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Boxing Day babies just make it work

By [VIRGINIA ANDERSON](#)

Cox News Service

Tuesday, December 26, 2006

ATLANTA — So you woke up with a hangover today, and the kitchen is speckled with gravy, cranberry sauce and bits of fruitcake. Needles fall from the tree, and pathetic dark circles have formed under the children's eyes.

Imagine if today were your birthday.

Get your hankies — or better, your presents — ready.

This is a sob story if ever you heard one. For thousands of us born on the day after Christmas, it's a bummer of a birthday.

OK, I know it's still the holidays — 12 days of Christmas and all that. And of course, to those of other faiths, Dec. 26 is simply another day.

But this ought to tell you something: Dec. 26 is also officially the day that commemorates a stoning and celebrates leftovers.

The Roman Catholic Church observes Dec. 26 as the feast of St. Stephen, the first martyr of the church who prayed for his enemies as they stoned him to death. And in England, Canada and New Zealand, my birthday is also Boxing Day, a day when servants received boxes of gifts, coins or, ahem, whatever was left over from the celebrations of aristocracy.

Ready for a rousing round of "Happy Birthday"?

It requires some artful attention from families who don't want to endure our guilt trips and whines.

"One year, my husband had a surprise birthday party for me in July," said Sheila Biales, who shares my Dec. 26 birthday.

Of course, Dec. 26 is not the only rotten day for birthdays. Anyone who expects a cake and candles near the winter holidays knows the downside of having to share their day with Jesus. We stick together, sort of like Chicago Cubs fans, united and proud in defeat.

There are millions of us. According to the National Vital Statistics Report, December ranked sixth among months for the number of births in 2004, with about 346,000 births. In my own family, three of five children were around-the-holiday babies. My older brother, Benjy, was born on Dec. 31; my younger sister, Julie, was born Jan. 3.

We used to whine about who had the worst birthday. Julie and I threw Benjy out of the bad birthday club. "At least everyone is partying and happy on your birthday," we argued. Besides, there's champagne, noisemakers and Times Square.

He can at least pretend that some of the party is for him.

Julie and I also rule out anyone born on Christmas Day or before from true birthday martyrdom — at least everyone was still fairly happy, we reason.

Julie always argued that Jan. 3 was the worst day because it was typically the day we returned to school.

The holidays were officially over, the decorations were down, and no kid who had to be dragged from a warm bed to go out into a cold, rainy January day was ever thinking about someone else's birthday, Julie argued.

I admit, I saw Julie's point. Jan. 3 is a bummer day for a birthday.

But Dec. 26?

One year, my mother was so over the holidays that she sent me into the old A&A Bakery in downtown Athens, Ga. to pick up my own cake while she circled the block. And the combined Christmas-birthday gifts? Don't even get me started.

Mother tried her best. Once, she had a birthday party for me in April. I was so excited — until a little girl brought me a beautiful angel inscribed with the words "April Angel."

Another one of my sisters — with an absolutely wonderful April birthday — laid claim to it.

A dear friend also born on Dec. 26 said the worst part may be the utter lack of sympathy for our whines.

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"When I've complained about not getting a birthday wish, people accuse me of being blasphemous," said Carolyn Seals of Atlanta.

All kidding and moaning aside, those of us with bad birthdays have figured out ways to compensate and contemplate our good fortune.

For starters, we truly appreciate the gestures of those who do remember (especially if they don't wrap our presents in Christmas paper).

One childhood friend, Peggy McGarity Bryant, has never missed my birthday, even though I have missed many of hers as I got caught up celebrating my hero George Washington's birthday. Peggy cannot imagine how much her thoughtful gestures touch my heart.

And even though I had to pick up my own cake that one year, that was an unexpected joy in itself.

I can still remember the childishly intoxicating aroma of warm sugar and flour and the sight of the beautiful flowers and dancing ballerinas on top of my cake as they handed it to me. And, best of all, the flowers were pink — not red and green.

And I've learned along the way that it really is better to be the giver than the receiver of gifts.

Perhaps because I always longed for birthday cakes I never got, I developed a love of making special cakes for the birthdays of friends and relatives, as time permits.

I took a cake-decorating class one year, and I have searched for and found delicious cake recipes. I am said to make a mean chocolate cake. I also make a pretty good white chocolate cake with poinsettias for those with holiday birthdays.

And my daughters, both of whom have November birthdays, would feel cheated if they didn't have their traditional carrot cake each year, shellacked with cream cheese frosting.

Also, over the years, dear friends have compensated for any birthday slights, perceived or real.

When I experienced a milestone birthday a few years back, Leon Stafford, one of my closest friends and a staffer here at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, had a surprise party for me.

What could be better than to celebrate with a few close friends and your children, and to have all in good health and cheer? I could not have been more blessed.

And it marked another moment when I realized how wonderful it is to have one more day with the people you love, doing the things you love.

Now that's a great birthday gift — no matter what day of the year.

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