

With Eyes Wide Open

Portsmouth College's Student Newspaper

Life in the Bleak Midwinter

By Sheldon Cotton.

As winter reaches its peak, countries in the Northern Hemisphere are beginning to experience the coldest weather they have had all year, with some parts of Russia being belted by -67.8°C snowstorms in the midst of December. However, even in these sub zero temperatures, life still finds a way to grow and prosper.

Biodiversity remains low in these cold areas, primarily due to the environmental challenges that these species face. A majority of the issues met by the ecosystem are due to dissatisfactory conditions for plant growth. As plants are the start of any food web, it is imperative that they can grow effectively in order to be able to produce enough energy to sustain themselves and the animals that eat them. One of the biggest issues within the community is that decomposition occurs at an increasingly slower rate with colder temperatures, this means that the organic matter cannot decay fast enough to be added to the soil each year. Leading to the soil becoming extremely thin and with a lack of nutrients, which is subpar conditions for effective plant growth.

So how do plants still grow here? It is by evolution that the plants have adapted to their environment. Many plants found in these chilling conditions will look extremely different to plants found in your garden. For example, big trees will not be found in these freezing areas, but instead you will find small low lying shrubs and grasses that won't grow over a few feet. They have adapted to grow this way in order to stay low and out of the way of tundra winds which can dehydrate the plant and cause it to lose water through transpiration, as the saturated water vapour rich air is moved away and dry air replaces it. Another adaptation of tundra plants is that they have darker leaves which contain a higher concentration of chloroplast that allow them to photosynthesise more efficiently, during the short hours of sunlight they receive.

The next trophic level within the food web would be the consumers or animals, however not many animals call tundra regions their home, with only 48 individual species of land mammals known to be living there. One of the most iconic animals that inhabit this frozen wasteland is the Caribou, or known to many as Reindeer. These animals are perfectly evolved to combat the cold weather. The anatomical adaptations of their bodies are their stocky build with short tails and ears, they have these features to avoid heat loss. As well as this, in their legs, the arteries and veins run alongside each other. This means that the fast moving blood in the arteries can warm up the slower moving blood in the veins to prevent it from freezing. Alongside these physical traits, they have behavioural ones which cause them to migrate further south once the extremely low temperatures begin to set in.

These amazing organisms have spent thousands of years evolving to live suitably within these harsh environments, but their ecosystem is so fragile that the slightest imbalance could throw the entire community into chaos. Currently this is the case, global warming has accelerated the fall of this ecosystem into disrepair. It's causing more extreme weather to appear at an alarming rate, higher snowfall and lower temperatures are killing off many species that live in these regions as they cannot adapt fast enough to cope with these harsh conditions. So while you're sitting at home this Christmas, maybe reach for a blanket instead of turning on the heating and remember to recycle anything you can. Do your part to reduce the impact of climate change, do your part to help save these environments and the creatures that call it their home.

Inclusivity at Christmas

By Jess Sabushimike.

On the 14th of November, Sainsbury's released an advert with an all black family where they talk on the phone about their Christmas traditions, in particular their Christmas dinner, and in the background are clips from previous years. Once it had been aired the advert received backlash on social media due to a group of white people not feeling "represented" and many trolls even suggested a 'boycott' of the store. The lack of representation that they started to complain about is the exclusion that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background (BAME) feel on a daily basis all year round. Unfortunately the Sainsbury's advert is not the first advert to face backlash due to including an all black family.

In the summer of this year, Argos released a similar advert with an all black, queer family and the backlash was astonishing. A few weeks prior to this they released an almost identical advert, the difference being that

the family was white and heterosexual. On Twitter the comments under the advert with the white family were in general not about the advert itself but instead focused on the products or people's customer service queries. This is a stark contrast to the comment section under the advert with the black family where the comments were filled with blatant racism and homophobia. Seeing hypocrisy is painful for the communities as it shows that we aren't seen as "normal".

Although both the LGBT and BAME community do not make up a large percent of the population, 5.4% of the population do not identify as heterosexual and 13.8% of people are BAME. This still means that there are several million people that are being excluded from representation within the media such as adverts and Christmas films.

Most classic Christmas films lack diversity as the typical film tends to celebrate white, heterosexual families. This changed with the release of 'The Happiest Season' this year which is a film about a lesbian couple celebrating Christmas which broke the record for being the most watched film on the streaming service Hulu on the first weekend. This is

a step in the right direction and hopefully seeing the success of this film will cause other production companies to create similar inclusive films.

The backlash that the adverts faced and the lack of representation in the media especially seasonal films shows how far the UK still has to go

before we are able to claim that we are a progressive and accepting society, however the small steps being taken show that we are heading in the right direction.

Humbug: How Dickens Changed the Course of Christmas.

By Daniel Stokes.

Known today as a “student’s worst burden” and nothing more than a “classic author”, Charles Dickens had a life that many are still none the wiser about. Ranging from being an activist into the overwhelming issue of poverty and known to some as the “Man who invented Christmas”, anyone claiming that Dickens is only the statements prior would be extremely mistaken.

Born in 1809, Dickens lived his life in the Victorian era. The Victorian era marked the decline of rural living and the increase in factory work, forcing those who used to work on farms to move to the cities to get a job. By forcing so many people who used to live in the countryside into the cities, poverty became a major problem due to the dense population and limited job opportunities. At the age of 12, Dickens was sent to work at “Warren’s Blacking Warehouse” (which he later used in “Oliver Twist”) due to his father being arrested for failure to pay a debt. This blight in his early life was neither short nor easy, and Dickens had claimed that the reason why he had such a concern for poverty, especially in children, was because he had been touched by it himself during his adolescence.

If not his most well known novella to date, his most impactful “A Christmas Carol” helped make Christmas into the holiday celebrated today as well as bringing attention to the working poor at the same time. The idea of the revolutionary piece of literature was first developed when Dickens attended a charity dinner, in aid of the Charterhouse Square infirmary, which cared for the elderly and impoverished men. Also attending the event was a man whom Dickens took inspiration to create Scrooge. Thomas Malthus (an English cleric, scholar and influential economist in the fields of political economy) published a

book called “An Essay on the Principle of Population” in which he observed that by helping those most in need you are only hurting yourself as the longer people live and reproduce, the more the population increases, and the more people slip into poverty due to lack of food and jobs. Better that the poor should die and therefore “decrease the surplus population”. With this man in mind, Dickens decided that creating this novella would be to bring awareness to the Victorian society almost in spite of Malthus, even using his quotes against him through Scrooge.

However, releasing the novella would not be as easy as writing and printing copies. “A Christmas Carol” was released one stave (chapter) at a time, meaning that Dickens had not actually finished the story by the time the first issue had been published in the papers. Initially, Dickens had wished to end the novella with Scrooge dying as a consequence to his previous actions, but eventually persuaded himself (after a trip to the Warehouse where he developed into a man) to turn a tale of revenge on the higher class man into a tale of redemption and forgiveness. In changing the ending to one of happiness and togetherness by letting Scrooge go to the Cratchit’s house (the family who represent poverty in the novella), it became clear that Dickens wanted those more fortunate in the contemporary society to be more generous, as even the smallest amount of help (shown as the turkey in the novella) can change the fate of those in need.

Near the end of the 19th century around 25% of those living in Britain at the time were in poverty. Closer to now, as the population rises due to better health care and charities with the sole purpose to help those in poverty, 22% of people in Britain are without housing. Although it may not seem like that big of a change, the population itself has increased from 17.9 million in 1850, to 67.8 million in 2020. It is clear to me that “A Christmas Carol” is a cause for this drop in poverty rates, even today, by bringing awareness, as Christmas can now be considered a time of togetherness and charity thanks to the novella written way before its time.

A Christmas Classic: The Polar Express

By Faith Ceeley.

It’s finally that time of year again. The Christmas tree is up and the Christmas lights are hung. What’s missing is a classic Christmas tale. Some famous ones which come to mind could be *The Grinch* or *A Christmas Carol*. However, there is one not many people talk about: *The Polar Express*.

Many might be familiar with the movie but you may not know about the book which was written and illustrated by Chris Van Allsburg. You

may know him as the author of *Jumanji!* It was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1985. By 2015, it had sold 7 million copies.

The book follows the journey of a boy who is debating whether Santa Claus is real or not. A magical train arrives at his house to take him all the way to the North Pole. He meets other children like him. When they arrive, one of the children is picked to receive the first gift of Christmas. The boy places the bell in the pocket of his robe and all the children watch as Santa takes off into the night for his annual deliveries. Later, on the train ride home, the boy discovers that the bell has fallen through a hole in his pocket. The boy arrives home and goes to his bedroom as the train pulls away. On Christmas morning, the boy finds the bell and it rings for him. Only those who believe in Santa will hear it ring.

The book went on to win the Caldecott Medal in 1986. It was so successful that in 2004, a film starring Tom Hanks was made! It has made \$313.5 million in the box office. It finally placed at #3 in the '25 highest grossing Christmas films of all time'.

Overall, I think that the book is great at putting you in a festive mood. The illustrations are beautifully drawn and make you feel as if you are actually in the story yourself. I would highly recommend it!

12 Days of Trumpness

By Beth Rolfe.

On the first day of Christmas

Trump gave to me,

Personal debt problems,

★ *Nearly \$1 billion on casinos, clubs & hotels.*

On the second day of Christmas

Trump gave to me,

Multiple failed marriages,

★ *Two divorces, rumours of a third.*

On the third day of Christmas

Trump gave to me,

A \$3 bill to taxpayers for his water,

★ *In 2018, Trump visited his club Mar-a-Lago, where he held a summit with the leader of China. During this, Trump ordered a glass of water, which was paid for by the taxpayers, in his own club.*

On the fourth day of Christmas

Trump gave to me,

Four years in office,

★ *2017-2021.*

On the fifth day of Christmas

Trump gave to me,

Five spoiled children,

★ *Three sons; two daughters.*

On the sixth day of Christmas

Trump gave to me,

Six banned countries,

★ *Travel ban from Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan, and Tanzania; all with large muslim populations.*

On the seventh day of Christmas

Trump gave to me,

A seven-nation tour,

★ *Mike Pompeo is set to embark on a seven-nation tour of the allies.*



On the eighth day of Christmas

Trump gave to me,

Eight criminal colleagues,

★ *Eg. Michael Cohen; serving time for silencing women about*

to give testimonies against Trump pre-2016.

On the ninth day of Christmas

Trump gave to me,

Nine years with the democrats,

★ *2001-2009 Trump was a registered Democrat.*

On the tenth day of Christmas

Trump gave to me,

A ten year vision to channel billions to his wall,

★ *The Build the Wall Act was introduced and \$18 billion was proposed to fund it in 10 years.*

On the eleventh day of Christmas

Trump gave to me,

A timetable of my workday which starts at eleven am,

★ *It's believed Trump's workday begins at 11am.*

On the twelfth day of Christmas

Trump gave to me,

Pictures of his twelve lavish golf courses,

★ *Trump has twelve golf courses in the US, three in Europe and 1 in the Middle East.*

Tab's Trivia

By Tabitha John.

Oh Christmas Tree Oh Christmas Tree... I can never remember the rest of the words! Ah yes, it is that season again where we bring nature into our homes and spend hours covering it in multicoloured lights and shiny decorations. Unless you have a cat like me and you have to surrender to the idea that you'll have a Christmas twig instead of a tree. But what is the origin of the Christmas tree? Don't worry I am here to give you all the trivia that you need, just in case you are a bit stumped. Sorry that was a bad joke, moving on.

The root of the Christmas tree tradition, as is typically associated with Christmas, can be traced back to 16th century Germany when devout Christians decided to bring decorated trees into their homes in order to celebrate. The first person credited with doing this is Martin Luther as apparently he was awestruck by the way the lights of the stars bounced off the tree branches. So he whipped out an axe, took it home and decorated it with candles to show his family. If we ignore the fact that this is a massive fire hazard, it's actually pretty sweet. This wasn't limited to just literal trees though, much like the fake trees within many people's homes, if money was scarce some people made pyramids out of wood and decorated them with candles. You can tell they were good at tregonometry.

Speaking of pyramids, long before Christianity we can actually see traces of the Christmas tree within paganistic cultures such as the Ancient Egyptians. Within their belief system existed a sun god known as Ra who was often considered to be the King of the gods with a blazing halo and the head of a hawk. During the winter they believed his power had been weakened and therefore, when the winter solstice came about (when the day is the shortest and the night is the longest), they would place green palm rushes within their homes to signify the triumph of life over death. If we branch out a bit we can also see that the Romans decorated their temples with evergreen boughs during their winter solstice festival, Saturnalia, in order to honour the god of agriculture Saturn who would make their orchards and farms bountiful. The

evergreen, also known as ‘nature’s architect’ is also seen within Druid culture of Northern Europe as it was used to symbolise everlasting life, an idea also found within Viking culture as the evergreen was a particular favourite of their sun god, Balder.

So if you celebrate Christmas, the next time you see your Christmas tree you can remember that ,even though it is dark and gloomy outside, your tree represents all of the light and hope that there is to come in the world.

As a bonus fact: The tallest living Christmas tree is apparently a 122 foot high Douglas Fir in Woodinville, Washington. Good luck to anyone who wants to put a star on top of that.

What to do if you’re feeling SAD this Christmas?

By Chloe White.

While many of us may be looking forward to the crispy roast potatoes, obscene festive jumpers and cheesy music, others may be finding it hard to see past the grey clouds dominating the skies for the next few months. As we head into the depths of winter, the onset of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is arriving just as quickly. As defined by the NHS, SAD is “a type of depression that comes and goes in a seasonal pattern”, and typically shows itself in winter.

What causes SAD is still unknown, however many theories suggest that the lack of sunlight may prohibit the Hypothalamus (the part of the brain controlling the release of hormones) from working effectively: producing a higher level of melatonin, a hormone that causes drowsiness; not producing enough serotonin, the hormone that affects mood, appetite and sleep; and disrupting the circadian rhythm, or an internal body-clock.

So we know how SAD may impact someone’s life scientifically, but how can the disorder actually manifest itself? To find out I thought it best to ask someone who’s lived through it, though they shall remain anonymous. The person in question spoke of a number of symptoms, including:

- Lethargy
- Lack of interest in usually enjoyable activities
- Poor appetite or overeating
- Lack of personal care

What is key to this disorder, as explained by the interviewee, is its ability to suck all the energy out of the sufferer, and turn normally exciting or pleasure into numbness. As with any mental health condition, the person suffering can often end up feeling extremely isolated and alone, which is why it is so important for those around them to be supportive during this time.

This year, when we cannot see our friends to support them as we normally would, it can be difficult to know how to be there for our loved ones. What is important to remember, regardless of local or national restrictions, is that for most people with mental health conditions it is essential to reach out to them, as no matter how clear others make it, they often will not feel that they can speak up. For this reason my main advice, and the plea of the interviewee, is to reach out to your friends, especially those you may realise acting more reserved or absent than usual. To support the older generation, teach your grandparents how to use video-calling platforms such as Zoom or Facetime, or simply pick up the phone and have a chat. Explore new ways of communicating, perhaps try writing a letter.

However you choose to support those around you, know that this is never unnoticed, and the power of a simple “hello” is immeasurable.

Homelessness at Christmas

By Jaime Ngo.

Christmas is generally seen as the period of forgiveness, charity and indulgence. A time to meet friends and family, and enjoy all the good things in life. However, a rising number of people in England are spending the festive season without the security of their own home to go to. An estimated 280,000 people spent Christmas last year underhoused or not housed at all; 325 of them were from Portsmouth¹. All year round, the homeless depend on the services provided by charities and organisations such as LifeHouse. However, the era of Covid has led to numerous challenges to the services which can be provided, and coming into Christmas, demand is as high as ever.

LifeHouse is a non-profit organisation which operates on Harold Road in Southsea. It’s run as an offshoot from the Vineyard Church and its pastor, Mike Morell, is the manager. It provides a wide variety of services, from hot meals on Wednesdays and Thursdays to counselling assisted by the legal firm Larcomes Legal Limited. They work with and rely on the generosity of volunteers, businesses and the general public for funds and food. Indeed, students of Portsmouth College have contributed to Lifehouse through fundraisers before, both in 2017 and 2019²³. Now, however, Coronavirus has upended the normal practices of the kitchen and forced it to adapt both to the circumstances and the increasing numbers of people who need their support. I was able to speak with Mike on Zoom to discuss all of this.

¹ England Shelters’ annual homeless data
https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1883817/This_is_England_A_picture_of_homelessness_in_2019.pdf

² Portsmouth News
<https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/college-students-rise-acharitys-big-challenge-1149642>

³ Portsmouth College
<https://www.portsmouth-college.ac.uk/news-and-events/back-to-basics/>

The Tuesday before the first lockdown came into effect, an emergency meeting was held between the members of Lifehouse to discuss what would happen. From it came a firm commitment to keep going no matter what, with Mike saying to me that the only way they would stop was if the “police dragged them away”. Instead of providing food inside the building where they usually operate, they performed a takeaway service on the door. They also performed a food parcel service to around 20 people who were afraid of going out or isolating. The staff took the usual COVID prevention measures: wearing PPE, restricting numbers to only 5 at a time, starting earlier and checking the temperatures of the staff when they came in. During this period an estimated 3 times the usual number of people came to Lifehouse for aid. Fortunately, they were ably supported by the wider community.

“Collectively, the public have quite a force” and the efforts of individuals trying to help “have been fantastic”, said Mike. Examples of this are numerous and include a girl called Emma who raised £573 doing a charity run, members of the public baking and bringing in cakes, and online donations which Mike says “keep them going.” There has been a greater sense of cooperation between community centres through the creation of a WhatsApp Group, which has led to a more efficient use of food resources. All of this combined has meant that Lifehouse have been able to operate during these difficult times.

Usually at Christmas, LifeHouse tries to bring a sense of the Christmas spirit to those that might not be able to experience it. People from pubs and local organisations come over to serve and cook Christmas meals, volunteers perform collections and on the 20th December at St Mary’s Church, they gather to perform a carol service. After seeing average numbers double during the second lockdown, it’s expected to get even busier this Christmas. However, Mike told me that LifeHouse intended to use the same format from previous Christmases, adapting for Coronavirus. Large takeaway meals with presents and putting Christmas coats on pavements for people to collect as well as dressing the windows with decorations are all ideas which will hopefully be implemented by the time Santa comes squeezing his way through your chimneys.

Another service which LifeHouse provides is counselling. It’s through this and other interactions with people that when I asked Mike about why people become homeless, he was able to provide several potential reasons. Generally, a chain reaction occurs. The catalyst is usually a domestic issue like a bereavement or being kicked out by their landlord. Then, they begin drinking or taking drugs which drains away the remnants of their funds. Alcohol is an extremely common problem in a homeless person’s life, even more so than drugs⁴, with the homeless consuming more than the general population on average⁵. Finally crime is, in his opinion, the biggest reason. Describing the streets as “a jungle”, he expressed a surprise as to the lack of cooperation between each other. He described how they would bully each other for money, using violence to extort each other. Some would turn up with cuts and bruises and 1 or 2 people have even been banned.

A personal story Mike told me, which epitomises the issues the homeless face as well as the fine line between a happy and strong career and the streets, is that of a man named Neil Hopkinson. To local police he was known as the polite one. He was a manager for an Apple Store and a “clever and successful businessman”. Then a divorce and drink made him homeless. It was a habit which he was unable to break and it meant he had multiple stays in hospital, and at one point nearly lost his spleen. He was “fun, very kind” but with alcohol prohibiting his recovery. For 2

weeks he had been able to restrain himself and appeared to be doing well; he had dressed smartly and spoke clearly and rationally. Then someone gave him £20. He bought cheap cider and the next time he came in, he was described as being in a “terrible state”. This year he passed away.

And it brings us onto the final topic. What to do about it? How to deal with a rising crisis of homelessness on the streets? Firstly, he conveyed a sentiment that the local Council is being unfairly blamed and that they have done very well in housing people during the pandemic. However, there were areas which needed tweaking. He touched upon mental health and said the system for dealing with it had “been dismantled” and to deal with homelessness, the issue of mental health had to be resolved as well. The amount of money spent in 2018 on mental health was £105 million lower in real terms than in 2012.⁶⁷ Secondly, he called for the Council to reinforce a message to not give money to the homeless and to pass stricter laws about the regulation of the sale of alcohol. Making alcohol more expensive will, Mike hopes, deter those with an alcohol addiction and the homeless from buying cheap alcohol; thereby preventing them from falling back into the cycle of alcohol abuse. Finally, he also suggested a program which Gosport Council have used to provide temporary accommodation during the pandemic; 30 ‘Pandemic Pods’ which have been fitted with basic living accommodations to house up to 60 people⁸.

The one piece of good news out of all of this is that the future of LifeHouse is bright. Their facilities are undergoing a free reconstruction worth £25,000 by PMC Construction of Cosham; as well as the leasing of a shop on Albert Road, their capacity is set to double, with the potential to provide live music. However, it is absolutely vital that we continue to support LifeHouse and the men and women behind this endeavour, especially during these difficult times. There are lots of different ways to help, for example any musicians and bands from Portsmouth College are welcome; you can donate to the charity through their website and finally you can bring in supplies, chocolate and old clothes to keep them going!

Below is a wishlist on Amazon for Lifehouse.

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/2QU0CX3SXZD46/>

⁴https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810284/Drug-related_harms_in_homeless_populations.pdf#page22

⁵<https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Working%20with%20Alcohol%20Use%20in%20Homelessness%20Services.pdf>

⁶ TUC report

https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Mentalhealthfundingreport2_0.pdf

⁷ The Independent

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/mental-health-trusts-uk-funding-government-cuts-royal-college-psychiatrists-a8219486.html>

⁸<https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-30-heated-cabins-installed-gosport-car-park-60-homeless-people-during-lockdown-2528794>

