Connections

Holiday Memories and Traditions From Around the World

December 2020

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PMB Administrative Services and the
Office of Diversity Inclusion and Civil Rights

Message from the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administrative Services

Dear Colleagues,

Under normal circumstances, the holiday season is one of joy, love and togetherness. We gather with family and friends, sharing affectionate moments and laughter over tables groaning with traditional favorites. Perhaps we dress in our finest attire and visit a house of worship to be surrounded by our spiritual families. We sing, pray, embrace and are thankful. We join together to remember loved ones who are no longer with us but remain forever in our hearts.

And so we end each year, deeply connected to each other through the memories of days gone by and the grateful knowledge that there will be so many more loving memories to share in the years to come.

Although it is true that for most of us this holiday season will look and feel very different from our most cherished memories of celebrations in the past, we end the year with hope. For hope is the light that illuminates the path forward for all of us.

May you and your loved ones be surrounded by hope today and every day.

- Jacqueline M. Jones

Special Section: Holiday Traditions from Around the World

Editor's Note: Although this list features many of the holiday traditions of countries, cultures and religions from around the world as well as here at home, it is by no means complete, and some obvious holidays have been left out by virtue of their familiarity to most readers. We invite you to enjoy this cavalcade of celebrations and enjoy the opportunity to travel the world through our shared experiences of family, fellowship and joy.

Many thanks to Greg Fritzler, Supervisory Payroll Program Manager, IBC, for suggesting the idea and for compiling the information about these traditions. Thank you, Greg!

Kwanzaa

Kinara

December 26 marked the start of Kwanzaa, also spelled Kwanza (with one 'a' at the end). It's a seven-day non-religious holiday meant to honor African Americans' ancestral roots. The celebration lasts until January 1.

The name comes from the Swahili phrase "*matunda ya kwanza*," which means "first fruits."

Created in 1966 by Maulana Karenga, a black nationalist and professor of Pan-African studies at California State University at Long Beach, Kwanzaa became popular in the 1980s and 1990s in tandem with the black power movement – making up the trio of winter holidays along with Hanukkah and Christmas.

The holiday is defined by Nguzo Saba, or the seven principles. Each day of the festival is dedicated to a specific principle, marked by lighting a new candle on the kinara, a seven-branched candelabra. Here's a look at what those principles are, and what they mean.

Umoja means unity in Swahili. Karenga defines this on his Kwanzaa website as: "To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race."

Kujichagulia is self-determination. Karenga says this principle refers to defining, naming, creating and speaking for oneself.

Ujima, translated as "collective work and responsibility," refers to uplifting your community. "To build and maintain our community together and make our brother's and sister's problems our problems and to solve them together," Karenga writes.

Ujamaa means cooperative economics. Similar to ujima, this principle refers to uplifting your community economically. "To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together," Karenga writes.

Nia means purpose. Karenga expands on this principle with, "To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community."

Kuumba means creativity. Karenga defines this principle as "To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it."

Imani translates to faith. Karenga defines this as faith in community, writing, "To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle."

Diwali

Diwali (or Divali, Deepawali) is the Hindu festival of lights, typically lasting five days and celebrated during the Hindu Lunisolar month Kartika (typically late October to mid-November). One of the most popular festivals of Hinduism, Diwali symbolizes the spiritual "victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance."

"O come all you faithful, rejoicing and victorious, come let us embrace the mystery in the spirit of life, as we celebrate the goodness of Kwanzaa and the African American heritage. Come and give thanks for companions on the journey in the struggle for freedom and justice."

- Traditional Kwanzaa Prayer

Chinese New Year

Modern Chinese New Year Parade

The **Chinese New Year** of 2021 falls on Friday, February 12, and the festival will last to the end of February, about 15 days in total. 2021 is the Year of the Ox, according to Chinese zodiac.

Chinese New Year (traditional Chinese: 農曆新年, 中國新年; simplified Chinese: 农历新年, 中国新年; pinyin: nónglì xīn nián, zhōngguó xīn nián) is the Chinese festival that celebrates the beginning of a new year on the traditional Chinese calendar. Marking the end of winter and the beginning of the spring season, observances traditionally take place from New Year's Eve, the evening preceding the first day of the year to the Lantern Festival, held on the 15th day of the year. The first day of Chinese New Year begins on the new moon that appears between 21 January and 20 February.

Chinese New Year is one of the most important holidays in China, and has strongly influenced Lunar New Year celebrations such as the Losar of Tibet and of China's neighboring cultures, including the Korean New Year (seol), and the Tết of Vietnam. It is also celebrated worldwide in regions and countries with significant Chinese or Sinophone populations, including Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Philippines and Mauritius, as well as many in North America and Europe.

The San Francisco Chinese New Year Festival and Parade is an annual event in San Francisco. Held for approximately two weeks following the first day of the Chinese New Year, it combines elements of the Chinese Lantern Festival with a typical American parade. First held in 1851, along what are today Grant Avenue and Kearny Street, it is the oldest and largest event of its kind outside of Asia, and the largest Asian cultural event in North America. The parade route begins on Market Street and terminates in Chinatown. Highlights of the parade include floats, lion dancers, elementary school groups in costume, marching bands, stilt walkers, Chinese acrobats, and a Golden Dragon. Observers can expect to hear at least 600,000 firecrackers and are advised to bring ear plugs.

Middle left: a photo of the Chinese New Year parade in San Francisco, 1891. Lower left: intricate 196-foot long Chinese dragon lantern on display last year in Boston. The materials for making a lantern are bamboo, wood, rattan, or wire for the frame, with the shade crafted from delicate rice paper or silk.

Las Posadas

Las Posadas is a *novenario* (nine days of religious observance) celebrated chiefly in Latin America, Mexico, Guatemala, Cuba, and by Hispanics in the United States, beginning 16 December and ending 24 December.

Observances: Regional Variations - In Wisconsin, the procession may occur within a home, rather than outside, because of the weather. One event in Portland, Oregon finishes with Santa Claus and Christmas gifts donated for needy children. In New York, worshippers may drink Atole, a hot corn-sugar beverage whichi is traditional during Christmas.

A large procession occurs along the San Antonio River Walk in Texas (pictured, left) and has been held since 1966. It is held across large landmarks in San Antonio, including the Arneson River Theater, Museo Alameda, and the Spanish Governor's Palace, ending at the Cathedral of San Fernando.

Farolitos (also known as luminarias) lining the inside of the 1717 Spanish Mission Church plaza at Pecos National Historical Park in Pecos, New Mexico on Las Posadas 2017. Photo courtesy NPS

Santa Lucia Day

Santa Lucia Day, also known as St. Lucy's Day, is celebrated in Sweden, Norway, and the Swedish-speaking areas of Finland on December 13th.

The observance commemorates Lucia of Syracuse, an early-4th-century virgin martyr under the Diocletianic Persecution, who according to legend brought food and aid to Christians hiding in the Roman catacombs, wearing a candle lit wreath on her head to light her way and leave her hands free to carry as much food as possible. Her feast day, which coincided with the shortest day of the year prior to calendar reforms, is widely celebrated as a festival of light.

Saint Lucy's Day is celebrated most widely in Scandinavia and in Italy, with each emphasizing a different aspect of her story. In Scandinavia, where Lucy is called Santa Lucia in Norwegian and Danish and Sankta Lucia in Swedish, she is represented as a lady in a white dress symbolizing a baptismal robe and a red sash symbolizing the blood of her martyrdom, with a crown or wreath of candles on her head. In Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Swedish-speaking regions of Finland, as songs are sung, girls dressed as Saint Lucy carry cookies and saffron buns in procession, which symbolizes bringing the Light of Christ into the world's darkness. In both Protestant and Catholic churches, boys participate in the procession as well, playing different roles associated with Christmastide, such as that of Saint Stephen.

A special devotion to Saint Lucy is practiced in the Italian regions of Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Trentino-Alto Adige, in the north of the country, and Sicily, in the south, as well as in the Croatian coastal region of Dalmatia.

Above, right: Lucy by Cosimo Rosselli, Florence, c. 1470, tempera on panel.

Left: Scandinavian Santa Lucia procession.

Below: traditional saffron-infused Santa Lucia rolls.

Mawlid al-Nabi

Mawlid, Mawlid al-Nabi al-Sharif or Eid Milad un Nabi is the observance of the birthday of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, which is commemorated in Rabi' al-awwal, the third month in the Islamic calendar. The history of this celebration *[pictured, right]* goes back to the early days of Islam when some of the Tabiʻun began to hold sessions in which poetry and songs composed to honor Muhammad were recited and sung to the crowds. It has been said that the first Muslim ruler to officially celebrate the birth of Muhammad in an impressive ceremony was Muzaffar al-Din Gökböri (d. 630/1233). The Ottomans declared it an official holiday in 1588, known as Mevlid Kandil. The term Mawlid is also used in some parts of the world, such as Egypt, as a generic term for the birthday celebrations of other historical religious figures such as Sufi saints.

Bodhi Day

Celebrated sometime between the winter solstice and Chinese New Year, Bodhi Day is the Buddhist holiday that commemorates the day that the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama (Shakyamuni), experienced enlightenment, also known as bodhi in Sanskrit and Pali. According to tradition, Siddhartha had recently forsaken years of extreme ascetic practices and resolved to sit under a peepal tree, also known as a Bodhi tree (*Ficus religiosa*), and simply meditate until he found the root of suffering, and how to liberate oneself from it. Some say Siddhartha made a great vow to Nirvana and Earth to find the root of suffering, or die trying. In other traditions, while meditating he was harassed and tempted by the god Mara (literally, "Destroyer" in Sanskrit), demon of illusion. Other traditions simply state that he entered deeper and deeper states of meditation, confronting the nature of the self. *[Below: Buddha under the Bodhi Tree, batik silk]*

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b-mitzvotav, v-tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Hanukkah.

Blessed are you, Our God, Ruler of the Universe, who makes us holy through Your commandments, and commands us to light the Hanukkah lights.

Winter Solstice

For six months, the days have grown shorter and the nights have grown longer in the Northern Hemisphere. But that's about to reverse itself. Winter Solstice, the shortest day of year and the official start of winter, fell this year on Monday, December 21. How it all works has fascinated people for thousands of years. Winter Solstice holidays across the Northern Hemisphere have great variations for any single day. For some people, the Winter Solstice is a mystical day on which pagans engaged in surreptitious rituals. For others, it is simply an astronomical event that tells them they have reached the time of the year where the nights are longer than the days. Ever since the last part of the Stone Age, man has considered this day of the year to not only be a spiritual time of the year, but one that had many practical purposes. It was not only considered to be the day on which the sun was finally triumphant against the night but was also used as a milestone to plan crop rotations and the mating of domestic animals.

Old solstice traditions have influenced holidays we celebrate now, such as **Christmas** and **Hanukkah**.

Below are a representative selection of festivals and ceremonies held by cultures throughout the Northern Hemisphere on or near the Winter Solstice. Enjoy!

Alban Arthan (Welsh): In the recent Druidic tradition, Alban Arthan is a seasonal festival at the Winter solstice. On the solstice, the Chief Druid would make his way to the mistletoe to be cut while below, other Druids would hold open a sheet to catch it, making sure none of it touched the ground. With his golden sickle, and in one chop, the Chief Druid would remove the mistletoe to be caught below. This ritual was recorded by Pliny (AD 24-79) in his *Natural History*, not as a part of a seasonal festival, but in the context of a sacrifice of two white bulls to invoke prosperity from the gods.

Blue Christmas (Western Christian): Blue Christmas (also called the Longest Night) in the Western Christian tradition, is a day in the Advent season marking the longest night of the year. On this day, some churches in Western Christian denominations hold a church service that honors people that have lost loved ones and are experiencing grief. These include parishes of Catholicism, Lutheranism, Methodism, Moravianism, and Reformed Christianity. The Holy Eucharist is traditionally a part of the service of worship on this day. This worship service is traditionally held on or around the longest night of the year, which falls on or about December 21, the Winter Solstice. There is an interesting convergence for this day as it is also the traditional feast day for Saint Thomas the Apostle. This linkage invites making some connections between Saint Thomas's struggle to believe in Jesus' resurrection, the long nights just before Christmas, and the struggle with darkness and grief faced by those living with loss. The worship often includes opportunities for expression of grief and pain as well as an opportunity to focus on the promise of hope.

Winter Solstice

Brumalia (Ancient Rome): This ancient Roman winter solstice festival honored Saturn/Cronus, Ceres/Demeter, and Bacchus in some cases. By the Byzantine era, celebrations commenced on 24 November and lasted for a month, until Saturnalia and the "Waxing of the Light". The festival included night-time feasting, drinking, and merriment. During this time, prophetic indications were taken as prospects for the remainder of the winter. Despite the 6th century emperor Justinian's official repression of paganism, the holiday was celebrated at least until the 11th century in the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, as recorded by Christopher of Mytilene. No references exist after the 1204 sacking of the capital by the Fourth Crusade.

Dongzhi Festival (East Asia): This is one of the most important Chinese and East Asian festivals celebrated by the Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese during the Dongzhi solar term (winter solstice), some day between December 21 to December 23. The origins of this festival can be traced back to the yin and yang philosophy of balance and harmony in the cosmos. After this celebration, there will be days with longer daylight hours and therefore an increase in positive energy flowing in. *Tang Yuan* are round glutinous rice balls filled with sweet sesame or red bean paste which symbolize family togetherness and are served during Dongzhi.

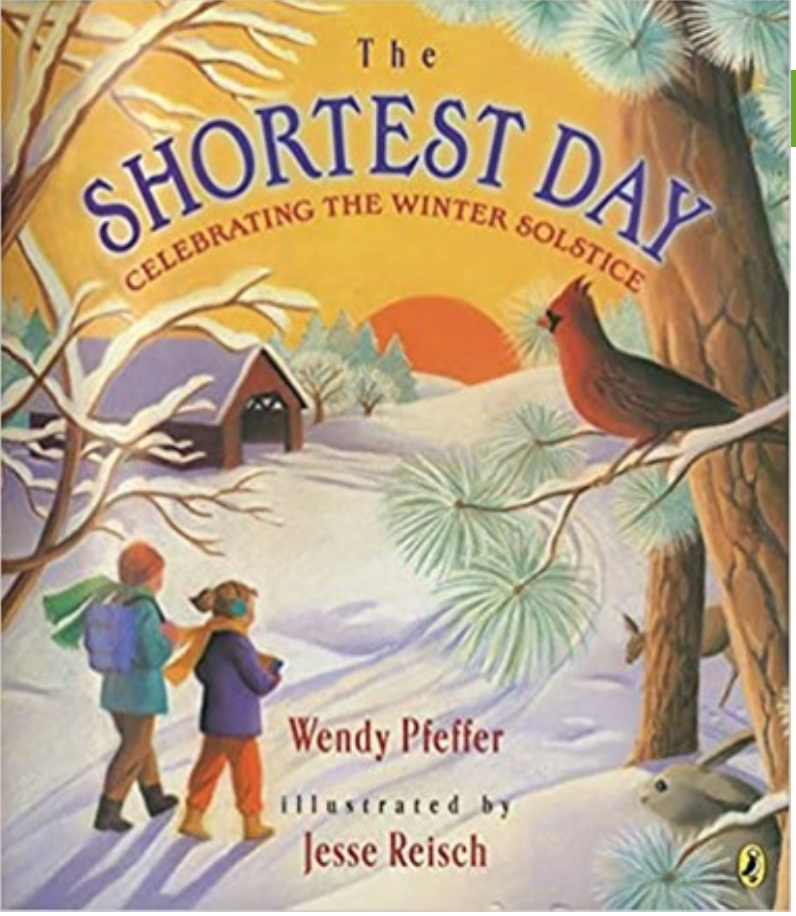
Korochun (Slavic): The first recorded usage of the term was in 1143, when the author of the Novgorod First Chronicle referred to the winter solstice as "Koročun". It was celebrated by pagan Slavs on December 21, the longest night of the year and the night of the winter solstice. On this night, Hors, symbolizing old sun, becomes smaller as the days become shorter in the Northern Hemisphere, and dies on December 22, the winter solstice. It is said to be defeated by the dark and evil powers of the Black God. On December 23 Hors is resurrected and becomes the new sun, Koleda. On this day, Western Slavs lit fires at cemeteries to keep their loved ones warm, and organized feasts to honor the dead and keep them fed. They also lit wooden logs at local crossroads. In some Slavic languages, the word came to denote unexpected death of a young person.

Winter Solstice

Soyal (Hopi): This is the Winter Solstice celebration of the Hopi Indians of northern Arizona. Participants ceremonially bring the sun back from its long slumber, mark the beginning of another cycle of the Wheel of the Year, and work on purification. *Pahos* prayer sticks are made prior to the Soyal ceremony, to bless all the community, including homes, animals, and plants. The sacred underground kiva chambers are ritually opened to mark the beginning of the Kachina season.

Shalako (Zuni): The Zuni people have lived in the American Southwest for thousands of years. Their cultural and religious traditions are rooted, in large part, in the people's deep and close ties to the mountains, river ways, forests, and deserts of this ancient Zuni homeland. The Shalako ceremony, which is performed in December, is one of the most important events in the Zuni religious calendar. Six men wear wooden frames ten feet tall covered with dance kilts and topped with masks of the face of Shalako, a deity or diving being. They dance throughout the night, embodying the spirits and visiting specific houses in the Zuni Pueblo. The next day a ritual race is performed during which offering sticks are planted in the ground to bring general health and fertility to the village, its crops, and livestock. Along with religion, the Zuni's unique language is a powerfully unifying force among tribal members.

Yaldā (Iran): This Persian festival, or Shab-e Yalda, is a celebration of the winter solstice in Iran that started in ancient times. It marks the last day of the Persian month of Azar. Yalda is viewed traditionally as the victory of light over dark, and the birthday of the sun god Mithra. Families celebrate together with special foods like nuts and pomegranates and some stay awake all night long to welcome the morning sun.



The Shortest Day

By Wendy Pfeffer
Illustrated by Jesse Reisch

Book Review by Abby True and her children Milo (8) and Nani (7) Lane

In this informative little book, the kids and I learned about the science of the winter solstice and also the history of how it has been celebrated around the world for thousands of years.

Before reading, we discussed what we thought we knew about the winter solstice already. Nani offered a succinct description: "It's a really short day but a fun adventure." The book explained the changes that happen in the northern hemisphere in autumn, how squirrels hoard nuts, foxes grow thick fur coats, and birds fly to warmer climates. The sun rises later and sets earlier each day and appears lower in the sky. The air grows colder as the days get shorter. Some animals hibernate as food becomes scarce. Around December 21st, the sun reaches its lowest point on the horizon, making it the shortest day of the year.

Milo pointed out that even though it's the "shortest" day of the year due to having fewer hours of daylight, it still has 24 hours like any other day, because that's how long it takes the earth to make one rotation around the sun. Milo went on to explain that, while the earth spins on its axis, it also orbits the sun, which takes one year.

We enjoyed reading about how humans gradually came to understand the seasons and how to measure the days. Milo's favorite part of the book was learning different techniques ancient people used to measure the days. For example, 3,000 ago, Chinese astronomers measured shadows to determine the shortest day. The longest shadow appeared on the shortest day because the sun was at its lowest point in the sky. The ancient Chinese understood that as the sun appeared higher in the sky, the shadows would get shorter, and the days would get longer.

Our favorite part of the book was learning how people celebrate the solstice with festivals and merrymaking. Thousands of years ago, people all over the world had traditions for celebrating the solstice, eager for the promise of a new beginning and the return of warmth and sunlight to the world. Romans celebrated by hanging evergreen wreaths, mistletoe, and holly; Druids in England and Ireland decorated oak trees with golden apples and candles; in Sweden, a festival of light called St. Lucia's Day celebrated the return of longer days; and the Incas in Peru marked the shortest day with a festival honoring the sun.

We discussed how we could celebrate the solstice this year. Nani decided giving and receiving gifts was her favorite way to celebrate, only instead of a Christmas tree, she suggested we put a flag in the front yard and put presents by the flag. Milo, the animal-lover, liked one of the suggestions in the book about having a winter solstice party for the birds by creating a simple treat out of cereal, peanut butter, and birdseed to hang outside.

Loving Memories of a Big Brother's Kindness

By Tracy Fuller, AK Mapping PM & UE Elevation Focus Area Coordinator, USGS Boise

Most Decembers in the memories of my youth are joyous months filled with snippets of large family gatherings, scrumptious dinners, decadent desserts, listening on the radio for updates to the whereabouts of Santa Claus and his reindeer, and the occasional present that left a lasting impression.

Christmas 1969 when I was eight years old is different. We will get to that story in a moment, but for now let's go back a few months to the summer of 1969, which had been a time of family wonderment and awe-struck rejoicing. I remember that summer like it was yesterday; the family gathering around the wood-encased, black and white, grainy television screen on July 20, 1969, watching Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin land the Lunar Module Eagle on the moon while Michael Collins orbited above in the Command Module Columbia. America seemed invincible. A man had walked on the moon! And all three astronauts would later come home safely.

Selective Service Commission conducting draft lottery, 1969

Neil Armstrong on the Moon, July 1969

Summer 1969 is emblazoned in my memory as one of the highlights of my young life when anything seemed possible.

However, the happiness welling from those summer memories is abutted against the memories of December 1969. Although too young to understand the full gravity of the situation, what I could sense was the foreboding, anxiety and sadness of my dear mother. My father had left my mother, me and my six brothers and sisters for another woman three years earlier. We had moved across the country from my birthplace in Libby, Montana to Olympia, Washington, so my mom could be close to her sister and my uncle Darren to have their support, and to get away from the pain she felt every time she would see my dad walking around small-town Libby with his new family.

Looking back now, I realize the person who was providing most of the support for my mom and the family at this time of struggle was my oldest brother Willy. He was 20 years old by December 1969, having been born on September 28, 1949. He was outgoing, friendly, and funny. I remember him carrying me on his shoulders to the corner store to buy me candy, wrestling with me in the living room, teaching me to ride my bike…stepping up and taking the place of the father who should have been there. And that is the reason for the pall that hung over my mom and the entire household leading up to December 1, 1969. That was the day of the first lottery drawing for the Vietnam War draft. *[cont'd]*

On that day, we sat around that grainy black and white TV, but that night, instead of joy and excitement filling the house as in summer, all I can remember is being held closely by my softly weeping mother, sitting in her lap on the couch while we waited for the first of 366 capsules to be drawn and read, each capsule containing a unique birthday for all males born between 1944 and 1950. I feel now for every parent, spouse or sibling whose son, husband or brother was born on September 14, the first capsule drawn, the infamous '001'. Willy's birthday would eventually be drawn at number '257'. Many ensuing days were spent watching for the official draft day for his number, but that night in December is what is forever etched in my memory. It meant that my brother, my mom's emotional support, our family's provider and protector, would soon be going to war.

Willy Fuller is the oldest, holding baby brother Jared. Tracy is standing on his left and younger brother Terry is on his right.

So how is this a Christmas story? How could Christmas turn such a sad time into something higher, something cherished, something that could mask out or at least dampen the memory of a weeping mother? The answer is a complex mixture of the story of the first Christmas, with its account of a baby born in humble circumstances who would give hope to a bitter world, and people, reaching out to support those in need.

Alongside and eclipsing the sadness of the memory of early December 1969, I have wonder-filled memories of Christmas eve and Christmas morning 1969. On Christmas eve, while listening to the radio to get a lock on Santa's path through the skies, there was a knock on the door. My sister opened it and peered out to find a mountain of presents, seven or eight for each member of the family, left by anonymous strangers. As a family we grabbed them off the porch and added them to the meager pile that had been under the tree. Then came another knock on the door. It was my aunt and uncle, bearing cooked turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, dressing, and a pie. A true Christmas feast for a family of eight.

As the night wore on and Santa was getting closer to the Pacific Northwest, we gathered as a family around the lighted tree in the darkened living room, piled close together on worn couches, and read the Christmas story from Luke. With that vision of a faraway world, of sheep and wise men and Mother Mary and the baby Jesus lying in a manger vivid in my mind, I was carried gently upstairs by Willy and placed in my bed, falling asleep to dreams of ancient Israel and to what gifts Santa might bring. *[cont'd]*

Upon waking up and running downstairs early the next morning, in front of the tree and the piles of wrapped presents delivered the night before were piles of unwrapped toys from Santa. For me and my two younger brothers there was an amazing assortment of Tonka trucks, a train set, a race car set, bows and arrows, BB guns, and an enormous arrangement of stuffed Teddy Bears. What I learned later in life was that Willy, knowing that he would be heading off to boot camp later that spring, wanted to make sure that his youngest siblings had sweet memories of Christmas, regardless of what had happened earlier that December or what might happen in the future.

As we close out the window on this family and a December long ago, remember there are people in need all around us. Seek them out. Find ways to support them with love and generosity. Turning a tough year or a bad month into something beautiful is our challenge, our opportunity, and the work that will bring the greatest joy. ■

I have fond memories of caroling through the neighborhood with my family and friends when I was growing up and then heading back home for made-from-scratch hot chocolate and snicker-doodles. To this day when I eat a snickerdoodle it brings me right back to my childhood. Good times.

Leslie Holland, Deputy State Director of Support Services, BLM Alaska

Easy Snickerdoodle Cookies

- 2 ⅔ cups flour
- 2 teaspoons cream of tartar
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- 1 ⅓ cups sugar
- 1 cup butter softened
- 2 eggs

Topping:

- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon

Instructions: Preheat oven to 400°F. Combine flour, cream of tartar, cinnamon, baking soda, and salt. Set aside. With mixer on medium, combine sugar, butter and eggs. Stir in flour mixture. Combine cinnamon and sugar for topping in a small bowl. Divide dough into 32 pieces and roll each piece into a ball. Roll balls in cinnamon-sugar mixture. Place 2 inches apart on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake 8-10 minutes.

Two Christmases

By Abigail T. True, Writer/Editor, AVSO

It started the day after Thanksgiving. My mom, a single mother of three, would load us kids into the car and we'd drive about forty-five minutes to a tree farm outside of Omro, Wisconsin. It was very important to my mom that we got a real tree, never artificial. I remember one year before the holidays when we were inside a local watch repair shop and my mom was chatting with the gentleman who owned the shop. "Sometimes I think I might just get a fake tree," she said resignedly.

"Don't swear!" the man said as if to even speak of putting up a fake Christmas tree was blasphemy. My mom's resolve seemed to strengthen after that, and to this day at 68 years young, she is still trudging out into a field to cut down a Christmas tree every year.

At the tree farm, it was usually bitterly cold, maybe snowing. My brothers, my mom and I would traverse fields of evergreen trees, laboriously searching for just the right candidate. We all seemed to have a different idea of what the perfect tree was. My mom envisioned what she called "a Charlie Brown tree," somewhat scraggly, sparsely

Abby's mother, Mary.

built but proud. I favored a Blue Spruce with its short, blue-green needles. Despite our differences, there were three features upon which we could all agree: we didn't want the kind of tree with long needles; the needles needed to stay on the tree (nobody wanted to be vacuuming every day); and perhaps most important of all—that scent, that beautiful, enveloping pine scent that evoked all things Christmastime in our minds.

Picking out a Christmas tree

Eventually, we'd find the tree and chop it down (seems kind of cruel to me now, but I told myself then it was a great honor for a tree). Together we'd carry it to the bailing station and feed it through the machine, which would bind it up tightly in netting, so we could get it home.

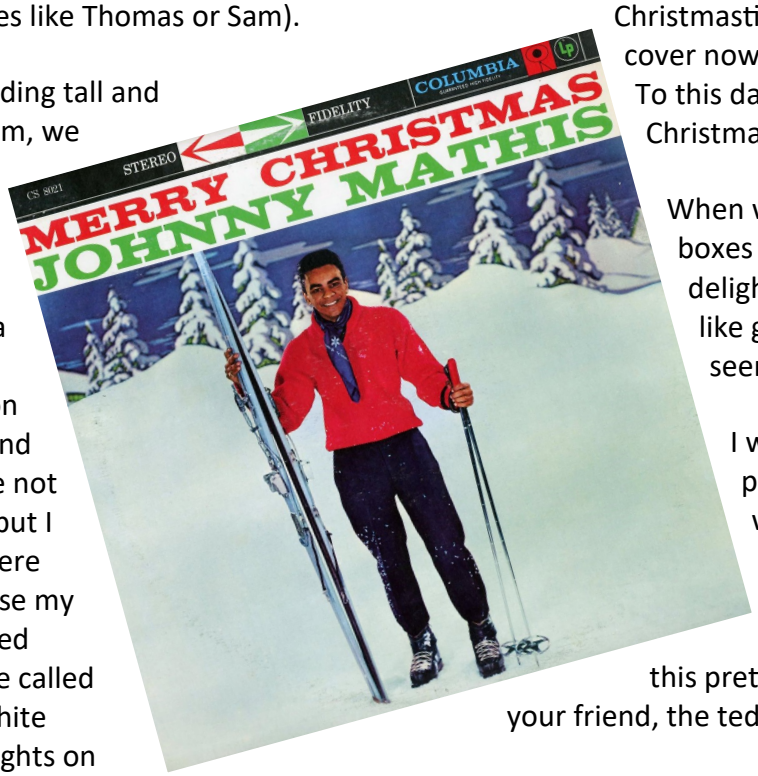
[cont'd]

We had a variety of ramshackle sedans growing up, and the safest way to get our tree home was to stuff it inside of our car. This was one of my favorite parts of the adventure because I'd volunteer to ride wherever was most haphazard, a position of honor, perhaps next to an open window with branches sticking out or manually holding a door shut that had to be partially bound with twine. It was a little bit scary and, therefore, thrilling. We'd stop in Omro at a pub called Tanner's on Main Street and have a bite (chili and fried cheese curds being a favorite!) before heading home.

A car full of Christmas tree!

When we got home, it was usually a fairly onerous process to get the tree in the house, sometimes needing to cut the top shorter if it was too tall for our 10-foot ceilings. The next challenge was getting it situated in its stand: "Abby! Tell me if it's straight!" my mom would command. "Okay, now you hold it. I need to check." She'd verify. We'd tighten the screws into the trunk (ouch! I often thought. I didn't like the idea of hurting our poor tree, which already felt like family to me. Sometimes I'd even give them names like Thomas or Sam).

When the tree was standing tall and straight in our living room, we then had to wait for the tree to let down its boughs. Eventually, it would be time to put on the lights. We were a white lights home. My mom has a specific vision for her Christmas tree and multicolored lights were not part of it (I liked white, but I also liked blue, which were strictly forbidden because my mom thought they looked cold). She liked what she called the "coziness" of soft white lights. She'd string the lights on her own, and at 5'4" she needed to stand on a stool to reach the top of the tree. The proper dispersion of the lights was absolutely critical—it had to be even. One year when I was very young, we strung cranberries and popcorn on string and hung it like garland all around the tree. I remember mainly that it was difficult, and the popcorn kept breaking apart. I was probably eating it the whole time too.



At long last, after the lights were just so, we would be ready to trim the tree. But first—Johnny Mathis. We always played a Johnny Mathis record at Christmastime. I can see the album cover now, Johnny Mathis on skis. To this day, it doesn't feel like Christmas without him.

When we lifted the lids off the boxes of ornaments, I remember delighting at seeing them again, like greeting old friends I hadn't seen all year.

I would imagine the perspective of the ornament when I would hang them on the tree—what's the view like from here? Do you want to be next to this pretty light? How about near your friend, the teddy bear?

There was an ornament of a tiny book, and I'd page through it before I could even read it, charmed at something so small. *[cont'd]*

Rum cake

My brothers and I each had a Christmas bulb that we'd gotten the year we were born, our names delicately painted on in white calligraphy—mine was red, Ross's was blue, and Mike's was green. They were so fragile. One by one they would shatter over the years until none remained. When the tree was decorated as perfectly as it could be, we'd all stand back and marvel at it. The sight, the smell, the warmth of its glow. I would sometimes crawl underneath the tree and lie on my back, looking up through its lighted branches, and it was bliss.

Decorating and putting up a tree are mightily important in my mother's Christmas tradition, but close on its heels is baking. Every year I can remember, my mom makes the same variety of treats: turtles (candies made of milk chocolate melted over caramel and pecan), dainty round cookies coated in powdered sugar called wedding cakes, candy cane cookies, and my favorite—rum cake. (When I was in fifth grade, my mom made the rum cake so rummy, you needed a designated driver to get home after eating it. Just kidding, it was the best one she ever made.)

Just like my own little daughter Nani does now, I always wanted to help by pouring in ingredients or stirring or, best yet, tasting. My mom would get out two aprons and tie one around her tiny waist and one around mine, and together we'd bake. I remember one instance when she got frustrated during the course of our baking, and ever the lady, she cursed, "Son of a BEEHIVE!" I would do well to take this lesson from her baking playbook!

On Christmas eves when my grandma Arlene was still alive, the whole family (all ten of her children and their many children and their many children) would go to her dilapidated house on Bay Street. Grandma's house was dark, and it had a musty smell. We weren't allowed to go upstairs because not all of the windows had panes and the grownups told us there were holes in the floor we could fall through.

But I loved Grandma's house, and it was exciting to see my big family, especially my aunt Lisa and uncle Jim. Though childless, Lisa and Jim have always been vibrant, energetic, young at heart. *[cont'd]*

Abby, her brothers and cousin

Jim was the uncle who would scoop us up and swing us around, throw us up into the air, and flip us upside-down. Lisa was beautiful, gentle, kind, always looking on the bright side of life. Jim and Lisa are sentimental souls who treasure the pure spirit of Christmas, and one of the things we like to do together is quote our favorite Christmas movies, *It's a Wonderful Life* and *A Christmas Carol*. "To my brother George—the richest man in town!" Jim might say, or "I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year."

After the party, we'd come home and hasten to bed. I think very early on I knew there was no real Santa Claus, but I pretended to believe as though it would make my mom happy, like I wanted to keep the magic intact for her and not the other way around.

Every year, my brothers and I would plot to get up early before our mom was awake and sneak downstairs to see if Santa had come, and we'd feel the stockings to see if they were full. And it would come to pass in this way, except it was only my twin brother and I who did the exploring; our older brother, sleepy, would always decline when the moment finally came. Ross and I would excitedly scurry back upstairs, exclaiming, "He came! He came!" we'd tell our half-asleep brother and then chatter together, eagerly waiting for our mom to awaken.

At long last, the moment would come, and we'd all gather around the tree. The presents would be arranged according to recipient, each on a different side of the tree, and one by one, we'd go around and open a present. My mom gets the best presents, the kind only someone who really knows you can get.

After presents, we'd get dressed. Christmas Day was exciting because we would spend it with our dad and his family—the Trues. We all went out to the country to my grandparents' house on frozen Lake Winnebago. I always wanted to look pretty on Christmas Day. I remember velvet dresses, red sweaters and white Peter Pan collars, creamy tights, and patent leather shoes. My hair was usually bobbed, sometimes with a ribbon.

When we got to my grandma's house, she'd always be waiting in the doorway to greet us. "Hello! Come ee-in!" she'd say happily in her native Ohio accent. My grandpa, by her side, could always be counted upon to say with mock indignation, "I didn't hear a 'Hi Grandpa!'"

"Hi Grandpa!" we'd quickly say, going along with the joke. Raucous, jolly greetings would continue for awhile, our grandparents complimenting our outfits or our hair or commenting on how tall we were: "Rossie, you're growing like a WEED!"

[cont'd]

Abby and her mother enjoying Christmas Eve dinner many years ago.

Favorite holiday decorations

Grandma and Grandpa's Christmas tree would be in the corner with a mountain of gifts surrounding it, green and red gumdrops filling crystal candy bowls around the room, assorted chocolates and nuts from the local confectionery, and Grandma's own nut bread set out for all to enjoy. On an end table, there was a big red ceramic boot filled with candy canes of every imaginable color and flavor. I liked the cherry flavor, which were white with rainbow stripes.

Little by little all of our aunts, uncles, and cousins would arrive. My brothers and I liked to arrive early because we were shy, and it was always less nerve-wracking to arrive first and wait for the others, than to be on display, marching up the driveway, knowing everyone's eyes were on you. We were usually a group of 21, and it was a loud gathering. Oftentimes, my grandpa would make a home video that we'd all watch later over pie and ice cream and laugh at all of our antics. Sometimes we'd record a video greeting to our family in Ohio or have a long-distance phone call with our family in Wales.

When the time came to open gifts, all 11 of the kids and 10 of the adults would scatter around the living room, its great big picture window looking out on the frozen lake, and we'd all wait with bated breath for the signal that it was okay to start opening. My dad was the wise guy in the family and also one of the loudest, so he'd usually make the announcement. "Reeadyyy…WRESTLE!" he would say (some of my cousins were talented wrestlers during their high school and college years, and as a result, our family was something of a wrestling family, following them to meets around the region, so we all knew this saying). It meant game on. There was no methodical, one-by-one opening of gifts at the True Christmas—it was a free-for-all, paper and ribbons flying everywhere, a cacophony of delighted squeals and awwws and thank yous. In a matter of minutes, the dust—err, the paper—settled, and we were left to enjoy our treasures while the feast was prepared.

My Grandma hated cooking. Or, at least she always said she did. I think it stressed her out, and why wouldn't it? Cooking for that many people seems overwhelming to me, too. We had all the usual fare—turkey or ham, stuffing, gravy, mashed potatoes (my grandma whipped her potatoes with a hand mixer, and I liked them best that way), Aunt Phyl's cornbread pudding (yum!), cranberry sauce, peas, and a thing called "City Chicken" that the adults all got excited about, but I never tried. We'd all get in a line and make our way around the table, piling up our plates. I took pride in how much I could eat. I was always a "good eater," and would set goals like, "I want to eat TWO FULL plates of food this year!"

[cont'd]

Cornbread pudding

After we'd eaten, many of us would put on our snowsuits and go outside for sledding, ice skating, or best yet, rides on the snowmobile. It was terrific fun to tie a sled to the back of a snowmobile and be pulled at high speed—of course the more danger we were in, the more fun it seemed. We'd stay outside for hours until we were frozen, snow blind, and our faces bright red. We'd come in for pie and fiercely competitive board game matches with our elders. My Grandma's favorite pie was cherry; we even had it at her funeral. I remember there was so much left over, and I'm sure it got thrown away, and it makes me sad to think about now. One Christmas, my aunt Terrie made a chocolate French silk pie and it was the finest dessert I'd ever had. I haven't had it since.

As dusk crept in, and with it, the cold of a Wisconsin winter's night, we'd start to trickle out the door. I was eager to get home to my mom by this time, worrying she was lonely and wanting to show her all of my presents. We'd engage in one of those long, drawn-out Midwestern goodbyes, a gauntlet of hugs and side conversations, promises to get together soon, more hugs.

"Come early, stay late!" my grandma would say every year. Sadly though, I would notice as the years went by, it seemed everyone came later and left earlier.

There was a golden age for our two family Christmases—years ago when I was little, when we were all younger, and it's faded with time. I treasure both of them, and it's with pleasure now that I revive aspects of each for a new golden age of Christmas celebrations with my three children.

Abby and her family, Christmas 2020

Isn't that what we do? Give the best parts of our past to the future? The smell of an evergreen tree, Johnny Mathis singing Christmas carols, rum cake, *It's a Wonderful Life*, a Christmas feast (with Aunt Phyl's cornbread pudding), and an enduring love for the cozy, warm comfort of home are a few of the traditions I can't bear to part with. I wonder what my children will take with them when our golden age fades and they build their own anew.

I can't wait to find out. ■

Jeulgeoun Sigsa

In my multicultural world, happy holidays translates to happy eating. I equate holidays to food since my fondest childhood memories centered on a smorgasbord of delicious dishes. Based on my background, there are times I feel like a spicy bibimpap, a Korean rice dish consisting of meat and assorted vegetables, with a butter-slathered biscuit on the side.

My mother is South Korean and my father's ancestors emigrated from Scotland and Ireland and settled in Pennsylvania farm country. Just like my mother can whip up a variety of kimchee (fermented and salted vegetables) ranging from cabbage to cucumber, my father could easily take a potato and make a multitude of tasty treats. Although it may sound wacky, I enjoy eating a baked potato garnished with kimchee. Now, that is what I would call a delicacy. Try hard not to judge, y'all.

Since I had the rich benefit of being raised in two different cultures, I was able to indulge in a variety of goodies. During the holidays, we enjoyed the typical meat and potatoes fare my father grew up with, and we also dined on rice, kimchee, yaki mandu (Korean fried dumplings) and bulgogi (marinated meat), a nod to my mother's heritage. It was a fabulous feast and although I cannot replicate my mother's impressive kimchee making skills, I ensure to buy it from the local Korean market.

My son and daughter have embraced their Asian heritage and will join me in eating rice, kimchee, bulgogi and soondubu jigae (Korean tofu stew) during the holidays. And to celebrate the Lunar New Year, we always ensure to partake in a steaming bowl of tteokguk (rice cake soup). We top that off with one of my father's favorite desserts, a few chocolate chip and peanut butter cookies with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Clearly, the best of both worlds and a holiday tradition my children appreciate and intend to keep.

Jeulgeoun hyuil (happy holidays)…or, as I prefer to say, ***jeulgeoun sigsa*** (happy eating)!

Barbara Green, Equal Opportunity Manager, National Park Service Alaska

I grew up in a small town and my family always knew elderly people who were living on their own and had no one coming to see them for the holidays. My dad would make bundles of kindling, my mom and I would bake pies, and our neighbor and friend would make homemade breads. She also played guitar. We would load everything up and make a point to visit each of these wonderful people and surprise them with some holiday tunes and good wishes. We also always visited the local retirement home and nursing home and sang carols and brought fresh fruits and cookies. It was always so special because everyone would join in and sing with us and it brought tears to all of us to share those special moments together. It taught me at a young age that the holidays can be a lonely time for so many people, but it's also a great opportunity to share good fortune with others and help brighten their holidays!

Thanks for the opportunity to share!

Marnie Graham, Field Manager, BLM Glennallen Field Office, Alaska

The Joy of Holiday Giving

Our Nacimiento: A Quick Sketch of Ecuador

By Nicholas "Nico" Kernan, Geologist, Division of Minerals Evaluation, AVSO

I grew up in Tumbaco, a small town outside of the city of Quito, the capital of Ecuador. At 18 I came to the United States for college and since then Ecuador is a place I mostly return to for Christmas. I am one of many that does the trip. Every year, starting in mid-December, Latinos living abroad travel by the thousands back to their home countries, usually staying through the New Year. Many save for months, or even years, to make the trip. For all Latinos the trip is rarely done lightly. I mean this literally. One of the strange skills I have acquired in my 14 years of traveling to Ecuador is being able to precisely identify if a bag is over the 50-pound international baggage weight limit. I have not only taken Christmas gifts, but also jars of Tylenol, containers of Metamucil, hair dye, laptop computers, auto parts, computer programs, boxes of Cinnamon Toast Crunch, power tools, perfume, and maple syrup. The phone calls, emails, and texts roll in from the moment I make travel plans. More recently, Amazon boxes just simply appear nameless at my door. The nature of the product (Could it be makeup? Perhaps some men's padded biking shorts?) usually indicates it is meant to be brought down during Christmas and sorted out after arrival. I suppose it must be a magical holiday feeling to get on the internet, send packages to Golden, Colorado, and they make it down to South America a few days before Christmas. It all makes me feel a bit like Santa Claus. That is, if Santa had to fly coach and worry about overweight baggage fees.

There is one Ecuadorian Christmas tradition that serves as a useful way to introduce Ecuador to those unfamiliar with the country. Every year, in my parents' living room, we build a massive *nacimiento*, or nativity scene. Nacimientos are common in almost all Ecuadorean houses during Christmas. The oldest nacimientos can be found in a convent within the old part of Quito, where cloistered nuns have been putting together the assemblage of figurines for hundreds of years. Today, there is an entire industry of artisans that make miniatures of houses, people, animals, and anything else you can think of to decorate a nativity scene. The figures are usually made from clay and cardboard and carefully painted by hand. Our nativity scene includes the standard manger with Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, some sheep, a donkey, the three wise men, etc. but this is just the beginning. The rest of the nacimiento depicts the entire country of Ecuador. I'll describe this nacimiento to you, and through it, Ecuador itself.

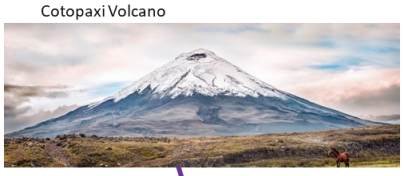
[cont'd]

Detail from Nico's Family Nacimiento

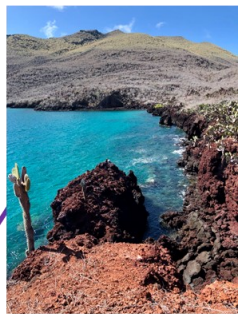
Happy Holidays in Mandarin: Jie Ri Yu Kuai!

San Francisco Cathedral in Colonial Quito

Cotopaxi Volcano



Galapagos Islands



Opening ceremonies at the bull fight ring in Quito

Napo River in the Ecuadorean Amazon

A chiva driving along the Ecuadorean coast

The nacimiento starts with the city of Quito where several stacked bricks serve as the foundation for this city that sits at an elevation of 9,350 ft. A grouping of small clay houses, painted white, indicate the colonial center of the city with its narrow, cobblestoned streets and ornate cathedrals from the 1500s. Street vendors crowd the sidewalk selling fruits, Chinese-made souvenirs, ice cream, pork rinds, and sunglasses. Many of these vendors are young, indigenous men with long ponytails and dark blue ponchos.

Old men in panama hats (which are not from Panama but from Ecuador, a misunderstanding originating from the construction of the Panama Canal) settle onto a bench in the *Plaza Central*, across from the Presidential palace. Each holds a newspaper open and chats in resigned tones about the latest financial crises. A *Banda de Pueblo*, a traditional brass band, is being drowned out by the peeling of hundreds of church bells ringing at noon.

From the colonial center, a wide avenue leads to the *Plaza de Toros*, the bullfight ring where a matador has completed a series of passes ending in a veronica which leads the bull towards an awaiting picador. The crowd on the stand cheers and the municipal band kicks off a vigorous *paso doble*.

Heading south you leave the city of Quito on the Pan-American highway, the main north-south artery of the country. The road is different from American highways in that it is littered with speed bumps, especially through towns. Locals call speed bumps *chapa acostados*, or “sleeping cops,” and take advantage of the slowing traffic to sell their goods as cars go by. At these speed bumps you can purchase fresh yucca bread, green mangos with salt, even roasted guinea pigs.

Continuing south there are two upright pieces of tree bark with cotton stretched over their tops. These represent the *Cotopaxi* and *Chimborazo* volcanoes. The first is the tallest active volcano in the world at 19,349 ft. elevation and the second is the furthest point from the center of the Earth.

[cont’d]

Detail from Nico's Family Nacimiento

Further south is a mountain capped with red transparent paper and a mass of Christmas lights tucked underneath. This is Ecuador's most active volcano, *Tungurahua*. When I was a kid, activity from its real-life counterpart regularly caused school closures due to "ash days."

Duck your head below the boards that make up the Pan-American Highway and tucked underneath is the Amazonian region of Ecuador. A mighty waterfall of aluminum paper gushes down one side and becomes the Napo River, one of the larger tributaries to the Amazon River. Among the foliage of green crepe paper are the bamboo homes of the various indigenous tribes such as the *Shuar*, whose shamans were famous for their secret process of shrinking the heads of slain enemies. Now their ancient skills are more likely to be engaged guiding San Francisco Tech CEO's on ayahuasca-induced journeys of spiritual enlightenment. A small figure of a clay jaguar slinks in the background. Its legs show signs of having been glued back together several times. After many years of being picked up and tossed around by children, it knows better than to make itself easily accessible to tiny hands.

In another nook is the coastal region of Ecuador. A handful of pebbles mixed with shells lets you know you are at the beach prompting thoughts of crashing waves and the smell of stewing biche de pescado, a peanut-based fish soup typical of the coastal province of *Manabi*. Fruit vendors lounge in hammocks suspended between palm trees, barely disturbed by the passing chivas, bright colored wood-framed buses with no windows or doors, which until not long ago were the main form of transport between coastal towns.

Roughly 600 miles offshore, a distance so great that it occupies its own piece of living room furniture, are the Galapagos Islands. The islands are made up of several clusters of basalt and scoria rocks on top of an ocean of crinkled dark-blue paper. On the rocks are marine iguanas, sea lions, and blue-footed boobies. The king of the islands are the giant Galapagos tortoises, which are the longest-lived vertebrate animals in the world, their life expectancy averaging over 100 years. *[cont'd]*

Detail from Nico's Family Nacimiento

In the surrounding waters swim hammerhead sharks, dolphins, and blue whales. A cruise ship plies the waters, its cargo a group of retired high school biology teachers from the States come to explore Ecuador's amazing diversity.

Back on the mainland we are now near the manger itself. Things start to become a little more normal for a nativity scene. There are fields with shepherds and sheep. A round mirror serves as a quiet pond containing goldfish and surrounded by ducks. Some painted cardboard houses dot the landscape. The houses have a hole in the back which lets you insert a Christmas light in each of them. This light illuminates their windows making it look like a cozy home with family back for the holidays. These houses are a little beaten up and otherwise unremarkable unless you knew that they were a gift from my grandmother. They were the first pieces of the nacimiento to be added beyond the manger itself, probably triggering the ever-outward expansion that resulted in the nativity scene we have today.

Leading up to the manger this pleasant pastoral scene is broken by a mass of donkeys. It was my mother's idea that everyone in the family would have a donkey with their name on the side. I am the last of six children. As a result, I remember the nativity scene originally containing eight donkeys (six kids plus two parents). As my brothers, sisters, and then myself have gotten married and had kids, spouses and grandchildren have added to the number of donkeys, multiplying their ranks to an almost comical extreme. Donkeys are piling up next to each other, pushing, shoving each other almost off the road and into the depths of the coastal scene below. But the endless caravan of donkeys just seems to get bigger with time. We have 25 now.

That is our nacimiento. You would have to see it to really grasp all the small details. This Christmas my wife and I will be in Ecuador. For the first time, we will be travelling with Henry, our one-year old son. I am looking forward to helping put the nativity scene together. Henry's donkey, I am told, is already waiting to join the pack. As a first timer he will hopefully be placed somewhere near the front. Maybe a kneeling angel or one of the wise men can make sure he doesn't get bullied around too much by the scragglier veterans in the back.

As I continue to build a life in the United States, maybe someday, if you come over to my place during the holiday season, you will also get a chance to see an overly large and somewhat awkwardly proportioned nativity scene. Perhaps it will depict Colorado (I imagine tiny hot springs, ski resorts, roadside pot shops…). In it, somewhere near the manger, you may catch a glimpse of some little cardboard houses with Christmas lights illuminating the windows and a handful of donkeys will likely be crowded along a narrow road close by. ■

Participants in the Christmas Festival in Venice, Italy, don amazing costumes and masks inspired by centuries-old fashions.

Growing up during the holidays, our house was filled with the Christmas songs of Johnny Mathis, Bing Crosby, Burl Ives, Elvis Presley, and The Carpenters, to name a few. I haven't played Christmas music at home for years now, but I have been known to belt out many a tune in the style and spirit of my old favorites!

Kim Mincer, Visual Information Specialist, Office of Communications, Bureau of Land Management, Alaska

Happy Holidays in Irish: Laethanta saoire sona!

Four generations gather for a treasured family photo on Luna's first Christmas in 2017. Above, left to right: Luna Roche, Barbara McAleese, Alexis Perez, and **Brittany McAleese, Equal Employment Specialist, Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Basin.**

When I was growing up we baked sugar cookies on Christmas Eve. Before we went to bed, my mom left a small plate of cookies and a glass of milk on the table for Santa and his helpers. Last Christmas, my granddaughters were visiting and I wanted to pass down the tradition to them. So the night before Christmas, we baked sugar cookies and placed them with a glass of milk near our fireplace. Early Christmas morning the adults "staged the scene" to make it appear that Santa had come down the chimney. I'll never forget the expression on their faces when they saw the cookies eaten and the mess that Santa left in our living room!

Jennifer Stevenson, Management Analyst and Team Lead, Business and Administrative Division

Happy Holidays in Japanese: Tanoshii kurisumasu wo!

Every Christmas, the four kids in the family make gingerbread houses. When they were little, there was all kinds of mess – frosting everywhere, sprinkles bouncing off the floor – and the houses were generally half collapsed or unevenly decorated. Now they are all teenagers and they still get excited about the tradition. The houses take much longer now due to the level of detail and thematic artistic approach given to each house. They still eat too much of the frosting during creation, but it's the time they get to spend together laughing and chatting that they all cherish in their hearts. Happy holidays!

Viv Hutchison, Branch Chief, Science Data Management, US Geological Survey, Denver

On Christmas eve since I was a child, my family has read ***'Twas the Night Before Christmas*** by Clement C. Moore. My husband and I still read that book from my childhood with our own children, who are now college students. We all know the poem by heart, but each year we inevitably go 'round and 'round, trying to remember whose turn it is to read. Of course, Rudolph was not part of the story in 1823 when Clement Moore wrote the immortal story, but I've enclosed a picture of our own Rudolph, who joined our family this year and has helped us navigate the fog of this pandemic.

Christina L. Stamos, Supervisory Hydrologist, USGS California Water Science Center, San Diego

Happy Holidays in Hawaiian: Hau'oli Lanui!

Every year since my kids were little, I would purchase a new ornament and Christmas pajamas picked especially for them. They get to open these gifts on Christmas Eve, hang their ornament on the tree and wear their new PJ's to bed that evening. The picture I included shows my son Gabe's ornament of a boy skiing, because he loved skiing with the National Sports Center for the Disabled and looked forward to it every year. My hope is when my kids are grown and start their own families, they can carry on with this tradition as well as have their very own set of ornaments for their first Christmas trees and can share the memories with their families.

Kathleen Santistevan, Program Assistant Security and Drug & Alcohol Testing Division, Interior Business Center

Above: Gabe adds his ornament to the tree. Upper right: Gabe and his sister Kandace. Right: Gabe skiing in Colorado

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Breckenridge, Colorado. Photo by Daniel J. Boits, Jr.

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Connections Magazine

Holiday Memories and Traditions from Around the World

December 2020

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