

Each year the girls and I hike out to the Christmas tree farm in search of the saddest, sorriest Christmas tree we can find. When we find it... we know it! We chop it down in a what usually turns out to be quite a dramatic production. Some years our chosen tree is so dead or so sad that the tree farm people can't bring themselves to charge us. Other years we accidentally select a sorry looking specialty tree that costs A LOT. We figure it all evens out in the end. We haul our tree home and pull out all our old decorations to bring love and life to our tree. My two all time favourite ornaments – an angel Maya made when she was four (check out those teeth!) and a simple and functional decoration by Hanna (yep, that's a toilet paper roll hand decorated with pencil!). There are so many priceless ornaments like this that make us laugh – the joy in these ornaments never gets old. We have had many interesting trees over the years; one tree had two tops and they were so tall the angels weighed it down and it looked like they were flying and another was a perfectly good stump that someone left behind – it had no top so the angel kind of just nestled in there. Christmas for us is about embracing the unique, the interesting and the perfectly imperfect things in life.

- Anita

*When I was growing up, like many families, on Christmas Eve my brother and I got to open one gift. This gift was **always** a boardgame that we would immediately learn and play together as a family. After many hours of boardgames my brother and I would retire to the basement and had our own tradition of watching/falling asleep to the cartoon version of Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas. To this day, on December 24, I always play a boardgame & watch/fall asleep to How the Grinch Stole Christmas.*

- Aidan

My husband is from Bulgaria and our daughters were raised with a combination of Bulgarian and Scottish-Canadian foods and customs.

On Christmas morning the girls would open their stockings in their bedroom while their dad would prepare a traditional Bulgarian breakfast of banitsa. The banitsa would go into the oven and bake for 45 minutes while we were all opening the presents under the tree.

- Heather

(Check out Heather's Banitsa recipe on our Holiday 2020 recipes section)

Our Christmas morning is the same every year. The kids wake the whole household up (it was actually my youngest brother even in his 20's) and we all open stockings – one item per person at a time. There is always a mandarin at the bottom in the toe. After stockings Mum and I make breakfast – the same every year – scrambled eggs with sausages and toast. After breakfast then we all open presents. The mandarin in the stocking was meant to tide everyone over a bit for food, and the toys/silly things in the stockings are to keep everyone occupied until breakfast is ready; there is always a comic or magazine in every stocking too.

- Janet

Every Christmas there was a gift under the tree that was from my dad (not mum and dad, just dad). It was always a book. "Love from Dad" and the year it was given was always written on the first page. He would spend hours sourcing out just the right book for each of us. Now that he is no longer here, we buy each other a book and place it under the tree. I have every book he gave me and so any home I have lived in has needed a substantial bookcase.

- Jane

As my Mom has now been gone for 2 years now, we try to follow a tradition from her Ukrainian heritage where we enjoy the traditional "meatless" Christmas Eve meal. Well, it is almost totally vegetarian except you are allowed to eat fish, so we usually also cook a fresh salmon. The meal involves 12 dishes (to represent each apostle) starting with an appetizer made from boiled wheat seeds combined with honey and poppyseed called Kutia. It is a basic dish to symbolize the lack of food during the "hard times" coupled with the sweetness from the honey to symbolize love of family & friends. The next appetizer is Borscht (Beet soup). The remaining 10 dishes include baked salmon, different types of perogies, pickled herring (not one of my fav's), mushrooms in cream sauce, Blini (like a crepe with dried cottage cheese), Baked bread-like perogy with dill cream sauce, Cabbage rolls, assorted pickled vegetables, and Pampushky (donuts filled with prunes). It's a great meal but a lot of work so I really understand why my Mom was always preparing dishes well in advance of Christmas Eve.

- Jerry

For the last four years we have headed up to Mt. Washington for a couple of hours of snowshoeing after breakfast. It's fairly quiet and nice to be in the snow on Christmas Day!

- Maggie

Our family celebrates with a few traditions each holiday season. One is with our tree. Several years ago, we learned of the story of the pickle ornament tradition. No one knows for certain how it began and there are several stories circulating. The one we like claims that the Christmas pickle was a very old German tradition with the pickle ornament being the last ornament hung on the tree each year and then the first child to find the pickle got an extra present. Instead of an extra present, the person in our family who finds it gets to play Santa and open the first present.

We reserve Christmas eve as a special family night with our adult kids and their partners. Once it's dark we all pile into a vehicle for our annual Christmas light scavenger hunt. With Christmas music blasting from the radio, everyone does their best karaoke performance while we drive through neighbourhoods searching for every item on the scavenger list. Over the years we've seen so many beautiful displays and wacky ones like a life-sized Grinch standing in a window next to a Christmas tree! After we finish, we head home and everyone that stays overnight on Christmas eve gets a new pair of pajamas. They always all match, and the dogs get matching bandanas too. We settle in with snack food to watch a Christmas movie together. Some family favourites are Miracle on 34th Street, Tim Allen's The Santa Clause, Home Alone, Christmas Vacation, and of course Die Hard.

- Maria

(Check out our Holiday 2020 Games and Crafts section for her scavenger hunt!)

My favourite holiday tradition is that each year everyone gets to open one gift on Christmas Eve. It is never a surprise that it is matching pajamas for everyone to wear on Christmas Eve! One family member is designated as Santa and is solely responsible for distributing gifts on Christmas morning in an orderly fashion!! After the gifts have been opened...then the Santa Sack is hauled out and it is filled with gifts for everyone...this is in place of individual stockings!

- Michele