



JUST ASKING

BY MARY KLEST

What are the best holiday traditions for bonding with family?

I asked Barrington area families for their favorites.

Family traditions are ritualistic, predictable and memorable. This part of family history has no bounds. Traditions can be silly, sentimental or solemn. Here is one that invites participation and reflection.

"At Thanksgiving, I ask everyone to write on strips of paper what they are most grateful for about each attendee. I provide the strips, pre-formatted – that read simply:

Name _____

I am grateful for you because _____

I ask for three 'gratitudes' for each person. I then fold them up and place them by each seat at the table. Each person reads at least one of their gratitude's out loud and can savor the rest for their eyes only."

– **Maripat Abbott, certified life coach, North Barrington**

This tradition helps organize a family history. It is tangible, anticipated and shared.

"After Thanksgiving, I go through all of the family photographs I took during the year. I upload the photos to an online book making site like Shutterfly, and carefully arrange each page. I have the book delivered to my house and wrap it for the whole family as a gift. The photos show us picking kids up from camp, getting a new puppy, going off to college, a birthday party. They tell the story of our lives together. The photo book is the hit of Christmas. In most of our pictures from Christmas morning someone is looking through the book. It then lives on, atop our coffee table all year long."

– **Susan McConnell, photographer, Barrington**

During the holidays, families can enjoy a sense of adventure that includes a physical activity.

"We always kick off our Christmas celebration by going to Millennium Park to ice skate and view the holiday decorations. We take our own skates, not because we are great skaters, but so we don't have to wait in the rental line. We'd rather spend our time in the fresh air. If we're lucky, it is snowing on us as we skate. We take our laps as we look up at the Chicago skyline and its glowing lights reflecting off of the ice. Everyone out on the ice – from dating teens, to wobbling youngsters, to stylish grandparents of every tone and type – is laughing and having a blast. Including us. Then we go inside to enjoy a delicious dinner before we drive, tired and happy, back to Barrington."

– **Georgianne Harms, teacher, Barrington**

A tradition of volunteering can lessen the overwhelming commercial influence of holidays and restore the true meaning.

"A fond tradition in my family involves connecting with the community of elders. At the conclusion of the midnight Christmas Eve service, the minister would invite members of the congregation to take one or more potted poinsettia plants to give to our congregation's "shut-in" members (usually older members who weren't able to come to church services). On Christmas morning, before we opened our gifts, my family would take the poinsettia plants to some of our church's "shut-in" members. My parents have big hearts and passed that along to my brother and me."

– **Dale Juffernbruch, Barrington Hills**

Mary Klest is a Barrington-based writer and owner of Klest Communications, a content solutions company.

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