

My Family's
Christmas Traditions

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It's Christmas Day at my home in central Kentucky. The toasty warmth from the old-fashioned coal stove drifts lazily through the house. Heavenly smells waft from the kitchen and throughout the house. In the living room, gaily wrapped packages rest beneath the Christmas tree which stands serenely in the front window with its bright lights flashing. Another traditional Mefford Christmas is under way.

My family's Christmas celebration can be divided into three major categories: the Christmas tree, exchanging gifts, and traditional Christmas food.

Our Christmas celebration is traditional^{al} because every year we do virtually the same activities in the same manner. Everything we do has some significance (to us) that makes it worth repeating. Although, these traditions have become conventionalized with the passage of time, they are still enjoyable. Also, there is room left for creativity. That is to say that there ^{are} ~~is~~ still ways to make little changes to make these activities different, but at the same time they remain virtually the same.

One of our oldest Christmas traditions is the Christmas tree. Every year we place our decorated tree in its' place of honor in front of the living room window.

The main difference in the tree from year to year is the tree itself. Every year we select a fresh tree; we've never had an artificial tree.

The same decorations have been used for as long as I can remember. Every decoration has some significance. For instance, there are ornaments that have been around for over a decade (possibly even two decades) and some that have been purchased within the last five years. Some of

the ornaments are special because they are homemade. I made some of the ornaments when I was a child--so did my brothers and sisters. There is now another generation of ornaments appearing--the ones made by my sister's two children.

Each ornament is representative of something; much more, like a special or memorable event in someone's life. Actually each ornament stands for a member of my family. It's like a family tree because there's an ornament on it representing every member of my immediate family. Therefore, the Christmas tree ornaments are traditional and a part of our expressive culture because they are symbolic to our familial folk group.

The tree is a part of our traditional expressive culture because it's symbolic to us. Also, artisitry and creativity are involved in the decoration of the tree.

The reason we always have a tree is because it serves to remind us of the true meaning of Christmas and why we're celebrating. It helps us forget the commercialism of Christmas and to remember the night of Jesus' birth so many years ago.

Another of our Christmas traditions is exchanging gifts. Every year, regardless of our financial situation, we always exchange gifts. First and foremeost we do this because it's a way of showing our love and appreciation of each other.

Another reason we exchange gifts is because it's symbolic of God's gift of His Son to mankind and also of the gifts the Wise Men brought to the Christ Child.

Since we always wait until the week of Christmas to decorate our tree, we also usually wait until that week to do our gift shopping.

Sometimes we haven't even began to shop until Christmas Eve. I can give three reasons we end up doing our shopping at the last minute. One reason is because it's more economical because there are always a lot of great last-minute bargains. Another reason is because we always procrastinate until there's no time left to put it off. But, the major reason we always wait until the last minute is money. Christmas Eve is usually the only time when we have both the money and the time to shop.

After we've finally completed our shopping, we wrap our purchases and place them under the tree on an old bedsheet. The reason we put down an old sheet is so the presents won't get dirty from lying on the floor. The sheet never shows because once it's laid down, it immediately becomes covered with brightly wrapped packages.

The presents stay under the tree until mid-afternoon Christmas Day.

The last of my family's Christmas traditions that I want to discuss is food.

Food has always played a vital part in our Christmas celebration. Every Christmas we enjoy certain foods that we never eat at any other time of the year; therefore they have become synonymous with celebrating Christmas.

For instance, we usually have ham or turkey as the main course of our dinner. We also have a lot of other dishes. ^{They} ~~There~~ would be chosen from the following list: oysters, stuffing, peas, macaroni and cheese, rolls, sweet potatoes, greens, mashed potatoes, and cranberry sauce.

We have a lot of other Christmas food traditions, too. For example, we always have store-bought Christmas candy, apples and oranges on

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Christmas morning. There's always both homemade and store-brought cookies with eggnog to drink with them. The homemade cookies are cut out in shapes symbolic of Christmas. Such as, stars, bells, angels, Santas, etc.

Another example of one of our Christmas food traditions is the baking of certain cakes that we never make at any other time of the year. We always have fruitcake, pecan cake, and jam cake. This is unusual because no one would ever even consider making one of these three types of cakes other than at Christmastime. Almost everyone in my family enjoys both pecan and jam cakes, however, it almost unanimous that everyone dislikes fruitcake. This is an example of a tradition that is carried on more by force of habit than by anything else.

On the night of December 25th, the celebration comes to a halt, ending almost as quickly as it had began. All the wrappings, once smooth and beautiful are now wrinkled and torn, are scattered throughout the house. The remains of our Christmas feast are stored away for another day. In the living room everyone collects his or her gifts together and carts them away to his or her room like newfound treasures.

Everyone is a mixture of emotions-both sad and relieved that another Christmas has come and gone in what seems like a few seconds instead of hours. Thoughts of what might have been linger in our minds. We have shared yet another Christmas together and the only visible reminders of it are all the presents and the Christmas tree, the unsung hero of this holiday, still standing and now more beautiful than ever. Other reminders aren't so easily seen- the feelings

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of togetherness, the unspoken joy of just being together, the faces that are a combination of tears and smiles.

Yes, another Christmas has come and gone, but not without touching us all and adding something vital and important to our lives. As the final seconds of Christmas tick away on the clock, in the coal stove a dying ember fights to hold onto its last leash on life. Then suddenly, it stops burning and goes out-the same way Christmas has-slowly, silently, and with unbounded beauty and purpose.