

Spend More Time With Your Family This Holiday Season: Host A Caroling Party

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By Rondi Hillstrom Davis and Janell Sewall Oakes

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Too often we forgo entertaining because of the mere thought of all of the preparation that is involved. And more is not better. Often we try to out do each other with lavish parties and expensive gifts. Stop and remember for a second what was important from your own childhood. Was it an outing? Baking cookies with your grandmother? Building a snowman with your dad? We need to connect. This doesn't require more time, just shifting the focus of the time we already have. Here, a casual party and a very simple activity were the catalyst that brought everyone together.

To get the entire neighborhood into the Christmas spirit we planned a caroling party.

The day before our guests arrived, my kids and I spent an afternoon making decorative candleholders to give to each caroler, to light the way for our caroling expedition.

Dad, dressed as Santa, provided our very own photo opportunity. Little ones whispered their Christmas list in Santa's ear. Grown ups, as well as kids, had their pictures taken in Santa's lap.

Adults, kids, and even a few dogs then joined us on our merry way. Our numbers grew as we made our way caroling through the neighborhood.

As the carolers returned, we welcomed them with Mexican hot chocolate and ginger spice cookies. This party was a great way to engage everyone in an activity that the whole family could enjoy. And for a few short hours we were able to turn our attention away from the commercial marketing of the holidays to something much more personal.

Recipe: Mexican Hot Chocolate

Recipes are one of our most cherished traditions. Passed down from one generation to the next, they conjure up memories of holiday preparations or time spent with a favorite relative. Cooking provides a

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quiet time to pass on the wisdom of family lore.

Ingredients:

4 cups whole milk

4 ounces Mexican chocolate such as Ibarra

or

3 ½ ounces semi-sweet chocolate plus 1 teaspoon cinnamon

4 tablespoons sugar

Pinch of salt

1 teaspoon vanilla, preferably Mexican

2 eggs

1. In a medium sized saucepan, heat the milk over medium heat until scalding.
2. Break the chocolate into pieces. Add to the hot milk along with the sugar and salt. Stir until melted. Beat with a wire whisk until frothy.
3. Add the eggs and vanilla. Continue to whisk.
4. Pour into 4 mugs. Garnish with a cinnamon stick.

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Rondi Hillstrom Davis and Janell Sewall Oakes are the co-authors of the award-winning book *Together: Creating Family Traditions*. To check out their website that's jam packed with family ideas, visit

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Holiday Party Planning

By Mrs. Party Gail Leino

Holiday Party Planning by

... Gail Leino

Holiday Party Planning

'Tis the season to have a party and invite all your family and friends to celebrate the holidays with you. Have a family day and decorate the entire house with

. Your family will enjoy how festive the home is before and after the holiday party.

When decorating, make sure you have all the party supplies that you will need before the actual party day. Plan out the food and drinks you will be serving. Make a list of everything you need to purchase to help get you ready. If you are preparing any new dishes or appetizers, try them out in advance on your family and neighbors. You want to have all the quirks of any new recipes worked out before your party. It is a nice idea to give each of your guests

as a token of your appreciation

for them attending your party. Choosing the perfect favors for your party can be a way to cleverly tie in the

with your own individual touch.

Bring a festive holiday party atmosphere to your party with

and lights. For the

music, select a few of your favorite holiday albums to play so you can have some variety. It is fun to gather your guests together to sing old favorites. For the lighting, you can string lights on both the inside and outside of your home. You can also cluster some holiday scented candles together for a dramatic lighting effect.

Have the smell of holiday cheer in the air. Simmer cinnamon sticks on the stove to provide the holiday scent. These provide a pleasant holiday aroma to your home. Plan some

that will excite and engage all of your guests. You can have fun holiday party

prizes for the winners of the games.

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