

Cause:
Angel Tree

Deck the Halls

Benefits
of Yoga

Activism
Against AIDS

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Avatar

Activism Against AIDS
Uniting as one world to help people living with AIDS.



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Contact

Your valuable contributions are what make Avatar so unique. Please submit us your content, whether it be an article, poem, joke, game, photo, drawing or anything else you have to share!

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Letter from the Editors and acknowledgments.

Letter from the Editors

Happy Holidays, friends.

Can you believe it's already December? We certainly can't, but we're as ready as we'll ever be! As we enter into this last month of 2009, we've got some great holiday themed content for you.

Within our own editorial staff, this month is actually incredibly exciting; it's our debut issue with our new Avatar Editors! This month, we welcomed Casey, who's always up-to-date on world happenings as our Sub-Editor of News and Debates. We welcomed the caring and warmhearted Natasha (SaveMe) as our first Sub-Editor of Dear Avatar. The quirky and hilarious Amy (lost-myself) joined us as the Sub-Editor of Fun and Games, and last, but certainly not least, the amazingly artistic Stephanie joined us as the first Sub-Editor of Graphics and Quality! Avatar can only go uphill from here!

In our December **TeenHelp Times**, we have an article, "Socialism," giving readers a true, unbiased look at this political system. Don't forget to check out our **Mind & Body** section to learn about the benefits of yoga. We also have a piece from an outside source, Sian Morgan, that gives tips to both parents and children about how to deal with bullies in this technological time. In **Lifestyle**, you can find a brief history of several different holidays celebrated in today's society as well as how much they have changed since their origins.

In the December issue of Avatar, we also have Angel Tree featured as TeenHelp's **Cause of the Month**. Fittingly, with the holidays, this organization strives to make sure that children of incarcerated parents are able to smile on Christmas day! Of course, don't forget about **Dear Avatar** and the amazing content in **Fun & Games**; December might just be our most fun-filled issue yet! Finally, check out **Self Expression** and your December **Horoscopes**!

We can't believe we're saying it, but we'll see you in 2010!
The Avatar Editors.

Editors

Editor-in-Chief

Mel

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Sub-Editor of Mind and Body

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Natasha (SaveMe)

Sub-Editor of Lifestyle

Nat (Strider)

Sub-Editor of Fun and Games

Amy (lost-myself)

Sub-Editor of Graphics and Quality

Stephanie

Contributors

The Avatar Editors would like to thank the following TeenHelp users for their valuable contributions published in this month's magazine.

Contributions from readers like you are what make Avatar so unique and wonderful. Please consider submitting content, whether it be an article, poem, photograph, or anything else.

**www.teenhelp.org/avatar/submit or
avatar@teenhelp.org**

Articles

Sian Morgan

Images

Arbiter
Briana
tk338

Self Expression

Dreamer
Matthew



Activism Against AIDS

by Stephanie

Each year, on the 1st December, World AIDS Day takes place. The aim of the day is to create a larger awareness of AIDS (Acquired immune deficiency syndrome) and the spread of the HIV infection which causes this, as well as attempting to raise money, tackle related prejudice and improve education upon the subject. It is traditional for the President of the United States to make a proclamation on the 1st of December and governments of other nations often make speeches on the topic. The day is also used as a memorial to those who have lost their lives to AIDS.

Today, HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a threat to all men, women and children around the world. The condition is transmitted through one person with a bodily fluid containing HIV having direct contact with blood. Transmission can be through unprotected sex, blood transfusion, using contaminated needles, between mother and child or other exposure to bodily fluid which contains the virus. HIV destroys important defence cells in the body and cause immune deficiency – meaning that people with the virus get serious infections. According to UNAIDS estimates, 33.2 million people currently have HIV and around half of all people who become infected with HIV are under 25.

Today, HIV is a threat to all men, women and children around the world.

This year, the theme of the World AIDS Day is "Universal Access and Human Rights" with leaders around the world making an aim of universal access to HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment, recognising these as important human rights. Although great progress has already been made to make these services more accessible, there is still room for improvement and a lot of dedication is needed to reach this goal. Human rights are fundamental to tackling the AIDS epidemic and by promoting these, new transmissions can be avoided and people who already have contracted the virus can live without fear of being discriminated against and with good care and treatment.

There are many ways that you as an individual can contribute towards achieving this year's goals, such as fundraising for AIDS charities, perhaps through a

There are many ways that you as an individual can contribute towards achieving this year's goals, such as fundraising for AIDS charities, perhaps through a sponsored event, or simply creating awareness, and openness of the issue, perhaps by simply wearing a red ribbon that day. World AIDS day gives us the prospect of trying to spread awareness and hope globally. ■



Contact us!

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Socialism

by Casey

Due to a misunderstanding of political parties and past events, there are currently a significant amount of negative opinions toward socialism. Many people, wrongly, relate socialism to National Socialism, commonly known as Nazism; although National Socialism might have had some socialist ideals, it is also mostly focused on race, socialism is not about race.

By definition, socialism is a political system in which economies are controlled by strong welfare states, and there are equal opportunities for everyone.

Democratic Socialism is literally 'for the people, by the people', with the government answerable to the people. No country is Social Democratic, yet, but many have been socialist and have incorporated democratic ideals into their governing bodies.

Socialism is not a bad thing; it's not evil, and the ideals are not bad. Many countries have some socialist ideals such as universal health care. Socialism is misunderstood, and as it is spreading rapidly throughout the world, it is important to educate ourselves about the pros and cons.

Spain is one of many socialist countries. Just last month, there was a protest in the capital over a new bill about the ever-so-controversial issue of abortion that the government was trying to pass. Spain has currently legalized abortion only in the cases of rape or threat to the mother, which many people are fine with. However, this bill would make it easier to get an abortion, would provide education on safe sex, and would make contraception methods--particularly condoms and birth control--easier to obtain.

It was a peaceful protest (as peaceful as protests are anyway) and although parliament may attempt to take the opinions of protesters into consideration, the bill will probably pass nonetheless the bill will probably pass nonetheless. Socialism does not always do what the people want, but it typically functions to benefit, help, serve the people, and even acts in their best interest though they believe otherwise.



Photograph by Ricardo (Shish)

In conclusion, socialism is not always the root of all evils. Socialism is not a bad thing; socialism is it a good thing. Socialism is politics. ■

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The Benefits of Yoga

by Katrina and Maria (Gidig)

Salutations, everyone! As we've all learned by this point in our lives, stress, especially that comes with the holidays, can be overbearing; one can nearly be attacked by the strength of stress at times. Around this time of year, our homes can be hectic with Great-Aunt Eleanor coming to stay for a week. We feel rushed to find the money for presents, food and other celebrations. Among all these stresses, we often forget to step back, take a deep breath, and just let ourselves relax and be at ease. One great way to help us find peace with in ourselves is yoga! With this, we can get a handle on our life. Furthermore, yoga has multiple physical and mental benefits that make this exercise completely beneficial and worth your time!

There are many, many **physical benefits** of yoga, many that those who do yoga regularly don't even realize! Just a few of the many benefits include an increase in flexibility, organ massage, increased blood flow, muscle toning, and improvements in posture and endurance. Other benefits include **psychological benefits** such as stress management, boosted optimism, and increased self-control.

Yoga can easily help your muscles become more flexible. It does this by stretching muscles, and reaching muscles and joints not normally used in everyday life. Maybe you'll be able to do that backbend you've always wanted to do.



As odd as it may sound, yoga massages your organs as well. Our normal everyday activity does not always include exercises that massage your organs. As a result of this, your organs become healthier, stronger, and warn you easier in the case of disease.

Yoga increases the blood flow throughout your body as many other exercises do. This helps keep your

blood pressure, which, unless you are told otherwise by your doctor, can be a very positive aspect of this form of exercise.

Another physical benefit is that yoga aids in toning your muscles depending on which poses you choose! Different classes focus on different groups of muscles, depending on the instructor. However, most yoga classes focus on many of the larger muscles (biceps, triceps, abdominal muscles, etc).

Unsurprisingly (do to all of the many positions held for extended periods of time in yoga), these exercises greatly improve one's posture. As you learn how to hold different poses and strengthen your back, you'll have a much easier time standing and sitting up straight. As a result, you'll not only look more confident, but you'll also be more confident!

Because of yoga incredible knack of increasing endurance both on the yoga mat and "on the field" (metaphorically, of course), many football players, dancers, swimmers, tennis players, and all sorts of other athletes practice yoga in order to better their endurance at their own game.

Obviously, all of the physical and mental benefits combined can be great stress reduction tools. However, this one category is strong enough to stand alone. In yoga, the abnormal positions you are asked to do take all of your brain energy, so you tend to forget the stresses of your every day life and focus solely on the task at hand. It also teaches you to focus purely on the present instead of what we usually think about: the future or past.

Yoga, for many years, has been theorized to reduce depression, which is something that many of us here at TeenHelp have a very strong relationship--either directly, indirectly, or both--with. Many of the world's most famous yoga instructors believe that yoga allows those participating to bring negative feelings to the surface and release those negative feelings of sadness, depression, or anger.

Optimism is often said to be the key to a healthful and fun lifestyle, and yoga is a great way to bring about this optimism. Doing yoga regularly can balance many hormones, giving those who do yoga a sense of stability and happiness about life.

Obviously, yoga does take a lot of self-control while actually being performed. However, many yogis believe that yoga helps to bring that self-control one feels while actually practicing yoga into other aspects of life, such as social situations.

(Continued on page 7)



Something for the heart and soul.

Where Do I Start?

Attending a yoga class can be intimidating your first time if you're not sure what to expect. There's one secret, however, that you should keep in mind. Basically, those attending yoga classes aren't there for you; chances are, they won't even be paying attention to you! Others in the class are there for themselves and want to obtain these health benefits for themselves. They'll be immersed in their own bodies, minds, and souls, and you should focus on doing the same. Check at local dance studios, YMCAs and other community organizations for schedules of yoga classes. If you're not comfortable with going to a class just yet, check out a "Yoga for Beginners" DVD at your local library and get to work! You never know how much better you're going to feel after trying yoga unless you go ahead and start! ■

How Do You Deal With the Changing Face of Bullies?

by Sian Morgan

This year, National Anti-Bullying week shines a spotlight on the fastest growing face of bullying: cyberbullying. Basically, this means using information and communication technology to deliberately upset someone else. It includes bullying via mobile phones, instant messaging, emails, blogs, Twitter, websites, chatrooms, message boards, Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) such as Second Life, or social networking sites like Facebook and Bebo.

Cyberbullying can include threats and blackmail, harassment, repeatedly texting unpleasant messages/images, monitoring or hacking into someone's online activities or accounts, impersonating a person and using their identity online, posting or forwarding unpleasant comments or private information, sharing videos of someone being bullied, sending viruses, pretending to be friends to gain information, refusing to acknowledge messages or using 'ignore' functions, manipulating someone emotionally to do something: "If you were really my friend, you'd...", and 'Sexting' (sending sexually explicit messages or photos to cause distress).

The difficulty most children and parents face with cyber bullying is that it is more difficult to contain and control. Information can spread rapidly, repeatedly and widely – whether it was intentionally hurtful in the first place or not – and it can creep into a child's personal space no matter where they are. Those who bully can choose to remain anonymous and they don't necessarily need to be physically more powerful to bully anymore. Anonymity can also mean that boundaries could be pushed even further than if someone is physically in your face.

So how can you help, especially if you feel like children know more about technology than you do?

When online, help children make themselves more cyberbully-proof by encouraging them not to combine real names, ages and provocative words as their username/email address. Sexybecs13@whatever.com may seem a fun idea to 13 year old Becs who is just getting into boys and having fun experimenting with harmless flirting etc – but it gives away a surprising amount of detail to anyone looking hard enough who might not be so harmless.

(Continued on page 8)

Contact us!

Do you have any comments or feedback on any of our featured Mind and Body articles? Would you like to see one of your articles here or do you have any suggestions on what you'd like to see in future editions of Avatar? If so, we'd love to hear from you.

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Something for the heart and soul.

You might want to use a picture or image on a profile instead of a real photo. Keep passwords private and make them hard to guess by using random letters and numbers instead of names, phone numbers and birthdays etc. This makes it difficult for people to hack into email accounts.

The web is a very deceptive space. It can feel very private and intimate, but it's very public. You may need to discuss that the details they display, who they talk to and what they talk about are far more open and accessible than they might realise.

We insist that children tell us the truth about things and we drill them that they are rude if they don't answer questions or speak to people when spoken to - but they need to know that the web is the one place where it's okay not to answer people, to block and delete people and not to give out details like real names, personal information, phone numbers and addresses. They also need to know that other people don't always tell the truth on their profiles and in conversations either. If bullied, instant messaging services such as MSN have features that allow you to block or delete people, but children may need encouragement that it's okay to block people. On MySpace and Bebo, profiles can be set to 'private' so that only approved people can see it. On email accounts such as hotmail, you can block email addresses by clicking on 'options', then 'more options'. Click the heading 'junk mail' then click 'safe and blocked senders'. Finally, click the 'blocked senders' option and type the offending email address into the box and click 'add to the list'. Be as interested and open to talking about online friends and what a child does online as you would face-to-face friends and activities.

Children need to know that it's better to tell you about something that's happened online - as soon as possible - even if they've joined in bullying themselves or got themselves into an embarrassing situation. Save messages if you need to take further action about them.

When using mobile phones, you can remind children to be careful who they give their phone number to, but in all fairness most give out their phone numbers in good faith to people they think are friends. The problem is that they have little control over whether those people remain friends or if their number is passed on to others without their consent.

If you do find that nuisance calls or texts are a

problem, you can report this to your mobile phone provider. Newer phones may have reject lists where you can block a number but generally the only thing a phone company will be able to do is offer to change your number and liaise with the police on the matter. ■



Photograph by Briana

This information was taken from 'Bullying: A Guide for Parents' written by author and psychologist Sian Morgan. It is available to download or order at www.stophthespiral.com where you can also find more free information about bullying. Sian is currently designing a resource for children to help rebuild their confidence when they've been bullied. If you have children who have been bullied and they'd like to tell Sian what they'd like to see her include in this resource, she would love to hear from them at www.stophthespiral.com.

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TeenHelp's Cause of the Month: Angel Tree

by Katrina

Twenty-seven years ago, Mary Kay Beard, who was on America's Most Wanted at the time and serving a 180-year sentence at the Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women in Alabama had a change of heart near Christmas time as she served her sentence. Outsiders would bring the inmates small soaps and toiletries, and rather than keeping these for personal use, many of the inmates wrapped them up as gifts for their children. During her time in prison, Beard managed to get her time shorted to just six years. Once she was out on parole, she accepted the position of Alabama State Director and was asked to create some sort of holiday project involving inmates. Realizing that the real victims were the children and families of these inmates, she organized a group that set out to deliver gifts to children of incarcerated parents. She received a suggestion to write the names of the children on angel shaped pieces of paper, creating an "Angel Tree" at a local mall in Alabama.

Only one of the six million stories made better by Angel Tree, a young girl, Angel, as the daughter of a mother who had been in prison three times and was currently serving her third sentence, became a very angry and saddened soul. During one of the hardest points in Angel's life, a local church raised

money to send her to camp where she was able to forgive her mom. Angel Tree works to help others like Angel develop strong relationships with their parents through showing these children that there are people out there who care about them.

"...it's so much more than giving Christmas gifts - it's about restoring families."

The first year, Angel Tree gave gifts to 556 children. Today, Angel Tree is expanding rapidly and actually delivers gifts throughout the year. However, especially around the holidays, this organization needs help to deliver gifts to all of the children of incarcerated parents. To find out more, please visit:

www.angeltree.org



Photograph by Stephanie

Contact us!

Do you have any comments or feedback on TeenHelp's Cause of the Month? Do you have suggestions for a cause you would like to see featured in future editions of Avatar? If so, we'd love to hear from you.

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A unique way of seeking help.

Right now, I lack motivation; I know full well I could pass everything if I did all my work to the best of my ability, but I just can't be bothered. I have the time but I seem to get sidetracked and surf the Internet or watch TV. I know it's my own fault, but could someone give me some ideas/tips to make myself do homework?

Hello! Ah, the unfortunate problem of motivation. This is what many high school seniors will call "Senioritis," I think. I had a bad case of it last year, so I think I might be able to give you some tips. There comes a point each half of the school year where it's almost the holidays or it's almost summer, and everyone just seems to get really, really burnt out! I say that to just show you that you're certainly not alone in this, and you're certainly not the only one struggling. If I were you, I would set up a certain place where you study. Whether this is just a desk at your house or somewhere else, it needs to be somewhere where you're not around the internet or the TV so that you won't get distracted. I know it sounds cheesy, but now that I'm in college, I've finally learned that the library is a GREAT place to study! If I had've known this in my younger years, I have a strong feeling I may have done better than I did in school. So, give it a try; the library is quiet and you have tons of reference books everywhere just in case you need them--it's a win/win situation! Also, just remember that the holiday season is right around the corner and you'll be about of school in no time. In this time you're on break, give yourself time to refuel. Don't think about school, and don't stress yourself out. In the mean time, though, just try to hang in there. I know it's hard, but I also know that you can do it. Take good care of yourself!

Doctors have told my family that my grandmother isn't expected to live for more than a couple of days. It is such a hard time right now for my family; just please keep them in your prayers.

I'm so sorry that you and your family are going through such a rough time right now. I've never lost someone super close to me, but I know that it's one of the absolute hardest things to bounce back from. I just have to start by mentioning that so, so many people outlive doctors' life expectancy for them each and every day! So, with that in mind, just know that there's hope. I personally believe that a little hope and a little faith can go such a long way. One website that I read relating to this is

www.givesmehope.com; it's an amazing, uplifting place that just documents really beautiful things that happen in the world. So, if you get a chance to take a look, I really recommend spending some time there - it puts a smile on my face (and sometimes even tears of happiness) each time I look through it. As for the actual situation, if there's anything positive that could come out of knowing this, it's that you guys now know that you really need to spend some extra time with your grandmother. Just try to show her that you love her and that you care for her, you know what I mean? A little loving can also go along way, and it's nice to know that someone else realizes that they are loved and cared for. Also, if you get the chance, ask her to tell you some stories from when she was younger. I've found that there's nothing that grandparents love more than telling their grandchildren stories about when they, themselves, were children. We will all be keeping you and your family in our thoughts at this difficult time. You all take good care of yourselves.

I have been talking a lot with a new friend and I am crushing on them (they're trans, same as me). I was just hoping it was a phase. I want to tell them but I can't. Another thing is that they're asexual. I don't think they would ever like me as anymore than a friend. It hurts every minute I haven't told them. I want to tell them today, but I don't know.

It definitely does sound like you're in a bit of a confusing situation right now. I'm so sorry to hear that everything has been so iffy in the love life lately! Firstly, I just have to bring up the fact that because this is over in the internet, you need to be incredibly careful that this person is who you think they are. I know that you probably already know this and that I'm more than likely preaching to the choir, but I just felt like it would be a good thing to bring up anyway. Now then, down to business. I think that, even if for nothing else than just you not having to ask yourself "what would've happened if...", you should definitely just go for it. If you think about it from an outsider's perspective, you really don't have anything to lose. If the person has feelings for you, you could foster that kind of relationship. If the person doesn't like you, you're going to be right back in the place you are now with not really being able to start a relationship than them. And even then, you'll at least know. So, I just think you should go for it. If the person is asexual, you have to be prepared for rejection, but on the other hand who knows what could happen? I hope that it all works out.



A unique way of seeking help.

This guy and I have been talking to each other since our freshman year in high school (we are juniors now). Last year he moved three hours away. We still talk every weekend on the phone but it's hard to see each other. Distance dating is very hard, what could we do to make things easier?

Hi there. You're right, long distance relationships are hard and there are so many people who have experienced this type of thing. Though you should look on the bright side, you two are only three hours away so it's not like you're in different countries. If you are both willing and dedicated enough long distance relationships can work. They do have their pros and cons of course, like every relationship. To answer your question about helping the time go faster maybe you could try and keep busy. However make sure you to keep in close contact. Losing contact could possibly ruin your relationship. Sometimes I find doing things that make you feel closer to each other also help a lot when you're in a long distance relationship. Maybe try doing some things like watching the same movies at the same time while talking on the phone, listening to the same music, maybe look at the same thing such as the moon. Remember, long distance relationships take two very dedicated and faithful people. Good luck.

My friend is so upset. He told me that he has been diagnosed with Schizophrenia. I feel really bad for him because he is taking it really harshly. He thinks he is so unnatural and I want to reassure him. What can I say to him?

Hey there! Being diagnosed with any form of mental disorder, or actually anything is always rough. How ever being diagnosed with Schizophrenia is extremely hard especially if you aren't prepared or have no experience with dealing with that form of mental disorder. It's natural for him to take it harshly at first, people react differently to surprising events that happen in their life. However, he is natural, so many people are diagnosed with mental disorders each and every day. They are a normal fact of life. Maybe you could try telling him he is normal and he shouldn't let schizophrenia take over his life. As long as he takes the medication his doctor prescribed he can most likely live a normal life. Just be there to support him, tell him he is going to be fine. It might take awhile for it to settle in, but it will just give it time.

I feel like everyone I know has been dying lately, and because of it, I've started self harming. I've had to see my grandmother, my uncle, my best friend and her daughter all pass away, and it's hurting me. Also my daughter, who is four, is being taken away from me. Ever since all of this happened, I haven't been the same.

Hey there. I'm so sorry to hear what has been happening in your life. Losing the people close to you is always rough and the grieving process is always hard but you must go through it in order to properly move on with your life. One thing I can tell you is don't be afraid to cry! So many people make that mistake and refuse to cry, but crying is a healthy way to release emotions. As for the self harming, have you tried some alternatives? Some common alternatives are: keeping an elastic band on your wrist and snapping it when you feel the urge to cut, rubbing an ice cube on your hand, drawing on yourself with red marker, or coloring a whole page black with marker or pen. There are so many alternatives listed on TeenHelp's website, teenhelp.org/alternatives; try checking out the "Self Harm" forum. Now, remember what I said, grieving is a process we all need to go through in order to move on, and although it may be hard you will get through it. I myself believe that everything happens for a reason. And you're not a different person, you're the same person just going through a hard time. Stay strong, everything will work out.

Ask us for advice!

If you would like to submit a question for us to answer, you can email us at avatar@teenhelp.org or PM any of our Avatar Editors. We would love to hear from you!



Kicking off your month with pizzazz.

The Holidays: From Creation to Commercialization

by Katrina

It's that time time again! In 2009, the holidays are a time of waking up at wee hours of the morning to go shopped for loved ones, a time of resting from school or work and drinking eggnog or hot chocolate, a time of painting your nose red and dressing up like a reindeer to go door to door and collect donations for the Salvation Army, and a time of the sheer smiles that holiday music can bring.

In grade school, we all learned about the holidays--Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa (to name just three)--that we celebrated ourselves. However, did we ever once look at the histories of holidays we personally may not celebrate, but those that many others around the world hold very close to their hearts? In this article, we will examine the three aforementioned holidays, the histories of these holidays, and how they became what they are today.

Christmas: Many believe that Christmas originates altogether with the birth of Christ approximately 2,000 years ago. Contrary to popular belief, however, many of our current Christmas traditions started over 4,000 years ago--that's 2,000 years before Christ was even born! The Mesopotamian people, one of the earliest groups on Earth, had many Gods. Their main God, the king Marduk, was believed to fight the evil element of chaos each New Year. To aide him in this, the Mesopotamian people would hold a twelve day festival to bless Marduk as well as bring in the new year, which, you guessed it, is where our current "The Twelve Days of Christmas" popular holiday song originated.

Although many other cultures had similar celebrations, the Mesopotamian festival is the earliest holiday-style celebration documented. Years later, when Jesus was born, the exact date of birth cannot be pinpointed, so in

350AD, Julius I, the Bishop of Rome, named December twenty-fifth the date of Jesus' birth--Christmas.

Hanukkah: Hanukkah is another December holiday that originated with a group of early people--the Maccabees. Many years ago, this group, under the rule of King Antiochus of Syria, fought against their leader (Antiochus) as he attempted to pull them away from their religion to worship his own gods. The Maccabees won and wanted to reestablish their religion in the Temple of Jerusalem. With one very small jug of oil (only enough for one day, and the only one they could find), they lit up the temple, and the oil stayed lit for eight days, giving us the eight days of our current Hanukkah celebration.

Kwanzaa: A holiday developed thousands of years after Hanukkah and Christmas, Kwanzaa was only recently developed by Dr. Maulana Karenga in the 1960s. This holiday is actually not political or religious, and does not actually substitute for Christmas or Hanukkah or any other religious holiday. In fact, many people celebrating Kwanzaa also celebrate another religious holiday. Kwanzaa, which was developed after Dr. Karenga became incredibly inspired by the racial struggles of the '60s, is based on seven principles: Umoja, Kujichagulia, Ujima, Ujamaa, Nia, Kuumba, and Imani. Each of these represents a value of this holiday including self determination, the importance of friends and family, work and responsibility, cooperation, purpose, creativity, and faith. Though this holiday was just recently founded, over eighteen million people across the world celebrate Kwanzaa today.

Today, we often forget the core values and purpose of these holidays.

Stores across the globe have holiday sales before November is even over! They set out Christmas lists and we, as consumers, are sucked into this commercial holiday world. Even in a declining economy, mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons all set out to buy gifts for each other and themselves. Among all the chaos, just try to remember, though it may be cliché, the less fortunate. Spend a day or two volunteering and giving back to the world what the world has given to you. Most importantly, spend this holiday season with family, friends, and others that you love, and never get too wrapped up in the commercialization of it all. ■



Photograph by Joel (tk338)

jjoelio.



Kicking off your month with pizzazz.

Deck the Halls

by Nat (Strider)

The holiday season is here! People are scrambling to string up their lights and finish their shopping, while fruit cakes and cookies bake in the oven. The tree may be up, coated and glistening with trinkets and tinsel, but how do you dress up the rest of the house? These are some fun and easy ways to deck the halls in your home.

Wreaths

If you usually celebrate the holidays the old-fashioned way and pick up a real tree, chopped fresh and spitting needles, then this is the perfect decoration for you. Pull out a few loose branches from the bottom of the tree that are still full and green and organize it in a circular or fan-like shape. Most conventional wreaths seen in movies and on television are round, but fanned wreaths look snazzy as well. Tie the pieces together with twine or glue them with hot glue to keep them in place. If you want to add other pieces to your wreath, holly berries and pine cones make a wreath look even more festive. Outside on your door is the perfect place to put it. It's a great way to decorate the outside of your house, as well as keep those pesky needles off the floor. If you have a fake tree or don't get a tree around the holidays then many stores sell fake pine branches that you can use in substitution—plus they don't leave a mess!



Centerpieces

Colourful centerpieces look great on a table during the holidays, and they are fairly easy to make. Poinsettias and pine branches add the typical red and green, and you can organize them in many ways. A smart tip is to put your centerpiece on a tray or in a vase so that it can easily be moved if necessary. Also, having your branches in water helps keep them fresh longer. Try arranging the branches or flowers around a large candle or a few smaller ones in glass containers. When lit, the candles will make your centerpiece the highlight of the table.

Candles

Candles are a wonderful way to add a special glow to your home around the holiday season. They can be set up easily almost anywhere in the house, from mantle places to tables to countertops. Tea light candles are reasonably priced and can be found at almost any grocery or big box store. They can be placed on plates or kept in coloured glasses. If you don't feel like buying candles, then making them yourself is another option. All you need is some wax, thick string, a paper cup, and a few ice cubes.

Melt the wax over the stove on a low temperature and have your paper cup ready with a few ice cubes on the bottom. Tie the string around a pencil and have the bottom of the string touching the bottom of the cup. Set the pencil across the top of the cup to hold the string upwards. Pour the melted wax into the cup and wait for it to harden. Once the wax has hardened, cut the string from the pencil to the length you want your candle wick and tear the paper cup away from your candle. Having the ice in the cup will have made holes and interesting designs in the wax, making your homemade candle even more original.

Just remember that you don't need to buy a whole bunch of expensive decorations to make your home look festive for the holidays. Try looking through your house for red and green objects that could be placed together or see if there is anything outside that you could use instead. It's a wonderful time of year to be creative and have some fun! ■

Happy Holidays!



It's all fun and games until you're on the naughty list.



Hot chocolate recipe:

- 1 tbsp. cocoa powder
- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 2 tbsp. water
- 1 c. milk
- a bit of vanilla, if desired

Combine cocoa, sugar, and water in a small saucepan. Heat it on low heat, stirring occasionally to prevent the paste from sticking to the pan. After about 1 to 2 minutes, add milk and vanilla. Mix it all together until it reaches your preferred temperature.

Top Ten Winter Must-Haves!

1. Winter coat
2. Hat, mittens, and a scarf
3. Chapstick/Lip Balm
4. Cocoa mix and marshmallows
5. Colorful wool socks
6. Boots
7. Warm blankets
8. Lotion
9. Hair dryer
10. A good book and a toasty fire

TeenHelp Trivia

When was the new Donations system opened?

Name That Tune:

*"...and in the daylight I don't pick up my phone
cause in the daylight anywhere feels like home"*

Movies Coming out December 2009:

- The Lovely Bones
- The Princess and The Frog
- Did You Hear About the Morgans?
- Avatar
- Agora
- Sherlock Holmes
- Alvin and The Chipmunks: The Squeakuel
- Untitled Nancy Meyers Project
- Invictus

How do you say it?

Cake- English
Pastel-Spanish
Torta- Italian
Gâteau - French
Kuchen- Deutsch
kekic - Russian

Winter Word Search

S V U D A Y I K R J Y G Q M C
A T M N M S V S G E N I X I P
S A H K Z Y I N H K X C M T R
E Z R G D S I O P P G E G T I
K X R I I D N W B H D S K E Q
A M E I D F H O E W E K I N W
L O Z E V O L Y W D X A J S F
F G L R C F D L M M Z T P C S
W S Q K A O R Z A O E I S I O
O Q E O C C L A J B K N W K Q
N Y C W E O L Q C G W G L W X
S O W D V A X F Q S D O R I P
C G L J X T W B J R Q I N G N
H O G S V S L L D R T X C S I
C R D O N S G C R G L O V E S

Clues:

Snow
Snow flakes
Snowmen
Mittens
Gloves
Coats
Scarf
Cocoa
Sledding
Ice skating
Hockey
Cold
Ice
Snowball fights



Expressing life through your fingertips.

Life By Matthew

Life,
flies by.
gone so quick.
You have to live it,
or it's lost forever

Life,
so fragile.
Like a glass,
so easily smashed.
But so amazing,
like a butterfly in the sun.

Life,
Gone so quick.
But what makes life worth it?
what's worth the pain?

Life,
The smile of a child.
The setting of a sun.
The sounds of birds in the summer air.
Those tiny little bites of happiness.

Life,
so fragile.
But, like a droplet on a pond,
causes ripples.
Make those ripples,
ripples of happiness!!

Untitled By Maria (Gidig)



Untitled By Dreamer

Time's rolling past so fast.
It seems it was just yesterday I
walked past,
the shadow of everything.

I sit here scared and withdrawn.
The grass is uncut and I sit on my
lawn.
my heart is aching.

Afraid? I don't know.
Terrified? Maybe so.
I just can't move along.

Crying? Never.
Lying? Forever.
It just all feels so wrong.

Untitled By Casey (Arbiter)





An optimist archer!

by Katrina

This month's sign: Sagittarius (November 21 - December 21)

For you're a jolly good fellow, Sagittarius! Happy birthday. I've always wondered how it is to have your birthday and Christmas right around the same time (especially if you're selfish like me and think "oh no, now I have to wait another whole year to ask for this really big thing I want!") I'm only kidding of course; your birthday is going to be one of the best ones yet, this year, I'm predicting.

Strength: You have one of the bravest hearts of any of the signs. You have tons of energy, and in groups, you're always the one to get the ball rolling. Additionally, your optimism inspires everyone around you.

Possible Weakness: You can be very sensitive at times.

Famous Sagittariuses: Jimi Hendrix, Dick Van Dyke, Emily Dickenson, Steven Spielberg, Woody Allen, Billy Idol, Tina Turner

Capricorn

(December 22 - January 19)

Capricorn, I know that the holidays are always one of the toughest times of year for you. You get overwhelmed with finishing long term school or work projects and begin to feel the pressure of things piling up for you. Just take a few deep breaths and the beginning of the month and do a little work each day so that you're not hardcore stressing out the day before your deadline.

Aries

(March 20 - April 19)

Hi there, Aries. Let's face it: you have a huge family! The holidays are always a little scary for you because you want to make sure you get something for each of your family members. Fear not, though, by taking a hint from the ever-so-organized Virgo, make legitimate, written out lists of all those you need to shop for so that you don't forget anyone. I think we can both agree that for your kind soul, the holiday season is all about giving!

Aquarius

(January 20 - February 19)

Hello Aquarius. You have such a knack for making light of hard situations, and the "hard situation" of which I currently refer is the freezing cold weather! Get out those boots, scarves, earmuffs, and gloves and you'll be good to go. Because you're so keen about giving to others, this month might be a good one to go and volunteer to serve breakfast at a homeless shelter at least one or two mornings a week.

Pisces

(February 20 - March 19)

Pisces, in terms of relationships, you have a good month coming up. We've all realized by now that holiday lights seriously have a knack for making people feel a little "something-something" for others, and you're going to be that "other" person in your own crushes' life this month! Whether you're already dating someone or just admiring them afar, you're going to take a huge step in your relationship about mid-month.

Taurus

(April 20 - May 20)

Dear Taurus, at the beginning of the month, it looks like something awesome is going to happen to you financially. Whether it be an offering for a babysitting or lawn-mowing job, a raise at your current job, or even just finding a heads-up penny on the ground, this couldn't have happened at a better time for you since you have the perfect gift for that significant other right at the front of your mind.



An optimist archer!

by Katrina

Gemini

(May 21 - June 20)

Gemini, at this point, I realize you may be feeling a little desperate that the holiday season will be better than your year as of now. The good news is that it will! You've been struggling with something for a while now, and whatever that something may be, it's time to just turn up your chin, look to the sky, and let that something go. You deserve a break, and no one is going to have a better holiday season than yourself.

Cancer

(June 21 - July 22)

Hi there, Cancer. You're going to have a rocky start this December, let's be honest. You're going to feel like things just aren't going your way, and as much as I hate that, it is going to be a learning experience that you will come back and utilize later in your life. As you go through this hard time, just take deep breaths and surround yourself with loving family and friends. Things will certainly shape up by the end of the month.

Leo

(July 23 - August 22)

Leo, it's been about half a year since you're birthday, and with you always wanting to be in the limelight, we know you have the best gift of anyone planned for all of your family and your friends! This year, you have just the right mindset about the holiday seasons, and you need to keep that in mind as you spend the end of this year rolling into a hopefully great 2010 with your family and friends.

Virgo

(August 23 - September 22)

You're so organized, Virgo, and because of that, the holiday season is just going to be a breeze for you! From fighting the crowd at the "day after Thanksgiving sale" in the United States to just living up the smell of gingerbread and hot chocolate in the United Kingdom to celebrating so many various holidays in other countries, you're going to be absolutely good to go. If you do get overwhelmed by the end of the month, just keep your chin up; things will be sure to calm down soon.

Libra

(September 23 - October 22)

Love is brewing in the cold, winter air for you as well, Libra. Because it is so cold, you'll get to snuggle up in your coat and earmuffs, and who better to cuddle up and share a mug of hot chocolate with than your love? Whether it's someone you've been with for months or someone you're just now fostering a relationship with, you're sure to become closer to this person as the month goes on.

Scorpio

(October 23 - November 20)

Scorpio, Scorpio, Scorpio. I hope that you just had the birthday of your heart's desires. This month, you really need to make sure you don't get too overwhelmed with commercial Christmas desires. Always remember that the most important thing about this month and this season altogether is just spending time with those you love. This month, you're going to improve a lot of relationships with your family and your friends, so be pre-



Acknowledgements

Image sources

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Benefits of Yoga: www.everystockphoto.com
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How Do You Deal With the Changing Face of Bullies?: www.stopthespiral.com
The Holidays: From Creation to Commercialization: www.tike.com; www.holidays.net

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The Avatar Editors.

Please visit us at the Avatar page, www.teenhelp.org/avatar, or email us at avatar@teenhelp.org.