

Newsletter 6:

How do you make God laugh?

Tell him your plans.

OK, I confess. I've started: With a scant 35 days to go, I have succumbed to the dread of being ill-prepared, and made a start on my Christmas shopping. I've bought nothing of consequence – in fact, a bauble for the Christmas tree and some over-priced stocking filler (**all** stocking filler is, by its nature, over-priced). But I've made a start. It will reassure me through the coming weeks. It's my dream insurance.

There's a recurring nightmare which I've endured since early adulthood where I wake up one morning to discover to my complete surprise that it's Christmas day. The horror builds slowly with the realisation of each count of neglect: no gifts bought for loved ones; no fragrant Christmas pudding hanging in its calico bag on the back of the kitchen door; no shortbread in the oven; no prawns; no spangled tree; no case of Society label Late Disgorged fizz in the fridge or even under the bed. It's a true nightmare by any standard.

Thankfully, it's hard to imagine a less plausible dream. Thousands upon thousands of marketers and retailers have made it their personal mission to ensure that my dream never becomes reality. Perhaps I should be grateful...

But it does bother me that Christmas has become such a protracted affair. It was September when I made my first Santa sighting this year. What on earth do kids make of that? How do they sustain the tingly bubble of excited anticipation for 3 months? I know it would have killed me - I *adored* Christmas, and its agonisingly exquisite lead up. But I'm talking about a period of around 2 weeks – not a quarter of the damn year.

The Christmas harbinger was Breaking-up Day: that delicious final day of the school year which usually occurred 1 or 2 weeks prior to Christmas. Uniforms were abandoned in favour of bobble-braided shorts and thongs, and in the classroom, the Board Game was king. As a special treat children were allowed to bring their favourite games to school (my third-best friend brought *Mousetrap*, which saw her fast tracked to first-best in the space of a minute). At lunchtime - and just for that one special day - the tuck-shop Mums doled out chilled watermelon and lollies; and the teachers headed to the pub, where they stayed approximately until Australia Day.

I still love Christmas. I even quite enjoy Christmas shopping – although my 89 year old father is not getting any easier to buy for. In a week or two I will spend an entire Saturday making two enormous Christmas puddings – complete with paper-wrapped threepences (and the lone remaining sixpence); I will increase the ambient temperature in the kitchen to a cosy 40°+ by baking Scottish shortbread in the heat; I will get down on hands and knees to ferret out the Christmas mugs from the back of the cupboard; and I will buy walnuts in the shell. We will watch Carols in the Domain while wrapping

presents, and secretly concede that Melbourne always does it better. Bing will be permitted on the CD player for as long as we can bear him.

Whatever we plan to cook on the day, I know will be confounded by the weather. So a Christmas Eve trip to the fish markets for prawns to barbecue will presage a violent storm followed by a cold snap, whereas turkey with all the trimmings will be served in a heatwave. That's OK, we've learned to be sanguine – and in any case, boiled Christmas pudding served at 4 o'clock in the afternoon is a great leveller. In so many ways.

So, I'm looking forward to our funny, familiar Christmas. Some bits will be fabulous; others will be tender and sad, as our clan has grown smaller again this year. But I face my Christmas without fear. I know that my recurring nightmare is just a brilliantly executed marketing construct. I've got my early start, and the plans are in place.

Is that laughter I can hear?

May all your Christmas plans be loose ones. As ever, if you have any feedback, drop me a line via email at: members@winesociety.com.au.

Cheers

Gillian Hyde

Head of Membership

PS – Congratulations to member John Craig, of Scarborough, Qld, who is the winner of our Jacob's Creek Australian Open promotion. He and Mrs Craig will be enjoying the Men's Singles final from Centre Court seats, thanks to our friends at Jacob's Creek.