

## Holiday Activities for Kids

By Susan Camp

This year the Winter Solstice will occur on Saturday, December 21<sup>st</sup>. Winter Solstice, with the least number of daylight hours in the year, makes me shiver when I think about the cold and dark, but this special day heralds the slow return of longer daylight hours.

In olden times, joyous celebrations for the return of light and warmth would have occurred. Today, most of us don't focus on the Winter Solstice; instead, we celebrate one of several major worldwide holidays that fall around midwinter. For many households, ours included, that holiday is Christmas.

I remember what it was like to be a "sort of" only child at Christmas. My sister was ten years my senior, and while she was good to me and bought me cool gifts, Christmas Day in my pre-teen years was often a letdown as I thought about my friends playing games together and showing each other their presents. There weren't even any good Christmas TV specials back then, maybe a grainy black and white rerun of "Peter Pan" with Mary Martin as the dashing lad. (Does anyone else remember this production?)

I was a voracious reader and always received books at Christmastime. I was fortunate to have parents who permitted me to read any book I wanted, even though some outcomes of my desire to read everything were less than positive and not always appreciated by my mom and dad. Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," for example, had me pleading to leave on my bedside light. Every little night noise made me think that Jacob Marley was coming for me, dragging his chains along the hallway.

As I reminisced about childhood Christmases, I thought about other families with only children and concluded that I was not the only one who had felt left out of the fun of squabbling with siblings over new toys on Christmas Day. I am offering a few suggestions to help ease boredom after the morning excitement of opening presents has waned. Parents, older siblings, and grandparents can join in the activities, too.

Let older children help with Christmas dinner preparations. Don't shut them out of the kitchen. They can pass around hors d'oeuvres and plates of cookies and help set the dining room table. Send them outside to gather greenery for table decorations, and provide construction paper, scissors, glue, and crayons, to make placemats or place cards for the dinner guests.

After a big meal, a walk in the woods, on the beach, or even around the neighborhood can be fun and invigorating, especially if you encourage children to look for wildlife or try to identify leaves, pine cones, nuts, and acorns. They can bring some pine cones home and make peanut butter and birdseed feeders to hang up for the year-round feathered friends. This activity is best done in the garage or outside to spare Mom or Grandma the extra work of cleaning up the mess.

Making seed balls is a fun and inexpensive way to plant colorful flowers in unexpected places. The children can form the balls from craft store clay (not synthetic clay), a mixture of compost and potting mix, and flower seeds. Moisten the clay and compost/potting mix, and squish them

together with the seeds to form golf ball sized balls. Kids love this activity, but like making pine cone bird feeders, it is a messy undertaking. On the next pleasant day, the children can drop the seed balls in a spot that needs colorful flowers. Rain and irrigation will soften the balls, and the seeds will sprout in the spring. Native wildflower seeds like cosmos, coreopsis, milkweed, and coneflowers are ideal.

After the excitement and activity of Christmas Day, reading, playing board or card games, and telling stories are pleasant pastimes before getting ready for bed. Older children may be interested in hearing about what Christmas was like years ago. Don't be offended if they laugh!

May you and your family enjoy the peace and beauty of the holiday season.