

I can't believe it's January, 2014. We say that Christmas 'came and went', which means that it was over very quickly, in the blink of an eye. I know that all around the world, people celebrate New Year's Eve with big parties, and in many different ways. Usually, we have a quiet, family time at home. We typically buy food like smoked salmon, cheeses and wines, and chocolates. As it's cold and dark outside, we always light a fire. And then we watch the New Year being celebrated around the world on television. It's a quiet, lazy evening for us. However, this year was quite different. We were invited to the house of a couple who always have a big celebration on New Year's Eve. They have what we call an 'open house'. It means that anyone can turn up. Their house is really decorated with Christmas lights outside; it looks like something out of Disney Land. They have won awards for their decorations, and often you will see cars slow down as they drive by, so the people in the cars can have a good look. Well, this year, they had a fire pit outside, where we could roast hot dogs, and marshmallows. Inside, the kitchen was full of more food and drinks. We played Bingo in the lounge, and we also had fireworks outside. At one point, a policeman came by to warn us about the fireworks: they were too close to the road. But by then, Dan, the home owner, had already let off the big fireworks, so we were quite satisfied. The children ran around the property, through all of the Christmas lights, playing games, and squealing with delight. And I wandered around, as I usually do, with my camera, photographing all the pretty scenes that Dan and his wife had created for the holidays. I came upon an angel blowing a trumpet, next to a group of Christmas trees. "Perfect!" I thought. The scene glowed with hope, beauty, and goodness. It was a physical representation of what, I think, we all want for the New Year. It's interesting how a simple scene like that, even one made of plastic, can give a powerful image of the beauty that we can find in life, and of the meaningful future that the human family desires.

1. 'Came and went' is a useful phrase that emphasizes how time goes quickly.

a. Our vacation came and went. The time flew (by) because we were having so much fun.

b. I was nervous about the interview, but it came and went. It was over in the blink of an eye.

2. 'As it's cold and dark outside'.... Here the 'as' is used the same way as 'because'.

- a. As it's raining, we won't go for a walk.
 - b. As the flight is cancelled, we will catch the train instead.
3. 'At one point, a policeman came by...' Here the phrase 'at one point' is used to mean 'at a certain time in the party', 'during the party', 'while the party was still going'.
- a. At one point during the movie, we got up and left because it was so bad.
 - b. At one point during the lecture, I fell asleep. My friend had to wake me up!
4. 'To let off/ set off fireworks'. Two verbs are used when we talk about lighting fireworks. The preposition 'off' is used to add the meaning that the fireworks 'fly off' once they have been lit.
- a. We all stood back, and Mr. Jones set off the first rocket.
 - b. He was in charge of letting off the fireworks.
5. 'Squeal' and 'shriek' are fabulous verbs that describe a kind of scream. They are both high pitched, the first probably being the highest. It is the noise made by young children having fun, or a pig and sometimes other animals stuck somewhere, or in pain (a squeal). 'Shriek' is like a scream when someone is scared or angry. Again, because it is a high pitched sound, it is associated with women more than men.
- a. The children squealed with delight when the clown walked in the room.
 - b. The lady shrieked, "You clumsy fool!" when the waitress spilled red wine on her white dress.

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