

COMMENTARY

Hanks: For me, the holidays are ho-ho-hum

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Stopping by a friend's house the day after Thanksgiving, I was amazed by both her lavishly ornamented tree and her breezy declaration of the Christmas colors she was considering for next year. Despite the ubiquitous holiday tune claiming "It's The Most Wonderful Time of the Year," getting through this holiday is all I can manage, never mind Christmas 2007.

As I get older, the more Christmas seems like a major hassle. Hauling bulky boxes of ornaments down from the attic and seeking space for the tree in our itty-bitty bungalow aren't fun.

The best part of holiday decorating is topping our tree with a vintage "pull the string and he talks" Pee-wee Herman doll that makes my husband smile. If our version of the disgraced former children's entertainer were ever to be smashed in a terrible eggnog-related accident, we'd have to secure a replacement somehow.

Chances are, I wouldn't be prowling the mall for Pee-wee II. That's good, because I despise mall shopping. While some consider the mall "retail therapy" I need therapy after a mauling, er, mall outing.

My key reason for disliking retail? I hate feeling like prey. Prey forced to make polite conversation with the hunter.

I'm certain many retail workers are delightfully cynical people outside of work, but I don't see that while shopping. Traipse from one chain store to another and you'll be endlessly greeted by employees forced into plastic perkiness.

This is hard on me. Though I can be friendlier than a Lab puppy --in a way terrifying to Yankees and Europeans --I don't want to chat while purchasing pajamas. I often leave the mall empty-handed because I'm exhausted from being sweet to strangers.

Many folks tell me that if I dislike the mall, I should shop at locally owned stores. I do, when shopping for myself. Yet I can't give my conservative mother, a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, anything like the "Stabby McKnife" shirt from Hyde Park's Storyville boutique, with a cute cartoon knife exclaiming, "Hey kids! Stick me in your enemies!" Your momma might find it groovily ironic, but not mine.

This middle class matron is the succulent prey of the commission-powered retail predator. I hate the feeling so much that I'm probably the only person shopping at thrift shops because I want stores that are strictly sans service.

Recently I made a stop by a Salvation Army store near Lakeline Mall. It beat the actual mall because no bell ringer lurked outside.

I quickly snatched up a red plastic "Holiday Survival Kit." "Finally, there is someone else out there like me!" I thought, gleefully examining the item.

The kit had "State-of-the-Art Coping Aids for the Relentless Holiday Frenzy," including: "Mistletoe Prep" (yucky mints), "Wellness Wipes" (moist towelettes) "Carol Plugs (green earplugs) and a shot glass labeled "Mirth Boost."

That's not much for the original \$11.25 price ? likely explaining the pile of factory-sealed kits (circa 2005). But for \$2.50 at the Salvation Army, it brought me great pleasure.

If you're Grinchy too, good luck girding yourself against compulsory holiday cheer. Knockknock.biz has discontinued the kits. It was disheartening to realize that there really aren't so many people like me, but I'm coping.

With Christmas approaching, we're finishing up our decorating. Hubby hung our matching glittery black stockings as ironically as possible, one on each side of our post-modern hearth (the television). Now with my red plastic reinforcement against holiday happiness, and fruitcake ordered for family and friends, I'm ready for the holiday.

Yes, that means fruitcake really is sent out by people who don't enjoy Christmas.

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