

Enjoy Some Festive Fun!

Pre-season stress, credit-crunch Christmas worries? Rediscover the excitement of Christmas and forget the doom and gloom!

Well it's that time of year again when every time we turn on the TV or open a newspaper we're reminded that the BIG countdown to Christmas has begun! AND for some reason it always seems to catch us by surprise, doesn't it? I'm regularly heard saying, 'I can't believe it's nearly Christmas again!' But it does genuinely feel like just a couple of months ago I was ordering last year's turkey! Actually this year I'm still waiting for summer to arrive. Where did that go?

Cold turkey anyone?

As a family we're back to the annual debate of 'Shall we have turkey this year, or shall we try something different?' knowing full well we always choose turkey! The debate usually centres around cost and which type of turkey to buy. Some turkeys are tasty on the day, but like tasteless cardboard when cold. We splashed out on a free range, bronze bird

last year and it was delicious hot and cold and fed us for a week, but they are very expensive, so are they worth it? AND, there seem to be so many different types of turkey to be had these days. Did we have bronze turkeys 20 years ago? Steve's love of post Christmas turkey soup also plays a big role in our final decision!

There appear to be a lot more issues to think about at Christmas than there used to be, which can all add to the stresses and pressures we feel. And of course this year, wherever you are in the world, you can't escape from the doom and gloom merchants who are telling us all that none of us can afford any of it anyway! The real meaning and excitement of Christmas has been lost in this frenzy of consumerism.

Think back to Christmas as a child. Do you remember that feeling of excitement and anticipation, when having to wait a whole week to the big day seemed like an eternity? As adults, the

media imposed stresses of the festive season often mean we grow to dread what used to be our favourite time of year. The real meaning of Christmas can so easily be lost under a burden of expense and stress. So let's take a look at how you can enjoy Christmas again...

The first step

Jot down what you'd like to do this Christmas. Disregard what you think you should do, or what others tell you you should be doing. Think about what you'd like to achieve emotionally. Gather your family together and ask them the same question – tell them what your feelings are. Communicate with the members of your wider family and if they expect too much of you, don't be afraid to tell them. Be politely assertive – it works!

It's important to remember that Christmas is only a few days and yours doesn't have to be the same as everyone else's. Take time out to think about what this time of year

really means and keep coming back to that. Of course, there will have to be compromises, but as long as they're not all on your part, that's OK. If all your family can't be together on the 25th, then you've got 364 other days of the year to make it happen!

Really a disaster?

Remember that people would much prefer you to be relaxed rather than perfect – try to see the bigger picture. It's not the end of the world if things don't go to plan. One of the best Christmas meals we've had was the year Steve told me the butcher closed at 5pm on Christmas Eve. In fact it closed at 12pm, so we had no turkey! There were a few loud mutterings (to put it mildly)! We hunted the shops and the only turkeys we could find were frozen solid, so we ended up with an enormous joint of pork – the only piece of meat we could find anywhere! My first reaction was that Christmas was ruined, but it was the best day ever. The pressure to cook a perfect meal just vanished and I was relaxed and enjoyed just being with Steve and the children. When I look back I realise how silly I was to think one turkey could spoil the day.

Gifts don't have to cost a lot, either. The most successful gift I've bought cost me £4 for the whole family – it was a pack of

very realistic fake teeth. There were goofy teeth, crooked and rotten teeth and all combinations of these. Before we began opening our presents everyone wore their particular set of teeth. We were soon laughing so much tears were running down our faces, and the more we laughed and looked at each other the more prominent the teeth appeared, so made it worse!

Thinking of Christmas dinner as a normal Sunday roast with crackers takes a lot of pressure away and if things go wrong, take some deep breaths and count to ten before reacting. It really isn't the end of the world!

Everyone can benefit from forward planning at this time of year; write lots of lists, prepare menus, work out a timetable for the day itself. This is particularly important if you suffer from conditions where your energy levels are low or your health is unpredictable, such as in ME, fibromyalgia or chronic pain. Lists and forward planning will help you to pace your activities more successfully and make it easier for your family to help out, or even take over if necessary! Use the principles of goal setting and pacing and apply them to your shopping, present wrapping and card writing.

A computer can be a great help in many areas. For example, if you have painful wrists or hands, consider

printing your Christmas card envelopes; avoid crowded shops by shopping on the internet. Why battle around impossibly cramped shops when you can have everything, including your food, delivered to your door?

If you don't have a computer, ask a friend or relative to order for you and get it delivered to your home. If you enjoy shopping, but find it difficult, consider borrowing an electric wheelchair or scooter; many shopping centres have this facility available now.

The New Year

As for New Year Resolutions, so many of us set impossibly high targets. Take a moment to think about what you really want and look at what prevented you from achieving it last year. If you're anything like me your goals will be much the same from year to year, so ask yourself why is that? Why not write down your thoughts over the next month in preparation. Meanwhile, to get you started, make a resolution to develop and nurture a positive attitude. Start each day with 'Yes I can' and take it day by day. This will help you to achieve your goals.

As always your knitting and stitching will enable you to escape into the sanctuary of a quiet, stress free mind. Make sure you keep this 'me' time daily to help you to enjoy a happy festive period wherever you are!