

Opinion

Suffering from pre-holiday stress syndrome

I thought I would be the last person to get it. But I've got it. And I've got a bad case.



Tracy Staton

It's 16 days until Christmas, and I'm suffering from pre-holiday stress syndrome.

It was bad enough in first grade when Greg Hand told me Santa Claus didn't exist. We were in the school cafeteria; I was calmly eating my green beans when he sprung the news. The foundation of my world was shattered. I immediately ran to my teacher, Mrs. Krafka, and tearfully asked if it was true. She said no, of course, and restored some semblance of normality to my childish beliefs.

But the nagging doubt was there; I watched carefully Christmas morning and determined that Santa Claus was a fake. Christmas would never be the same.

Somehow, I managed to remain ex-

cited about the holidays each year. When Dec. 1 rolled around, I'd be mailing cards or buying gifts or making cookies, crossing the days off on my calendar until the long-awaited day arrived. But the realities of life started eroding my Christmas spirit. Bit by bit, year after year, the magic of Christmas diminished.

It started when I went to college and missed the annual tree-trimming at home. I called my parents during dead week, and they were decorating the house. I was studying and eating cold pizza; they were singing Christmas carols and drinking eggnog.

Christmas baking was the next thing to go. Since I had a job over the holidays, I didn't have time to fix slice-and-bake cookies, much less bake from scratch. One more tradition down the tubes.

Then I started neglecting television Christmas shows. I missed "Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer" three years in a row. And I haven't seen "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" since I was 16 years old.

It was such a gradual process that I

wasn't aware it was happening. I finally started realizing it when my family was here for Thanksgiving. My mom asked what I wanted for Christmas — I asked her to pay off my MasterCard bill. And all I could think about while they were visiting was how I should be working instead of playing Trivial Pursuit.

And now the process is complete. I just can't bring myself to get excited about Christmas when I have four papers, three finals, two projects and an exam to wade through before then. Not to mention the gifts I need to buy with the money I don't have and the seven hours I have to drive to get home.

It's not just me. Almost everyone I know is so worried about finals; they haven't even thought about Christmas shopping. Or the holiday itself has become unimportant compared to their ski trip to Utah or their plans for New Year's Eve.

It's all a question of priorities. When I was a child, the year revolved around Christmas. I dreamed and plotted and planned all year for that one day, waited anxiously for the family Christmas party and church pageant. When December

came, I immersed myself in gift lists, Santa letters and Christmas carols. My brother and I spent hours arranging and rearranging the nativity scene.

Now my mind is occupied by a story I need to write for *The Battalion*, the clothes I need to wash, and the massive amounts of studying I need to do. I am looking forward to the holidays — but only because I plan to sleep a lot. Preparations for Christmas have not even crossed my mind.

And I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I haven't been thinking about buying presents for my family. I'm sorry I've missed the lighting of the Advent wreath at church. I'm sorry I haven't had time to decorate a tree or send Christmas cards.

This Christmas issue is just one more episode in a saga of mixed emotions and unclear priorities. I've been wondering lately what's more important — my grades and my job or my friends and family, my ambitions or my mental health. When I was younger, these choices were obvious. Now I'm so involved in thinking about the future that I've forgotten about the present.

Christmas is a good time to evaluate my priorities. I'm hoping that I have the courage to stop for a few moments over the holidays and examine what all of this means. I hope I can find the appreciation for the "Christmas Spirit" (and related items) that I've almost lost.

I know I won't turn into Father (or Mother) Christmas overnight — I don't want to. I do want to stop concentrating on my financial and social and educational problems long enough to help my mom wrap presents and cook turkey. I want to stop being so self-absorbed that I forget to speak to Mrs. Crockett at church. I want to watch football with my dad and play Monopoly with my brother without thinking I should be doing something else.

I know that stress is a part of life — it's the natural accompaniment to my ambitious career goals. But when it becomes the main theme instead of a minor discord, it's time to draw the line.

No more pre-holiday stress syndrome. I'm changing my focus — as soon as finals are over.

Tracy Staton is a senior journalism major, a staff writer and a columnist for *The Battalion*.

Democrats are masters of campaign clichés

Paul (the politician, not the singer) Simon began the evening by saying: "This is an exciting and important night." Right there I knew we were in trouble. Paul Simon telling you that something is going to be exciting is like the dentist telling you, "This won't hurt a bit." A little subtitle appears in your mind's eye: "He's lying."



Donald Kaul

And, as it turned out, he was. He was speaking at the Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in Des Moines, Iowa, where all six Democratic presidential hopefuls appeared, paying homage to the Iowa caucuses. Such meetings are not meant to be exciting or even important in a dynamic sense, of course. They are instead ritual gatherings of the clan designed to express solidarity and reinforce the myths of the party. (The chief Republican myth is that they know how to manage things; Democrats insist that they are compassionate.)

Party meetings provide a way for Democrats and Republicans to stand in front of a mirror and say: "Each day in every way, we're getting better and better." It doesn't do any harm and it keeps them off the streets. But it is no place to talk sense and with few exceptions, no one did in Des Moines. I counted the clichés uttered by each of the candidates, and it was a job. They came so fast and thick that it was difficult to decide whether you were listening to a series of single clichés or a single, multiple cliché.

As nearly as I could make out, Sen. Simon and Rep. Dick Gephardt of Missouri finished in a dead heat in the cliché contest, with Sen. Albert Gore Jr. close behind.

Gephardt, however, got marks for courage for mentioning the name of Jimmy Carter (Carter could have been president of Albania for all the mention he gets at Democratic meetings) while Simon got special credit for originality. He actually made up a cliché:

"It is time for the President of the United States to fill leadership posts with champions of the needy rather than cronies of the greedy," he said.

Jesse Jackson would have done better in the cliché department but he tends to disguise them in rhymes.

Who did himself the most good at the dinner? Al Gore, no question.

The name of the game in the Iowa

caucuses is not so much to win but to exceed expectations. What Gore did last week was to reduce his expectations in Iowa to zero. If he gets seven votes in Iowa next February, the political commentators will say he did much better than he had any right to.

Pursuing a Southern strategy, he attacked the whole idea of the Iowa caucuses. "There is something wrong with a nominating process that gives one state the loudest voice and then produces candidates who cannot even carry that state," he said.

"Iowa is a competitive state. Yet we have not been able to win it for the past 23 years. We have lost four of the last five elections. Last time, we lost 49 of our 50 states. The time before, 45 of our 50 states. Isn't it time for a change?"

It was the closest to sense any candidate came all evening, but Iowa's Democrats greeted him with an enthusiasm usually reserved for bubonic plague. Change the Iowa caucuses? What, and quit show business?

The Democratic field has been characterized, unfairly I think, as a group of dwarfs or lightweights. They're not that. They share a certain lack of foreign policy experience but other than that they are bright and remarkably well-informed.

Their collective problem is more subtle. Rather than projecting the image of national leadership, they seem to be running for the post of Brightest Kid in Class.

If that's the case, then Bruce Babbitt is the winner. Listen to him closely and you'll find his ideas fresher and more thoughtful than those of any other candidate in either party, also more candid.

"If we care about the progressive agenda, then we've got to be honest about the deficit," he told the 8,000 Democrats assembled in Des Moines. "If we won't say what we'll defend, where we'll cut, who we'll tax and how we'll pay, we'll never be able to look America in the eye and say why we're Democrats. . . . I'm going to say it straight — we've got to raise taxes and cut spending. We've got to apply a needs test to the budget so that spending cuts reflect our priorities. We've got to consider a consumption tax that's progressive to pay for the programs we need."

That sounded good to me. It remains to be seen whether the country is ready for a president who reminds you of Henry Alrich, however.

It wasn't exciting; it wasn't particularly important. But it was interesting. How it will all turn out, God knows.

Copyright 1987, Tribune Media Services, Inc.



Mail Call

Nuke Old Sarge

EDITOR:

This "Old Sarge" mascot really bites the big one. I think it should be nuked. With this letter, I've sent 1,323 signatures on a petition that states: "We as students feel the 'Old Sarge' mascot is an embarrassment to the school. Please don't ever display it in public."

Eric Wilke '91 accompanied by 1,323 signatures

Selfish use of traditions

EDITOR:

I certainly agree that the old Sarge mascot is an unnecessary and undesirable addition to Aggie games. There are logical alternatives to this proposal, like having Rev spend time on the west sideline since the team is over there anyway. But I can hardly say I'm surprised or shocked at the thought of a copycat mascot considering the cavalier treatment of tradition in recent years.

I'm not saying that people who refuse to conform are bad or anything of the sort. What I'm saying is that students and groups, including student government, use tradition when it suits their purpose. Consider the oxymoronic pitch for the Big Event, "a NEW TRADITION", and the use of "RELOAD" by seniors in one of the yells. If you'll listen to one of the Aggie Band's records from the mid-1970's, you can hear two or three people yelling "RELOAD" during the pause of the yell in question. Sounds like the origin of a "NEW TRADITION" to me.

Tom Key '89

Bring back old yell leaders

EDITOR:

As far as the Old Sarge mascot goes, I completely agree with Doug Beall: it is a bad idea. The whole purpose of the new mascot is so the old alumni can participate in yells at the game; but the costume itself does not portray the traditional image of Old Sarge. That is why it has been so unsuccessful with the students. Beall is completely wrong in saying that the old Ags have done their yelling, and if they want to participate now, they have to sit in the students section. Show a little respect Beall. There are other alternatives to the new mascot. If the old Ags are really serious about wanting to show their Aggie spirit, why not open the idea up to them? Why not have the old yell leaders from years-gone-by get dressed up in their old "whites" and get down on the field to do yells? I honestly believe that there would be a list of old Ags ready and willing to come back and lead yells. They would most likely consider it an honor to participate once more. I think our old Ags are worth it. How about you Beall?!

Julie Brieden '90

accompanied by 11 signatures

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer.

BLOOM COUNTY

by Berke Breathed



The Battalion
(USPS 045 360)

Member of Texas Press Association Southwest Journalism Conference

The Battalion Editorial Board

Sue Krenek, Editor
Daniel A. LaBry, Managing Editor
Mark Nair, Opinion Page Editor
Amy Couvillon, City Editor
Robbyn L. Lister and Becky Weisenfels, News Editors
Lloyd Brumfield, Sports Editor
Sam B. Myers, Photo Editor

Editorial Policy

The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting newspaper operated as a community service to Texas A&M and Bryan-College Station.

Opinions expressed in *The Battalion* are those of the editorial board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Journalism.

The Battalion is published Monday through Friday during Texas A&M regular semesters, except for holiday and examination periods.

Mail subscriptions are \$17.44 per semester, \$34.62 per school year and \$36.44 per full year. Advertising rates furnished on request.

Our address: The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-4111.

Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Battalion*, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station TX 77843-4111.