



Reflections of a River Rat:

The grinch of holiday shoppers

By Jim Holleran

I made a pledge last week to do my Christmas shopping at Target and Macy's when I learned both would be closed on Thanksgiving Day. This was a step in the right direction, I reasoned, away from the commercialism at the start of the holiday shopping season. Let's preserve Thanksgiving as a day for families to count their blessings and savor their kin rather than crowd the starting line of the Christmas shopping sprint.

If my debit card could carry a hunting scope, I would keep Target and Macy's in its sights. They would be my exclusive holiday stores.



Then I learned Target and Macy's weren't alone. To my surprise, Wal-Mart, Best Buy, Kohl's, Macy's, Dick's Sporting Goods, JCPenney and several others would be closed too. Of course, the family-owned businesses would all be closed. This was positive news. Give the employees the day off. Reverse the trend that threatened to turn our lives more into Potterville than Bedford Falls.

The only negative was that my Target/Macy's plan had unfolded. There was no way I could shop at all the stores that honored Thanksgiving. When I aired my frustration, my partner of 40 years dropped a reality bombshell on me.

"Jim, you are the grinch of shoppers," deadpanned Mary Frances. "You're impatient, grouchy, you rush. It's distressing for us. It's disturbing."

Geez, I sounded like a candidate for a 14-step program. "Hi, my name is Jim. I've been a recovering shopper for ..."

Truth be told, I suffer from a common predisposition of most men – I don't shop, I buy.

When I buy clothes, I head for the clearance rack. When I go to the grocery store, I don't comparison shop, I simply grab the product that I have used before. We're in the process of overhauling our kitchen. I thought I deserved the husband's merit badge for examining samples of flooring and countertop granite. But picking through styles and colors of backsplashes and tiles. No way. My vote will be overridden anyway by my one-woman board of directors.

I was feeling upbeat last week when I dodged Black Friday for yet another year. Then I learned the next day would be Small Business Saturday. I like that concept, supporting small businesses over the big box stores. But I wasn't moved to go shopping. I never participate in CyberMonday because I don't want to spend Thanksgiving Weekend enslaved to the internet in search of bargains.

My idea of Christmas shopping is to take a walk through an antique mall or down a street of eclectic shops. I never intend to be one of those lemmings meandering through a mall, wearing shorts in the dead of winter, dripping ice cream and shrieking "OMG!" when they spot a friend.

Mary used to cast a dubious look in my direction when my son Liam and I invoked our strategy in mall clothing stores. We would pick a clearing against a

wall, close to the fitting rooms but within earshot of our party, then sit back and read or work a crossword puzzle.

My last recollection of mall shopping was the time when traffic gridlocked outside Eastview Mall in suburban Rochester. Motorists were tied up for 3-plus hours. Several ran out of gas. Most were angry. I read the newspaper story and chuckled.

My idea of shopping is to haunt odds-and-ends shops where vinyl records or jewelry or house parts or an antique box might transport you back in time to a memory of your youth. One of my favorite finds was a Steve Urkel doll that I should have wrapped up to needle a basketball buddy. But that guy abused our friendship when I worked one of his AAU games, blaming a 40-point loss on the referees. So I left the ultimate find on the store shelf.

So much has changed since my youth when blue laws were in effect. Back in the 1960s, they restricted commerce on Sundays, emphasizing the Puritanical concept that it was a day of rest intended for family gatherings. Back in the day, you might find a movie theatre or a diner open, but the department stores and grocery stores were closed. That landscape has been supplanted by the image of the blue Amazon Prime van creeping through everyone's neighborhoods.

When I grudgingly go shopping with my wife, I can't help but snicker when I think of the stand-up comic's routine. She was complaining about her husband moving too slowly, when she called out: "C'mon, pick up the pace, and I'll let you stand outside the windows at Victoria's Secret."

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