

# Holiday Traditions Without The Hassle

by Kim Kotecki





**T**raditions are a wonderful marriage between the routine and the uncommon, serving as special moments that are comfortingly predictable. With our schedules being so full, it's often tempting to overlook traditions and let them slip away because of the time it takes to make them happen. But who says a tradition is only meaningful if it takes a lot of time? Here are ten holiday traditions that will actually leave you with renewed energy and sometimes even extra time at the end of your day, which is sure a blessing in December. They are memorable and meaningful, but simple just the same.



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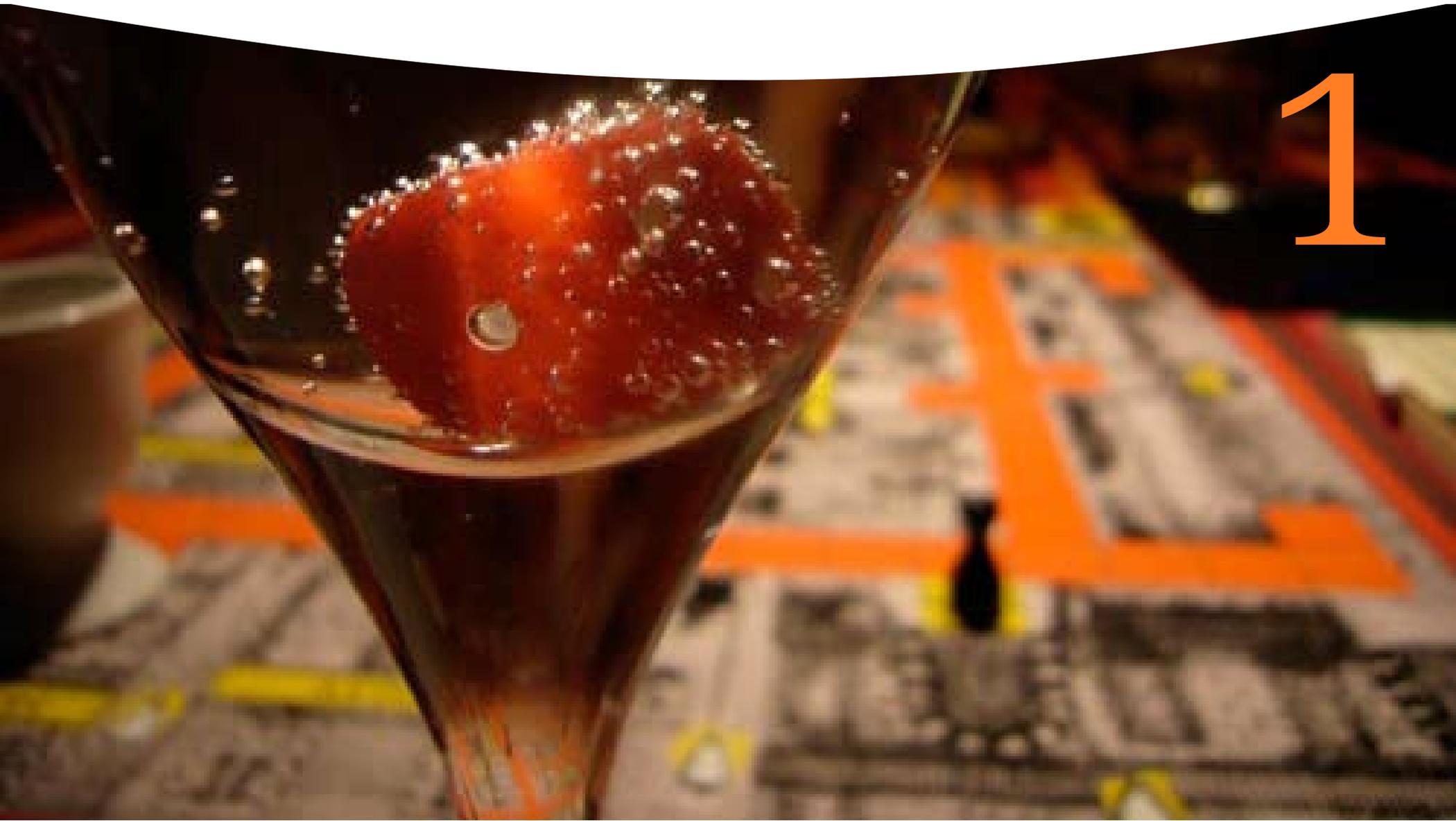
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## Treasuring Time

“We haven’t seen them in so long!” Is this a true statement describing any of your friendships? Instead of mailing them a gift or having a quick gift exchange one rushed evening in December, commit to spending the money that would normally go towards gifts on a shared experience that will create a memory. Schedule it in January, post-holidays, so that you can all feel relaxed. It could be a fun night at a local fondue place, or a Saturday playing games and drinking good wine. Whatever you enjoy doing together, carve out the time to make it happen as your gift to one another. Years later you are guaranteed to remember the time you spent together, versus the new fleece pajamas you received, as soft as they are. Making memories is much more valuable than any gift you can find.



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## Sharing Sugar

A major project in December is baking Christmas cookies and desserts. Everyone has their favorites, and by the end of it all, the baker is often exhausted, guarding the goods with her life, so that they won't be completely gone before the holidays even arrive. Why do we try to do it all? It's time to divide and conquer, people! All it takes is a little communication and flexibility. Chat with a couple of friends and/or family members who are planning to spend some time baking as well. Decide on who will bake what recipes, then revel in the efficiency of baking a whole bunch of two or three recipes, versus a couple dozen of six or seven recipes (or more!). Be specific about a realistic deadline, then meet up to exchange the tins of sugary goodness. Everyone needs to agree on how many dozen they are to share and talk about what recipes will be used, so that there are no surprises (or disappointments) on delivery day.



A colorful illustration of a child with brown hair and a blue shirt lying in bed, looking out at a Christmas tree decorated with lights. The scene is set at night with a full moon and falling snow. A large white number '3' is overlaid on the right side of the illustration. In the bottom right corner, a digital clock shows '2:01'. The artist's signature 'KotECKi' is visible in the bottom left corner of the illustration.

How many  
sleeps till  
Christmas?

## Computerize Your Christmas Cards

There's nothing wrong with streamlining your Christmas card list with the help of your computer. Sure, there are just some people you simply cannot send an e-greeting to, like Great Aunt Gertrude. She doesn't even have a microwave, let alone a PC. Then, there are others you wouldn't dare send something computerized to. Your godmother loves hanging her cards above the doorway, and you know this. But then, let's be honest, there are a few dozen people, at least, you communicate with on e-mail that you could streamline into a fun and unique holiday greeting.

There are plenty of "build your own" e-card sites out there, including the [Kim & Jason eCard Zone](#).

This would allow you to insert a great photo and have some fun getting creative with it. It also buys you a little more time, since you don't have to wait for the postal carrier to schlep your mail to their doorsteps. Keep it simple and be ready to let go of certain things, like the days of licking countless Christmas card envelopes!

## Shopping Shenanigans

It's inevitable, even with online shopping being a huge convenience, there are still a few things you will need to head to the mall to get. Maybe you just refuse to pay shipping on that box of bricks your husband wants. Instead of turning into the Grinch as you wait in lines and fight the crowds, spice it up with some companionship. Invite a friend (or two) to join you and make a day (or even weekend) of it. Incorporate dinner and even a movie, and now you're really having fun. Who says holiday chores have to be such a drag? Everyone has to go out, so why not go with your best buds and make the best of it? Waiting in line is so much more fun with a fancy coffee drink in one hand and a friend by your side!

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## **The Greatest Gift for Grandparents**

Are you scratching your head again about what to get the grandparents this year? They really do have everything they need. Start a fun tradition with the kids that doubles as the best grandparent gift ever. Dust off the video camera and invite each child to contribute something for the gift. It could be singing a favorite song, lipsyncing, dancing, reading a poem, telling jokes, playing a musical instrument, playing a sport... whatever your child is into. Guaranteed, this will consume an entire

Sunday afternoon of plotting, practicing, and performing, while you get some wrapping done. In the end, be sure to make an extra copy for your memory box, as it will be priceless to show their spouses twenty years from now.

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## **Declare the Decorating Weekend**

Make a weekend of decorating the house for the holidays. The key is “team-work.” Get everyone involved, making it fun for all and not a pain for one person. Divide up the jobs: putting up the tree, stringing lights outside, hanging garland, etc. Order pizza, blare the Christmas music, and just have fun with it. Oftentimes, the decorating has a way of lingering over the course of a week or more. If you get your hands deep into the decorating for a short amount of time, you will enjoy it more and be able to keep a playful mind-set throughout the process. Cap off the weekend with a nice evening together relaxing and basking in the lights and thrill of having the house all ready to go.



## Save a Day

Perhaps the day you'll look forward to most in December, start the tradition of picking a day to tackle your list. This will significantly help reduce your stress levels and feelings of busyness. Either save a vacation day from work and take it in December, or find a friend or family member to babysit while you tackle that to-do list. Preferably a weekday, to avoid the crazy weekend lines. You can get a ton of things done in an uninterrupted day: shopping, baking, cleaning, packing, laundry, resting... whatever it is you need to be able to go into the holidays with a (sincere) smile on your face. There's nothing worse than entering Christmas week with a list that is impossible. Avoid that reality and take the time you need.



## **Give for Giving**

We often take for granted that Christmas can be very difficult for many people. Ask your local church or school if they know of any families who will be struggling to buy gifts this year. Get a list from the organization and take a trip as a family to pick up some goodies. Everyone can contribute to the process. There is an unmatched high that comes with this sort of generosity. One weeknight of shopping is all it takes to give a family a Christmas they never thought was possible, and to give yourselves the gift of joy that is only found in real selfless generosity. Keep this same family in your thoughts and prayers throughout the holidays. This tradition helps to put things in perspective, allowing you to let go some of the annoyances of the hustle and bustle.

## Driven to De-stress

Keep a close tab on the stress level in your household. When you find that it has officially risen to a level that needs some TLC, invite your family members to join you on a spontaneous evening drive, maybe even in your pajamas with pillows. Bring your favorite holiday music and enjoy the magic of all of the Christmas lights. Stop for some hot chocolate along the way and pledge not to head home until your heart rates have leveled off to a manageable level. There will inevitably be moments in December when the stress of the added busyness takes its toll. Use this idea as an “in case of emergency break glass” strategy.

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## **Candy House Creations**

Certain family traditions, like building a gingerbread house, are amazing but also very time intensive. If it's one of those years when it just won't be able to happen, enjoy this simple candy house tradition in its place. Build the house using graham crackers and an easy royal icing recipe. Let the houses sit overnight to ensure a secure structure. The next day, let loose with the frosting and countless bowls of colorful candy. Some favorites for decorating are M&Ms, small candy canes, Hershey kisses, licorice ropes, mints, etc. You are only limited by your creativity, so you can get as elaborate as you want!



**The End**

Have yourself a very fun, very Merry Christmas!