

**WHAT HAPPENS TO A FAMILY'S HOLIDAY TRADITIONS
WHEN MOM & DAD MOVE INTO A RETIREMENT COMMUNITY?
Advice on keeping traditions alive from those who've lived it**

BLOOMFIELD, CT, Nov. 6, 2008 – Christmas has always been Shirley Taylor's favorite holiday. She used to decorate her house "top to toe" and host big parties with such enthusiasm she never sat down all night. Now, her grown children do the hosting and she's enjoying the opportunity to relax and visit.

This year, she and her husband, Stan, will be unfolding this new tradition as they celebrate their second Christmas at Duncaster's continuing care retirement community. "I have a Scandinavian background, so every year I used to do my version of a Scandinavian Christmas for our extended family of 20, complete with an extensive collection of Christmas decorations and recipes I picked up on our travels," recalls Mrs. Taylor.

The Taylors now rotate the holidays among their four adult children – an arrangement that is working out well for everyone. "Last year we went to our daughter's in Vermont, this year we'll spend Thanksgiving in New Jersey and Christmas in West Hartford. This allows us to enjoy a really good visit with one family at a time and since our kids no longer have to travel to our house, they are able to be with their in-laws, too. It's also much easier on us to ship the grandchildren's gifts in advance and only concentrate on bringing gifts for one set of grandkids at a time," says Mrs. Taylor with a laugh.

Holidays for all of us are about traditions. So what happens when the primary keepers of those traditions decide to make a change in their lives by moving into a retirement community? "The move out of a home that's been the scene of many long-standing traditions does change things, there is no question about that," says Martha Sterett, Duncaster's Move-In Coordinator. "But that doesn't mean those traditions need to be lost. When I work with people who are contemplating a move to Duncaster, this often comes up. We find many of our residents develop very personal ways of keeping those traditions alive without the big houses they thought they needed to celebrate them."

Carol Finnigan used to start her Christmas preparations the day after Thanksgiving. For 35 years, her West Hartford eight-room Colonial was the center of holiday activities for her four children, six grandchildren, great-granddaughter and even her neighbors. "We used to celebrate all of the holidays in my home," she recalls. "I'd decorate, get out the good china and silver, rearrange the dining room and insist that everyone had to look nice and know their manners."

Today, Mrs. Finnigan has another take on the holidays. "I moved into Duncaster, in 2005. This will be my third Christmas here and I've learned that it does not have to be me who does it all. Now I can sit back and relax

and let people do things for me and am enjoying the holidays more than ever.”

What advice do these women have for people who want to preserve their family’s holiday traditions after a move to a retirement community? Here are some tips:

- **Keep the meaningful holiday decorations and get rid of those that have little significance.** “Our residents tell us that their moves made them really look at their ‘stuff’ and decide what was truly important. Many found that they’d been collecting things over the years that really weren’t part of an emotional package,” says Ms. Sterett. “Reflecting back, they realize that the garland they’ve been using is something they bought at a discount store for 90 percent off the week after Christmas. Most likely that can go, whereas an item that someone made for them – something with a story – is important to keep.”

“We gave a lot of the bigger decorations to our kids as we were moving out of our big house. But we kept what was particularly meaningful to us,” Mrs. Taylor says amidst displays of nativity scenes and other holiday works of art from the worldwide travels she and her husband experienced.

- **Incorporate the old *and* the new, keeping the traditions you value most.** “I’m going to bake my grandmother’s cookies and enjoy the taste and smell of the holiday, but I’m not going to do a whole dinner,” says Mrs. Taylor. “I’ll be keeping part of my old life and incorporate it into my new one. You don’t have to give up anything if you don’t want to.”
- **Give up the feeling that it has to be you who hosts all of the holidays.** Her first year at Duncaster, Mrs. Finnigan decided she’d continue to host Christmas and let someone else in her family take care of Thanksgiving and Easter. “Christmas always meant a lot to me whereas Thanksgiving and Easter didn’t mean as much, so it was easier to give it up that first year and let another family member have it at their house. You don’t have to give up hosting all of the holidays. Give up one and see how you feel about it.”
- **Find new ways of bringing joy to yourself and others at the holidays.** In addition to what she does with her own family, Mrs. Finnigan visits a nursing home twice a week to bring companionship and some fun to the people living there. “That’s how I get joy all year round,” she says.
- **Expect resistance to your new approach but be firm.** “My kids had a hard time with the idea of my giving up hosting the holidays,” says Mrs. Finnigan. “They said, ‘Ma, you’re not too old. You’ve always done it before.’ I told them it was time for a change. After a few years, they

accepted it and now they host and I enjoy the holidays just as much, if not more.”

- **Pass along your family’s most valuable holiday traditions – the stories.** “We encourage people to pass along the stories and traditions and to make it a joyful thing,” suggests Ms. Sterett. “Passing along family stories is the most important way to honor and preserve your family’s heritage and memories.”

Ms. Sterett points out that making changes to holiday traditions initially seems overwhelming to people moving into the next stage of their lives but that most find they have an easier time adapting than they expected. “Many of our residents initially choose to keep some of their decorations in storage here in case they want to get to them. By the time the second holiday comes around, they often tell us they have no interest in dragging them out. It’s all about making changes and building new traditions when you’re ready for them. Don’t feel everything has to change at once. Give up what you want and sit back and enjoy the new traditions as they emerge. You’ll find giving up the burden of maintaining all your old traditions -- just because that’s the way you’ve always done it -- may mean enjoying the true spirit of the holidays more than you ever did before.”

About Duncaster

Duncaster is Bloomfield's signature lifecare retirement community. This campus of 190 independent residences, assisted living and Duncaster’s Caleb Hitchcock Health Center is designed to help residents live life to the fullest by providing security and fulfillment. The community includes an aquatic and fitness center and an on-site health clinic. Residents can participate in ongoing education, social and cultural programs. For more information, see www.duncaster.org or call (860) 380-5005.

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