As a kid growing up it was all about the Presents. It was about My Mom & Pop who would Decorate the outside of the House with lights on the House, in the Bushes, with Plastic Pieces in the yard. Sometimes there was even a Santa on top of the roof. Yet there was always that Nativity Scene with Mary, Joseph & Baby Jesus. Every Room in the house was always Decorated including the Bathroom. My Mom always tried to put up the Christmas Tree right after Thanksgiving. This was she & we could enjoy Christmas a lot longer. For My Mom Loved to Decorate the Tree with Lights, Garland, Ornaments & some that we made for her when we were Kids. As we grew older sometimes she would have a Different Theme for her Tree. There was always that Special Angel that she put on top of the Tree too. Then at the age of 10 or so me & one of my Brothers found out that Mom & Pop were really Santa Claus. Or as she tried to explain when we were older that her & Pop were Santa's helpers. Yet for years we kids never let on to Mom & Pop's Secret. My Mom was a Big Kid at heart when it came to Christmas. She always made a big deal on Christmas Eve at putting out the Cookies & Milk for Santa. Yet as we got older there was a request for an added glass of Tea for Santa. Her explanation was that Santa got kind of tired of just drinking Milk all the time. Of course as kids we would roll our eyes & put out that glass of Tea too. By the time I was 17 or 18 we decided to come clean with Mom about the Cookies, Milk & Tea thing. I broke my Heart to have to tell her that us Kids knew she & Pop were Santa’s helpers. Yet for years no kids never let on to Mom & Pop’s Secret. My Mom was a Big Kid at heart when it came to Christmas. She always made a big deal on Christmas Eve at putting out the Cookies & Milk for Santa. Yet as we got older there was a request for an added glass of Tea for Santa. Her explanation was that Santa got kind of tired of just drinking Milk all the time. Of course as kids we would roll our eyes & put out that glass of Tea too. By the time I was 17 or 18 we decided to come clean with Mom about the Cookies, Milk & Tea thing. I broke my Heart to have to tell her that us Kids knew she & Pop were Santa. Mom took it in stride yet she knew that a Family Tradition was shot down.

Growing up Later on Christmas day we had several family members come over. There was always Laughter, Dinner, Talk & exchanging of Gifts. Before a meal there was always a Prayer said Blessing of the Food, for the the one’s that made it. Also there was the Blessing of our Loved ones weather they Lived Near or Far. There was the making of memories that carried us through would last a Lifetime. For some of those People are no longer with us, yet the memories are still there.

Now With My Mom being gone for 6 years now Christmas Day are still the same, yet it is Different too. On the way to My Brother’s house I always whisper a Merry Christmas to My Mom & wish Jesus a Happy Birthday. It makes me feel kind of close to My Mom that way. Our Family still get together, we still say a Prayer before our Meal to ask God to Continue to Bless & Watch over us. To Also Bless & Watch over us in the coming of the New Year. We ask God to Bless & watch over our Family & Friends who aren’t with us that day too. As well as asking God to Bless our Food. Even with an empty space at our Table, our Family still grows. Maybe not by leaps & bounds, but it still grows. We still exchange Gifts share some laughter & yes still making Memories too.

Yet even with all this we still remember the Reason for The Season. It’s about a Little baby Boy who was Born underneath a Bright Star. Who grew up, Died on the Cross to Forgive us for our Sins. Yes, Jesus is The Reason for the Season.

What Christmas Has Meant to Me!

By Wyla Goodman

What Christmas Has Meant to Me!

Faith & Family

December 2019

A Special Supplement to

News Journal
The origins of Christmas caroling

The festive nature of the holiday season makes it an ideal time to sing, especially in groups. Perhaps it’s no surprise then that caroling, a tradition that dates back many centuries, ultimately collided with Christmas. Caroling and Christmas caroling are two different things. According to History.org, the origins of modern Christmas caroling can be traced to wassailing, a term that has evolved for more than a millennium. What started as a simple greeting gradually became part of a toast made during ritualized drinking. Time magazine notes that the word “wassail,” which appeared in English literature as early as the eighth century, eventually came to mean the wishing of good fortune on one’s neighbors, though no one can say for certain when this particular development occurred.

During medieval times, farmers in certain parts of Britain would drink a beverage to boost the health of their crops and encourage the fertility of their animals. By 1600, farmers in some parts of Britain were still engaging in this ritual, and some were by now taking a wassail bowl filled with a toasting beverage around the streets. These wassailers would stop by neighboring homes and offer a warm drink, all while wishing good fortune on their neighbors.

During this period, wassailing had nothing to do with Christmas, but that began to change in Victorian England, when Christmas became more commercialized and popular. It was during this time when publishers began circulating carols, forever linking the tradition of wassailing with Christmas.

Christmas caroling as Victorian Englishmen knew it might have fallen by the wayside. But while carols may no longer go door-to-door singing Christmas songs and wassail bowls filled with this toasting beverage were by now taking a back seat in this ritual, and some carolers at their local mall or church.

The national Retail Federation reports that retail sales in November and December of 2016 reached $656.3 billion, marking a 4 percent increase over the same period a year prior. For budget-conscious families, entering the holiday season is a magical time of year when many people celebrate their faith and express their love and appreciation for their family members, but there are ways to exchange gifts that can stretch families’ budgets.

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Great gifts for people who help you year-round

The holiday season is a time to connect with loved ones. Families gather during the holiday season, and friends reconnect. Tradition reigns supreme for many people during the holiday season. Exchanging gifts is one tradition that transcends religion, as people who subscribe to various faiths exchange gifts with their loved ones during the holiday season. When making their holiday shopping lists, shoppers should make sure they don’t forget the various people who make their Christmas so meaningful to them.

Mailmen

Mailmen are the first link between people and their families. They are some gift ideas that can help the people who work throughout the year. Small tokens of appreciation during the holiday season can help mailmen, teachers, hairdressers, and others know they’re valued.

Hairdressers

Hairdressers go to great lengths to make people look good throughout the year, and those efforts should not be forgotten during the holiday season. Many hairdressers use supplies, such as scissors, they purchase on their own. A gift certificate to a local eatery, which includes teachers, daycare workers, and those efforts should be recognized during the holiday season. School systems and daycare facilities may have rules in place governing such items. For those who want to pamper the people who pamper them, a gift certificate to a local spa can make for a wonderful gift for hairdressers this holiday season.

Educators and Caregivers

Educators and caregivers, which includes teachers, babysitters, and daycare staff, do a lot for children. Their efforts should be recognized during the holiday season. School systems and daycare facilities may have rules in place governing such items. For those who want to pamper the people who pamper them, a gift certificate to a local spa can make for a wonderful gift for educators and caregivers this holiday season.

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How to make Kwanzaa celebrations special

Kwanzaa is an opportunity for families to gather and celebrate their rich cultural heritage. Kwanzaa is a weeklong celebration that was the brainchild of Dr. Maulana Karenga, a professor and chairman of Black Studies at California State University Long Beach in 1966. At a time when riots were rampant near where Dr. Karenga lived and worked, he thought a celebration to unite African Americans as a community and help them reconnect with their African heritage could benefit his community.

The name “Kwanzaa” is from the Swahili phrase “matunda ya kwanza,” which means “first fruits.” Kwanzaa pays homage to the traditional harvests that take place in Africa during December and January.

Kwanzaa presents another way to reflect on the year that is drawing to a close and look forward to the months ahead. Kwanzaa also presents an opportunity to focus on family, community and traditions which already is a hallmark of the holiday season. Individuals and families can harness the meaning behind the seven principles of Kwanzaa by incorporating various traditions into their celebrations.

• Ujamaa: Celebrate unity by gathering together with other African Americans to discuss favorite components of African culture and history. Share important stories and traditions with younger generations.
• Umba: Celebrate by gathering together with other African Americans to discuss favorite components of African culture and history. Share important stories and traditions with younger generations.
• Ujima: Organize a community-wide effort, such as helping to lay up a neighborhood garden or raising money to support a less fortunate family, to celebrate collective work.
• Ujamaa: This is the principle of cooperative economics, and can be perhaps best supported by shopping locally. Local businesses, owners also can support one another and cross-advertise to keep revenue in their communities.
• Nia: Having a purpose in life is important and can keep goals on track. Harness this principle by figuring out a passion and sharing it with others through teaching or mentoring.
• Kuumba: Creativity can be explored through crafts, such as making a unity cup or decoration for the holidays. Listening to or playing culturally relevant songs and/or viewing artwork from Africa are just a few other ways to harness your creativity.
• Nia: Faith can be expressed by religious devotion, or through belief in one’s people, parents, teachers, and leaders. Uniting people in skills can be another way for celebrants to enjoy the holiday together.

Kwanzaa is a family-oriented holiday, and it’s easy for everyone to play a role in making Kwanzaa celebrations even more meaningful.

Kwanzaa decorating tips

Kwanzaa is celebrated by millions of people every year. Individuals of all ages take part in the festivities, which were established in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, professor and chairman of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach. Dr. Karenga, prompted by the Watts riots in Los Angeles, sought ways to bring African Americans together as a community, and Kwanzaa was born.

Kwanzaa can be a fun opportunity to gather with friends and family in the heart of the holiday season.

Kwanzaa, which celebrates the symbolism and traditions of African American culture, begins on December 26 and lasts through January 1.

There are many components of Kwanzaa celebrations, and decorating for the holiday remains an important way to demonstrate spirit. Celebrants can start by decorating with the traditional colors of red, green and black. These can be displayed in fabrics used in the home, clothing, linens, and other decor. The Kinara Ya Tulu, or the traditional Kwanzaa flag, can be hung and serve as the holiday’s centerpiece.

Celebrate also will want to decorate with the seven symbols of the holiday, or Nguzo Saba: Umoja (unity), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). Posters, crafts or photographs can be used to symbolize these seven principles.

Another component of Kwanzaa is a seven-branched candleholder known as the "kinara." The kinara represents African ancestors and should be displayed on a table or in another prominent area of the home. Light seven candles to represent the seven principles.

Articles of African culture, such as masks or artwork, can complete Kwanzaa decor. Cultural artifacts can be tied into the creative aspect of the holiday. Celebrants might want to craft their own masks or African-inspired artwork to use throughout the holiday.

Families come together during Kwanzaa to celebrate African American culture and unity. Decorating for the holiday is a great way for African Americans to exhibit pride in their heritage.
Spiritual Christmas traditions to embrace

The holiday season is a special and spiritual time of year. It can sometimes be easy to get lost in the more commercial aspects of the holiday season, and there’s certainly nothing wrong with shopping for gifts that will show your loved ones how much you love and appreciate them. For those who want to focus back on the spiritual side of this special time of year, the following suggestions can help in those efforts.

Share the story of Christmas

The Gospels of Mark and Luke offer differing accounts of the birth of Jesus Christ. Both indicate that Jesus was born to Mary, who was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter. Mary became pregnant through immaculate conception, but she was a virgin when visited by an angel who informed her that she was to carry God’s son. At the time of Christ’s birth all Jewish people had to be counted by Roman soldiers for tax purposes. That required people to return to their places of birth. As a result, Mary and Joseph set out on an arduous journey to Bethlehem. Upon arriving in Bethlehem, Jospe had no vacancies, but Mary and Joseph were given shelter in a stable where Jesus was ultimately born.

Attend Mass

Churches traditionally hold religious services on Christmas Eve and Christmas. Those services are joyful expressions of faith, music and community spirit. But Christmas mass is not the only time to head to church. During Advent, the four-week period preceding Christmas, Catholics prepare and repent. Advent calendars help count down the days until Christmas.

Set out a nativity scene

Make a nativity scene the primary focus of Christmas decorations and encourage children to play with the figures and act out the Christmas story.

Focus on gifts for good

Families can focus their energies on faithful endeavors and the spirit of giving that’s synonymous with the season. Do good deeds for others, embrace peace and love and share special time with others.

Sing carols

Spread the holiday spirit through song. Get together with a group of friends or neighbors and go door-to-door, or hold a caroling performance at a centralized location. Select religious hymns, but also include some secular favorites.

The holiday season is a great time of year to reconnect with one’s faith and spirituality.

30 ways to celebrate the merry month

The holiday season begins in late November and runs through New Year’s Day. It is marked by various gatherings of friends and family, decadent foods, cocktails, traveling, and gift exchanges. The National Retail Federation says consumers will spend an average of $967 during the holiday season. However, the joy of the holiday also is about all of the memorable experiences that tend to make the season so beloved.

With that in mind, here are 30 ways to make the holiday season that much more merry:

1. Visit with an elderly or housebound neighbor and share conversation.
2. Donate gently used toys to a children’s hospital.
3. Research the history of the holiday and share it with people you care about.
4. Make handmade Christmas tree ornaments.
5. Donate money to a charity or other good cause.
6. Encourage “pay it forward” movements in your community. Start by doing something simple like buying a coffee for a complete stranger.
7. Feed birds facing the cold, winter weather.
8. Take a ride or walk around the neighborhood to look at decorated houses.
9. Make a fire in a fire pit in the yard and toast marshmallows while sipping hot chocolate.
10. Ring watch holiday movies.
11. Attend the concert of a children’s choir.
12. Help a friend decorate his or her home.
13. Host a tree-trimming party.
14. Schedule a day for baking cookies.
15. Sing Christmas carols at a running home.
16. Put together care packages of items and send them to troops overseas.
17. Share the holidays with a military family whose spouse is in service and can’t make it home.
18. Offer to shop for someone who is homebound due to age, a chronic illness or injury.
19. Visit a large city to look at Christmas window displays.
20. Buy and hang real ornaments.
21. Make a new friend and invite him or her to a holiday party for the first time.
22. Babysit a newborn so his or her parents can get errands done or just catch up on rest.
23. Volunteer at a soup kitchen.
24. Share the religious traditions of your holiday with someone of a different faith.
25. If weather permits, go sledding, build a snowman or have a snowball fight.
26. Share favorite memories at family holiday dinners.
27. Remember a deceased loved one with a special tribute.
28. Construct a gingerbread house.
29. Teach someone how to make a cherished family recipe.
30. Surprise a distant relative with an impromptu visit.

Faith & Family 2019
December 21, 2019
Faith & Family 2019

New Year’s Eve is one of the most festive nights of the year. Counting down to a new year while simultaneously saying goodbye to the current year provides grounds for celebration for millions of people across the globe.

New Year’s celebrations vary depending on where the partying is taking place, but it’s common for people to check their inhibitions at the door on December 31. That can make for a fun evening, but also puts celebrants in jeopardy of making bad decisions or confronting the consequences of others’ poor decisions. Adhering to three simple safety strategies can increase the chances that this New Year’s Eve is memorable for all the right reasons.

1. Travel in packs. Most people who are out and about on New Year’s Eve are focused solely on having fun. However, some criminals see New Year’s Eve as an opportunity to prey on unsuspecting men and women who may not be as alert to danger as they are on other nights of the year. For example, a recent report from Australia’s Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research found that the number of violent offenses between 9 p.m. and 3 a.m. on New Year’s Eve is nine times higher than it is on other nights of the year. By hitting the town with friends and staying with those friends throughout the night, New Year’s Eve revelers can make themselves less vulnerable to criminals.

2. Don’t overindulge in alcohol. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration notes that people who consume alcohol begin experiencing a loss of judgment when their blood alcohol concentration, or BAC, reaches .02. That means it only takes a relatively small amount of alcohol before people’s judgment begins to falter, and judgment only suffers further with each additional drink. The pressure to overindulge in alcohol on New Year’s Eve can be considerable, but revelers should avoid situations where they might be tempted to drink too much. Such overindulgence only makes people vulnerable to bad decisions and even criminals looking to prey on inebriated victims.

3. Don’t get behind the wheel. Even people who avoid alcohol on New Year’s Eve are vulnerable to potentially unsafe highways. That’s because everyone shares the roads, and drivers never know who else will be on the road when New Year’s Eve festivities end and everyone goes home. The U.S. Department of Transportation notes that, over the last half-decade, and average of 300 people died each year in drunk driving crashes in the week between Christmas and New Year’s Day. To avoid becoming such a statistic, New Year’s revelers can celebrate at home and invite others to stay overnight.

New Year’s Eve is a fun but potentially dangerous night. However, a few simple safety strategies can make sure New Year’s Day conversations are all about the fun from the night before.