

Chatterbox #38 – Christmas

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone! This is Harp.

Maura: And Maura.

Harp: At Culips.

Maura: That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. So go to our website and become a member and then you can have access to more detailed explanations of some of the expressions in this episode, and the transcript, and also a quiz.

Harp: And we're here today with a Chatterbox episode. And the Chatterbox episode is where we chat. We talk about cultural happenings and things in the news and sometimes we interview people.

Maura: Yeah, whatever's going on or interesting at the moment.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: And of course, at this time of year, **the holidays** are what is happening.

Harp: Yes, and that's our topic today for Chatterbox: we're gonna talk about **the holidays**.

Maura: Right. So, we put out a question on Facebook asking people to give us some of their questions: What do you want know about Christmas and New Year's in Canada? And we got some responses.

Harp: We did indeed.

Maura: So, first we'll answer some of those questions and then we'll also share some of our own stories about Christmases and New Year's past.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: So, let's start by answering some of them. Now, the first question we got was about food. That's always a question on people's minds!

Harp: Yup.

Maura: So, what kind of food do we eat around this time? Are there any kind of

traditional things that we have at Christmas or New Year's with any significance?

Harp: For Christmas, it's usually **a turkey dinner with all the trimmings**, stuffing, mashed potatoes.

Maura: Right. So that's really the standard Christmas dinner, but a lot of people might choose to not eat that, and it's just the traditional meal; there's no symbol behind it as far as we know.

Harp: No, exactly. And it also depends on your family background. For me, my family is from India, so when I was growing up, we sometimes added Indian elements to **the turkey dinner**. My mom would make carrots, but a curried carrot.

Maura: Ah, nice. And for my family, we practised a Polish tradition, which was to have perogies on Christmas Eve. So, we didn't have **turkey dinner**.

Harp: Delicious! Maura, I remember when you made perogies for a party. They were so good.

Maura: Mmhmm. So, like you said, Harp, depending on your family background, you might have any variety of traditional food for you that you decide to eat on Christmas or New Year's.

Harp: Yeah, for New Year's there's no set meal that a family would have. It depends, again, on where your family comes from.

Maura: Right. This question actually made me think of something, because I was eating one the other day, and that is a **clementine**.

Harp: Definitely a holiday fruit!

Maura: So, it's not a necessarily traditional food, but around this time of year, we see **clementines** all across the grocery stores in Canada.

Harp: Yeah, so a **clementine** is just a small orange that you can peel and eat very easily and they're delicious.

Maura: I think most of them come from Morocco and, just by chance, **clementines** are in season right now in Morocco, which is why we have them now in the cold winter. But when I was younger, we used to leave food for Santa Claus and we always included **clementines**.

Harp: Very nice. When I was young, we used to call them Christmas oranges.

- Maura: Oh, that's cute.
- Harp: Yeah, because they were only around during Christmas time.
- Maura: That's true. **Now, which one is more important for you, Harp, Christmas or New Year's?**
- Harp: Wow, that's an interesting question. For me, they're both important, but for totally different reasons. For me, Christmas is a time with my family; we have a traditional meal. And then New Year's is my time to go out and party with my friends and have a good time.
- Maura: Yeah, same with me. When I think about Christmas, I think about family, and when I think about New Year's, I think about friends. So, they're both big, important holidays. But think about how much time is spent planning for Christmas.
- Harp: Yeah, you have the list to buy people presents. There are so many **decorations** everywhere you go.
- Maura: Right. People put up their Christmas tree weeks in advance. So really, Christmas is a lot bigger in terms of money spent and preparation and all the things that are a part of it.
- Harp: Yeah, it surrounds you. Even today, walking here to Culips, on the street in Montreal, they're playing .
- Maura: Right. I love that. And there are lights everywhere and **Christmas decorations** everywhere: all over the streets, on people's homes, inside people's homes. You really can't avoid knowing that it's Christmas time.
- Harp: For sure. And with all snow we already have this year, it just looks beautiful. One way that Christmas is different from New Year's is that at Christmas you give gifts and you receive gifts, which you don't do at New Year's.
- Maura: Right. I've never seen people **exchange** New Year's gifts.
- Harp: Nope, never.
- Maura: No, but Christmas gifts, yeah.
- Harp: Definitely. With your close friends and family you usually **exchange presents**.

- Maura: Right. Sometimes people even **exchange presents** with people at work. So, what kind of presents do we give and receive? It's really hard to say, because it depends on the person, depends on your relationship, depends on how much money you have in the bank to spend.
- Harp: It could be anything. You could give any sort of gift depending on the person.
- Maura: Right. I think I've seen ads on television for people to give cars as presents. Some people give really expensive, elaborate gifts that cost a lot of money. But you could also give a friend a really small gift, like a little box of candies or chocolates.
- Harp: Or some cookies you made, something small.
- Maura: Right. So there are a whole range of gifts. Usually, if it's a close friend or family member, you might want to spend a little bit more money, but really, it's hard to say for sure. A lot of the time, as well, people don't **exchange presents**.
- Harp: Yeah. It's usually a kind of **unspoken agreement** with the person if you're going to give them a gift or not.
- Maura: Mmhmm. Sometimes you might be surprised when someone gives you a gift that you weren't expecting. I personally don't **exchange gifts** with a lot of my friends. That's because we don't need to spend all that money. We don't need to buy each other a gift, and we just spend time together instead. So a lot of people choose to do that.
- Harp: Yeah, same thing with my friends. Sometimes we'll **exchange presents** that we've made for each other. One of my favourite gifts that my friend ever gave to me was a hand-knit scarf. So she made it; it wasn't expensive.
- Maura: Sometimes those gifts are even better, because they're sentimental and someone made it for you, so it's more special.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: One thing that's becoming more and more popular is for people to donate money to a charity on someone else's behalf, and then usually around Christmas, they give that person a card and it says that they've donated money to a certain charity or organization in their name.
- Harp: That's becoming much more popular.
- Maura: My father actually did that for me and my sisters one year. And I don't remember exactly what he bought, but he bought different animals for people

living in other countries that needed these animals to live.

Harp: Oh, that's very nice.

Maura: It was a really sweet gift.

Harp: The last question we got from one of our listeners was in regards to our favourite activity during Christmas or New Year's.

Maura: Hmm, that's a good question. Well, I think one of my favourite things to do around this time, honestly, is to do nothing, with friends and family.

Harp: Yeah, I agree. Just relax and enjoy each other's company.

Maura: Yeah. Last year, on New Year's day, I had a really great day. And I just lay around all day with one of my friends and we watched movies and ate food and we barely moved. It was great.

Harp: Sounds like fun.

Maura: OK, so I think that about does it for our questions. Hopefully we've answered them enough. And if you have any more questions, you can always send us an email, make a comment on this episode, or write to us on Facebook.

Harp: Exactly. And we'll answer your questions.

Maura: So now let's share some stories from past New Year's and Christmases, Harp.

Harp: What's your favourite Christmas memory?

Maura: Well, I always remember the Christmas when I was a kid and my sisters and I wanted a cat. We really wanted an animal. And I remember waking up on Christmas morning and we heard a little meow, meow, and we weren't sure, because it was such a faint sound. We weren't sure if we were really hearing something or just imagining it, and we woke up our parents and we asked them: "We hear some noise! We hear some noise! What's going on?" And then we went downstairs and we had a kitten! And I think my parents put the kitten in a box right before we came down, so it was extra fun because the box was moving around and the little kitten head popped out!

Harp: So cute!

Maura: Yeah, that's one of my favourite memories of a good surprise on Christmas morning.

Harp: That's really, really cute.

Maura: What about you?

Harp: Oh, I love Christmas so I have so many memories. Umm ... One of my favourite memories is actually when I was in Korea teaching English and I knew about a program that **Canada Post** had. And **Canada Post** is just the national postal service, so they deliver all the letters for everyone. And once a year they do this special program where people can write to Santa Claus. So when I was in Korea, I got all of my kids to write letters to Santa Claus. And you write it and **the address is** Santa Claus, North Pole, HOH OHO. And Santa Claus wrote letters back—or **Canada Post** wrote letters back—to all of the kids, and they were so excited to get these letters from Santa Claus! And it was fun.

Maura: Yeah, I love that. I think it's a pretty great thing that we do for kids. Yeah, it's pretty awesome. Yeah. So if you want to write to Santa, you can write Santa a letter with your Christmas wish list. And what about New Year's stories? You must have some good New Year's stories.

Harp: Yes! My favourite New Year's story was when I turned 18, because my parents me had promised me that I could go out to a party with my friends, so I was very excited. But this was **Y2K**.

Maura: So, this was the year 2000, when everyone was worried that the computers were going to freak out and there was going to be a big catastrophe in the world.

Harp: Exactly. All the computers would stop working, and you wouldn't be able to buy food, and you wouldn't be able to get gas. And there was so much hype about **Y2K** and what was going to happen with the computers when the numbers went from 1999 to 2000. So my parents **put down their foot** and said, "No, you can't go out to a party." And we had to stay at home with the family.

Maura: That's really funny, because we all know what happened because of **Y2K**.

Harp: Nothing! Nothing happened! But I missed a fun party.

Maura: Well, I guess **it's better to be safe than sorry**.

Harp: For sure.

Maura: For me, I remember one New Year's Eve, when the weather was really bad, which I think happens quite often in Canada.

- Harp: Yup.
- Maura: So New Year's Eve comes around and we have a big snow storm, but we decided to drive to the party we wanted to go to anyway, even though it was one hour away.
- Harp: And what happened?
- Maura: Well, on our way there, there was a lot of snow, and the roads were slippery, and you couldn't see very well. So, our one-hour trip turned into a two- or three-hour trip. I just remember being in the car forever. And you know what? We actually ended up spending New Year's in the car.
- Harp: So you celebrated the New Year in the car?
- Maura: Yup, driving somewhere on the highway, in between home and our party.
- Harp: That's funny. Did you end up going to the party?
- Maura: We did end up going to the party, but we didn't stay that long, because we had to get in the car and drive all the way back.
- Harp: Oh no. So maybe you should have stayed at home like I did.
- Maura: Maybe. OK, great. So, this episode we answered some of your questions. Again, thank you so much for writing questions. We always love to hear from our listeners. So never hesitate to send us a message!
- Harp: Exactly. And then we finished with talking about stories: our favourite stories from Christmases and New Year's Eves that have passed.
- Maura: Yeah. I don't think we'll ever run out of stories.
- Harp: Nope.
- Maura: And if you have any good Christmas or New Year's stories, send them to us; we'd be curious to know. So, again, don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com. Become a member and gain access to all the wonderful extra things that go with our episodes.
- Harp: Exactly. And happy holidays to everyone out there!
- Maura: Yeah. If you have some time off from work or school, enjoy it! So, we'll talk to you soon. Bye!
- Harp: Bye everyone!

Detailed Explanation

The holidays

This episode we talk about Christmas and New Year's, also known as **the holidays**. When we speak about **holidays**, without the **the**, then these days off from work could be at any time. When we speak about **the holidays** close to the end of December, with the **the**, it is clear that the person is speaking about Christmas and New Year's.

As we've talked about in a previous Christmas episode, because many people in Canada do not celebrate Christmas, it's now more common now to call this time **the holidays** and to wish someone **happy holidays** instead of *merry Christmas*.

Here is an example with **the holidays**:

Andrea: So what are your plans for **the holidays**?

Lisa: For Christmas I'm staying home and for New Year's I'm going to New York City.

Turkey dinner with all the trimmings

The traditional Christmas dinner in Canada is a big turkey with stuffing, potatoes, gravy, cranberry sauce, and other vegetables. These extras or additional food that goes with the turkey are **the trimmings**. This is a phrase that often goes together as Harp says it: **turkey dinner with all the trimmings**. Other than this expression, we don't often use the word **trimmings** for meals.

Stuffing is made differently depending on the recipe, but it gets its name from being stuffed inside the turkey. Stuffing can be bread or bread crumbs, seasoning, and other parts of the turkey cooked together inside. The potatoes might be mashed, as Harp says, but they can also be baked or roasted. The gravy and the cranberry sauce can be eaten with the turkey meat.

Clementines

Clementines are a type of small, sweet mandarin oranges. Harp says that when she was younger she called them Christmas oranges!

Like we say in this episode, many people associate **clementines** with Christmas because it is at this time that we eat them. They are not a Canadian fruit, but are grown in warmer climates. Most **clementines** sold in Canada are from Morocco.

More Christmas food

One type of food that is especially popular around this time of year is desserts. Christmas cookies are baked by many people and given as gifts. Common types of Christmas cookies include shortbread and gingerbread. The classic Christmas dessert is fruit cake, which many people love and many others hate.

Christmas versus New Year's

Christmas and **New Year's** celebrations are both big in Canada. Generally, **Christmas** takes a lot more preparation than **New Year's**. For **Christmas** there is often travel to visit family, and there are gifts to buy for family and friends. There are also **Christmas** parties leading up to the day with friends and work.

New Year's is also a big day. **New Year's** Eve is a party more often celebrated with friends than family. Some people also travel for **New Year's**, but it is more of a choice. For **Christmas**, most people visit their family, especially if their family lives relatively close. New Year's might also be a big celebration with lots of preparation for you, if you decide to have a **New Year's** party!

Christmas decorations

There are so many kinds of **Christmas decorations**! Outside you can always see Christmas lights on some houses, sometimes with additional Christmas ornaments and statues. These additional ornaments might be blow up Santas or snowmen, which is a recent trend.

On many of the streets in Montreal, there is Christmas music playing. There are also Christmas lights put up by the city. Other decorations like garlands and wreaths are also put up.

These same decorations can also be seen in people's homes. The main indoor **Christmas decoration** is the Christmas tree! Many people have either a real tree or a fake one, and then decorate it with ornaments and lights.

Christmas carols

A **Christmas carol** is the name for a traditional song sung at Christmas time. A real **Christmas carol** was written in the past, and so new Christmas songs are not considered **carols**.

Here is a short list of some of the most popular **Christmas carols**:

Deck the Halls
Jingle Bells

Jingle Bell Rock
Santa Claus is Coming to Town
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
The Twelve Days of Christmas
We Wish you a Merry Christmas
Winter Wonderland

Presents and gifts

There is such a variety of gifts that a person can give. A person can give a very small gift or a very large gift, and gifts may cost a lot or just a little. Generally, people spend more money on the people they are closest too. Some people buy presents for many people and other people do not buy very many gifts at all.

A gift can be anything to anyone. It is an individual choice who a person buys gifts for and how much they spend.

We can use the words **present** and **gift** to talk about the items people give each other on special occasions. There is no difference between these words when they are used this way.

Nicole: I don't know what he got me this year.

Donna: He always gets you nice **presents**.

Nicole: I don't know what he got me this year.

Donna: He always gets you nice **gifts**.

Present and **gift** both have other meanings though, and when they are used in other ways, they are not the same.

An unspoken agreement

An unspoken agreement between people means that everyone agrees to something even though it has not been spoken about. The people then act according to this agreement. In this episode, Harp says that she has **an unspoken agreement** with some of her friends. **The unspoken agreement** is not to buy each other Christmas presents. Harp did not discuss this with her friends, it likely just happened naturally.

An unspoken agreement means that everyone participates or does not participate in certain behaviour. This often happens naturally or by expectations that one person puts on another. **An unspoken agreement** could be that both people do equal work on a project at work, or that people take turns helping each other mow their lawns.

Here is one example talking about **an unspoken agreement**:

Carmen: Wow, your roommate is really quiet.

Lois: We have **an unspoken agreement** that when one person is studying the other person is quiet too.

To exchange presents

To exchange presents has two different meanings, and they can both be used during the holiday season. The first meaning, and how it is used in this episode, means that one person gives a friend a present and that friend also gives a present to the person. It is an **exchange** because both people give and receive something. It is not **an exchange** if only one person gives a gift.

Some people have organized gift **exchanges** with family, friends, or colleagues. In this case everyone randomly selects the name of one other person and has to buy for them. This also means that someone has chosen your name and that you will also receive a present. To add to the fun of this **exchange** some people keep the names of the person they are buying a gift for secret.

The other way to **exchange presents** is to take a present that was given to you back to the store where it was bought to exchange it for something else. This might be done because the gift is too big or small for the person (in the case of clothing). It is not polite to exchange a gift simply because you do not like it.

Canada Post and Santa Claus' address

Canada Post is the Canadian postal service. This is the organization that is responsible for all our letters and packages.

Every year at this time they offer a special service free of charge! Children can write letters to Santa Claus and receive a response. Canada Post will reply to letters from people all around the world! All you need to do is include the postage for the return letter. The letters will be answered in the language they were sent in. Of course, you can also email. Emails will be answered in English or French.

Santa's address

SANTA CLAUS
NORTH POLE
HOH OHO
CANADA

Y2K

The New Year of 2000 was the time of **Y2K**. In **Y2K** the **Y** represents *year* and **2K** represents 2000. There was fear across many parts of the world that because of a computer problem with the new numbers in the year 2000 there would be disastrous results. As we all know now, after the New Year there were no reported disasters, and any small computer problems that occurred were largely unreported.

To put down your foot

To put your foot down or **to put down your foot** is used when someone is giving a strong opinion and is determined that they get what they want. When **someone puts their foot down** it means that the person is strongly giving their opinion and refusing something. **Putting your foot down** is serious!

In this episode, Harp's parents are the ones that **put their foot down**. Harp's parents strongly believed that she should not go out to a New Year's party for the year 2000, and that is what happened. Her parents refused to allow her to go out.

Here are a couple more examples with **to put your foot down**:

Teacher: My students are really talkative, and they are not working very hard.

Friend of teacher: It sounds like you really need **to put your foot down**.

Patricia: I really **put my foot down** last night and I told him what I thought.

Zoe: Good for you! I hope it works this time.

Note: Even when the subject is plural, we still use **foot** in this expression, not *feet*. Harp says her parents (plural) **put their foot down**.

It's better to be safe than sorry

Here is an expression that literally means just what it says: **it is better to be safe than sorry**. **To be sorry** in this expression means that you regret doing something. So according to this expression, it is better to be safe and not have done something risky, than to do something risky and possibly have regret.

This expression can be applied to Harp's Y2K party story. It was better for her to be safe at home than to risk going out to a party and having a Y2K disaster happen. This expression is often used after someone has chosen to be safe (not to do some risky thing), as this expression confirms their decision not to take a risk.

There are also many expressions that contradict this expression and encourage people to do risky things like, *I only regret the things I have not done*.

Here are a couple of examples with **it's better to be safe than sorry**:

Michael: My friend wanted to go skydiving with him this weekend, but I said no way. I am too afraid to do something like that.

Lena: **It's better to be safe than sorry.**

Henry: My gas tank says it's almost empty, but it's broken, so I'm not sure if we need to fill up.

Kevin: **It's better to be safe than sorry.** I think we should fill up just in case.

Quiz

- 1. Which of the following specifically means the time around Christmas and New Year's?**
 - a) holidays
 - b) the holidays
 - c) the days
 - d) the days off

- 2. What is turkey dinner with all the trimmings?**
 - a) a turkey with potatoes and stuffing
 - b) a turkey with dessert
 - c) a turkey with a hamburger
 - d) a hamburger and French fries

- 3. What fruit is associated with the holidays?**
 - a) apples
 - b) mangoes
 - c) clementines
 - d) starfruit

- 4. What is Harp's unspoken agreement with her friends?**
 - a) not to drive in snowstorms
 - b) not to sing Christmas carols
 - c) not to buy each other Christmas presents
 - d) not to go out on New Year's Eve

- 5. Two people exchange Christmas presents when they both buy each other a present. If you go to a store to exchange a present, what might you be doing?**
 - a) returning that present to the store to get something that fits you better
 - b) giving Christmas gifts to cashiers
 - c) buying Christmas gifts for strangers
 - d) visiting Santa

6. What was the name given to the computer problem some predicted to begin on January 1, 2000?

- a) 2YK
- b) Y2K
- c) K2Y
- d) YK2

7. Mel: The boss _____ yesterday and said we can no longer take one-hour lunches!

Please fill in the blank.

- a) got her foot up
- b) got her foot down
- c) put her foot up
- d) put her foot down

8. Which expression warns against taking risks?

- a) Seize the day.
- b) It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.
- c) It's better to be safe than sorry.
- d) Merry Christmas!

Answers: 1.b 2.a 3.c 4.c 5.a 6.b 7.d 8.c