

One mom's Christmas wish

Please don't ask my son what he's getting for Christmas.

We're Jewish, you see. That means that when you ask my child what Santa's going to bring him, he's forced to tell you he's getting nothing. I've taught him to explain that politely with the words, "We don't celebrate Christmas; we celebrate Hanukkah." That might sound simple, but it's a big load for a preschooler.

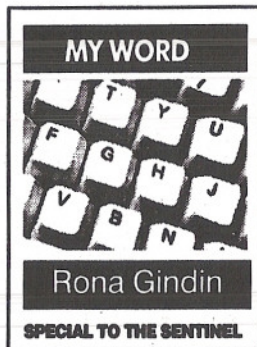
I make sure our Hanukkah celebrations are warm and wonderful. We light colorful candles in a special candelabra, eat potato pancakes dipped into applesauce and play holiday games together. Josh receives a small gift every night for eight nights. But Hanukkah is a minor holiday for the Jewish people, and, although the festivities are beautiful and fun, they are not as alluring to a small child as the bounty of Christmas.

Although I understand the sensational spirit of Christmas for Christians, I resent strangers expecting everyone to share their holiday with them. Our first July in Orlando, a well-meaning Barnes & Noble salesman tried to comfort my son by saying, "Maybe Santa Claus will put that book you want in your stocking for Christmas." With-

in the next year and a half, we heard similar versions repeatedly. And every time the subject comes up, it's up to this little kid to explain that Christmas gifts aren't part of our lives. That makes me mad. You can't tell we don't go to church by looking at us, so just don't say anything.

Unfortunately, we can't escape Christmas. Stores, streets, television shows, theme parks ... the festivities are everywhere.

And I'm not anti-Christmas; I just don't want it forced upon us. I'll drive around to see the neighbors' colorful lights. I'll hum along to non-religious carols playing in malls. I give contractors Christmas tips, employees gifts and Toys for Tots unwrapped dolls. I bring my children to friends' homes to share their holiday with them, and open our home in return. I attend Christmas luncheons — though I wish they would be called "holiday luncheons," as they are in cities with larger Jewish populations — and just hope that I don't win the red-and-green decorations being awarded as door prizes. Christmas should not be a part of my life, but it is, and I'll handle it. But keep my kids out of it.



I'm told that our plight will get worse. The local elementary-school choir sang "Happy Birthday, Baby Jesus" last year. How am I supposed to deal with that? Should I let my son sing to someone else's savior, or deprive him of being in an exciting school event? Stick to "Frosty the Snow-

man," please.

There are kids who have it worse. The Sentinel Santa stories show me kids who hope they'll find a warm blanket on Christmas morning; imagine how they would choke if asked about the latest Power Ranger Megazord.

Have some respect, please. No matter how nice you mean to be, your good intentions can make a happy child sad.

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