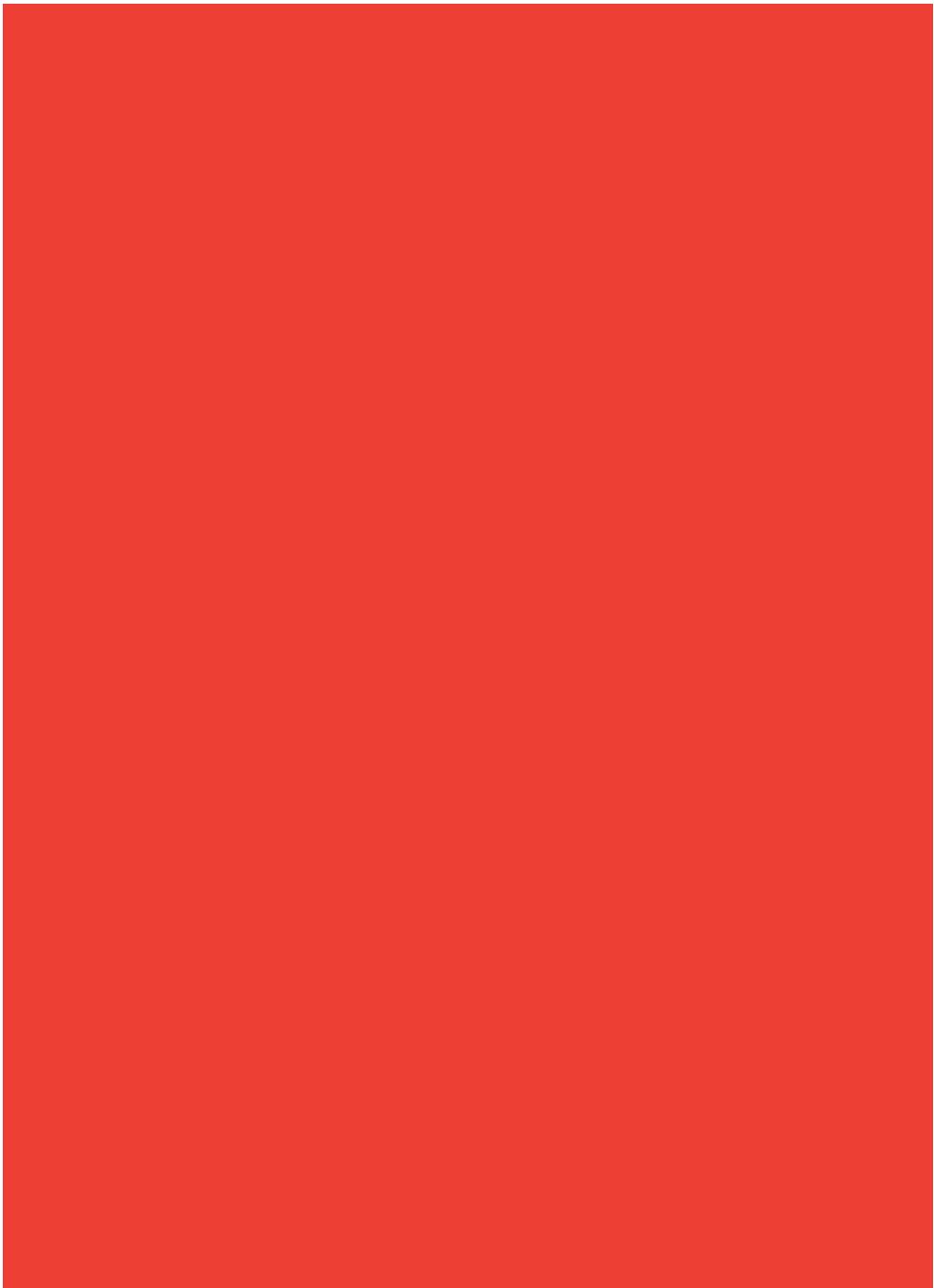


The
Book
of
(Holiday)
Awesome



So what's this all about?

Holidays are stressful. Long shopping lists, **tricky travel**, and visiting in-laws all snowball into busy weeks of blood-boiling bliss. When that tree's wedged up high, when the presents are all wrapped, when the party dress is squeezed on . . . well, sometimes you just want eggnog and a nap.

And that's when I hope you'll flip open **The Book of (Holiday) Awesome** for a little escape between gravy boats and Christmas lights, between holiday baking and board game nights. Flip it open when you're tired, flip it open when you're mad, **flip it open to feel festive**, flip it open to feel glad.

Because holidays give us great breaks and holidays give us great times. They're full of family moments and little chances to unwind. From the big banging moments at the end of the year to the little ones in the spring and the fall, it's fun bouncing through them with loved ones, and fun bouncing through them at all. Sometimes between **Christmas card stresses** and dinnertime messes, it's easy to forget we're celebrating some pretty big things: the birth of a country, **a time to remember**, a day to give thanks, or a Monday off in September.

So let your brain drift back to good memories, let your mind enjoy old times, **let your body slip into the awesome**, and let yourself relax and unwind.

I hope you have a very awesome holiday.

Love,
Neil

Getting a Christmas card from someone you thought you lost touch with

Surprise!
Your friendship is alive.

When the clock starts ticking and you **scatter and splatter** in distant directions, sometimes it seems like life's bumps and deflections sever ties and cut you off from the world.

Maybe kids arrived and you moved away, **maybe college came and you left for the day**, maybe your job got changed or you argued and fought, maybe time just rolled on and you stayed in the same spot.

But somehow that thick black line of friendship slowly faded and went away. Somehow the phone calls stopped coming as tomorrow became today.

And then! Out of nowhere! When you open a card and see the familiar cursive of an old friend . . . well, it's like a little light in your heart is finally flickering again.

Your eyes pop and jaw drops as you salivate and **soak up every word** of that little package of love. And between the lines of job updates and the words about the kids is an even bigger message hidden right below the lid.

CHRISTMAS · 3

It says: “I’d like to get together again. I remember our laughs and know how busy we’ve been. But I hope you agree that, **since life’s short and always wavering**, it’s even more important our friendship is worth enjoying . . . and worth savoring.”

AWESOME!

Walking into a grocery store and seeing the first shipment of eggnog

My buddy Mike's a sugar rat.

Whenever I visit his apartment downtown we end up ordering pizza, **watching old movies**, and playing video games. And when we're done snacking I always turn to him and say, "Hey man, you got any chocolate or anything?" We're close, me and Mike, and have long passed the point where we're too polite to only eat when we're offered food. I'll hunt around the man's fridge like it's my own and I expect him to do the same.

Now the funny thing is that when I ask him, Mike usually just heads to the kitchen and starts hunting through cupboards of really, really old Tupperware, **under stale half loaves of bread at the bottom of the freezer**, and behind dusty food processors above the fridge. Yes, he hunts until he pulls out a surprise pack of unopened Reese's Peanut Butter Cups or peels the lid off a brand new tub of ice cream.

My buddy Mike's a sugar rat.

See, he doesn't trust himself to have the good stuff in view, so he hides it in the cracks and corners of his place and

hopes he'll forget it. This is known as the **Out Of Sight, Out Of Mind Diet Plan**, and it seems to work wonders for him. After all, he doesn't gorge himself on candy bars that much, and whenever a sweet-toothed pal is jonesing for a fix, he just goes hunting until he finds the gold.

I think Mike's whole theory is the same one behind the entire eggnog industry.

Just think! They're saying "Here, enjoy this deliciously sweet and creamy drink, but—ah ah ah! You can only have it in December. Here, grind some cinnamon on top, **spike it with rum**, break out the crystal punch glasses for a sugary surprise in your mouth, but—ah ah ah! There's none available in the new year."

And thank goodness, **thank gracious**, thank God for that.

Because if we drank eggnog all the time we'd get pretty fat.

AWESOME!

Plugging in your Christmas lights from last year and having them all work

Whether you swirl strings of lights around your front hedges, **line them up perfectly around the roof**, or use them as a glittery frame around your garage door, you know as well as I do that one dead bulb dims the whole scene.

That's why it's a beautiful moment when you peel open that musty cardboard box in the basement, untie that tightly wound ball of **glass-and-wire knots**, and plug them in for the great big show.

When the bulbs are all sparkling it's time to get the whole neighborhood shining in a shimmering little moment of

AWESOME!

When that kid crying in the mall isn't your kid

There's nothing like a good old-fashioned **holiday hissy fit** in an elbow-to-elbow packed mall to help soothe your fraying nerves.

Whether it's the snotty-nosed toddler wailing on Santa's lap, **the sweaty snowsuit screamer** on the floor of the toys section, or your everyday baby bawler yelling to the food court heavens, it doesn't matter.

It's just a migraine moment in the middle of mall mayhem.

And whether you're taking care of your baby brother, **babysitting the neighbors**, or wheeling around your own **mutant offspring**, we've all been there. We all know the stress, we see the staring eyes, we all know the pain, and . . . we do sympathize.

But it's still great when that kid crying in the mall just isn't your kid.

Hark! The herald angels sing.

Glory to the kid free king.

AWESOME!

That moment near the holidays when there's suddenly cookies, chocolate, and candy everywhere

Roll those rum balls, sprinkle sparkles on the shortbread, and dump the bulk bag of candy canes in the crystal dish by the secretary's desk.

If we're gonna get fat, let's get fat together.

AWESOME!

Getting the person you have a crush on for office Secret Santa

I work in an office.

Crystal bowls of red jelly beans, **snowman ties**, and festive cheer all spring up in the cubicle hallways as the holidays get near. And sure, sure, holidays are about big love, family time, and being at home, but it's fun getting in the mood with the folks we spend our days with too.

And nothing says **Christmas Is Coming** more than the classic **Secret Santa** moment at your workplace. We all drop our names into a bowl and everyone picks one out of the pot to buy them a little present within the five or ten dollar budget.

Getting the person you have a crush on for your office Secret Santa is a beautiful moment. When you unfold the paper and reveal the object of your desire, suddenly you've got an excuse to send a signal to someone you've been flirting with all year.

Yes, now's the time to ditch the movie gift certificates, **box of chocolates**, and stuffed animals in Christmas hats and send them a little bit of love. Of course, the big question is—how? Here are three tips for some festive love:

1. **Ban the briefs.** Sending sexy lingerie or a bottle of cologne packaged in a box with a sweaty six-pack on the cover is way overboard. Coming across as the Christmas Pervert will get you on the Naughty List.
2. **Be a spy.** What's their favorite coffee? Where do they eat lunch? What do they do on weekends? Talk to their friends, see what's on their desk, and try to give them something personal that shows you know them.
3. **Make it a pair.** A home run could be including time together as part of your present. Try a classy "Homemade Lunch" in the cafeteria where you bust out your Grandma's famous meatball recipe, or how about a set of coupons for "Five Free Coffee Runs," where they get to join you for donuts down the street.

Getting the person you have a crush on for your office Secret Santa is a great big moment of opportunity. Because let's be honest—a lot of great relationships start up at work, and there's nothing wrong with telling your special someone that they mean something to you.

Make your move.

AWESOME!

The first big snowfall of the season

Crystal flakes form in space before floating down from cloudy skies.

Soon blankets of white coat sidewalks like icing and **frosty corners freeze** in shady yards by the shed. Scarves twist tightly around necks, noses snuffle and turn red, and everyone walks the streets with wide eyes and snowy lashes. Boots slip and slide on the sidewalk, **mittens swipe seats in the park**, and branches glow under a silent new moonlit world.

Sometimes the first snowfall gets your bones excited about everything the season brings: family moments, **quiet times**, eating foods you loved as a kid. It's a sign of venturing into a new world while bunkering into an old one at the same time.

When the snow flies down for the first time everything slows down around you and **nostalgia bombs** burst in your brain . . . of slip-sliding to school on sidewalks, slushy snowball fights in the park, and sticky mittens rolling snowmen with your sisters on the front lawn . . .

AWESOME!

When the neighbor shovels your little patch of the sidewalk

Sidewalks bring us together.

Fences split yards, **lawns divide homes**, and invisible property lines are scribbled on dusty blueprints in city archives. But somehow those little strips of concrete tie us all together and connect the dots between our lives.

It's a beautiful moment when a friendly neighbor shovels the snow off of your walk after a winter snowstorm. Swaddled in snow-packed mitts, **sweaty scarves**, and salty boots, they're just lending a helping hand of kindness and some friendly season's greetings.

AWESOME!

When strangers wish you happy holidays

Holidays are hectic. Gift shopping, **mall hopping**, money dropping, and through it all you're planning in-law sleepovers, giant family dinners, and complicated travel plans.

It's nice in these roaring revved-up moments when a complete stranger catches your eye and wishes you a heart-felt happy holidays.

Whether it's the cashier at the grocery store, the receptionist at your gym, or the lady getting a perm beside you at the salon, it's nice scoring that warm little season's greetings to remind us we're all chasing the same ol' thing.

That's right: Love, big hugs, **family time**, and cozy company right when we need it most.

AWESOME!

Eating all the chocolates in your Advent calendar at once

Nice try, Advent calendar.

You hid those **brown chocolate lumps** in your thin plastic bones and camouflaged it all in Christmas colors. Your perforated doors were locked shut and you teased us with larger and larger squares leading up to the big day.

But it got complicated.

We missed a couple days and then got two the next. Then we decided eating two was what we liked best. And that big door on Christmas Eve was too much to handle. So we ate all your chocolate in a big chocolate eating scandal.

AWESOME!

The smell of a fresh Christmas tree

I grew up on artificial.

Whenever it was time to put up the tree, we'd clomp down to the basement and pull out the giant dented-and-torn cardboard box that looked like it'd been through a war and a washing machine. Inside was a **rat's nest** of jabby branches with faded spray-paint tags on the metal spokes. There were red for long ones, orange for medium, and yellow for the short bushy ones on top.

My sister and I would begin sorting branches before stabbing and twisting them into the stem. The end result was a **sparse Sears special** that looked like a cross between Charlie Brown's tree and one dying after a forest fire. It wasn't pretty, but by the time we drenched it in tinsel waterfalls, **construction paper loops**, and popcorn strings, it sure looked pretty to us.

Yes, fake was easier, **fake was free**, fake was the only way our tree could be.

But there was always something sweet about going to the neighbor's place and smelling the fresh pine from the

freshly sawed tree in their living room. And I know those trees cost more, leave needles everywhere, and are chopping down nature.

But they sure smell a lot like Christmas.

And that smells a lot like

AWESOME!