

This booklet is one of seven new Christmas stories from Wageningen, the Netherlands. With these stories, ZinZin – a local cultural center without a permanent residence – and the Wageningen public library (bblthk) celebrate the Christmas season of 2021 in a connecting way.

Wageningen residents contributed to these new Christmas stories in various ways. It started with a request to all residents: send us a photo, drawing or painting telling what this Christmas means to you. These images were the source of inspiration for seven amateur writers from all corners of Wageningen society, who attended a writing workshop together. The image the author of this story chose is featured on the front of this card.

Photo cover: Fatma Al-Manji

The Spirit of Christmas

December, the most anticipated month of the year. The time to reflect and look back at the past year and share memories. The time reserved for family and friends. During December, my family comes together at our old town house to share a good time by the barbeque grill, eat and laugh at silly old memories by the outskirts of old town Muscat.

My father, on the other hand, is usually busy around this time of the year. He is an old merchant at the traditional market called Mutrah Souk. I love spending time with him at the store because I get to see people from around the world buying presents for what seems to be an important day called “Christmas.”

Growing up, I never understood what the fuss around Christmas was all about. I tried to grasp it, my mom usually described it as a western version of Eid al-Fitr. That sort of made sense, but not really, until my father and I came across an old man lost in the middle of Mutrah Souk.

“Excuse me, do you speak English?” asked the old man.

“Yes sir, I do speak a little bit of English but my son here is better than me...” my father replied.

“Ali come quick and help this dear old man!” my father yelled in Arabic.

From the look of him, the old man had just arrived from a very cold country as he was dressed in a thick white and red attire. He resembled the old townsmen like my grandfather, but judging from his outfit he couldn't be a local.

“Yes sir, how may I help you?” I asked.

“Errm, could you tell me where I am? My sleigh was caught by heavy winds, we must have landed at the wrong place but we aren't sure where we are. This is an emergency because I need to deliver presents to the kids before next week,” he answered frantically.

“Oh, I'm so sorry to hear. I'm not sure where you are headed but this is the traditional souk of Muscat called Mutrah Souk.”

“Muscat? How far away is Europe from here? Oh, this is a mess... What will I do with all these presents?”

My father noticed his panic and tried to assist him. He welcomed him inside the store and offered him some Arabic coffee with dates, the epitome of

Arabian hospitality. The old man really appreciated it and began explaining his story...

What we didn't understand from his previous questions was that he travelled around the globe annually to deliver presents to children. A wonderful concept to us, because who wouldn't love to have presents every year?

He said that every Christmas, it was his proud mission to put smiles on children's faces. The old man was astonished to find out that we did not celebrate Christmas, he thought everyone celebrated it all around the world. He then went on and on to describe Christmas as the time when family gathered around by the Christmas tree to exchange presents. But right before they could get their presents, the children would get a visit from Santa Claus because he had the coolest presents. This was the most anticipated event of the year for the town's children. So, he was now left with a big pile of presents and no children to share the joy with.

Watching him describe this day, my dad couldn't help but interrupt and ask “Why don't you share the presents with the townsfolk in Mutrah souk?”

I translated my father's question, and the old man leaped with joy. “I've never celebrated Christmas in a souk, but this sounds like a great idea!”

The townsmen and the children gathered by the souk under a big palm tree. It was a magical experience for all of us, as we all got a present from the old man. My present was a pair of funny looking wooden shoes called clogs, a great souvenir from the Netherlands. I never knew who the old man was until I opened the card attached to the present. It read

“Thank you for showing me the spirit of Christmas. Merry Christmas and happy new year...

- Santa“

I just want to tell you: 

Now it's your turn. We hope the card inspires you to surprise someone with a personal message. And if you got this message: feel the connection and celebrate Christmas your way!



Fatma Al-Manji, describes herself as an amateur writer and flower fanatic. Fatma currently lives in wageningen and enjoys exploring new ways to interact with the city that she calls her home. She has created her own Christmas tradition and spends it cooking new recipes with friends. She describes writing as “A refuge for her imagination”.

