

# The Family Forum

Growing Together in Faith and Family Life

December 2010

## From My House To Yours

I wanted to share this blog post I wrote last Christmas...

Yesterday I was looking for something to spruce up my outfit a little. It was the annual Carols and Communion service at church, and I wanted to look somewhat "nicer" than usual.

I was rooting around in my jewellery box and came across a white brooch. Instantly I was back in time, to an era when my British grandmother used to twirl my 7-year-old hair gently into ringlets with wet rags before bedtime. In the morning I would wake up and untwirl the fabric, feeling like a princess. She wasn't able to visit often, her home was a farmhouse in the English countryside, and my home was in the suburbs of Toronto. But we had a connection, her and I, that spanned countries and generations.

I remember her letters, I remember her smile, I remember her soul. And I remember the brooch. I have two of them. Another she gave me just before she got on a plane bound for her homeland. I told her that her brooch was pretty and sparkly, then she pulled it off her coat, bent down to my level and placed the treasure in my little-girl hand.

This Christmas season I remember my Grandmother. Her name was Edith. She raised two boys in a centuries-old farmhouse called Denby Hill Farm in Oakworth, West Yorkshire. She washed her clothes by hand, and did her dishes under a window that saw the cows walk by twice a day for milking. Her life was not easy, but her faith in God was strong.

I can imagine her looking out



Our family - Christmas 2009

over the moors, the wind in her white curls, finding strength for the days ahead. Maybe that particular day was a Sunday. Maybe she'd found something extra-special to wear to church when she looked in her jewellery box that morning.

And maybe, just maybe, it was a white brooch.

Visit [annsklar.wordpress.com](http://annsklar.wordpress.com) to read much more on my blog!

**MERRY CHRISTMAS**

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## Connection Points - Ideas For Building Community

### MEN - Josh Sklar

I have a crazy Christmas idea for you guys. Get a bunch of the lads together who are married with kids and plan an afternoon out to give your wives an afternoon together!

The weather outside is ready for sliding, the lakes will soon be frozen over for skating, and let's not forget snow men and snow forts!

Get the kids, get the snowsuits, and get outside. Give your wives a break to have some time together and hang out as you take care of the kids.

Don't forget the camera, the hot chocolate, and the long johns!!!



### WOMEN - Anna Sklar

How about a low-calorie gift exchange party for the ladies this month?

Invite a few friends over for some fruit and veggies and some herbal tea. Ask everyone to bring an item or two for the buffet table, so there's less work for you at this VERY busy time of year!

For the gift exchange you could ask everyone to bring a gift no more than \$5 or they could bring an item from home that they no longer use. Each gift is assigned a number and everyone draws a number from a hat or basket or whatever you can find!



### FAMILIES - Anna Sklar

Invite your neighbours over for a drop-in Christmas party. Kids can make invitations and drop them off in neighbour's mailboxes.

Ask your neighbours to bring a treat with them.

The young ones can help clean and decorate your house as they party date approaches. They can also bake some goodies, help greet guests and help clean up when the party is over.

Here's a sampling of what our neighbours brought last year - it was great to get to know them a little better!



## Contributions Needed!

Here's what we need for the January issue:

- Your Family Favourite Recipe
- Your ideas for Connection Points (about 100-125 words)
- Your idea for Reaching Out (about 100-125 words)
- Couples for Marriage on pg 2 (about 200 words each)

Deadline is December 15th

Email contributions or ask for more info:

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## Health - Decreasing Christmas Calories

The holiday season has begun! This time of year is full of so many memories and celebrations that center around delicious, seasonal food. At this time, there is so much extra food around... so many extra calories that can be actually *seen* after the holidays... on us! Fortunately, we don't need to deny ourselves of those special foods... that can actually lead to splurging and overeating! Here are a few ideas to help you enjoy without guilt!

1. **Don't go to parties on an empty stomach!** Fill up a bit on fruits, veggies, & a low fat protein with water before you go so you won't be very hungry and tempted to over-

eat a lot of high calorie foods.

2. **Get the "lay of the buffet":** before diving into the food, check out all your choices and prioritize what you'll really enjoy the most.

3. **Focus on portion control and eat slowly:** Truly savour a smaller amount of food. You don't have to eat a lot of something to enjoy it.

4. **Remember, we *drink* calories too:** punches and alcoholic beverages contain a lot of calories that can add up quickly.

5. **Limit the rich, heavy foods:** the key to a

lifestyle of healthy eating is to enjoy it!

6. **Keep moving!** it can be challenging to find time to exercise, but *making* time for it will help you enjoy foods more by taking the guilt away. Exercise helps to keep caloric intake and output balanced.

- Wendy Lempner, R.D.



## Family Activity



There are many Christmas plays, concerts, parties and other events for your family to enjoy during the month of December.

Try to attend one or two that stay true to the original meaning of Christmas.

Enjoy the nativity story with your family in as many ways as you can this year!

## Family Favourite Recipe - Fudge Balls

*This is my favourite Christmas treat from my husband's treasure box of family recipes. He makes these every year for our family to enjoy. Thank you Joshua!*

Melt in a saucepan over low heat:

6 oz or  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup semi-sweet chocolate chips  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup butter

Add:

$\frac{1}{4}$  tsp salt  
2 cups icing sugar  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup evaporated milk



Blend well. Cool for 30 minutes. Roll into balls about 1 inch in diameter. Recruit your children to help you decorate with sprinkles, nuts, icing sugar, crushed candy canes, mini M&M's - be creative! Or enjoy them as is!

Keep the Fudge Balls cool in the refrigerator. These are also great for freezing!

## Finances - Decreasing Christmas Spending

Christmas seems to be the trickiest time of year for the family budget. We tend to over-extend and overspend ourselves every December. Add to it the travel that is often involved, the meals out because of busyness, and the last-minute-forgotten-gifts - the bills can pile up very quickly!

We've tried a couple of ideas in our family that have worked well through the years.

One is tracking Christmas expenses and the other is setting up a special Christmas budget.

In years past we have kept all our receipts and added up what was spent at Christmas. Then we have a dollar figure to save towards for the next year. We could either plug this into our every-day budget or make extra money closer to Christmas to accommodate the extra money needed for the holidays.

Another idea we've used is making a special Christmas budget. If we knew money would be particularly tight or we just wanted to aim at spending less that year, we would set limits on spending for different friends or family members.

Examples could include \$20 for each stocking, no more than \$100 total for each child, \$10 to spend on extended family members, etc.

Here are a few other good ideas for decreasing holiday spending and stress:

1. Choose one homemade item and make the same thing for everyone - ornaments, recipes in a jar, baked goods, etc.
2. Drawing names and setting price limits in the family - everyone gets one name and a dollar figure to spend.

3. White elephant parties - everyone brings an item from their house they no longer need. Items are assigned a number, numbers are drawn and gifts are opened!

4. Donate to different charities on behalf of gift recipients. This is shopping stress I can handle!



## Marriage: Opposites Attract Part 2

### Living With An Introvert...

Having been married to my beautiful wife Anna for over ten years, I have come to realize the truth of the expression, "Opposites attract."

In a course I completed a few years ago, we both did a battery of tests and profiles. One showed our personality trait in the area of extrovert vs introvert. The person who went over the materials with me shared that he had never seen a couple so far apart on the scale as the two of us.

Thinking that her shyness was something to be fixed, I tried to introduce her to the outgoing life in a few ways. To start with, I just dragged her along on my hectic and relational schedule and figured that she would pick it up as we went along. All she did was get tired.

I went back to the drawing board and tried to slowly turn the temperature up a degree at a time with the same results. At the end of the day when everyone had gone home and I was chomping at the bit and ready for more, she was cocooned in a blanket in a catatonic state on the couch!



Josh and Anna Sklar, Winter 2008

And then one day it hit me (no, Anna didn't hit me, I was too quick).

I realized that all the energy that I was pouring into others relationally could be better spent if I poured some of it just into her.

And as I took the time to sit with her and watch the sunset, stroll along the boardwalk at the lake, or read in bed before turning out the lights, I saw a wonder and beauty that I had sometimes missed.

Yes, I saw the beauty of the setting sun and the cool evening breeze off the lake, but most of all, the beauty inside Anna that I fell in love with. A strong and peaceful spirit that tries to live in each moment and helped me to do the same.

Yes, I am comfortable in the spotlight. Yes, I am energized by being with others and laughing, talking, and playing. Yes, there are roles that I must fulfill that require me to do these things. But more than that, I have come to realize that I am most at home when I am with Anna and fulfilling the most important roles in my life - husband and father.

- Josh Sklar

### Relationship Challenge:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...

Instead of focusing on all your differences and personality traits that tend to frustrate or annoy one another, focus on the things you love about your husband or wife.

Look for the positive, and start making a mental list.

Write a special note or send an e-card to your spouse that highlights 3 things from your list.

### Marriage Prayer:

Lord, thank You for our marriage. Help us to always see the good in one another in the midst of the stresses and frustrations that sometimes come with family life.

Remind us constantly of the things we love about each other and help us to encourage each other always.

In Jesus name, Amen.

## Faith At Home - Christmas Traditions

I've been asking myself a question repeatedly since I became a mom. I had a very happy childhood and my mom made sure there were some wonderful traditions celebrated in our family. As my sons get older I carry on the traditions passed down to me.

The question I keep asking is *What do I want my own traditions to look like?*

My family gave me a great foundation to build upon, making holidays really stand out and seem magical to me. I want the same for my boys.

Sometimes as we are celebrating a certain tradition my sons get an idea and we make the traditions more and more our own with each year that passes.

Here's peek at our family's traditions:

- Decorating our home - we try to focus on nativity décor and tree ornaments
- Baking our favourite holiday treats - Josh enjoys spending time in the kitchen, especially at Christmas! And he enjoys sharing his creations with friends & family.
- Daily Advent readings and candle-lighting

- Reading the story of Jesus' birth on Christmas morning.
- Stockings are stuffed and opened first.
- Three gifts for the boys to represent the three gifts from the Magi - gold represents an extravagant gift, frankincense a spiritual gift, and myrrh a practical gift.

Ask your family what they want their Christmas traditions to look like and see how you can make them fun, festive and Christ-centred this year and all the years to come!

Another question that's starting to brew in me is *What does God want my traditions to look like?* Maybe that's a question to be answered next year?

- Anna Sklar

### Family Prayer

This Christmas  
May GOD open

Our hearts to HIS love...  
Our minds to HIS wonders..  
Our ears to HIS voice...  
Our lives to HIS presence.  
Have a blessed Christmas

- Prayer is from a card we received last year.

### Preschool Idea:

As you hang your Christmas tree ornaments, make sure to have some nativity ornaments on hand and tell the story of Jesus as you decorate your tree.



### Elementary-Age Idea:

Ask your children to help you decorate your home. Do they have any ideas on how to make your home more Christ-centered this year? Try out their ideas!



### Teen Idea:

Every year, purchase a Christmas décor item for your teen that is true to the season. When it is time for them to decorate a home of their own they will be prepared! Start with a nativity scene!



## Green Living - Recycling Christmas Wrapping

Every year there is a HUGE pile of Christmas wrapping leftover from all the packages, boxes and bags that are opened during the holidays.

Instead of filling up garbage bags and throwing it all away, here are a few ideas for a "greener" Christmas:

- Wrap presents in bags or boxes that can be reused.
- Choose wrapping that can be reused for different holidays other than Christmas. Solid colours are great for this idea.
- Save and fold any paper that stayed intact throughout the opening of the gifts. Even small pieces are good for wrapping stocking stuffers next year.



- Recycle the rest of the paper if you can.
- Save any salvageable parts of the Christmas cards you were given. Anything that doesn't have writing on it can be cut up and reused as post-cards or gift tags next year.

- Another idea for your Christmas cards is to place them all in a basket and take one out each day. Pray for the person(s) who sent you the card. *-Idea from Maude in Sudbury*
- Have the kids draw pictures for family members and wrap the presents in the drawings.
- Use newspaper or old fabric scraps to wrap your gifts.

- Anna Sklar

## Reaching Out

*This Christmas, answer a child's prayer by giving a gift.*



Browse [www.worldvisiongifts.org](http://www.worldvisiongifts.org) to see the World Vision Gift Catalogue.

Find items such as food, animals, medical and classroom supplies, and soccer balls!

Free cards are sent upon request.

### DECEMBER 2010

*Feel free to use this calendar for your family - hang it up to keep track of schedules, appointments, anything!*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 Hannukah	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21 Winter Solstice	22	23	24 Christmas Eve	25 Christmas
26	27	28	29	30	31 New Years Eve	