

Christmas Is for the Kids (Until You Realize It's for You, Too)

How My Family Brought Back Christmas Magic for Me

Christmas has a funny way of changing as you move through life. When you're a kid, it's all about you, of course. You wake up early, tear through the wrapping paper, and bask in the glow of whatever Santa left under the tree. Teenagers, of course, have a more skeptical view; sleeping in takes precedence over the magic of unwrapping anything at all. But when you have your own children, something shifts. Suddenly, Christmas becomes magical again, not because of what's under the tree, but because of the sparkle in their eyes when they see Santa's "footprints" across the kitchen floor or notice a cookie mysteriously nibbled from the plate. There's joy in orchestrating the illusion, in creating those little moments that feel bigger than life.

I remember the midnight Masses from my childhood. Staying awake during those long services was nearly impossible, but it came with a particular aerobic benefit: constantly kneeling, sitting, standing, and kneeling, kind of like a Richard Simmons workout. And yet, no matter how tired I was, Christmas morning called: the crack-of-

dawn excitement, the flurry of gifts, and the quiet satisfaction of seeing the family together.

I didn't quite feel that same charm until I had my own children. When they were young, I found myself pulling out all the stops, scattering flour to mimic Santa's tracks, leaving a few cookies eaten, a little milk drunk. Those moments make the holiday magical, and they stick with you. Teenagers, of course, sleep past all of that, forcing you to adjust your expectations and embrace the humor in their inertia.

Later, we leaned into funny, inside-joke gifts: a little present for the child who always lost their keys, a quirky gag for someone who had an embarrassing mishap during the year. One son even flipped his Jeep, so we gifted him a tiny "replacement bumper" just for laughs. Those moments of shared laughter, often at ourselves, become treasured memories.

Now, with five children, four spouses, six grandkids, two more on the way, and two foster kiddos, Christmas has transformed again. It's not just about gifts; it's about gathering, helping little ones unwrap presents, delivering them to others, and reveling in the chaos of a mountain of wrapping paper. I feel that same magic I did when my kids were little, watching them now as parents themselves, with their eyes sparkling as they see their kids unwrapping presents. It's a beautiful cycle, so hard to describe but so deeply felt every time Christmas morning comes along.

Regarding my own gifts, the most meaningful ones aren't extravagant but personal. For example, the year my daughter arranged professional photos of my sons, capturing their personalities and candid moments, transforming them into timeless, artistic



black-and-white prints. Another memorable moment was when all the kids coordinated to be in town so we could take a full family portrait, with 17 of us, including the grandkids. That picture now hangs on the wall as a testament to family, blended families getting along, and the small victories of life that bring richness.

Those kinds of gifts, the ones rooted in thoughtfulness and shared history, endure. Ornaments celebrating each new grandchild, handmade creations from elementary school, keepsakes that tell a story of a family growing together ... these presents never lose their meaning.

Christmas magic, it turns out, never really disappears. It just changes shape, moving from the thrill of receiving to the joy of giving, to the quiet pride in watching a new generation experience the wonder we once held in our own hands. That, for me, has always been the best gift of all.

-Jim Monast



THE COST OF CLUTTER

HOW MINIMALISM CAN SAVE YOU THOUSANDS

We've all been there: staring at a closet full of clothes and thinking, "I have nothing to wear." Or paying rent for a bigger apartment just to store things we barely use. Clutter isn't just a space problem; it's a money problem. Every unused subscription silently chips away at your finances. The good news is that minimalism offers a way out. Far from being about deprivation, it's about reclaiming control of your space, spending, and savings.

The Hidden Price of 'Stuff'

Every purchase comes with two price tags: the sticker price and the hidden costs. That \$50 gadget isn't just \$50; it might also mean higher credit card interest if you're carrying debt, or another box in the attic eating up storage space. The more we accumulate, the more we pay to maintain, store, clean, and eventually replace those items. That's

where minimalism comes in. It forces us to ask: "Do I really need this, or is it just clutter in disguise?"

Quality Over Quantity

Minimalism doesn't mean buying nothing. Instead, it's about buying better. One high-quality pair of shoes can last for years, while three cheap pairs wear out quickly and cost more in the long run. Choosing durability and timeless designs over impulse buys protects your wallet and reduces waste.

Simplifying Finances

Clutter can even creep into your bank account. Old subscriptions, overlapping accounts, and unused memberships all nibble away at your budget. By canceling what you don't use and streamlining your finances, you save money and reduce the mental load of tracking your bills.



Downsizing Expenses

One of the biggest financial wins of minimalism comes from downsizing. A smaller home or apartment doesn't just mean lower rent or mortgage; it also slashes utilities, maintenance, insurance, and even property taxes.

More Space for What Matters

A clutter-free environment frees up mental bandwidth. With fewer distractions, you can focus on what truly matters: building a side hustle, nurturing relationships, or enjoying a calmer, more intentional life.

The Hidden Hazards Behind Everyday Jobs

SURPRISING WORKPLACE DANGERS AND HOW TO PROTECT YOUR RIGHTS

When most people think of workplace injuries, they picture hard hats, steel-toed boots, and construction zones. And while those jobs are unquestionably risky, not all work injuries happen on scaffolds or factory floors. From flight attendants and office staff to delivery drivers, many workers we help never expected to need a workers' compensation attorney. But injuries can happen anywhere and, sometimes, in the most surprising ways.



Slipping and Falling on the Job

Not every fall happens on a construction site. Flight attendants, ticket agents, and delivery drivers often face slippery floors, icy sidewalks, or tangled cords that can cause serious injuries. A quick slip in a hotel lobby or outside an airport can lead to lasting pain and medical bills. These everyday hazards are among the most common and often overlooked causes of workplace injuries.

Harmful Noise From Headsets and Devices

Workers who rely on headsets or communication systems can experience **acoustic shock injury**, a trauma caused by unexpected loud sounds. Customer service representatives, emergency dispatchers, and call center employees are especially at risk. One sharp burst of feedback can lead to tinnitus, dizziness, hearing loss, and even lasting anxiety. It's a real injury that deserves real attention.

Sun Exposure for Outdoor Workers

Construction workers, landscapers, and agricultural employees spend hours in the sun

every day. Prolonged UV exposure can cause severe sunburns and increase the risk of skin cancer. Unlike sudden accidents, sun-related injuries often build up gradually, but they can be just as harmful and are just as eligible for workers' compensation.

Biological Hazards in Care and Education

Health care workers, teachers, and veterinary staff face constant exposure to biological risks such as viruses, bacteria, and animal-borne illnesses. These hazards are part of the job but can still lead to serious health issues. Whether you work in a hospital, daycare, or animal clinic, protection from workplace illness matters just as much as protection from physical injuries.

Injuries don't always look like broken bones or bruises. Sometimes, they're invisible, delayed, or simply overlooked. If you've been hurt or even suspect your job is affecting your health, don't ignore it. **Contact our office today to learn your rights and see whether you qualify for workers' compensation.**

ONE SCRUFFY PUP, 75 NEW BEST FRIENDS

HOW A HOMELESS SHIH TZU FOUND LOVE, LAPS, AND A COMMUNITY

Chewy's comeback story might just melt hearts better than any "Rocky" movie. This scruffy, matted little Shih Tzu was wandering the streets of Austin, Texas, one day, then commandeering hearts the next. When a staff member from The Philomena, an assisted-living center, spotted the tangled-up furball, she did what any sensible dog lover would do: She scooped him up and took him straight to the vet. The microchip told a clear story, including his name and past home, but the humans at the other end of that story refused the next chapter. They blocked calls. They had moved on. Chewy did not.

Priscilla Duran, who runs The Philomena, blinked and then said the simple, brilliant thing you wish everyone would when a friendly animal shows up: "What if he's our dog?" That question changed everything. Chewy, calm as can be, fit into the assisted-living center like the missing puzzle piece no one knew they were missing.

Now he patrols the hallways like a tiny, four-legged ambassador. He shimmies into the front office to greet visitors, takes VIP laps during Scrabble night, and has perfected the art of the walker joyride. Some days, he is decked out in a dapper suit, suave sunglasses, or tiny sweater, looking like he



has an appointment to impress. Residents who once shuffled by with downcast eyes now light up all because of the miniature ray of sunshine.

He has a special gift for the memory care wing. Words, which sometimes hide from those living with dementia, seem to rise back to the surface when Chewy pads into the room. A hand that had been still will lift to stroke his head. A face that had been blank will crease into a smile. "I've not seen him pass anybody who does not grin ear to ear by seeing this little dog," Priscilla told CBS Austin.

Chewy is a fluffy lesson in second chances. The residents of The Philomena understand that fresh starts in a brand-new environment can be rough, and they welcomed Chewy as one of their own. He is more than a companion; he is a tiny (unlicensed) therapist, a lap-warmer, a Scrabble coach, a walker buddy, and the living proof that love often arrives in furry, unexpected packages.

As Priscilla puts it best, "Dogs are just proof that actions speak louder than words." Chewy's actions speak volumes: comfort, joy, and an endless supply of tail-wagging goodwill.

SUDOKU

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ANSWER



EATS WITH ELLIE CRISPY PROSCIUTTO AND CHEESE SLIDERS

INGREDIENTS

- 3 oz thinly sliced prosciutto
- 1 package dinner rolls, halved lengthwise
- 1/4 cup fig preserves
- 3/4 cup shredded fontina cheese
- 3/4 cup shredded Swiss cheese
- 1/2 cup melted butter
- 2 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh thyme
- 2 chopped garlic cloves
- Black pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400 F.
2. On a parchment-lined baking sheet, arrange prosciutto and bake for 8–10 minutes.
3. On a separate lined baking sheet, place the bottom halves of the rolls and spread fig preserves over them.
4. Layer with fontina and Swiss cheese. Top with crispy prosciutto.
5. Place the top half of the rolls over the prosciutto and gently press down.
6. In a bowl, mix butter, Dijon, Worcestershire sauce, thyme, garlic, and black pepper.
7. Pour butter mixture over rolls. Cover with foil and bake 10 minutes.
8. Remove foil and bake an additional 10–15 minutes, and separate before serving.

Inspired by [HalfBakedHarvest.com](https://www.halfbakedharvest.com)



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When 'What If' Won't Quit

HIT PAUSE WHEN YOUR BRAIN WON'T STOP TALKING

We've all been there: lying awake at night, replaying conversations, imagining worst-case scenarios, or obsessing over things we can't change. Overthinking might feel harmless, but when those thoughts keep circling, they can take a toll on your mood, energy, and overall well-being.

So, how do you break the cycle? It starts with noticing what's happening in your mind. Next time your thoughts go into overdrive, pause and ask yourself: *What emotion is fueling this?* Maybe it's worry, guilt, or frustration. Recognizing the source is the first step toward loosening its grip.

Turn down the mental volume.

When your brain feels stuck on repeat, try redirecting your energy. *Dive into a hobby, work out, learn a new recipe, or volunteer for a cause that matters to you.* Shifting focus gives your mind a break and can help you feel more grounded.



Breathing exercises also work wonders. Place one hand on your heart, one on your belly, and take slow, steady breaths in and out through your nose. It's simple, but it signals your body to relax and can help calm racing thoughts in just a few minutes.

Challenge your thoughts.

Automatic negative thoughts (those instant, gloomy reactions) can trap you in "what ifs" and worst-case scenarios. *Write them down, seek a more balanced perspective, and see if you can do anything about them.* Taking small, thoughtful actions toward solutions can help quiet the mental noise.

And remember, you don't have to figure it all out alone. Talking to a trusted friend or a therapist can give you a fresh outlook on managing those runaway thoughts.