

# Holiday Customs Irk Feminists

By PAT PETRASKE

"Was Christmas meant to be so miserable?" Lyn Somers, a member of the Catholic feminist group, St. Joan's International Alliance, questioned her reaction to the holiday season that is now in full swing.

St. Joan's seminar, "Holidays for Women: Blessing and Burden" held last Thursday at Colgate Rochester/Bexley Hall/Crozer Center for Theological Studies, touched upon the "financial, emotional and physical strain" that the holidays, from Christmas to Mother's Day, inflict upon women.

"Peace on Earth, Goodwill towards Men and Jingle Bells are blaring at you as you walk down the street, saleswomen are yelling and everyone is shoving. I feel like going into one of those stores and saying 'Merry Christmas' to everyone. But they'd think I was nuts," Mrs. Somers said wryly.

Christmas for Mrs. Somers, principal of the pre-school program at St. Augustine's Church, has developed into "something wrong that we should try and change." "What I do especially on holidays is not something I enjoy our have talent for. It's something my husband, family, friends and next-door-neighbors expect me to do," she sighed.

The rude wakening came when Mrs. Somers was writing out the traditional list of Christmas cards. "How joyful can Christmas be if I find myself damning my friends' existence because I have to send them Christmas cards?"

She saw two alternative courses of action: "Either I can keep going until my family dies from my cooking and I fall over from exhaustion or I can become an instrument for change."

While her remarks brought chuckles, many of the women gathered expressed gratitude that they were able to find a group which sympathized with their predicament. "It was always something I had to do," said one woman, recalling the hours of preparation she had to put in for Christmas. "I didn't want to complain but I knew it was unfair."

She divorced her husband after 40 years of marriage and looked to the alliance to crystalize her thoughts of feminism. "I do not blame my husband; he was a victim of his society. But I felt I could not be myself nor stand up for what I thought." She is

looking forward to moving into her own apartment and having the freedom of celebrating the holidays in whatever way she chooses.

Regardless of a woman's life style, she continues to work, believes Ellen Zazycki, who together with Mrs. Somers launched St. Joan's in Rochester. "The holidays should be a holiday for everyone not just for my husband and family."

She recalled going to church on Easter Sunday. "The priest was talking of resurrection and all I wanted to do was to find a pew and curl up in it. The kids had all torn open their Easter baskets and the work had only begun."

The petite mother of three advocates turning every holiday into a "community sharing." "We have to help the family assume the responsibility of community giving; families pray together and should give together."

Christmas does contain many joys, stressed Mrs. Zazycki who realizes there are many women who are creative and love to cook

and wrap presents. But she has begun to wonder what Christmas is all about and believes the roles placed on women are "unfair and not suitable for all women." "This was not the initial plan. Women have been duped by the greatest marketing campaign ever."

Members of St. Joan's International Alliance are urging women to sit down and determine what the holidays really mean. "You must admit to the way you celebrate. Who really benefits from the Christmas spirit?" Mrs. Somers asked.

This year Mrs. Somers decided "not to get writer's cramp" and has used the money that she would have spent on Christmas cards and stamps "for something good just as Christ was an instrument of good."

"I'm going to try and show the Christmas spirit all year long so my friends won't need to receive a card from me," she said. Mrs. Somers' children, ages three and five, have also learned "that there is no jolly man who delivers presents. They have to learn gratitude for what they receive."

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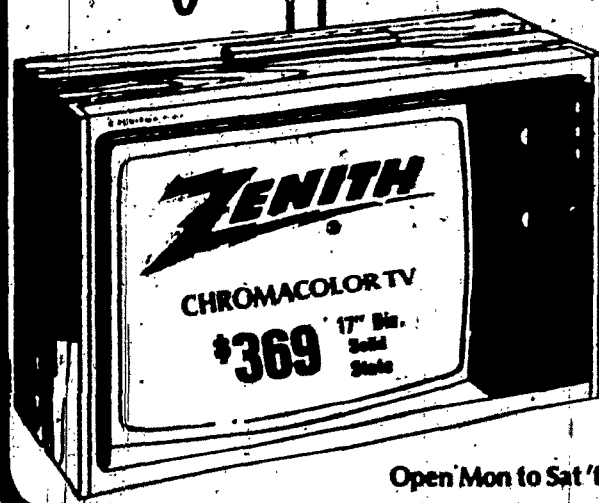
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