A Christmas to Remember
What is your favorite Christmas memory? Or put another way, what has been your most memorable Christmas?

We asked several dozen of our favorite writers to share their memories with you this Advent season, the four-week period that renews our spiritual understanding of Christmas. Our query opened the floodgates for stories about traditions old and new and the indelible stamp that families leave on our holidays forever. Some wrote about restoring cultural traditions, and others consciously created new memories.

You won’t be surprised to read that enduring Christmas memories don’t depend on expensive gifts or big parties. It’s the love we have shared, the loved ones we have missed, and the time spent together doing ordinary things. As we prepare for the renewal of the Christ energy born in each of us, we also celebrate the human experiences we remember and cherish.

Your Friends in Unity

PS: Comparing Christmas memories might spark an illuminating conversation with your own family and friends. To that end, Unity has created a lively card deck to prompt stories and memories called Remember That Time … A Christmas Conversation Game. (See opposite page.)

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Los Regalos de mis Abuelas
(The Gifts of My Grandmothers)
Rev. Juan del Hierro

I remember their deep faith and trust in God. I remember their excitement at having the whole family together to celebrate Christmas. I remember the many calls and video chats we shared when I was not able to celebrate with them in person. There is so much to remember about the beautiful women who graced my life as grandmothers. This year will be the first without either of them.

My Abuelita Maria Elena passed away a few years ago. My Abuelita Haydee did so in 2020. Especially during the holidays, I remember them. And as I honor the grief I feel from no longer being able to call them up to wish them a merry Christmas, I also honor the ways in which they made my holidays so special. Their Christmas gift to me was far more than just the wallets and belts they gave me in what seemed like every year. Their gift to me was seeing the importance of family and the importance of God in my life.

My Abuelita Maria Elena would light up when talking about the true significance of Christmas. For her, it wasn’t just about the birth of Jesus. She would always remind us of the wonderful mother that Mary must have been. No Christmas was complete without a novena said to honor Mary. My Abuelita Haydee was a bit more reserved about her faith, but it also ran deep and was important to her. Her faith in God never faltered and showed up through her generous and loving spirit.
One of the things I missed most when I left Ecuador at age 7 were the great posadas our families had. A posada is a gathering of loved ones during the weeks leading up to Christmas, at a minimum on the four Sundays of Advent. We sing carols, pray together, “eat and be merry.” It usually begins with a song that reenacts Mary and Joseph’s looking for lodging as Mary is about to give birth to Jesus. Once everyone is settled, the family gathers around the Nativity to pray and sing.

It was on a visit to Ecuador one year that I found and fell in love with a Nativity display. Everything about it honored my Ecuadorian heritage, and everything about it reminded me of my grandmothers’ tender love. In 2019, I decided I would create the tradition of posadas for my family here in Florida. I brought out my wood-carved Nativity, prepared my Abuelita Maria Elena’s famous chocolate hazelnut mousse, and prayed and sang with glee. I realized then just how many of the traditions that my grandmothers cherished had been passed down to me.

Unfortunately, 2020 did not allow for a posada with my extended family. But this December will be different. This December, I will bring out my Nativity and decorate the house. Our family will gather. I will make my grandmother’s mousse once more. And I will make sure pictures of both grandmothers are visible as we pray the novena. We will sing, we will pray, and we will remember. We will remember the wonderful women who supported us and deepened our faith. We will remember them and ensure their legacy lives on in our traditions of our holidays.

Most of all, my grandmothers taught me the importance of loved ones coming together, whether in person or through a simple call on a special day like Christmas. Especially this year, that is one Christmas gift they gave me that I will cherish forever.

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As time passed, I searched desperately to make sense of it all. I found some inspiration through *Daily Word* and other books, prayer support from Unity Prayer Ministry, and seminars. I found some hope in a particular scripture: “I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25).

When my father was murdered on Christmas Eve two years later, I began to sink even more deeply into my sadness. But I continued to cling to hope from the Book of Joel.

Then on December 24, 1995, a miracle happened. Our first grandbabies—twin girls—came into the world a month early. Our son PJ, who had been born two years after Tumi’s death, was in college, and his then-girlfriend, now wife, could not have been prepared for the joys and challenges of having twins. But I was. I knew it was the fulfilling of the promise.

After visiting the hospital for the hundredth time that day, I drove to Unity Temple on the Plaza in Kansas City for the Christmas Eve candlelighting service. As I sang with the choir, I kept repeating the scripture from Joel in my mind. This was my restoration day. The promise was fulfilled. For the first time since that dreary Christmas in 1974, I felt my joy restored.

A few years ago, I received a message that made the promise even more meaningful. I introduced a guest speaker at Unity Temple—Debbie Wojciechowski, a spiritual medium. As she repeated the intuitive messages she was hearing in that session, hands would go up as audience members recognized the presence of their loved ones.

When she described a little boy in an accidental death, she could have been talking about anyone’s child. But I knew it was Tumi. She described a room and a shelf with a framed picture next to a statue of an angel holding a candle. I realized she was describing my hearth room and the mantel above our fireplace, where the bronze angel candleholder sits next to the white frame containing Tumi’s picture and the words: The soul that sorrows is as dear to God as the young soul He has taken home.

She told me he wanted me to know that when I looked up at the picture the other day, he had been standing there. It was what she said next that confirmed Tumi’s presence. She asked whether there were twins and said Tumi wanted me to know he had sent them.

Our family has been blessed with four grandchildren and more joy-filled Christmases. But Christmas 1995 remains my best Christmas ever!

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A Global Online Christmas
Rev. Claudia Fletcher

Growing up in Jamaica, Christmas Day was a huge production at our house because my mother always celebrated in a big way. Truth be told, my mother was a “foodies” so there was always a lavish spread.

Dinner especially was a smorgasbord of meats and seafood. Besides the obligatory roast turkey and baked ham, there was roast pork plus pork chops. Chicken was also prepared in multiple ways: “shake and bake,” roasted, and barbecued. Roast beef, steak, and various fish and shrimp dishes were menu staples. Is it any wonder that I eventually became vegetarian? I won’t even mention the side dishes and salads, which were as varied as the entrées.

However, the best part was not the dining experience. It was the time we spent in the kitchen preparing the meal. My three sisters and I would pitch in to help my mother while we listened to a radio broadcast from Jamaicans living in the U.K. as they sent Christmas and New Year’s wishes to their families and friends back home. Their newly acquired “foreign” accents coupled with bad grammar and mispronunciation were a source of delight. We would laughingly mimic them, promising Mom that we, too, would send her greetings when we moved overseas. “Hello there, Mommy. We know you’re busy cooking up a storm in the kitchen. We wish we were there with you. We’ll be home next year.”

Dinner was always by candlelight beginning around 7 p.m. Despite the extensive menu, the only guests would be our grandmother and sometimes my mother’s favorite brother, visiting from Canada. My grandmother, not a pork eater normally, would indulge in the ham, saying, “Give me several slices, because whether I eat a small amount or lots, my stomach is going to hurt me, so give me plenty.” The day would end with opening gifts and playing board games. It was the best of times.

After we sisters moved away from home, the tradition continued. We would still gather at Mom’s house on Christmas Day. As we raised our own families, the number of participants at Christmas grew, as did the fun. My mother was ecstatic. She looked forward to having her girls and grandchildren around her at her most valued time of year.

Christmas 2014 was my mother’s last Christmas Day on the planet. The day was made special for Mom by holding her newest great-grandbaby for the first time. Although she had an unfavorable prognosis hanging over her, Christmas was as fun and enjoyable as those in the past.
Then came Christmas 2020, the sixth since my mother’s transition. For a variety of reasons, Christmas Day gatherings had unfortunately become infrequent. However, we decided to use the virtual space made available by the pandemic and create an online gathering. Because we were in different places and time zones—Singapore, Ghana, New York, and Texas—meeting time was at 8 a.m. for us in Jamaica.

The idea came to me to honor Mom’s memory by recreating the breakfast menu we had had as children, which religiously consisted of curried lobster, boiled green bananas, escovitch fish, fried ripe plantains, fried bammy (a flatbread made from cassava), boiled yams, steamed callaloo (spinach), and ackee and saltfish (Jamaica’s national dish). We agreed to cook various versions to accommodate those now vegetarian and vegan. Two items were consistent in every home—curried lobster and curried chana (chickpeas).

We gathered on Zoom on Christmas Day and shared more than a meal. We did what we had not done up to that point, which was finally to create our own broadcast sending greetings from across the world. We shared our fondest Christmas memories of Mummy and our love for her. We played games just as we had in the good old days. And although she was not present in physical form, we shared an oversize photo from Mom’s 80th birthday celebration, and each felt her spirit of unconditional love for her family. Truly, love never goes away.

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**Making Christmas Memories**

Rev. Linda Martella-Whitsett

*We wanted our preteens to embody the giving spirit of the Christmas season. The years when Santa Claus had magically delivered wrapped packages were behind them. They were holiday humbugs.*

My husband Giles and I introduced the idea of becoming Santa for others, leading us to a not-for-profit organization where we could contribute Christmas gifts for children of the same age and gender identity as our kids.

I remember the day we went shopping, each with cash in hand. The care with which Adrian and Alicia selected gifts, within budget, and wrapped them thrills me even now. They could imagine unknown children awakening Christmas morning to find magically appearing presents with their names on them. Embodying Santa transformed our family’s experience of Christmas.