

# Traditions, traditions!

One of the best things about the holidays is the rituals that accompany them. Here four readers share their favorite holiday traditions and memories.

## Bring out the tamales!

by Marie Hernandez

I have fond memories of growing up and always attending the family celebrations on Christmas Eve, while Christmas day was usually left to our immediate families. When my grandmother was still alive, we would all gather at her house by 2 p.m. in the afternoon to begin the festivities.

A piñata always kicked off the celebration. The youngest always got the chance to hit at it first and then it went up the chain to the eldest. After the excitement of toys and candy, most of the food preparation was done and the meal would begin by 4 p.m. All the adults laid claim to the table, while the children that were old enough to eat on their own were scattered around the living room or any open spot to eat.

After dinner, my uncles would begin to partake in their “adult” drinks, as we were always told, while listening to the Mexican music coming out of the radio. My mother and my aunts could be found gossiping in the kitchen soaking the “ojas” or corn husks for the tamales. The tamales would usually be done in time for a late snack. They were so good coming out of the boiling water, the steam coming off of them



and the chaos in the kitchen of everyone trying to grab one before they were all gone.

The completion of tamales meant it was time for some rounds of la loteria, or Mexican Bingo, as we so affectionately nicknamed it. La Loteria is much like picture bingo. Each card was lined with five columns of four pictures each. A picture of each object was included in the deck of 54 cards. Each time a card was pulled from the deck, you covered the picture with a penny or pinto bean until you hit a diagonal, horizontal or vertical bingo. The big game was always saved to the end with a cover-all! You earned the bragging rights and were always talked about at the next family gathering of how you walked away with it all.

Mass was always attended after the fun and excitement. A change of clothes were brought for Mass and off you went.



# Oh, how we love them!

## Food, food and more food

by Esther Chosnek

Hannukah wouldn't be the same in our family without the wonderful foods we make during the season. Every year we would go to my parents and feast on beef brisket, potato latkes, Mom's famous apple cake, doughnuts, cookies and cheesecakes.

Hannukah commemorates the victory of Judah Maccabee and is celebrated for eight days. After sunset each night, we light a candle on the menorah, one for each night. It reminds us of the miracle of the oil that lasted for eight days instead of one.

Traditionally, gelt (money) would be given to the children on each day of Hannukah, but today we usually give a gift. When my sister-in-law, Becky, visited her

children's school to talk about Hannukah and its traditions, the other children wanted to know how to become Jewish so they could benefit from eight days of presents!

We all have fun memories. Grandpa used to give the nieces \$2 bills. When they asked where he got them from, Becky, their mom, would tell them that Grandpa made them on his printing press in the basement.

Today, my nieces are grown and celebrate with families of their own. To recapture a bit of their youth, I take them to lunch at Arni's every Hannukah. We reminisce about past Hannukahs and what the memories mean to us. It's a time that's very special to me.

*Three generations gather around the Menorah to celebrate Hannukah. Pictured from left to right are: Jacque Chosnek, Isaac Williams, Sara Chosnek, Rachael Chosnek, Erin Chosnek Willis, Esther Chosnek and Becky Chosnek.*



VINCE WALTER



# Fitting into the holidays

by Tanuja Sheth

The one thing I remember about being a teenager in suburban Chicago is that you never wanted to be different than anyone else. As a teen, you wanted to have the same clothes, listen to the same music and maybe even celebrate the same holidays as your friends. You never want to be considered different or not the norm.

This was a hard task for me since my parents are immigrants from India. So right off the bat, they looked different, talked with accents and my mother wore different clothes. Many teenagers are embarrassed by their parents – imagine how much worse it could be when your parents are not “regular Americans.”

When I was growing up, the Indian-American community was much smaller than it is today. Although we did celebrate our major Hindu holidays at home and with friends, there was no temple for community celebrations. My parents felt that if I could not celebrate Indian holi-



days as they had in India, I might as well celebrate American ones and enjoy those festivities with everyone else. Therefore, we had a Christmas tree and I got Christmas presents. Why should anyone be left out?

In school, I was involved in orchestra and played the violin. The local Methodist church needed players for an orchestra to play in the Christmas Eve service. One of my favorite and most cherished holiday memories is going to play at the Methodist Church on Christmas Eve. We played classical music along with traditional carols in a beautiful church. The weather was always a perfect, clear and crisp December night filled with stars. When asked what I did on Christmas – I could say that I had been to church!

I was just like everyone else.





# shouting up the Chimney

by Mary Dennis

Oh, the excitement of Christmas Eve in my home in Dublin, Ireland, with my eight brothers and sisters and our Ma and Da. We'd all be bouncing off the walls with excitement.

Christmas Eve Day was always endless. We'd all be irritable and cranky with anticipation, but at the same time trying to be as good as we could for this was our last chance to redeem ourselves before Santy's arrival on Christmas Eve.

Letters to Santy were very slowly typed by me with my index fingers on my Ma's old portable typewriter (to keep me busy I suppose). By tea time, the house was clean from top to bottom, and we were, too!

In our brand new pajamas we'd all gather around the blazing coal fire last thing before heading up the stairs to our beds. This was our special time to actually talk to Santy before he arrived. We'd do this by shouting up the chimney to him and his reindeers. The chimney was a direct line to Santy! It might all sound a little idyllic, but in reality it was nine hyper, overexcited children pushing and pulling to take turns to shout up the chimney over a blazing coal fire. The closer to the fire we could get and the louder we could shout the better for Santy to hear us.

My Da was the biggest child! He and the older ones really played it up for the smaller

ones. Theirs wasn't just a one-way conversation; they actually had responses from Santy and Rudolph! Their dialogue would make us get even closer, toppling over each other like puppies to be the nearest to the fire. We were convinced that every crackle and pop was something else entirely – we could hear them, too! Looking into the bright coals we were certain we could see fairyland, and our imaginations would just take off.

With nine of us, this took quite a while. Then it was off to bed, after leaving out some Christmas pudding and a Guinness for Santy.

Roll on many years and my husband, John, and I have now immigrated to West Lafayette with our daughter, Michelle. Christmas rolls around and horror of horrors, we don't have a fireplace in our home. Luckily our good friend and neighbor, Margie Pope, had one. It became the tradition for us to visit Margie on Christmas Eve so we could shout up the chimney. This went on until Michelle was too embarrassed to do it anymore.

Now when we have our young nieces or nephews visit over the holidays, or we are lucky enough to make a trip 'home' over the holidays, we see that the tradition lives on. But, probably not quite with the same abandonment as it did with my brothers and sisters in Ireland.