
ENHANCE CHERISHED *Holiday* MEMORIES & TRADITIONS

Each year, my husband buys me a new ornament that reflects the current year's adventures. They always reflect somewhere we have traveled together or seen together that reminds us of the wonderful gift we have been given to spend our lives together for the past year. It is fun to decorate the tree with these very precious ornaments each year.

-Dan W.

On Christmas Eve, we gather our closest friends and family for dinner. We host a feast of seven fishes (we include non-seafood items for those who do not eat fish). We then have a secret Santa gift exchange and sing Christmas carols. The best part of the evening is when we all "break bread" together. Our church gives out loaves of blessed bread and we share this with our friends and family on Christmas Eve. We end the evening at midnight mass. It's food, fun, and remembering the true holiday spirit.

-Tina Semethy

Every year during my childhood, my dad would record me and my siblings waking up on Christmas morning and coming down the stairs to see all the presents under the tree.

-Amanda Sunderlik

My favorite Christmas memory with my Italian family is Christmas Eve at my grandma's house with homemade pasta/sauce, meatballs, and braciolo. Everyone brings small change because after dinner we would gamble and play seven and a half while eating homemade Christmas cookies that we made with my grandma a few days prior.

**- Brooke Monnot, SLP
Green Meadows in Louisville, OH**

My favorite holiday memory is of my grandmother, my dad, and myself making ethnic pierogies on Christmas Eve from scratch. We would meet in the morning, make them, let them dry, and then she would boil and fry them and have us all over for an early dinner. We would then open presents and go to candlelight church service.

- Becky Strauss-Sweet

Every year, we get each child and ourselves an ornament for the tree. As the children grew and left the nest, they took their ornaments with them. It is fun to look back and remember each year. My favorite ornaments are from my childhood. My Dad taught my siblings and I to ski and I have an ornament of a little girl on skis. My second favorite ornament is a plastic icicle - it doesn't look extraordinary, but my grandma had them on her tree. I got them all, but over the years, the plastic has become brittle and I am down to one cherished icicle. So many wonderful memories hanging on my tree!

— Denise Rose

My favorite holiday memory is going to church on Christmas Eve with my parents and siblings. We would then get food ready and go to my grandma and grandpa with all my cousins, aunts, and uncles. My Grandma would make a few different soups and we would have multiple appetizers.

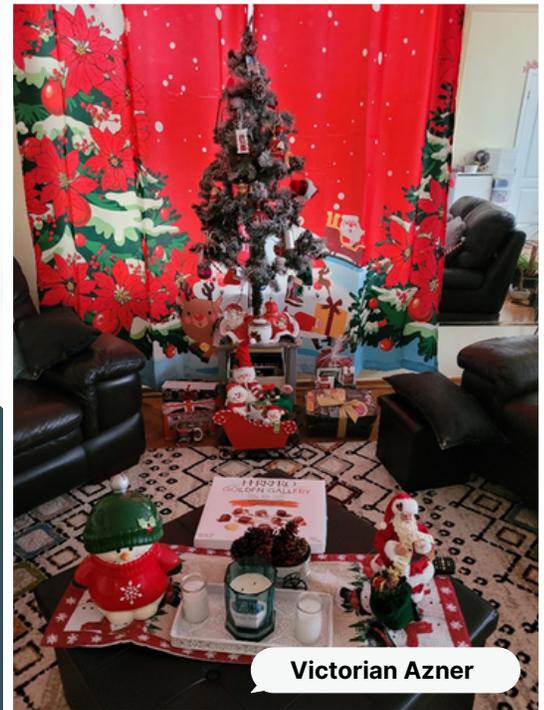
-Anna Phelps

Our family has done this tradition every Christmas since the grandchildren were little. After indulging in all the delicious food and the giving of gifts, we play a few games. Over the years, some of the games have changed, but the two that bring in the most laughs (and competition) are Left-Right-Center (a dice game where the winner gets all the money in the pot) and the other is a game where you take a bunch of trinkets and roll them up in a BIG ball of Saran wrap. Each player only gets enough time to unroll the ball to grab a trinket (or two) until the player next to them rolls a double on the dice. Everyone gets in on these games, from the youngest to the oldest.

-Rhonda R. Hodo, MS, CCC- SLP, RAC- CT

Every year we get a Baskin Robbins ice cream cake with chocolate cake and chocolate chip ice cream (because that's Jesus's favorite) we have them decorate the top to say "Happy Birthday Jesus" and then at the end of the evening we sing happy birthday and blow out the candles. One year, my husband called in to order the cake and he told the clerk what he wanted on top. The clerk asks "Happy Birthday who?" My husband says "Jesus". The clerk still isn't understanding and asks my husband "Peases?" and to that my husband says "No, Jesus....the Savior of the world!" Then the gentleman shouts "Oh JESUS!" They both laughed and till this day it is one of my favorite stories.

- Mary Cockrell PT



As a Filipino, I have numerous Christmas Holiday traditions that we still follow even though I live in the US.

- Our family goes to church for 9 days up until Christmas eve. We call it "Simbang Gabi". We believe that if you complete the nine days whatever you wish for will come true.
- After attending church on Christmas Eve, our family gathers for dinner. We call this "Noche Buena". This is also the time where we do our Christmas gift exchange.
- We have special food that we also eat only on Christmas. We call it Puto Bumbong and Bibingka.
- Christmas decorations outside and inside the house as early as September. I started mine in November.
- We also used to do Christmas Carols where we weny to different houses. Money collected was given to Church donations and used to buy Christmas gifts.
- On Christmas Day, children accept cash gifts which we call "Aginaldo" from their Godmothers and Godfathers. Filipinos believe that this money brings good luck.

These are just a few of Christmas traditions that my family still celebrates. However, we stopped singing Christmas Carols because I think my neighbors would find it strange if I stood on their front steps singing Christmas songs.

- Rhea Martinez



Our family always lights up our Advent Wreath every year, one candle each Sunday of Advent symbolizes hope, love, joy, and peace. After reading a verse from the Bible, we all enjoy some hot cocoa and some freshly baked sugar cookies.

-Marolo II Alfa

Each Christmas Eve, my husband, 2 boys and I have appetizers and watch Christmas movies. The boys enjoy going to the store and picking out what food we will have and begin planning out their order of Christmas movies! We sneak some pictures in front of the Christmas tree, being sure to include the dog as well! After the kids go to bed, my husband and I place the gifts from Santa under the tree. Then we open a bottle of champagne and watch the movie "It's A Wonderful Life"

-Trisha Kubiak

Elf on the shelf is my favorite family tradition currently. It's like Christmas every morning watching my daughter look for the elf.

-Philip Jostes

In my family, I started our own holiday tradition around 15 years ago when my children were small. My husband and I have four children close in age and it always seemed like the present unwrapping went so quickly and things were a mess! I wanted to find a way to slow things down and open each gift individually so that they were able to appreciate the gifts and see what each person got. I typically spend a specific amount on each child so that things stay even. I mark each gift under the tree with just a number and try to have an equal number of gifts for each of the kids, even if some are small ones and some are larger. My husband and I usually just have a few gifts mixed in.

I create a master list with the numbers and gifts and who each number is for. Each number has a trivia question attached. Each person then gets to open gifts one at a time in a basic rotation. I read off a trivia question and each person has to answer before they get to open their gift. If they don't know the answer to the question, they can ask for help from the other siblings or from either parent and we make sure that the question gets answered.

The trivia question styles have changed over the years to remain age appropriate. When they were very small, I chose questions pertaining to the family such as middle names, ages of siblings, or questions about their favorite shows or characters. When they started school, I added in some math questions, spelling questions, or school-based trivia. I have always tailored the questions to each child somewhat so that it remains fun! As the kids have grown into their teens, now all our questions focus on music.

I scour the internet for questions about all our favorite artists, songs, and often I add a few questions that I'm sure that they don't know just to spark more conversation and introduce them to new music or artists. We end up helping each other out by singing a few bars of the song, giving clues about the song or artist, or even playing the song if someone can't figure it out. We all look forward to this each year and it is truly enjoyable. It slows down Christmas morning and helps us spend more time as a family and not just open gifts!

-Jamie Brach



Every year on the weekend after Thanksgiving, my family throws a gingerbread house building /soup party for friends and some family. Everyone brings a soup to share, candy for the gingerbread houses and I bake and assemble all the gingerbread houses. It completely sets the mood for the upcoming holiday of Christmas and spending time together. Leftover soups are shared and frozen, or sent to the folks that couldn't make it. This is by far my favorite get together every year

Lisa Johnson - COTA / (in IL)

As a child, my cousins and I were always placed at the kitchen table to eat Christmas dinner while my older sister and remaining aunts, uncles, grandparents, and parents all sat at the "grown-up" table. When I reached the age of 12, I asked my mom while eating thanksgiving dinner, "When do I get to sit at the grown-up table for Christmas?" My Grandma happened to be retiring this particular year and my mom said, "I have a surprise for you! You get to sit at the grown-up table this year and you get to celebrate your grandmother's retirement along with the rest of the adults this year for Christmas!" This was great! Finally, my turn to be at the "grown-up" table! Additionally, the family had heard that my grandmother had won the pick 6 lottery and she is buying everyone sitting at the grown-up table a new car. The whole family was in a "boil" about this, and we were very anxious for Christmas to come so we could all see our new cars. When Christmas finally arrived, I told my mom I wanted to get to grandma's house early so I could help get ready for dinner (and make some brownie points that could result in me getting the "best" car).

During dinner Grandma announced that she'd like everyone at the table to meet her in front of the house because she wants to give us all something special for Christmas. I was more than ready to get the keys to my new car (which I was certain was sitting outside in front of the house waiting for me). She then gave each one of us a small package wrapped in the nicest giftwrap paper. I thought to myself that these must be the kind of packages new car keys must come in. We were instructed to wait until everyone got their package and open them all at the same time. The time had finally come. The house was quiet, and everyone was anxious to see what their keys would open (that was parked outside on the street.)

Grandma said "Ok, open your packages now". We tore into those packages and then into the cardboard box underneath. To all of our surprise, she did actually buy us all new cars - sports cars, luxury cars, pickup trucks, and even one tow truck!!!! There was only one thing we had not anticipated!!!! We never expected her to buy cars from the car manufacturer she bought them from. She bought us all cars made by "Mattel" - the cast iron toy car maker of "hot wheels". Grandma laughed and said to us all, "I never won any lottery, but if I had won, I would've bought you all your dream cars!" She continued by saying "You all made my dreams come true by coming to Christmas dinner and spending Christmas as a great big family."

I'll never forget that Christmas!!!! I can't remember a Christmas that was more exciting for me as a child.

-Sheldon Williams

My cherished holiday memory is for as long as I can remember, my brother, my parents and I have always had "game night" on Christmas Eve (this now also includes my brother's wife, my significant other and our newest addition as of November, my nephew). Each year, our parents would buy a new game as our "family gift". When we were younger, it was usually something more competitive such as ping-pong or foosball, but now that we are older, it is usually a comedic game or a game that my parents grew up playing. We all sit around laughing and reminiscing about fond holiday memories and playing these games. We are still competitive, of course, but it has always been amusing and one of my favorite times of the year. My family is very close, so this is a very cherished memory for us all.

-Laci Brooks

I always remember stringing real popcorn for the tree as a child. This is something I now enjoy doing with my own children!

-Krizek

My favorite holiday memory is being home on Christmas Day and staying in our pajamas all day long and just relaxing, enjoying snacks, music, and movies with my immediate family.

-Matt Steele

My loving memory is getting up early Christmas morning with my mom (as her birthday was Dec 24th) and making homemade yeast rolls. It took two hours to peel the potatoes, put together the candy yams, make chocolate and pumpkin pie, and get the ham ready for the oven and corn while watching the Christmas Parade!

-Sandy Tompkins

My favorite memory (although ironically something I never enjoyed eating), is my immigrant parents making chocolate chestnut pockets! It is a fond memory because it reminds me of a time when my mom was younger and she was very active around the holidays making homemade honey balls, fig cookies, & these chestnut chocolate pockets. It was such a process, but she was patient and enjoyed making these pastries as a part of our holiday tradition. They all would be dusted with powdered sugar or drizzled with honey, and I always helped to sprinkle rainbow sprinkles on them. I can relate as an Occupational Therapist even more now, with my years of experience, how important these traditions are and how we enable others to continue with life satisfaction by helping others keeping with their traditions via adaptations and modifications!

Paula Kaltman, OTR/L

My family tradition is on Christmas Eve - everyone gets together by table after we see first star in the sky, and we wish each other Merry Christmas and share oplatek (white piece of thin bread). Then we eat 12 dishes and sing Christmas carols.

-Leo Werner