs of excited parents bustle into the Toys Sure "R" Costing "U"

...the dog would immediately start trotting in a straight, purposeful line, and it would continue night and day, traveling thousands of miles if necessary, defying exhaustion, starvation and thirst, until it located a rug, which it would throw up on.

Plen-"T" store and club each other with sturdy Tonka trucks in fierce holiday struggles over who gets to purchase the only remaining unit of the toy industry's hottest new product concept, Baby Fester Face ("The Doll That Develops REAL BOILS!"); a time when festive gatherings of loud, eggnog-impaired people attempt to sing "The Twelve Days of Christmas" despite the fact that nobody ever

remembers what my true love gave me after day five:

"... drummers milking
"Eight leapers leaping
"Six snakes a-molting..."

Yes, the holiday season is a time of traditions, and here in the newspaper industry we have a cherished tradition of reminding you, the public, of all the holiday-related ways in which you can get injured or killed. We also perform this service for you on Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Halloween and Thanksgiving. ("Enjoy your turkey dinner, but remember: This year, 250 Americans will choke on their gibleet.")

So today I want to discuss a potential holiday disaster that was brought to my attention by alert reader Debby Denniston, who sent me an Associated Press article that appeared last December in the *Albany (N.Y.) Times Union*. The article, which I am not making up, begins:

"FREMONT, Neb.-- A 10-year-old boy trying to keep his dog from throwing up on a rug was pinned when the family Christmas tree fell on top of him."

This incident should come as no surprise to anybody who has ever owned a dog. Throwing up on rugs is the primary function

of dogs, as a species. If you were to put a dog in the middle of the Sahara, the dog would immediately start trotting in a straight, purposeful line, and it would continue night and day, traveling thousands of miles if necessary, defying exhaustion,



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starvation and thirst, until it located a rug, which it would throw up on.

So anyway, when this Fremont, Neb., dog--whose name, according to the article, is

"Pookie"-- started to woof, the boy shoved him off the rug. Naturally, this caused the Christmas tree to fall. Christmas trees have some kind of inner-ear problem that renders them incapable of standing erect for any significant length of time. In their natural forest environment, they grow horizontally on the ground, like zucchini.

Compounding the problem is the fact that Christmas trees are known to be among the most vicious members of the plant community. They become especially hostile after they've spent weeks tied up tightly at the Christmas-tree sales lot while holiday shoppers repeatedly lift them up and pound them down to see if any needles fall off. So when Dad brings a tree home, cuts its ropes and tries to jam it into one of those ludicrously flimsy, ashtray-sized "tree stands"--- which are barely adequate to handle a small floral centerpiece, let alone an enragged, full-grown conifer --the tree, free from its restraining ropes, will immediately start lunging violently in all directions, while Mom, trying to be helpful, says, "OK, now it's leaning to the left...OK, now it's leaning to the right.....OK, now it's leaning back to the left...OK, now it's..."

Meanwhile, Dad, somewhere down on the floor under the thrashing branches, pine sap smeared in his hair, is fighting for his life, bleeding from hundreds of tiny pine-needle stab wounds and saying many non-holiday words. At least that's the tradition in our house.

But getting back to the Associated Press article: There the boy was, alone in his house, trapped under a highly aggressive Christmas tree. Fortunately, Pookie saw what was happening, trotted alertly over to the boy, and, in the heroic tradition of resourceful canines Lassie and Rin-Tin-Tin, threw up.

No, seriously, the article states that the boy was able to reach a phone and call 911, whereupon "police and firefighters pulled the tree off the boy, who was not injured." The article does not state whether the police used tranquilizer darts on the tree.

So fortunately this story has a happy ending, which is good, because the holiday season should be a happy time. So before we create the impression that there's nothing more to this very special time of year than tree attacks, we'd like to wish you the best, and leave you with this holiday thought: Both holly AND mistletoe are poisonous.

Features

A look at the African-American holiday Kwanzaa

by Calandra Matthews
The Collegian

While many people are preparing for the Christmas holiday, many African-Americans are preparing for another holiday: Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is an African-American holiday that was founded in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, professor and chair of the Department of Black Studies at the California State University at Long Beach and director of the African-American Cultural Center in Los Angeles.

Unlike Chanukah or Christmas, Kwanzaa is a cultural celebration rather than a religious one, therefore it can be celebrated by people of all faiths. Many African-Americans celebrate both Kwanzaa and Christmas.

"Kwanzaa was created to reaffirm our culture and the bonds between us as a people," says Dr. Karenga in this month's issue of *Essence* magazine. It encourages all people of African descent to turn to their culture and value system.

The word Kwanzaa is Swahili, meaning "first fruits". It refers to agricultural celebrations that took place in Africa as thanks for good harvests. The values of ingathering, reverence, commemoration, recommittment and celebration are the foundation for Kwanzaa.

Traditionally, Kwanzaa is observed for seven days, from December 26th to January 1st. It is based on the seven principles of the Nguzo Saba, an African-American value system. Each principle corresponds to one of the seven days. The seven principles are: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-

determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), and Imani (Faith).

At the beginning of the holiday, a mkeka (straw mat) is placed on a table, as a foundation. It represents the African culture and history.

The kinara (candle holder) is then placed on top of the mkeka. The kinara holds seven candles, called the mishumaa saba. One black candle in the center symbolizes the people, three red ones on the left symbolize the blood of the people, and three green ones on the right symbolize their ancestral lands.

Next, the muhindi, or ears of corn, are placed on the table to represent the children of the family. Other fruit and vegetable crops (mazao) are also displayed to symbolize the family's labor throughout the year, their success and achievements.

The unity cup (kikombe cha umoja) is most important because it signifies the unity of the family, as well as the unity of Africans on both a national and a global level.

Although gifts are not a primary part of Kwanzaa, gifts (zawadi) may be exchanged. Most gifts are for the children. Kwanzaa gifts must have some cultural meaning or value to them. Many times, books or even homemade items are given.

The Karamu (feast) is the culmination of the Kwanzaa festivities. This is a celebration of family and friends that includes everything from food, music and dance to singing and storytelling. The unity cup is passed around from the oldest to the youngest, and everyone comments on how they will improve their lives in the coming year using the seven principles.

In twenty-seven years, Kwanzaa has grown to become an international holiday. More than 18 million people worldwide celebrate it every year, including some students here at Behrend.

"I started celebrating Kwanzaa about two years ago," says Samuel Harris. "I enjoy it very much. I do think that more people should know about it."

Many students are still learning from it. Earla Simpson commented, "I understand it more now than when I was a child. I understand what the values and principles mean."

Members of the Association of Black Collegians (ABC) will hold a Kwanzaa celebration tomorrow evening at 6 p.m. in the Wintergarden. All students, faculty and staff are welcome to attend.

"Kwanzaa isn't just about giving presents, but about unity and sharing with your family," says Alexis Pratt. "And giving thanks."

