

Valley Families and Their Holiday Traditions

Written by Interviews by Thuy An Bui, Kirstina Bolton and Ashley Loose
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Five Valley families share their most cherished holiday traditions and memories.



The Hastings Family Jay; Kimberly; Brody, 4; Colt, 2; and Barkley, English Bulldog

For Kimberly Hastings, public relations manager for Macerich and her family of five (including her pup, Barkley) the holiday is about family, grandma's apple pie and a very special Christmas wish.

What are your favorite family traditions?

We have many Hastings traditions! To celebrate the season, we started buying the boys a holiday ornament that symbolizes the year or a milestone. This year, I'm thinking about a 'Cars 2' ornament for Colt and Sponge Bob for Brody. We write a note and keep it in the ornament box that explains the meaning. It's fun to look back and see the characters and memories we've created through ornaments. We also always head to Texas to celebrate the holidays with food, family and fun! This year is no exception. Jay is an only child and I'm the baby in a family of three girls, so every year the entire family gets together—we catch up on time passed, share presents and, of course, have homemade food. We're all looking forward to my grandma's apple pie. She's 91 and still makes the sweetest apple pie we've ever tasted. And every year we head to Biltmore Fashion Park and enjoy holiday movies on the Center Lawn; this year we might even bring Barkley, the family bulldog. Christmas Day is always complete with amazing food and football.

Are you planning anything special for this year?

This year, I'd like to take the family to Williams and ride the North Pole Express. Both boys would love the 'real' train experience, and it gives me a great excuse to buy the boys matching PJ's since PJ's are recommended for the ride.

Does having kids enhance the holiday season for you?

Since having children, the holiday season does bring back the magic and allure of the season. I love the excitement the boys get visiting Santa, writing letters to Santa and I secretly love getting the kitchen completely covered in frosting and sprinkles when we make holiday sugar cookies. The holiday season is a great time to bring out the kid in all of us. There is something magical about seeing Christmas through the eyes of children.

How do you prepare for the holidays?

We start very early—in fact half, our Christmas shopping was complete in October. I also live by to-do lists; from planning the grocery list to the gift-giving list, I keep a tablet by my bed and wake up in the middle of the night and jot down ideas. (Yes, Jay thinks I'm crazy.)

If you could have any holiday wish come true, what might that be?

For Colt to say 'mama' and 'dada.' Colt was born with a profound hearing loss and unable to speak or communicate in traditional ways. Our wish would be for Colt to enjoy the sounds of the holiday season and speak his first words with the use of his hearing aid and cochlear implant.

Favorite holiday song?

'The Hanukkah Song' by Adam Sandler or Brody's rendition of 'Jingle Bells.'

Favorite holiday movie?

'National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation' or 'A Charlie Brown Christmas.'



The Van Es Family Johnjay; Blake; Jake, 8; Kemp, 7; Dutch, 5

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You have heard his voice every morning on 104.7 KISS FM's radio show, Johnjay and Rich—now meet him and his family as they gear up for the holidays. Johnjay Van Es, along with his wife and three sons, sure know how to rock the bells as they prepare for the most wonderful time of the year.

What is your favorite holiday tradition?

We always take the boys to get a fresh Christmas tree, and we love to come home and get the lights on and decorate it together.

What is your favorite holiday memory?

When the boys were younger, we would take them to the Polar Express; they loved it. The look on their eyes when Santa came on the train was so fun. We also shared this experience with family and friends. We took 21 people one year; it was the best one ever. We all had the same pajamas.

Are you traveling this holiday season?

Yes, we are going to Santa Monica and Pinetop. Beach and a white Christmas; what gets better than that?

What is the best present you have ever given/received?

Giving my mom a car!

Favorite holiday food?

Pumpkin pie. We have already started on that.

New Year's resolution?

Be healthy, stay positive and enjoy family!

Favorite holiday song?

Anything by Harry Connick, Jr.



Nadine Toren

Nadine Toren, CBS 5 personality and AZFoothills.com contributor, is looking forward to the holidays with her fiancé, Nate, and her growing family, sharing traditions, embracing the warmth of the season and planning extravagant and intimate holiday dinners.

What makes the holiday season so special for you?

Family. I instantly gained brothers, sisters, a niece, a nephew and a mother-in-law-to-be now that I'm engaged. It's wonderful to witness my family grow, and create new traditions with my fiancé.

What are your favorite holiday traditions?

Thanksgiving wouldn't be complete without my mom's sweet potato pie—even if I'm not able to celebrate the holiday with her, I make sure to make it. And speaking of Thanksgiving, last year my fiancé and I declared T-day to be about football and decorating—our house becomes a winter wonderland. We utilize a handful of my fiancé's childhood décor; you know, those Annalee characters. (We have Santa and his reindeers.) I've also taken on a festive twist of my own: stocking up on our holiday decorations we can use every year. Our dining room table has accents of Rudolph, and our tree sports 'N' ornaments (both our names begin with the letter). I place bows along our staircase, and even get in touch with my creative side, creating an annual wreath to hang above our fireplace. It's wonderful having people over, playing music, and sipping on tasty treats like White Russians.

What are you planning for this year?

Thanksgiving will be small and intimate. We'll probably host a little dinner at our house. My fiancé's mom will definitely contribute her twice-baked potatoes, and I'm sure his sister (and her new hubby) will bring the vino. During the day we'll decorate the house, so by night, it will

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feel like Christmas. This December, I'll actually live out a childhood dream: ice-skating at Rockefeller Center! Yep, we're spending Christmas day in an airplane, arriving to Hoboken, N.J., just in time for a fabulous dinner with my fiancé's brother's family. We'll sightsee around New York City that week, ringing in 2012 (the year we tie the knot!) with my fiancé's East Coast fam and my Manhattan cousin and her husband.

What's your favorite holiday memory?

My sister singing 'Winter Wonderland.' Because of her entertaining performance, she would literally make my other sister laugh until she cried. This was many years ago—my parents were still married, and we'd often host Thanksgiving and holiday dinners with family friends. I can close my eyes and see our fireplace lit up, my mom playing the piano, and my dad serenading everyone to Frank Sinatra. It was truly a happy time full of good food, a lot of fun, and festive spirits—memories I now keep dear to my heart.

If you could have any holiday wish come true, what might that be?

That one day my soon-to-be-husband and I can host Thanksgiving dinner for our entire family.



The Lopez Family Steve; Ginger; Morgan, 4; Matteo, 2; and Boden, 11 months

As a former racecar driver and founder of Clean Air Cab, Steve Lopez, along with his family, know how to roll with the holiday madness. Clean Air Cab is the only carbon-neutral taxi fleet in the Valley, and during the holidays, it's a race to ensure everyone gets where they need to be.

What is your favorite holiday tradition?

Ginger loves Thanksgiving and getting together with family. I really enjoy cooking and baking all of the holiday fare. I am torn: I love Thanksgiving and trying to conquer the bird, and searching for the flakiest pie crust but I love Christmas and all of the decorated cookies, cakes, breads, streusels and strudels too.

What is your favorite holiday memory?

I grew up in Michigan so I remember the snow just starting to fall after Halloween and all of the holiday season seemed magical. One of my most fond memories is sitting around the holiday table with all of my family and sampling each and every main and side dish, along with eating most of the desserts. When we were finished with our feast my grandpa would always start talking about our next meal.

Are you traveling this holiday season?

Ginger and I are going to go to Ridge Crest, Calif., for Thanksgiving. We are going to visit her brother and his family. I have a new brine and oil rub I am going to try this year!

What is the best present you have ever given/received?

Afghans made by Ginger's grandmother, and our children.

Favorite holiday food?

Ginger really enjoys challah bread and if I have to say my favorite...tamales! Making them not so much, but eating them is worth the effort.

New Year's resolution?

Give more to volunteering our time this year!

Favorite destination spot for holidays?

Aspen, without a doubt. Ginger and I were working there when we met and fell in love.

How does having children make the holidays more fun?

Having a full house has enhanced the holidays beyond my own dreams. I really like showing my kids how to cook and bake and seeing their reactions to new foods. I also like to watch them experience, as only children can, the magic of Christmas and learning the warmth of family.

What are you most looking forward to this holiday season?

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Both Ginger and I always look forward to reconnecting with our families.



The Rivera and Rumer-Rivera Family Edgardo; Don; and DJ, 12

Dr. Edgardo Rivera recently moved from Houston, Texas, to Scottsdale this January and is the Medical Director of Banner MD Anderson Cancer Center. Along with his long-term partner, Don Rumer-Rivera, and their adopted son, DJ, the family celebrates the joyful holiday season together with a mix of Latin American culture and American traditions.

What is your favorite holiday tradition?

My favorite part of the holidays is celebrating Christmas Eve with friends and family until early in the morning the next day. Because we are a multicultural family and diverse in many ways, we listen to traditional Spanish and Puerto Rican Christmas music as well as traditional American Christmas music. We celebrate by dancing, eating traditional Puerto Rican food and singing around the Christmas tree. When I was a kid, we would always go to midnight mass.

What is your favorite holiday memory?

There are so many but usually the happiness and the joy of being with family and friends that you have not seen in a long time.

What is your favorite holiday decoration?

I would say the tree and the nativity. Every Latin American home always has a nativity, usually outside in the yard and definitely under the tree. On Dec. 25, we place baby Jesus on his crib as a symbol that Jesus Christ was born.

What are you most looking forward to this holiday season?

I'm looking forward to celebrating the holiday with new friends and with my family (which has now been legally completed with the adoption of our son).

How does having a child make the holidays more fun?

A child makes the holidays better by bringing innocence and joy into this season.

What is the best present you were ever given?

I can't remember a bad present!

Favorite holiday food?

Pernil and arroz con gandules followed by tembleque or arroz con dulce.

Favorite holiday movie?

'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.'

New Year's resolution?

Exercise more while at the same time trying all of the non-chain restaurants in the Greater Phoenix metro area by the end of 2012.