



## Christmas Traditions

EVERY CHRISTMAS EVE, after going to church and having our big family dinner, my sisters, Shannon and Courtney, and I would camp out in Courtney's bedroom. A tradition that kept going for years, it started when I was in sixth grade and Shannon came home from her freshman year of college for Christmas break. Both of them had rooms upstairs, and could run across the hall, in and out of each other's rooms; meanwhile, I was tucked downstairs, but I did my best to spend every bit of free time upstairs in what I considered to be their ultra-cool lair.

When Shannon came home for Christmas that first year, I had been counting down her return since the very day in August we had dropped her off at school in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. With her home, all three of us were upstairs, having fun, when the hour got late and we decided to bunk together that night. Courtney had a trundle bed that slid out from underneath her daybed, and Shannon claimed that space. We were serious about the campout, so the three of us pulled my mattress off of my bed and dragged it – literally – upstairs so that I could have a place to sleep.

The mattress got lodged in the staircase, which at first was frustrating, but soon proved to be a source of fun and entertainment. We would stand at the top of the stairs and dive onto the mattress, sliding all the way down, catching air for a minute and landing on the floor of the front hall. Then we would scam-

ble to the top again – which was a feat similar to climbing up a playground slide at the park – and do it all over. Finally, we got back to the task of tugging the mattress the rest of the way up the stairs, around the corner, and into Courtney's room. Floor space was tight with the two beds and one mattress, but we made do.

The first year we camped out, we stayed there for the entire two weeks Shannon was home for Christmas. The next year when she came home, we were eager to set up camp again, and it officially became a tradition. This continued for years, until Shannon got married and moved away, and Courtney and I were left alone in the overnight adventure. It was sad to have Shannon not there, but I did get to upgrade to the trundle bed and didn't have to haul my mattress up the stairs, which was nice, especially because with our increased age and wisdom, and a few reprimands from our parents, we had long since abandoned the mattress sliding.

As schedules got a little busier, we shortened the campouts, not starting them at the beginning of Christmas break, but on Christmas Eve. In addition to sleeping, we would read *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* from an old book that we had since we were little, and then we would slip in a cassette with the narration of the book *The Polar Express*. Our favorite part came when the narrator read the line, "The elves roooooared wildly..." Shortly after the roaring of the elves, we would drift into a gentle slumber.

Not long after we had fallen asleep, my mom would sneak upstairs to capture a photo of the annual event. As the door to the hall opened and light spilled in, it would startle us awake and we'd lift our bedraggled heads, stunned by the flash. Once developed, the photo would reveal red-eyed faces peering up at the camera through slightly disheveled hair and piles of stuffed animals. Despite the fact that each year a less than flattering photo resulted, we continued to do it, because it was a tradition. I wouldn't have wanted Christmas Eve any other way than with sisters, the sound of rooaring elves, and pictures to remember it by.

Traditions are an important part of our lives. They provide a framework and structure on which the drywall of our life is hung. They are a home base that we return to on a regular basis, giving a sense of security and joy to our lives. Holidays seem to offer the most prolific amount of traditions. In this issue, as a holiday gift to our readers, several of our local friends have put pen to paper to share some of their favorite holiday traditions with us. These are the things that make the holidays special for them. Turn to page 90 to read their stories.

With all of the recent bleak economic news, it may be difficult to get into the holiday spirit this year. In a season when goodwill and cheer are supposed to be around every corner, it feels like there is an overflowing abundance of grim news stories and financial despair. This is a prime season to practice being a good steward of your money, buying wisely and locally. If you feel overwhelmed and not sure how to tackle the holiday shopping, we can help. On page 68 you will find our annual Holiday Gift Guide. Some of our area's best local businesses have offered up their suggestions for great gifts. It is a small step, but supporting local businesses will help revitalize our local economy, one purchase at a time.

One of the greatest gifts we who reside here have been given, is the chance to live in the Spokane and Coeur d'Alene area. It is a gift we unwrap each day, pulling back the wrapping paper and discovering the delights that await within. Each time we attend a community event, visit a great restaurant or stroll through our cozy neighborhoods, we experience one of the best gifts possible. One former Spokane resident who understood that gift was Bing Crosby, the beloved entertainer who is well known for, among other things, singing *White Christmas*. On page 36 we bring you the history of his younger years spent in Spokane.

As we enter the holiday season, let us do so with a sense of appreciation and thanksgiving for all of the blessings we have received thus far in life. Focus not on the wavering economy, but on the wealth of our spirits and the richness of our hearts. Let's make *that* a tradition.

Merry Christmas!

*Blythe*