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"I STOPPED BELIEVING
IN SANTA CLAUS WHEN
MY MOTHER TOOK ME
TO SEE HIM IN A
DEPARTMENT STORE,
AND HE ASKED FOR MY
AUTOGRAPH." -
SHIRLEY TEMPLE



HOW IT ALL GOT STARTED

CHRISTMAS TREE-Long before the advent of the modern day decorated Christmas tree, plants and trees that remained green all year had a special meaning for people in the winter. Just as people today decorate their homes during the festive season with pine, spruce, and fir trees, ancient people hung evergreen boughs over their doors and windows. In many countries, it was believed that evergreens would keep away witches, ghosts, evil spirits, and illness.

In the Northern hemisphere, the shortest day and longest night of the year falls on December 21 or December 22 and is called the winter solstice. Many ancient people believed that the sun was a god and that winter came every year because the sun god had become sick and weak. They celebrated the solstice because it meant that at last the sun god would begin to get well. Evergreen boughs reminded them of all the green plants that would grow again when the sun god was strong and summer would return.

The ancient Egyptians worshipped a god called Ra, who had the head of a hawk and wore the sun as a blazing disk in his crown. At the solstice, when Ra began to recover from the illness, the Egyptians filled their homes with green palm brush, which symbolized for them the triumph of life over death.

Early Romans marked the solstice with a feast called the Saturnalia in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture. The Romans knew that the solstice meant that soon farms and orchards would be green and fruitful. To mark the occasion, they decorated their homes and temples with evergreen boughs. In Northern Europe, the mysterious Druids, the priests of the ancient Celts, also decorated their temples with evergreen boughs as a symbol of everlasting life. The fierce Vikings in Scandinavia thought that evergreens were the special plant of the sun god, Balder.

Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition, as we now know it in the 16th century when devout Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. Some built Christmas pyramids of wood and decorated them with evergreens and candles if wood was scarce. It is a widely held belief that Martin Luther, the 16th-century Protestant reformer, first added lighted candles to a tree.

Walking toward his home one winter evening, composing a sermon, he was awed by the brilliance of stars twinkling amidst evergreens. To recapture the scene for his family, he erected a tree in the main room and wired its branches with lighted candles.

It is not surprising that, like many other festive Christmas customs, the tree was adopted so late in America. To the New England Puritans, Christmas was sacred. The pilgrim's second governor, William Bradford, wrote that he tried hard to stamp out "pagan mockery" of the observance, penalizing any frivolity. The influential Oliver Cromwell preached against "the heathen traditions" of Christmas carols, decorated trees, and any joyful expression that desecrated "that sacred event." In 1659, the General Court of Massachusetts enacted a law making any observance of December 25 (other than a church service) a penal offense; people were fined for hanging decorations. That stern solemnity continued until the 19th century, when the influx of German and Irish immigrants undermined the Puritan legacy.

In 1846, the popular royals, Queen Victoria and her German Prince, Albert, were sketched in the Illustrated London News standing with their children around a Christmas tree. Unlike the previous royal family, Victoria was very popular with her subjects, and what was done at court immediately became fashionable—not only in Britain, but with fashion-conscious East Coast American Society. The Christmas tree had arrived.

By the 1890s, Christmas ornaments were arriving from Germany and Christmas tree popularity was on the rise around the U.S. It was noted that Europeans used small trees about four feet in height, while Americans liked their Christmas trees to reach from floor to ceiling.

The early 20th century saw Americans decorating their trees mainly with homemade ornaments, while the German-American sect continued to use apples, nuts, and marzipan cookies. Popcorn joined in after being dyed bright colors and interlaced with berries and nuts. Electricity brought about Christmas lights, making it possible for Christmas trees to glow for days on end. With this, Christmas trees began to appear in town squares across the country and having a Christmas tree in the home became an American tradition.

ROCKEFELLER CENTER CHRISTMAS TREE

The Rockefeller Center tree is located at Rockefeller Center, west of Fifth Avenue from 47th through 51st Streets in New York City. The Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree dates back to the Depression Era days. The tallest tree displayed at Rockefeller Center came in 1948 and was a Norway Spruce that measured in at 100 feet tall and hailed from Killingworth, Connecticut.

The first tree at Rockefeller Center was placed in 1931. It was a small-unadorned tree placed by construction workers at the center of the construction site. Two years later, another tree was placed there, this time with lights. These days, the giant Rockefeller Center tree is laden with over 25,000 Christmas lights



SING, HEY! SING, HEY!
FOR CHRISTMAS DAY,
TWINE MISTLETOE AND
HOLLY.
FOR A FRIENDSHIP GLOWS
IN WINTER SNOWS,
AND SO LET'S ALL BE
JOLLY!
TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS
SONG

CHRISTMAS TREES
ARE GROWN IN ALL 50
STATES INCLUDING
HAWAII AND ALASKA.



ROCKEFELLER CENTER
CHRISTMAS TREE

MISTLETOE-Held sacred by the Norse, the Celtic Druids, and the North American Indians. The Druid priests would cut mistletoe from an oak tree with a golden sickle. The branches had to be caught before they touched the ground. They then divided the branches into many sprigs and distributed them to the people, who hung them over doorways as protection against thunder, lightning, and other evils. The folklore continued over the centuries. It was believed that a sprig placed in a baby's cradle would protect the child from goblins. Giving a sprig to the first cow calving after New Year would protect the entire herd. Mistletoe is a symbol for peace and joy. The idea originated in the ancient times of the Druids: whenever enemies met under the mistletoe in the forest, they had to lay down their arms and observe a truce until the next day. From this comes the custom of hanging a ball of mistletoe from the ceiling and exchanging kisses under it as a sign of friendship and goodwill.

In the 18th Century, the exchanging of kisses between a man and a woman was adopted as a promise to marry. At Christmas a young lady standing under a ball of mistletoe cannot refuse to be kissed. The kiss could mean deep romance, lasting friendship and goodwill. It was believed that if the girl remained unknissed, she couldn't marry the following year.

Mistletoe is an aerial parasite that has no roots of its own and lives off the tree that it attaches itself to. Without that tree it would die. Mistletoe was thought to be sacred by ancient Europeans. Druid priests employed it in their sacrifices to the gods while Celtic people felt it possessed miraculous healing powers. In fact, in the Celtic language mistletoe means "all-heal." It not only cured diseases, but could also render poisons harmless, make humans and animals prolific, keep one safe from witchcraft, protect the house from ghosts and even make them speak. With all of this, it was thought to bring good luck to anyone privileged to have it.

CHRISTMAS STOCKING- There was a kindly nobleman whose wife had died of an illness leaving the nobleman and his three daughters in despair. After losing all his money in useless and bad inventions the family had to move into a peasant's cottage, where the daughters did their own cooking, sewing and cleaning. When it came time for the daughters to marry, the father became even more depressed as his daughters could not marry without dowries, money, and property given to the new husband's family.

One night after the daughters had washed out their clothing they hung their stockings over the fireplace to dry. That night Saint Nicholas, knowing the despair of the father, stopped by the nobleman's house. Looking in the window Saint Nicholas saw that the family had gone to bed. He also noticed the daughters' stockings. Inspiration struck Saint Nicholas and he took three small bags of gold from his pouch and threw them one by one down the chimney and they landed in the stockings.

The next morning when the daughters awoke, they found their stockings contained enough gold for them to get married. The nobleman was able to see his three daughters marry and he lived a long and happy life. This is where we received the tradition of hanging Christmas stockings for kids.

Children all over the world continue the tradition of hanging Christmas stockings. In some countries, children have similar customs; in France, the children place their shoes by the fireplace, a tradition dating back to when children wore wooden peasant shoes.



CHRISTMAS IS NOT A TIME
NOR A SEASON, BUT A
STATE OF MIND. TO
CHERISH PEACE AND
GOODWILL, TO BE
PLENTEOUS IN MERCY, IS
TO HAVE THE REAL SPIRIT
OF CHRISTMAS.
--CALVIN COOLIDGE



In Holland, the children fill their shoes with hay and a carrot for the horse of Sintirklass. In Hungary, children shine their shoes before putting them near the door or a windowsill. Italian children leave their shoes out the night before Epiphany, January 5, for La Befana the good witch. In addition, in Puerto Rico children put greens and flowers in small boxes and place them under their beds for the camels of the Three Kings.

RUDOLPH-1939 Copywriter Robert L. May of the Montgomery Ward Company created a poem about Rudolph, the ninth reindeer. May had been “often taunted as a child for being shy, small, and slight.” He created an ostracized reindeer with a shiny red nose who became a hero one foggy Christmas eve. Santa was part way through deliveries when the visibility started to degenerate. Santa added Rudolph to his team of reindeer to help illuminate the path. A copy of the poem was given free to Montgomery Ward customers. 1949: Johnny Marks wrote the song, “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer”. Rudolph was relocated to the North Pole where he was initially rejected by the other reindeer that wouldn’t let him play in their reindeer games because of his strange looking nose. The song was recorded by Gene Autry and became his all-time best seller. Next to “White Christmas”, it is the most popular song of all time.

CANDY CANE-During the 17th century, craftsmen created white sticks of candy in the shape of shepherds’ crooks at the suggestion of the choirmaster at the Cologne Cathedral in Germany. The candy treats were given to children to keep them quiet during ceremonies at the living Nativity scene, and the custom of passing out the candy crooks at such ceremonies soon spread throughout Europe.

LETTER TO SANTA-In the latter part of the eighteen hundreds, children wrote letters to Santa Claus. By the 1890’s post offices were over run with letters for Santa each December. There was a great diversity in the correct spelling of his name and where he lived – South or North Pole. Mail clerks gravely stamped them with a certification that the address could not be found and forwarded them to the dead letter office in Washington. Nevertheless, children had faith in the Postal Service and knew Santa would get their letters. They came from children from all walks of life. One Christmas eve, eight-year-old Edsel Ford, son of Henry and Clara Ford, and the future president of the Ford Motor Company, penned his letter in Detroit, Michigan:

Dear Santa,

I Haven’t Had Any Christmas Tree in 4 Years and I have Broken My Trimmings and I Want A Pair Of Roller Skates And A Book, I Can’t Think Of Any Thing More. I Want You To Think Of Something More. Good By. Edsel Ford

HOME ALONE

For most children, the holidays are happy, fun, and exciting times. However, for the children of whose parents are serving time, holidays can be stressful and confusing. These children struggle every day with feelings of anger, abandonment, loneliness, and despair.

HOME ALONE cont.

For imprisoned parents, one of the greatest punishments incarceration carries with it is separation from their children. As one mother put it, "I can do time alone OK. But its not knowing what's happening to my son that hurts most." One in three prisoners is a parent, and about 75 percent of women in prison are mothers. One in every 43 children has a parent in prison, which means more than 1.7 million children will spend Christmas separated from their incarcerated mom or dad. "Every time a parent goes to prison, their sentence is also a form of punishment for their children. These kids don't necessarily understand why their parents are not with them for the holidays. They only want to be with their parents, and to feel their parents' love, just as any other child would during this special time of year," -CEO of Prison Fellowship. The following are patterns of coping that families exhibit when a parent is incarcerated. Remember, however, that each family is unique and these are generalizations.

Family on Hold-This type of family often visits their incarcerated member, writes or telephones. They take pictures of events, people, and places to keep their loved one connected to their lives. Rarely, however, are feelings discussed. Anger about the crime or the incarceration, sadness, abandonment, confusion, loss, frustration and hurt are all real and present emotions that are left on hold to deal with upon release. There is often a focus on the positive commitment to make this period of separation "ok".

Parallel Family-Families in this group keep in touch by letter or phone with occasional visits. They have a "life goes on" attitude without positive or negative emotion. "This happened and we'll deal with it." These family members tend to develop their own lives, meet new people, learn new skills, and grow in completely separate ways from the incarcerated person.

Estranged Family-This family is cut off from the incarcerated member. Sometimes the family has decided not to maintain contact. Sometimes foster parents often have trouble coordinating visits. Often, inmates choose to limit contact with family when they are unable to cope with their feelings or the frustrations of correctional policies.

Turbulent Family-Negative feelings are expressed in out of control ways in this family. They are rarely able to develop effective relationship skills. Contact during incarceration can become hurtful and abusive at worst, or simmering and unpredictable at best.

GOING HOME

When the release from prison finally comes, it creates a major crisis for most families. The inmate's homecoming is likely to be shrouded by joblessness, economic hardship, or continuous poverty. In addition, role changes and restructuring of responsibilities by spouses and children can cause resentment and anger in the post parole period. A child's adjustment to release is often related to the style of coping evident during incarceration.

On hold families often feel initially relieved at their abilities to have weathered the storm. They are confident that the worst is behind them. When the intensity of family life combines with many years of unresolved anger and hurt, the outcome can be disastrous. This is especially true for children who need an opportunity to express those feelings in a safe environment.

The parallel family has to reconcile their images of themselves as "the same as before incarceration" with all of the changes that have occurred. These changes often threaten the confidence of the released prisoner and pose many challenges to the relationships. Children are often faced with the dilemma of choosing to keep their "self" and risk the relationship or give up their new roles and identity to keep the relationship.

The estranged family must often cope with the released prisoner's attempts to "surprise" them, reconcile the relationships, and pick up where they left off. For children, the conflict caused by the decision to welcome parents back vs. rejecting their overtures may cause massive distress, internal conflicts, and loyalty issues with custodial caregivers.

The turbulent family is likely to continue to operate in a volatile fashion. Children may also attempt to express feelings they were unable to during incarceration and if they fear the violent and unpredictable reactions of parents, this acting out may occur outside the family, in school or on the street.

In each of these families, the effect of the parents' coping strategies on the child's development is significant.

FACTS ABOUT THE CRIME AND SENTENCE

The stigma of a parent's arrest will vary with the type of crime charged and the child's social context. If a parent is charged with a sexual crime, for example, a child will be subjected to intense feelings arising from the stigma attached to the crimes of rape or sexual abuse. If there is suspected injustice related to racism, politics or police brutality, and family and community rally around the incarcerated parent, children might join in and view the parent as an innocent victim even if they are guilty of the crime. For school-aged children this can also challenge their developing sense of right and wrong. The length of sentence will affect how a child copes with a parent's incarceration, as will the explanations given to them and the motivation of caregivers to maintain the child's relationship with the incarcerated parent over time.

You can play a powerful role in supplying a child with some of the needs that aren't being met by the incarcerated parent. Stories from children of prisoners tell how relationships made a positive difference. A school counselor-I went to see her once a week and all we talked about was hair and nails but I wouldn't miss those appointments for anything. She also told me I was smart. A nurse at the clinic taught me to tie my shoes and to whistle and every time I saw her she acted really glad to see me. The librarian that found me books that had kids with a parent in jail. My third foster mother told me that no matter how many times I got into trouble, she would not give up on me.



*"One hundred years from now,
It will not matter what kind of
car I drove, What kind of house
I lived in, Or how much money I
had in the bank, But the world
may be a better place because I
made a difference in a child's
life." Author unknown*

SEASON'S GREETINGS FROM EDUCATION SERVICES