

## POLITICS AS USUAL: Lost in the Santa Shuffle

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

My column this week will be a wee bit of a rant about the 'holiday' season.

It is tangentially related to politics, I suppose but, regardless, I am going to use the forum to speak my mind.

This issue has been bugging me for years, but this year it reached a boiling point.

Christmas comes too early. Much too early.

Let me rephrase that. Christmas marketing and sales and baubles, and shiny stuff and commercials ' that comes too early. If I see the Frosty the Snowman special again I am going to scream!

When stores are putting out snow-globes and nutcrackers at the same time as witches and goblins for Hallowe'en, you know we have finally crossed over the ever moving line of what is acceptable.

I saw a cartoon in The Globe and Mail a few weeks ago announcing the new holiday, 'Hallow-thanks-mas?'. The 'new holiday'?

It's not funny, because it's true!

I am not preaching. I admit that I have succumbed to the shiny displays and lovely decorations. I have recently returned from a small shopping spree with four wooden reindeer and a matching sleigh. Where the heck I am going to put them has not been decided yet.

So, I am not pretending to be holier than thou but I am saying that I wish I did not have the 'opportunity' to purchase such things in the second weekend of November, much less October.

I understand that retailers have got to make their money. Businesses thrive or fail based on seasonal sales. I get that.

But lost in this never-ending manic Santa shuffle is the original meaning of all this. It isn't supposed to be an ode to deals and presents and big red bows on lovely boxes of goodies.

It's supposed to be about good will towards others. About family time. Friends getting together to share a meal and be thankful for what we all have. For those of us who were raised in a particular faith, it is a celebration of a special event of religious significance.

The importance of the day has been dwarfed by the importance of getting the 'right' presents for everyone. Folks are exhausted from crowded malls and cranky kids being dragged about.

I too have gotten caught up in the hysteria of getting the 'right' gift. One Christmas a few years ago I became obsessed with getting a large Elvis bust for my nephew ' because he asked for it. The fact that the bust weighed a good 20 pounds, was enormous and that I had to go all the way to Honest Ed's in Toronto by transit to get it because it was the only place that had it; then get it home on the GO bus (where it occupied its own seat), did not seem ridiculous at the time.

My nephew wanted it. Ergo, I must get it.

I am not sure how things got to where they are now, but they don't have to continue along this path. Frankly, if things keep going the way they are now, we will be hearing Christmas jingles in July. And I think we can all agree that's something we'd like to avoid.

So, for this holiday season, I intend to slow down a bit, enjoy the season, go ice skating, make gingerbread houses with the kids, visit with friends and family.

And yes, I will go shopping and get a few special gifts for some special people, but I will not go crazy. And as for Elvis? I think we can safely say, he's left the building.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is ' after all ' Our Town.