

A special time of year

At Children's Hospital Boston, winter is a time to celebrate many holidays and a season of hope. Here are some stories by Children's staff and employees about why this is a special time of year.

Waiting 'til midnight

Lilliana Lopera-Jimenez, Social Work

I come from Colombia, South America, and we celebrate Christmas on the 24th of December, like most Hispanic families. We actually wait until midnight on the 24th to open our presents. When I was a little girl, my parents used to send my brother and me to sleep, and we pretended we were asleep until our parents said it was time to wake up and open the presents. This tradition of waiting until midnight continues in my family.



Three kings come bearing gifts

Matilde Pena, Social Work

Children don't get toys on December 25 in my country, the Dominican Republic. Instead, they get them on January 6. This is a holiday, and schools are closed. On the night of January 5, children go to bed early, but before going to bed, they leave water and grass under the bed (for the camels). The three kings come riding their camels and leave toys for the children that night. It's called Three Kings Day. It's a day just for the children.

Stringing family ties together

Juli Herrera, Medical Records

I had the pleasure of growing up in an extended family, complete with step-parents, step-grandparents—the whole nine yards. My Christmases were spent doing a lot of bouncing from house to house, making sure I had every side of the family covered. The great thing about having such a mixed and diverse family background is it makes for many memorable holiday traditions.

For instance, when I spent Christmas with my father, we would listen to the Nutcracker Suite while stringing popcorn and cranberry garland for the tree. It took a long time, but there was something so great about the family getting together to make something so simple yet beautiful to decorate the tree.

And at my mother's house, we always host an "open house" on Christmas Eve, when friends, family and neighbors drop by to have some holiday food and cocktails. When I was growing up, my little sister, little brother and I would bake and decorate a cake, light a candle and sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus in front of the Nativity scene before any of our guests arrived. We also had the tradition on Christmas morning of me waking up my siblings, gathering our stockings from the end of our beds and shuffling sleepily to my mom's room to open them together. Once the mayhem of stocking opening was complete, we kids would have to wait at the top of the stairs while my mom and step-dad went down to make sure Santa wasn't still there. When we got the okay, we'd trample down the stairs to the tree, stand in awe of the presents beneath it and then go to work at throwing paper shreds all over the living room.

When winter comes, spring is sure to follow

Amy Battisti-Ashe, Interpreter Services

You may not know that the Christmas tree is actually a Pagan symbol, representing, as it does, everlasting life—the tree that stays green while the rest of the trees lose their leaves during this dark turning of the Wheel of the Year. My roommate and I are both Pagans, he of the Feri tradition and myself of Dianic Wicca. Together we will welcome the return of the Sun on the Winter Solstice, decorating an evergreen tree and lighting candles to chase away the darkness. The beauty of the Solstice for me is that, although we may feel like the winter is just beginning, with this festival we are reminded that spring is not really that far away. It brings hope in troubled times.



Memory of the century

Christine Powers-Perry, Public Affairs

My grandmother—who passed away this year at age 103—was a December baby. The year she turned 101, in celebration of Christmas as well as her birthday, she did something especially grand. She pulled out the polleras she'd made for my sisters and me as children. A pollera is a traditional Panamanian celebration dress. By then these little dresses were about 40 years old! After locating the old polleras, she had my sisters and sister-in-law assist her in making more of them. She then dressed her youngest great-granddaughters (down to the baby who was about 2) in polleras and taught all seven of them a Panamanian dance!

Though I was out of the country for this momentous event, it was caught on film for me to enjoy afterward. I can still hear her singing, "Mi pollera, mi pollera, mi pollera es Colorado," which is the first line of the song. A priceless memory.

