

# MERRY COLUMBUS HASHANAH

If you're reading this hot off the press, you must have missed the bus to Boston, or maybe Mommy doesn't want you home for Fall Break. I'm in Montréal preparing for Canadian Thanksgiving (which is not, as most Americans believe, an imaginary holiday). If you find a ride home, you'll honor Columbus on Monday. I'll be eating turkey with my grandparents in manifest observation of the "action of grace," as we call it in French.

It's not Christmas, but Fall



**Andréa  
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*Raisin  
d'être*

Break nonetheless fills me with the kind of illicit joy I get from drinking skim milk straight from the carton and walking around my apartment naked. Days off are so wrong, but they feel so right.

As all productive members of society are prone to do, I've always secretly marked the passage of time by the welcome holidays, breaks, and vacations that punctuate the calendar. I like the legitimate cover they give me for sleeping past noon, drinking beer at unrespectable hours, and indulging in What Not to Wear marathons on TLC.

This guilty joy can be traced back to my pre-Labatt days. As a child of Québec's particular brand of civil society, I was raised as a secular Catholic. I went to a private school run by nuns, but I never went to Mass on Sundays. I got the guilt without the punishment.

It is from this upbringing that I inherited an odd sense of holiday propriety. Because I was never properly punished, I attributed all holiday mishaps to the divine, wrathful intervention of God Almighty. On His special days of rest, He was always there to dole out the chastisement I wasn't getting weekly in the pews. In 2nd grade, the nuns told us that Santa wasn't real—the day before Christmas vacation. The year I won a 4-foot tall chocolate Easter bunny in a drawing contest at my Dad's office, it broke as soon as it got home. These were

interpreted as signs of divine disapproval.

God's reach even extended to the pagan celebrations on the Christian calendar. Before I came to Cornell and discovered that Halloween was but a thinly veiled excuse for animal-themed Playboy outfits, God had wracked me with holiday half-guilt.

As anyone who grew up in Canada, the Northeast, or Siberia can attest, there's usually snow on the ground by October 31st (or at least there used to be, back in the pre-global warming days). God declares open meteorological war on Santa by making trick-or-treating as prohibitive as possible for anyone on Arctic territory.

My mom, apparently hardened by her own years of guilt, used to openly defy the heavens by buying us XXXL Halloween costumes that could be squeezed over our ski suits and long underwear. I have only frostbite scars and obese Minnie Mouse pictures to show for these outings. From such formative experiences, I gleaned that God disapproved of me collecting Tootsie Rolls on snowshoes. I hadn't earned the privilege. I didn't take it every Sunday.

In recent years, my brother and I have expressed outright defiance on God's own turf, staying home on Christmas Eve while the rest of the family trudges to Mass. We drink copious amounts of beer and play heathen games like poker and Monopoly. Even the presents can't assuage our unresolved half-guilt.

I can't speak for Carl-Eric, but the only holidays I am truly able to enjoy are others', untainted by Québéco-Catholic guilt and weird childhood memories.

Cinco de Mayo is a personal favorite. In high school, wearing Dollar Store sombreros and drinking virgin margaritas at the On the Border in the Vernon Hills strip mall was a ritual pure and untainted by divine half-guilt.

Rosh Hashanah is quickly moving up the ranks as well. I am told that it is the holiday of repentance. Last week, I got to celebrate *de facto* Rosh Hashanah by virtue of having many Jewish classmates. All of the class cancellations left me with lots of extra time for naked milk-drinking. There was, however, no repentance because there was no guilt. My God wasn't on watch.

Despite linguistic commonality, He apparently doesn't have jurisdiction in France either. My year among the francophone cousins taught me to celebrate their numerous national breaks without any half-guilt.

And if anyone should be feeling completely guilty about taking a day off, it's the French. They have no fewer than eleven national holidays. All of these conveniently happen to fall either on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, thus justifying the "faire le pont" practice, whereby extra days off are inserted to "make the bridge" to the weekend, thus creating jumbo-long, mega-sized long weekends. But these extended celebrations of New Year's Day, Easter, Labor Day, Victory in WWII, Ascension, Pentecost, Bastille Day, Assumption, All Saints Day, Armistice Day, and Christmas represent but a fraction of France's calendar of guilt-free breaks. The national observance of the entire month of August, cumulative cigarette breaks, and the five hours of productivity erased from the legally-mandated 35-hour work week round out a perpetual schedule of R and R.

There should be some guilt racked up there. There is none. Zéro. The French thoroughly enjoy their days off, Blackberrys stowed away. God lounges on a nudist beach on the Côte D'Azur and leaves them alone.

It is, therefore, almost too painless to engage in repeated observance of their national holidays.

Maybe it's the lingering memories of a guiltless year in France. Maybe it's the decade I've spent in the United States, removed from the Québéco-Catholic incubator, but I feel no guilt for the Godless Thanksgiving I will celebrate.

I feel no remorse for NOT thanking God for the bountiful Canadian harvest or even for my many cross-border blessings.

Instead, I thank the good people at the Ithaca Farmer's Market for picking delicious corn and onions.

I thank the forebears of North American democracy for creating a free society in which this heretical tract can be published.

I also give advance thanks to the people who run Hell if it turns out that I'm wrong about the God thing. Go easy on me during the holidays.

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## UNCUT BONDING

I had just arrived in Port Authority when I got a phone call from my brother. It was loud in the terminal, so I could barely hear him. "Hey," he said in his monotonous bro-tone. "What's up?" "Nothin' much," he said, "What are you doing?" I told him that I had just stepped off in New York. Then, as I was opening the doors to 42nd Street, I heard him say "John-David, I had sex last night." I shuddered at the thought, so I asked him to repeat it once I got onto the sidewalk just to make sure. He exclaimed, "I GOT LAID LAST NIGHT!" Paul and I don't have the closest brotherly relationship, so I was surprised that he called to inform



**John-David  
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*Country Club  
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me of this. I assumed that it was his first time and that he wanted a little pat on the back so I said, "Oh gosh Paul. Well, congratulations! Who's the lucky bitch?" He replied, "Some chick from Oakdale." I laughed and said, "Oh wow, she sounds nice. I hope you didn't get her pregnant." He said, "I don't think I got her pregnant." "Paul... I was hoping you would say, 'I know I didn't get her pregnant, because I wore a condom...'" He interrupted me, "Oh wait, John-David... I know I didn't get her pregnant because I wore a condom." I laughed again and told him I was proud of his ultimate act of masculinity. That alone was enough awkward humor for me to send out a

mass text message to everyone I knew, but the story quickly turned into a saga.

I was back at school and had pretty much forgotten about the whole thing when I got a call from my mom. "I don't know if I should tell you... but, oh nevermind," she said nervously. Grandma was in the hospital, so I told her that she couldn't do that to me. "Well, Paul had sex for the first time last week..." I replied, "Yeah... I know. He told me on Friday. Wait, how do you know about that?" She proceeded to cautiously say, "Well he kind of had to tell me. Something happened..." My first thought, of course, was that he had gotten this girl pregnant. She continued, "Paul, um... well, he ripped his penis." My jaw dropped in utter horror. "What do you mean he ripped his penis?" "Well, he was having sex and it just ripped," she told me, "We're on our way to the doctor's office now." I told her how bad I felt for poor Paul, and I confirmed that it was indeed not during his first time, which was comforting to know. When I asked how something like this had occurred, she said, "I think that something happened with the rubber... Is there a kind of rubber that has lubrication on the inside?" I embarrassedly told her that there wasn't a condom like that on the market, but that it didn't matter because that surely was not the cause of this unfortunate event. I told her to call me after their visit to the doctor and we hung up.

At this point, I should give you a little background. So neither my brother nor I are circumcised. Why would somebody do this to their child? Was it that my parents hippies or European? No, no. My father incredulously claims that he remembers his own circumcision, and that he couldn't bear the thought of putting either of his sons through the same amount of pain and trauma. Right — I'm sure little baby Dave was so traumatized that he could

still vividly recall that procedure in his late thirties...

Later that day I got a call from my brother. "I just got out of the doctor's office..." he said. I told him that I heard about what had happened and that I was very sorry about the whole ordeal. "He had to put a needle in the head of my penis!" he told me. "Then he took a knife and cut part of my dick off." "Oh my gosh Paul! Did the doctor circumcise you?" I asked with genuine concern. He said no, and that they just had to cut off the small section that had ripped. When I got on the phone with my mom, she said that Dr. Carlson told her that some children are born with the skin being a little too taut down there. The doctor looked at it and told my brother, "Oh gee Paul... I'm really sorry I didn't notice this when you were a baby. I should have caught that sooner." I would imagine that those were not very comforting words to a boy who finally lost his virginity only to have his penis rip so early in the game.

So why have I decided to tell you this story? It was the first time that my brother and I had ever really bonded over something. He was always too young to have the same friends as me or to be concerned with the same things, so we never really got close growing up. I never shared his passion for sports or video games, and he never enjoyed Mariah Carey or Barbie dolls. It took 17 years for us to finally find some common ground, but our uncut penises finally forged a relationship between brothers and for that, I am forever grateful.

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