



A Screw Loose



by Liz Holzemer



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Chrismukkah

They say the holidays are all about celebrating traditions and creating new ones, especially once you have children. How do you go about ringing in the holiday spirit when you're a fair-skinned, hazel-eyed, Hebrew school-educated gal who eloped to Vegas with her Catholic husband because of their diametrically opposed religions?

How does one go about creating traditions when you're caught in a multi-faith, identity crisis conundrum?

The holidays conjure up wonderful childhood memories for me. There are the sounds and smells of Hanukkah that I remember so fondly in my mother's kitchen. Hot oil crackling in the frying pan for the perfectly crisped



latkes. The chop-chopping of onions and tears streaming down my mother's face as she prepared dinner. Hearing my father's deep voice as he recited the blessings before lighting the candles on the menorah to celebrate the Festival of Lights.

Barukh atah Adonoi. Blessed are you, Lord.

Celebrating the holidays has always been an untraditional experience for me. I celebrate Hanukkah and Christmas or Chrismukkah as it was coined by Seth Cohen's character last season on Fox's *The O.C.*, which, by the way, misrepresents life there. Trust me; I grew up behind the Orange Curtain as the Angelenos referred to us.

My father is Jewish, and my mother is a Methodist, who converted to Judaism after I entered the world and their matchbox 1-bedroom UCLA apartment. My father walked to synagogue every Friday with his Polish mother and Russian father in Brooklyn, and my mother enjoyed making Christmas sugar cookies and decorating a fresh pine in Burlington, Vt., as a young girl.

Because the moon is out of whack this year, Hanukkah begins at sunset on Christmas day Eve. Like all Jewish holidays, Hanukkah is temperamental depending on its mood or the time of the month. It likes to be celebrated shortly after Thanksgiving on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev, keeping a safe distance from Christmas and enjoying the spotlight while it can; other years it overlaps Christmas. This year, it chose to make a HUGE statement by waiting 24 hours after Christmas Eve. It's the first time this has happened since 1978. Still following me?

It wasn't always easy being raised by my kosher father who hails from a long line of Russian Orthodox Jews.

My mother used to tell my brothers and me not to breathe a word to our father about the non-kosher Hebrew National hotdogs she enjoyed when we attended Saturday movie matinees.

"Sshh," she whispered before the lights dimmed and we

***Bad Hair Day**

***Confessions of a Middle Aged Drama Queen**

***Dad Droppings**

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***Life At 40**

***Livin' In My Head**

***Stgh, Moan & Garfbtikle**

***Don't Get Me Started**



were bribed with offerings of hot buttered popcorn and jumbo-sized Hershey's bars.

Hey Mom, guess what, Dad always knew and still does!

My three younger brothers and I were raised to celebrate both holidays. We took turns lighting the candles, spinning the dreidel and betting gelt on which candle would burn out last. We didn't have a Christmas tree or string multi-colored lights outside like the rest of our neighbors, but my parents held over several night's worth of Hanukkah gifts to tear open from brightly colored Christmas paper. Talk about an identity crisis.

We didn't attend mass and because our parents raised us to believe that Christmas is a universal holiday, my father always made a fire (yes, there was a time when homes didn't have a light switch for instant warmth), and read 'Twas the Night before Christmas before ushering us to bed.

Nor did we have a Christmas tree, but there were my grandmother's handmade stockings stuffed with Valencia oranges, chocolate candy kisses and a new magazine subscription.

My husband and I have celebrated over a decade's worth of Chrismukkahs together.

In the early years of our marriage, we spent them in Venezuela celebrating with the natives while eating Hallacas-a traditional Christmas dish of maize, rich meat filling and spices wrapped in banana leaves and lighting off fireworks hours after dusk.

Now with a 20-month old son and a daughter who's old enough to understand the holidays, my husband and I will attempt to share our multi-faith traditions with as little confusion as possible. We'll wrap Christmas gifts in Hanukkah paper and Hanukkah gifts in Christmas paper

***Dad Libs**

***LadyOfTheHouse**

***Blissfully Numb**

***MommyChronicles**

***DomesticEngineering**

***College Daze**

***Midlife Cometh**

***The Imperfect Man**

***Bereft On The Left**

***Mommorphosis**

***MomsAlwaysWrite**

***HorseSense&Savvy**

***Scrambled Brains**

***Desperate Working Mothers**

***Urban Momfare**

***Family Business**

***My Brain On PBS!**

***You Can't Be Serious**

***Hoochy Mama**



and place them under our own fresh pine. My daughter and I will make Star of David and menorah gingerbread cookies.

All in the spirit of Chrismukkah cheer.

So I guess I've arrived at the conclusion that as long as you're celebrating the season as a family, it doesn't matter if you stuff a stocking or spin a dreidel because you can do both!

Happy Chrismukkah or is it Merry Chrismukkah?!

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