

A young evergreen tree in a black pot is being held by two hands. The background is a soft, out-of-focus scene of snow falling. The title 'Holiday Traditions' is written in a white, elegant script font across the top. The author's name 'by Blythe Thimsen' is written in a smaller font below the title. A small inset photo in the top right corner shows a person in a red coat and hat standing in a snowy outdoor setting.

Holiday Traditions

by Blythe Thimsen

We

are creatures of habit! We tend to go to church and sit in the same pews each Sunday, take the same parking space at the office every morning, and get the same toppings on our pizza every time we order. Eleven months out of the year, this might be called being in a rut. When the calendar flips to December, though, and the holidays arrive in full force, all bets are off. Things that we do every year to mark the holidays are not examples of being in a rut; rather, they are things to be cherished, looked forward to and welcomed.

Do something one year and you make a memory; do it every year and you make a tradition. For each of us, the traditions are different. They are things that may seem odd or silly to someone else, but for the person who upholds them, they are what make the holidays special and real. Sharing these traditions with others is a great way to share the holiday magic. So we asked some of our favorite friends and neighbors to share their holiday traditions with us. Enjoy!



LESLIE LOWE

KHQ Weather Forecaster

We are a family wrapped in Christmas traditions. Growing up, my family always had Christmas Eve dinner together, then it was off to midnight mass. But, before mass we would always gather around the tree that night to open just one gift each. I can still hear Bing Crosby belting out *White Christmas* or Elvis softly singing *Silent Night*. Even though we knew this one particular gift would always be the same, it didn't take away from the excitement. Who knew that pajamas could be so exciting?!

I was about eight years old when I walked into my mom's sewing room just after Thanksgiving. I could see white ruffles and very soft white and red material. I wanted to see all of it, but Mom shooed me out of the room. I couldn't understand why. We would always watch Mom sew—after all, she made most of our clothes. It wasn't until that Christmas Eve that I discovered she was in the middle of making my flannel nightgown. For some reason, I thought those PJs just magically appeared! Mom made our Christmas pajamas until we were in high school. To be honest, I don't even remember when it stopped, but I do remember when I picked up the tradition and made it my own. I say "my own," but I can barely sew a button on a shirt, let alone a pair of PJs, so "mine" always came from Target, Shopko or Macy's and had Ghostbusters, Smurfs or Care Bears on them.

I don't think my kids were as thrilled as I was when they first opened their one gift on Christmas Eve. It wasn't as special to them (yet) as it was to me, and I'm sure they were hoping for something a little more exciting. But it caught on and stuck with this new generation as well. In 2004, I married an amazing man and got two more beautiful daughters out of the deal. It makes us a family of two boys and three girls. I still get them PJs every year—usually in the form of boxers, yes even for the girls, because that's what's cool. And, because they are older and we are a little more spread out, we can't always be together on Christmas Eve. It might be time to pass the torch of Christmas Pajamas onto our three beautiful grandbabies.

As for the big day, it also has its traditions. We always waited until Christmas day to open the rest of our gifts. Some were wrapped, but the gifts from Santa were always left unwrapped and carefully placed in such a way that we knew who it was for.

Yes, we've had a number of unique traditions spread throughout the holidays, but the magic of Christmas Eve and Christmas PJs is still the one I hold most dear. From our family to yours, have a Merry Christmas and blessed New Year!

BECK A. TAYLOR,

President of Whitworth University

For some of us, the Christmas traditions we grew up with are our favorites. The tradition that I'm most excited to share is one that I married into. When I married my wife, Julie, 20 Christmases ago, I married into a family that loved to hunt quail – not the mountain quail we see around the Inland Northwest, but the elusive bobwhite quail found on the plains of Oklahoma and Kansas.

Not having grown up around guns and hunting, Julie's relatives were a bit suspicious of me when I expressed an eagerness to learn how to flush quail and shoot a shotgun. It wasn't that they were uninviting, but I suspected they were afraid of getting shot, you know, Dick Cheney style! So one Christmas when Julie and I were dating, her father, grandfather and some others invited me to go along. I was eager to fit in and to be included in the ritual hunt. Little did I know it was also a rite of passage.

Before the hunt, we parked the trucks at the end of a long tree line that would become our first hunting grounds for the day. We diligently began putting on our hunter's orange gear, counting and distributing shotgun shells, and taking care of other, you know, more *personal* duties, so as to not slow the group down once the hunt began. It was at that moment that I noticed Julie's grandfather had stepped away from the group – he was standing perfectly still, looking



at the beautiful sunrise that promised a good day together. I suspected he was taking it all in and having a moment of peace and solitude before beginning a tradition that his father's father likely taught him. I thought for a moment and decided it would be a good move on my part to wander over and gently put my arm around him and tell him how much I appreciated him, not to mention his granddaughter, and the opportunity to join in the family hunt. Knowing him, I expected he would meet this gesture with warmth and I would score a few points. That's why I was so surprised to see the look of horror on his face as I put my arm around his shoulder and gave a gentle squeeze. Just as I began to think I had misjudged his nature, I realized that I had caught him doing his part to not slow down the hunting group. I was embarrassed beyond belief, and he took great joy in repeating this story year after year as the family, with me now included, sat down for our traditional Christmas breakfast of quail, homemade biscuits and gravy.

Our family still enjoys quail and biscuits on Christmas morning, and that tradition gives me an opportunity to express thanks for the life of Julie's late grandfather, and the joy of marrying into a wonderful family.

FERY HAGHIGHI

Owner of Fery's Catering

Growing up in Iran, one of my favorite holidays was Norouz ("New Day"), the Persian New Year. Considered the biggest celebration of the year, it was a wonderful time with family and friends. Our country celebrates first with preparation: setting out new or special clothes; spring cleaning ("Khaane Tekaani") and setting the "Haft Seen." The following seven items, the names of which all begin with "S" in Farsi, are arranged on a table with candles and a mirror:

- Somagh (sumac) – sunrise
- Serkeh (vinegar) – age and patience
- Senjed (dried fruit of the lotus tree) – love
- Samanoo (sweet pudding) – affluence
- Sabzeh (sprouts) – rebirth
- Sib (apple) – health and beauty
- Sir (garlic) – medicine

Then, on the eve of the last Wednesday of the Persian year we had "Chahar-Shanbeh Soori." On that night, people old and young gather around bon fires to sing and leap over the fire. We say, "Zar-dee-yeh man az toe; sorkhee-yeh toe az man" (which means: I give you my sickly color; I take back your vibrant red vitality). This is particularly accurate since the Persian New Year is the official beginning of spring.

The actual moment of beginning of the New Year, "Saleh Tahveel," is the spring equinox. All members of the immediate family gathered for a big dinner, usually with Sabzi Polo Mahi (rice with fresh herbs served with smoked and freshly fried fish) and Koukou Sabzi (a fresh herb and eggs dish). Shouts of "Aid-eh Sho-mah Mo-bar-ak!" (Happy New Year!) can be heard throughout the night; thereafter, the Persian New Year continues for the next 12 days with gatherings and gift exchanges (traditionally coins/gold coins and from older relatives to younger family members). Finally, on the 13th day, Seezdeh Behdar, everyone goes out for a picnic and the sprouts from the Haft Seen (Sabzeh) are tossed, cleansing the home from the old year's problems.

When I was last in Iran, my country was being torn apart by a civil war and my final Norouz there was not fun at all; however, the following year, I was able to celebrate American New Year in Spokane, reunited with family, and then the Persian New Year two months later. I have come to cherish New Year in my new country and still enjoy sharing the Persian New Year with our many friends and family. I hope you will enjoy a joyous and happy holiday season followed by a wonderful New Year —Aid-eh Sho-mah Mo-bar-ak!

OZZIE KENEZOVICH

Spokane County Sheriff

Christmas for me has always been a time when it seems, if but for a few weeks, the world talks of a hope of peace on earth and good will. There is an anticipation of spending time with friends and family. For my family this time starts with putting up the Christmas tree.

My earliest memories are of turning off all the lights in the house and looking at the Christmas tree as its lights blinked on and off. Not much has changed. I still look forward to watching the lights as they flash, reflecting off ornaments hanging on the tree and the ever changing shadows of tree branches on the walls nearest the tree.

Then comes all the holiday foods: apple strudel, Christmas cookies and povitica, a honey walnut pastry roll. My grandmother passed all of these traditional pastries onto my wife who has passed them on to our kids.

Christmas Eve is my favorite night of the year. It starts with everyone choosing a present to open followed by reading the *Night Before Christmas*. The Christmas story as told in St. Luke 2: 1-14 reminds us of the true meaning of Christmas. One of the most spiritual songs written, *Silent Night*, rounds out the night.

Christmas Day is the classic Christmas movie *A Christmas Carol*, followed by gathering with family and friends, and having a turkey dinner.



Over the past six years Christmas Eve has added a new tradition. My family and I drop off plates of Christmas pastries and candies to the deputies and staff working that night. We start at the Public Safety Building then move to the jail, dispatch, Spokane Valley Precinct and to the Geiger Corrections Facility. My wife and I remember what it was like for our family when I worked a night shift and it was Christmas Eve. I hope everyone will remember this year that there are those who stand guard here at home and in far away lands so we may have a Merry Christmas.

May one day the hope of Christmas become a reality; Peace on Earth. Merry Christmas everyone.



BEN STUCKART
City Council President

Setting a holiday table is something important to me and my family, because gathering together with food is such a big part of the season. So many of my holiday traditions revolve around food, or gathering at the table for a shared meal.

When I was growing up, my mom and I would always bake Christmas cookies together. She makes a really mean sugar cookie with frosting that is not too crispy, but just right. Growing up, I knew all of the neighbors, so my mom and I would make bake and decorate our Christmas cookies

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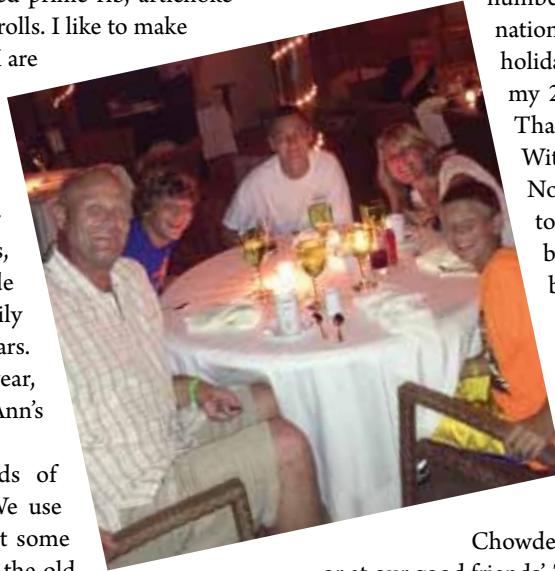
together and then deliver them to the neighbors. I may be all grown up, but I still try to get together with my mom during her Christmas break (she is an elementary school principal) and spend a day baking cookies with her.

It is not just baking, but I also love cooking for my family at the holidays. I usually make a salt-encrusted prime rib, artichoke sourdough stuffing, and from-scratch yeast rolls. I like to make this every year, whether my wife, Ann, and I are here at home, or back visiting my in-laws in Minnesota.

Some traditions are inherited, though, and one of my favorites comes from my wife's family, back in Minnesota. Every year in November, as a kick off to the holidays, Ann's family gets together to make homemade sausage. This has been a long-standing family tradition, which dates back many, many years. They use the same smokehouse each year, and there are pictures from the 1940s of Ann's grandpa in the smokehouse.

We usually make about 15-20 pounds of sausage, which lasts us the whole year. We use an old iron machine to fill the casings, not some new hi-tech set up. The sausage is made in the old family smokehouse, and there is an art to making it. You have to time it so the weather is just right; if it is too warm or too cold outside, the sausage won't smoke correctly. We start bright and early with the meat mixture in a vat, and work all day. The only variation is the types of wood we use, which can impact the flavor.

I definitely had to be married to Ann before I got invited to the annual sausage making tradition, but now this tradition from her side of the family has become *my* tradition as well. We like to go back to Minnesota as often as we can to participate in this family tradition. The years we don't get to go back in November to make the sausage, we go for Christmas and get all of the sausage that was made for us. Throughout the year, about once a month, we have red beans and rice with the homemade sausage. Delicious!



KELLY GRAVES

Gonzaga University Women's Basketball Coach

One of the problems with coaching basketball is that the holiday season is our busiest time of year. Because of the overwhelming number of tournaments offered all over the nation and beyond, we are often gone during the holidays for several days at a time. Throughout my 25 years of coaching, probably five or six Thanksgivings have been spent at home. With most of our team travel happening in November and early December, I always try to give the team an extended four to six-day break during Christmas. Even though it's brief, I feel that it is important for all of us to step away from basketball and reconnect with our families and loved ones.

Since we have been in Spokane, my family spends Christmas Eve attending afternoon Mass on the South Hill. I get to the church an hour early just to save seats! Afterwards, we enjoy Clam

Chowder, crab and all the fixins at either our home or at our good friends'. That night, the kids get to open one gift of new pajamas (they always pretend to be surprised) and a viewing of the movie *The Gift*. If you haven't seen it, you should! It is a very uplifting film about the true spirit of Christmas and the best gift anyone could receive.

Christmas morning starts with brunch that includes my wife, Mary's, amazing homemade cinnamon rolls and her famous baked eggs with sausage and bacon or her Kibbi with Syrian Bread (one of my favorites, from her Lebanese roots). After brunch, the boys and I, along with their friends and their dads, head to the Kennel to play a game of pick-up to work up our appetites. Our Christmas dinner is served at Nana's house with prime rib, mashed potatoes, string beans with bacon, pie and ice cream. As you can see, a lot of our traditions involve food; it must be why I have carried a few extra pounds over the years!

Christmas is truly about giving, not just presents, but of yourself and sharing your love for each other. I preach to my team every day that a person cannot truly be whole until they become part of something that is bigger than them. Love is the greatest gift of all. ❧

Happy Holidays