



Holiday spirit will stay alive without tree

It may be a white Christmas this year, but I don't think it's going to be very green.

See, there's not going to be a Christmas tree at my house this year. Kind of a disappointing prospect, don't you think?

We'll still have decorations, cards and such, but no tree.

No tree means no reminiscing about past decorating endeavors. No tree means no pine for this year's batch of potpourri. No tree means no Hallmark-style gushing over keepsake ornaments.

So why no tree?

His name's Mike, he's 11 months old and he's a slobbering, holy terror.

My parents' black lab is 90 pounds of exuberant, life-loving puppy who has a penchant for chewing wood — among many, many other things.

But my holiday spirit shall not be dampened by doggie slobber!

After all, the holidays should be about family and community, not just the hustle and bustle of the mall. It's a wonderful time to reconnect with the things which really matter in life.

They're also a time for remembering...remembering how darn gullible I was as a kid.

I don't know how many years in a row I fell for the old "ahhh shucks, you just missed Santa" routine. Every year they'd rush me to the back door — just in time to see the vanishing light of Rudolph's nose.



Jessica Kennedy

I was so gullible, I bought the story every year. Heck, I was probably one of the oldest believers.

And was my family good at procuring evidence of the jolly one's existence. One year my aunt and dad convinced me that there were reindeer paw-prints on my grandparent's roof. To this day, I'm not entirely convinced it wasn't Dasher and Dancer and company.

Heck, one time my grandparents even brought the neighbors in on the Santa-facade. We were told that Santa was going to be stopping by our grandparents' house Christmas Eve. True to form, the doorbell rang, we opened the door and magically, there were bags of presents for all.

Years later, I'm still not completely convinced that Santa isn't out there somewhere.

Who knows for sure?

What I do know is that the spirit of St. Nicholas is everywhere this time of year. It can be found in the men and women who dedicate their holidays to helping others.

They're the bell-ringers and the soup-kitchen workers; the people who donate food and distribute warm clothes to the needy.

Forget, for a moment or two, the crushing commerciality of the season and selflessly help those in need. It'd be great if we could find a little Santa in ourselves.

This year, there's probably not going to be the traditional tree. This may be the first Christmas I don't see a Christmas ornament or the Christmas elf in my house.

So this year I'm going to rally my Christmas spirit around the little Santas and the memories. I'll take time to reconnect with the important people in my life and say the things I've been meaning to say.

And maybe I'll break down and buy my parents a miniature tree to put on top of the TV — out of Mike's reach.

Kennedy is a senior advertising and broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



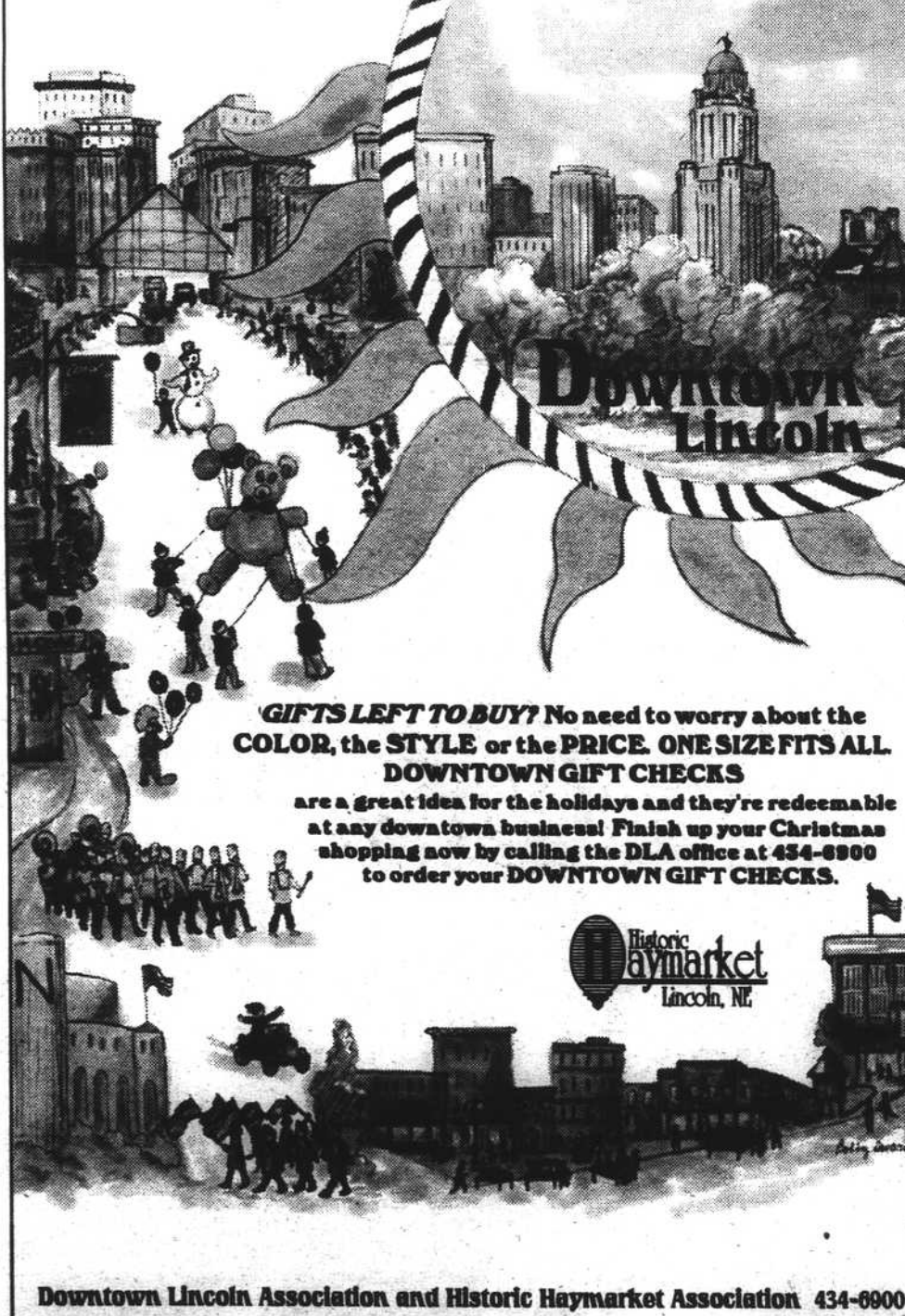
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International students find reasons to celebrate the Christmas season

BY CHAD LORENZ
Senior Reporter

“The Christmas celebration is imported from America.”

KOICHI MIYAJIMA
junior economics major from Japan

Most UNL students spend the holidays with family or friends, but international students rarely are able to go home during winter break.

While students in the United States typically celebrate Christian or Judaic traditions, some international students' religions don't have holidays in December.

So, many international students look for alternatives for celebrating during the American holiday season.

Koichi Miyajima, a junior economics major from Japan, will celebrate his first Christmas in the United States this year. He said the Japanese have a different take on Christmas traditions.

“We import many things from the U.S.,” Miyajima said. “Also, the Christmas celebration is imported from America.”

Although most people in Japan are Buddhist, they celebrate Christmas without the religious meaning, he said. Instead of celebrating with friends and family, Christmas is a holiday for lovers in Japan, Miyajima said.

Boyfriends typically buy their sweethearts extravagant gifts for Christmas — sometimes costing up to \$1,000, he said.

“That's why a guy works hard before Christmas because he wants to get an expensive gift,” Miyajima said.

Miyajima said he was going to spend Christmas with his girlfriend on a Colorado skiing trip. He would not specify what gifts he had in mind for her.

Christmas is also a common holiday for boyfriends to propose marriage to their girlfriends, he said.

Japanese families also spend time together during Christmas, Miyajima said. He said parents usually buy presents for their children under 12 years old.

The Japanese also have adopted the tradition of Christmas trees, but trees aren't so easy to find, he said. Artificial trees sometimes cost

more than \$1,000 and live trees are rare, Miyajima said.

Saad Alavi, a senior finance major from Pakistan, said he probably won't be able to see his family during winter break this year.

During his four years in the United States, Alavi sometimes has been able to return to Pakistan during the winter break. His family usually gets together for a big meal when he's home, he said.

Alavi has family members in other states who sometimes take him in during the holidays.

“If I'm not with my family, I have friends over here I'll celebrate the holiday with,” he said.

Because of his Muslim faith, he celebrates the holiday more in the United States than in Pakistan. Muslims recognize Jesus as a spiritual figure, but not as the Messiah.

Some of his friends are Christians, so Alavi celebrates some traditions with them, he said. He and his friends usually give Christmas presents to each other, he said.

Alavi said he doesn't mind celebrating Christmas, even though it's not traditionally a part of his religion. He celebrates it as part of American culture, not as a true religious holiday, Alavi said.

“Nobody's stopping me, so why not enjoy it?” he said. “There's nothing wrong with that.”