

# Driving Home for Christmas

When I was a child I didn't want to be anywhere for Christmas but home. I insisted that we celebrated Christmas exactly the same every year. Just the family. At home. No visitors. When we left the house it was only for our traditional Christmas walk through the winter wonderland. Well, there wasn't always snow, but most of the time it was cold and crisp which was acceptable for me too.

## The good old Tradition

Only as an adult do I now realise how important tradition was to me and obviously always has been, especially around Christmas time. I loved the same Christmas decorations every year, nothing new and fancy. Everything had its place. The colourful aluminium tree, that made a metallic jingle once the candles were put in motion on the kitchen table. The tree top reserved for a glittery angel with short white hair, who I therefore named after an old aunt of the family. My favourite Christmas balls had lost a bit of their colour already, but I always sneaked into the tree. Replacements were about as welcome as spontaneous visitors interrupting the "family peace".

## I don't like Change

Over the years the way we celebrated Christmas changed. Sometimes they were big, unwanted changes, such as the first Christmas without granddad. Other years they were only small, practical adjustments like putting the tree up in a different place. When granny died, the tradition of Christmas-cookie-making ended. Anyway, I tried to hold on to as many family rituals as I could.

## A Matter of Perspective

I took over making the advent calendar out of empty toilet

paper rolls, that my granny used to put up for us on the staircase in the hallway. I asked my parents to move the Christmas tree back to the corner in the living room where it had always been before. I insisted on watching Russian fairy tales while decorating the Christmas tree, since my sister and I used to love them when we were kids. But Christmas wasn't the same anymore. I thought it was due to the fact that my beloved jingly tree had eventually met its maker.

Whatever I did to keep our family Christmas traditions alive, nothing brought back the feeling of excitement and joy that I used to have as a child awaiting Christmas Eve. I just wasn't able to see it all through the eyes of a child anymore. Guess what, I wasn't a child anymore. However, all the "magical things" that seemed to have happened for me during Advent had now been replaced by a rather sober view of a grown-up.

## **New Traditions**

Two years ago I ended the tradition of spending Christmas in my parents' house. Not because I didn't want to be with my family anymore, but because I now had a family of my own. I realised that I can bring back the magic of Christmas by looking into my son's eyes rather than trying to revive reams of Christmas rituals of my own childhood. So I learned to see Christmas from a different angle again – not with children's eyes but in them.

## **One for you one for me**

This year is going to be the third Christmas away from "home". We are on our way to establish our own family traditions. (I am still looking for a jingly tree like the one we had, but I have also found new 'favourite' decorations in the meantime.) The first year we had to decide what we are going to do the German way and what the Irish one. I introduced the empty-toilette-roll-advent-calendar. My husband made me familiar with the stockings on the fireplace. I had to adapt to doing

presents on the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup> instead of 24<sup>th</sup> at night time. On the other hand, I gladly accepted putting up the Christmas tree on the 1<sup>st</sup> December and not just on Christmas Eve. On Christmas Eve we are now going to the evening mass which my grandparents used to bring us to in Germany before I even knew what this was all about. Thus old and new, German and Irish traditions come full circle.

## **The Christmas Magic is back**

The magic of Christmas now means for me to spend a very special time with my family. It means to reflect on old traditions and memories, but also to make new ones. Having said that, I wish everybody and especially my family in Germany and Ireland a Merry Christmas with lots of memorable moments!

P.S. If you have lost the ability of seeing the magic of Christmas as a grown-up as well, I would like to recommend you watching the movie [“The Polar Express”](#). My sister gave it to me years ago and I know now why.