

# 2023 Winter E-Zine

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# Oh! The Traditions We Keep

BY TARA NANAYAKKARA (RUNNER UP, \$50 WINNER)



It always goes back to the mother, doesn't it? Traditions that is, in our case at least. This year, 2023 marks the 50th anniversary of a tradition my mother started back in 1973 that continues to this day at my house every December 22nd. Everyone from extended family, friends who are like extended family, and my husband's coworkers, all gather for a plethora of great food, drink and lively conversation with festive music rounding out the soundscape.

We were a relatively young immigrant family when my parents brought us over from Sri Lanka in the sixties. We had no extended family when we settled in St. John's. We nodded politely while friends and classmates talked about visiting their Nan and Pop for Christmas dinner. What could we add to the conversation when all our relatives were in far flung parts of the world? Nobody could relate to our way of doing things. We exchanged invitations with other South Asian families and enjoyed Newfoundland style parties with people from church or other organizations my mother belonged to but still... something was missing.

That's when December 22nd became a thing at our house.

"We should host a Christmas party and invite all our good friends," my mother said.

Memories of my father polishing the wine glasses, the fireplace crackling in the background, the scent of Pledge on just-polished furniture, and music on the stereo are forever cast in my mind for posterity.

In its earliest incarnation, the event was dubbed a "carolling party". One of my mother's teaching colleagues was a brilliant pianist. With grand flourishes and sweeping keystrokes she would rouse the forty odd guests into a merry round of songs and carols which eventually segued into rollicking Newfoundland tunes. Spoons would be retrieved from the kitchen drawer, a guitar and a trumpet would magically appear and the party would go on and on, and the food! Well that just didn't stop. There were fish cutlets, patties, Christmas cake, all recipes handed down from my maternal grandmother back in Sri Lanka. Then there was a foil tree adorned with crab puffs and cocktail sausages with chutney.

Decades later as an adult with a family of my own, I inherited the mantle of being the official party thrower and that's how it's been ever since. Now even my children's friends join in the fun. It's a tamer party these days. My mother's speciality was warm mulled tea punch while mine is hot buttered rum with whip cream and freshly grated nutmeg. Along with the ubiquitous Sri Lankan short eats, we have smoke salmon on crostini, bacon wrapped dates and other delectables. Not much carol singing these days but there is just as much fun. Of course some things don't change. The Christmas cake and the fish cutlets are a must-haves. My children won't have it any other way.

Now for an old chestnut, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Oh! The traditions we keep.

# Retellings

BY EMMA COLE (RUNNER UP, \$50 WINNER)

For Christmas Eve, the family goes to my parents' house and tells the same stories in the same order. From the rocking chair, nan regales the Christmas she and pop got engaged while stranded in a snowstorm. My uncle talks about his grandfather sitting at the kitchen table while his kids opened their presents, only speaking to get a refill on coffee – pop used to tell that one. My cousin recounts the year three separate people gifted her the exact same baby doll.

My sister is younger but has kids, so she gets to try out new stories, seeing which one might earn a permanent spot; her son's new 'girlfriend' at preschool, the disastrous princess she hired for her daughter's birthday.

Right before supper, my aunt will arrive, waving through the front window. And nan will start to tell the story, tripping over her words, of when my aunt was twelve, and insisted she play with her new baseball bat as soon as she unwrapped it.

"And when – came back in...said, 'Mommy, I lost the ball in the snow!'" Everyone will laugh just as my aunt steps foot into the living room. She'll be undoing her scarf and chuckle along. Then we'll be ushered to the table, where my mom unveils the same meal that we have every year.

We sit in couples; my mom and dad, my sister and her husband, my uncle and his wife, my cousin and her boyfriend, the two kids at the kids' table. I sit across from nan, and my aunt squeezes in next to me.

After supper the men watch TV, the women clean up, and I watch nan watch the kids. My aunt will stand in the kitchen doorway and offer to help. She'll be thanked, but ultimately turned away.

Later, my aunt might come look at a drawing one of the kids did – she'll smile to herself and ask something like "Is that a pride flag?" And nan will answer something like "She's too young for any of that."

And once everyone's gathered back in the living room with coffee and tea, my mom will try and prompt a story from my adolescence: calling her crying during my first date in high school, dropping a whole box of vintage tree ornaments, or getting food poisoning on a Christmas cruise. I'll excuse myself.

Usually, I head out to the back patio to smoke – my aunt might be out there already. And as snow starts to fall, she can ask me about my PhD research, and I can ask her about her transition.

We'll come back inside to say goodbye to the kids, who are too excited for their bedtime. From there, everyone leaves in the same order. My parents offer the guest rooms – old bedrooms – if the roads are icy. Everyone declines – even me, though I'll be back in the morning.

# This Winter Will Be the Winter of Long Johns / January

BY COLE HAYLEY (THIRD PLACE, \$150 WINNER)

## This Winter Will Be the Winter of Long Johns

This winter will be the winter of long johns.

The winter of long johns and coffee made at home, poured into one of several travel mugs branded with logos of defunct businesses.

This winter will be the winter of long johns, long johns and affordable weighted blankets. A winter of ethical consumption and left-wing cannibalism.

This winter will be the winter of long johns.

The winter of long johns, candy cranberries, half-off scented Christmas candles, and stopping to acknowledge local authors doing book signings at Chapters.

This winter will be the winter of long johns; long johns and love in long-exposure, of death-via-exposure. A winter of warmth.

This winter will be the winter of long johns; a winter spent playing games of cards with family members "getting up there." A winter of board games and even more boring affairs.

This winter will be soul food.

This winter will be good soup. his winter will be Millennial.

This winter will be a winter to call off engagements, a winter of career switches.

This winter will heal.

This winter will be mild.

This winter will be without snow.

This winter will come, go, and come back to make sure you've stayed by the door, eagerly awaiting its return.

I've said it all before:

this will be the winter of long johns.

The winter of long johns and putting on an extra layer of protection between you and the elements.

This will be the winter to do away with polar dips, the winter to finish your manuscript, the winter semester you decide to grow up and drop out.

This, my friends, will be the winter of long johns. The year of long johns.

This will be the year of winter in three distinct flavours: personal,

professional,  
& metaphysical.

This will be the winter you pick up skiing, the winter you finally make it to the cabin with friends; this winter will be the first winter you'll actually try to enjoy because you realize, in Newfoundland, winter is a whole half of your life.

This— this winter right here—this is the winter of long johns, and right now, at Riffs, they're 33rd and a 3rd % off.

## January

There's a blink of deep-green far off, the last bit of light holding on— admirable, in the annihilation of January dark.

It's not there for very long. The eyelids of the day heavy with snow fallen, and snow promised. It collapses

like a weightlifter going to failure. Pitiful, but God, you have to love its perseverance... I wish I was as brave.

# The Loot Bag

BY BRIDGET A. RICKETTS (SECOND PLACE, \$200 WINNER)

Anna sat on her dad's shoulders on the side of the road by the Marystown shopping mall watching the Christmas parade. Her older sister Marie stood close by jumping up and down trying to see a float of mummers as they passed by.

A shout went up from the crowd. Everyone turned their heads to look down the road. There he was... Santa! He sat in a red sleigh on a flat-bed trailer towed by a truck.

The truck stopped in front of the throng and Anna arched her neck to look up. It was her first time looking at the real live Santa Claus. Then, to everyone's delight, he started throwing out loot bags. "Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas!" he bellowed.

"I'll get some," said Fred, their dad. He lifted her off his shoulders and put her on the ground. Anna clutched her sister's hand and watched him wade into the crowd. He started waving his arms to get Santa's attention and deftly caught a bag within a few seconds. He tossed the bag back to Marie who squealed with delight.

Anna looked at Marie clutching her loot bag, then back to her dad in the crowd. He waved his arms again, but every bag that was thrown in his direction was caught by a quick handed man who passed the bags on to a brood of boys.

In a matter of minutes, the clamouring ended, and Santa yelled out, "That's all for now kids, but I will bring presents Christmas morning!"

The truck pulling Santa's sleigh moved slowly down the road as Fred walked back to his daughters with empty hands. Anna could feel the hot tears as they spilled down her cheeks.

"I'm sorry, my darling. All the bags are gone. Marie will share with you, won't you Marie?"

"Don't cry Anna. I'll share," Marie said with a smile.

Four-year-old Anna was not to be mollified. "I don't want Marie's. I want my own," she cried.

Fred picked up his youngest and tucked her head into the crook of his neck.

"There, there now. We will all share. There'll be enough for everyone," Fred soothed her as they walked back to the car.

Just as they were about to drive away, there was a tap on the window. Fred rolled it down and one of the boys stood there.

"Hey mister. Here you go... for your little girl," he said, passing a loot bag through the window. "I saw her crying and wanted to give her mine. Merry Christmas."

He was gone quicker than a wink before anyone even had a chance to say thank you.

Many years later, a much older Anna was telling her grandchildren about her earliest memory of seeing Santa and the boy who gave up his loot bag for her.

"I later found out who that boy was and kept my eye on him all while I grew up. Then one day I married him. That boy is your granddad."



# Me, You and Cressie

BY MORGAN MOAKLER JESSIMAN (FIRST PLACE, \$250 WINNER)

It is my first winter living in rural Newfoundland.

The snow seems to come and go as quickly as a Nan does from the dinner table – rapidly covering all corners, and then disappearing to unknown parts. The greens, yellows and reds of November foliage are stacked against the greens, yellows and reds of the Christmas decorations that have been up in homes and town halls since November 12th. One day after we remember veterans, we must start thinking of what Jesus would like at his birthday party.

Living in the Bible Belt of the Pentacostal and Salvation Army churches means that our markets are filled with homemade signs reading ‘Give it to God – and go to sleep’ and women named Loretta asking us which prayer service we’ll be attending on December 24th.

“All Saints usually has a registration on the Facebook ya know! Right tech savvy, that Pastor Tom. The others usually do drop in though if ya can’t make up your minds.” She winks at my partner and I, and we nervously laugh and continue to mull about the market, hoping to find anything secular.

“Should we just go to one?” Mark, my beautiful and gullible partner asks me as we return to the car.

“You know how we don’t like straight people coming to our clubs? I don’t think Christians would like spiritually ambiguous queers going to their masses,” I chortle in response.

Mark is in pause. He mulls this notion over before responding.

“Do you think people would be mad at us? I just want us to fit in.” Mark puts the car in drive and we begin to coast on Route 208.

It is now my turn to pause and reflect.

“I think that us not hanging our flag, acting like very close roommates, and changing our rainbow leash for the dog is all enough for folks to think we’re good Christians. Remember, we decided that we weren’t going to kick up a fuss when we moved out here, so we’re essentially hiding parts of ourselves. But us staying safe doesn’t mean we also need to conform,” I sigh, lighting my first cigarette of the day while passing Crescent Lake.

Mark nods silently in response, still ruminating.

According to locals, Crescent Lake is home to Cressie, a ten foot long eel monster. While reports of seeing her massive scaly body have been done, no one has ever gotten a picture of the infamous beast. All merchandise portraying her beautiful snake portrait simply comes from memory.

“We’re kind of like Cressie, you know?” Mark says, as if reading my mind.

“What do you mean?” I say laughing, and almost choking on my own smoke.

“Well, we’re elusive, mysterious and while the locals love us, they’ve never really seen us,” he responds, grinning.

I cackle in response. It is just like Mark to compare two back in the closet queers, to a legendary lake monster.

# Meet our Winning Writers!



**Morgan Moakler Jessiman**

FIRST PLACE WINNER

Morgan Moakler Jessiman (she/they) is a multidisciplinary artist originally from Ktaqmkuk and holds a degree from Concordia University in Communications, majoring in Intermedia. Morgan is also known as Nora Fence, a burlesque performer with a funny flair. With their diverse background in the arts including exhibitions, performance, and writing, and working with organizations such as Banff Centre and The Tempest, Morgan is excited to have submitted this story as it is very close to their heart!



**Bridget A. Ricketts**

SECOND PLACE WINNER

Bridget is a writer and filmmaker living in Mount Pearl. In the past two years she has produced eight short films including her NIFCO First Time Filmmaker's short Attar of Roses which premiered at the Nickel Independent Film Festival June 2023. Recently she wrote and produced Bridey's Birth Control for the St. John's Short Play Festival.



**Cole Hayley**

THIRD PLACE WINNER

Cole Hayley is a playwright and poet originally from Elliston, NL, but now is based between St. John's and the "Mainland." Cole is a recent graduate of the National Theatre School and an alumni of Memorial University of Newfoundland, where he received a BA in English and Communications. He is the recent recipient of 2023 Playwright's Guild of Canada RBC Emerging Playwright Award and a member of the inaugural Poverty Cove playwrights unit; currently, Cole is working on publishing his first collection of poetry.



**Emma Cole**

RUNNER UP

Emma Cole is a writer from St. John's, Newfoundland. She studied English at Acadia University, where she wrote her Honours Thesis, a short story collection entitled Kaleidoscope. Emma's work has been recognized by WritersNL, CBC, estuary, Kiwanis, and Arts & Letters. You can find her writing on her website, [emmacharlottecole.com](http://emmacharlottecole.com).



**Tara Nanayakkara**

RUNNER UP

Tara Nanayakkara is a writer, wife and mother who loves to cook and entertain. Writing and cooking are her passions. She's the author of Priya's World, Dawning of a New Garden and Cardboard dreams. She is marketing a memoir, Sightlines, about her life dealing with visual impairment as a visible minority.



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