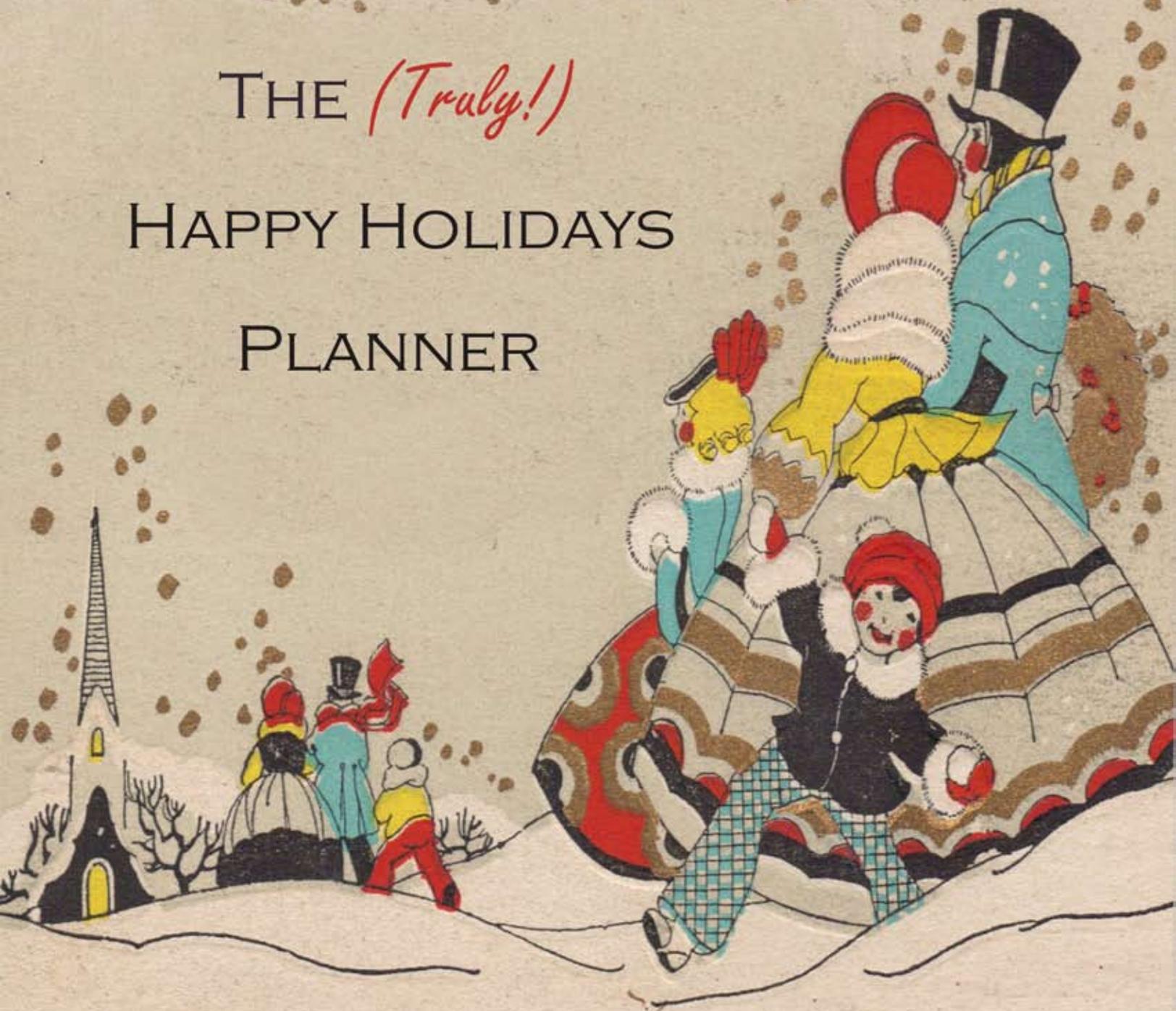


THE *(Truly!)*
HAPPY HOLIDAYS
PLANNER



STACEY CURNOW

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Hello Friend!

Welcome to the Create the Conditions™ for (truly) Happy Holidays program! I'm delighted that you chose it, and I can't wait to make this your best holiday season EVER!

Okay, so first of all, take a deep breath. The motto for this program is "Live imperfectly with great delight." My intention with this program is *not* to achieve "perfection."

Instead, this program is designed to help you string together many happy moments, first by creating the conditions for them, then by reducing stress so that you can savor them, and finally by helping you recognize and remember them after they've passed.

This way at the end of the holidays you will have many happy memories and you will be filled with a sense of great satisfaction.

So start now. Think about who you would like to be, what you would like to do and what you would like to have this holiday season. Now imagine it all going off smoothly. Most importantly, imagine that your days



are filled with meaning and connection, and that you feel expansive and joyful.

If you are stuck thinking that it will be difficult to meet everyone's needs, imagine, too, that you and those around you always find a creative solution to what has previously seemed like a problem.

Finally, imagine that, no matter what, you choose to feel happy. After all, happiness is a choice. It's just that choosing to feel happy takes consistent practice. And that brings me back to my program, because it consists in large measure of routines that will make happiness an easier and easier choice to make.

Whatever happens, on each day of the holidays you will expend energy. You will either expend it having a stressful holiday, or you will expend it having a lovely holiday. My assumption is that you want a lovely holiday.

This requires planning, and that's exactly what my program is meant to help you do. I have made this program with *you* in mind. I've provided tons of tools, techniques and prompts for you to take excellent care of yourself and the ones you love. I've taken all



of the guesswork out of how to have joyful, effortless holidays.

I've made it easy for you--*you* just have to live imperfectly with great delight.

Happy Holidays!

Stacey



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THE HOLIDAY: YOUR STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

This guide will serve you whether you are planning to celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas or Hanukkah.

Yes, I recommend you enjoy the same menu provided for Thanksgiving for all your big holiday meals. My family agrees that we all love the foods represented in the meal, so why argue with success?

This way, if you are up to it, you could double your shopping list for nonperishable items and even double recipes and freeze for the next holiday and really cut down on effort and stress for the next holiday!

Of course, I need to mention that the holiday meal does include turkey and a sausage stuffing. If you are a vegetarian, you will omit those recipes from your menu. You probably have a favorite main dish that you serve at holidays, but if you would like a suggestion, along with the shopping list, recipes, and time line for preparation, please refer to the Party Planner section which has an easy, delicious and completely vegetarian menu.



Today (Ideally one month before the holiday) :

Take a deep breath.

Think about what you would like to be (host or guest), do (make turkey or bring rolls) and have (lots of fun and meaningful connection).

Go to your phone or computer and contact your family and friends and let them know what you'd like the holiday to look like.

Be explicit about what you want to do and ask others what they would like to do.

If you are finding it difficult to meet everyone's needs, remember: You can have your celebration any time that will work for you and everyone else.

My brother is a physician and I'm a nurse-midwife and that means we are always working on Thanksgiving and Christmas but our family always makes sure to get together at least one day in the week around those days and it is still wonderful!

I've known people who will simply choose to gather with extended family on one day between Thanksgiving and New Year's, and that works great for them!



The important thing is to take care of yourself and honor your priorities.

Two weeks before the holiday: (If you are hosting.)

Confirm plans with friends and family.

Confirm what everyone is going to contribute.

Decide on your menu – either go with the easy menu I provided or go with your family favorites – now is not the time to experiment with new recipes!

If planning to cook a turkey, decide whether to use fresh, frozen or smoked. Be certain the size selected will fit in your freezer, fridge and oven. Order size planning on 1 to 1.5 pounds per person if buying whole turkey.

Stock up on staples at your next grocery shopping trip. (Find list of staples attached- include paper towels, tin foil, plastic bags, trash bags, etc.)

If you want, make bread and rolls – freeze.

One week before the holiday:

Buy turkey, if purchasing one that is frozen.



Decide on centerpiece. (I like a simple bouquet of sunflowers.)

Prepare cranberry relish. Store in the fridge.

Select wine to go with your meal. (Add to shopping list.)

HOLIDAY WEEK:

Four Days Before:

Clean out refrigerator and freezer.

Go grocery shopping.

Three Days Before:

If you have a frozen turkey, begin defrosting.

Two Days Before:

Clean and prep all vegetables and seal in zip-lock-style bags. (Green beans, potatoes, etc.)

Prepare as many dishes as you can that you can put in freezer.

One Day Before:





Prepare pies. Cover and refrigerate.

Prepare salad. Cover and refrigerate.

Set table. (Include “Celebrity Talk Show” questions in a bowl or basket.)

Chill drinks. If extra space is needed, store in a cold garage or out on the porch.

Holiday Day!

Early am:

Prepare stuffing. Cover and refrigerate.

Thaw rolls.

Wrap roasting pan with foil, or use disposable roasting pan or a cooking bag for quick cleanup.

Clean turkey, removing bag of giblets. Place in roasting pan, and put back in the fridge.

Simmer giblets, adding water as needed until tender. Then refrigerate, covered with liquid, until needed (to use in gravy).

Use your slow cooker if extra space is needed to keep





menu items warm.

Clean while cooking to avoid big cleanup later.

Four hours before dinner:

Stuff turkey.

Put turkey in oven. Roasting time depends on the size of the bird.

Three hours before dinner:

Cook sweet potatoes.

Two hours before dinner:

Finish preparing vegetables (make sweet potato dish, green beans, etc.)

One hour before dinner:

Fill glasses on table with water. Fill large pitcher with water. Fill small pitchers with half-and-half for coffee (cover and refrigerate). Fill sugar bowl.

One half-hour before dinner:

Take turkey out of oven and allow to rest.

Place vegetables and side dishes (don't forget all the pre-prepared foods like the cranberry sauce) in serv-





ing bowls.

Open wine and pour into glasses.

15 minutes before dinner:

Warm rolls in oven.

Whisk gravy and pour into gravy boat.

Place all dishes on table.

5 minutes before dinner:

Carve turkey, place on platter.

Place rolls in covered basket and place on table.

Enjoy Your Wonderful Meal with Your Loved Ones!

After dinner:

Make coffee.

Serve dessert and coffee.

Take any and all offers for help cleaning up!

Take a walk and celebrate that you created a wonderful time of fun and connection!



HOLIDAY DINNER SHOPPING LIST

Recipe 1: Simple Roast Turkey & Pan Gravy [R1]

Recipe 2: Muzzie's Fabulous Stuffing [R2]

Recipe 3: Orange Cranberry Sauce [R3]

Recipe 4: Old Fashioned Mashed Potatoes [R4]

Recipe 5: Oven Roasted Sweet Potatoes and Onions [R5]

Recipe 6: Sautéed Green Beans with Nutmeg [R6]

Recipe 7: Rolls and Butter [R7]

Recipe 8: Pumpkin Cheesecake [R8]

Meat:

- 1 (15- to 16 pound) turkey, fresh or frozen (your choice) [R1]
- 1 pound bulk breakfast sausage (I use Farmer John links with no casings) [R2]

Condiments:

- Extra virgin olive oil [R5] [R6]
- Vegetable oil [R2]

Produce:

- 3 pounds onions [R1] [R2]
- 4 medium red onions [R5]

- 1 head garlic
- 1 bunch carrots [R1] [R2]
- 1 bunch celery [R1]
- 1 green apple (smallish) [R1]
- 1 bunch parsley [R2]
- 5 pounds russet potatoes (12 medium potatoes) [R4]
- Fresh green beans (about 12 good handfuls) [R6]
- 8 medium sweet potatoes or yams [R5]
- 1 pound bag fresh cranberries [R3]

Spices:

- Thyme [R1]
- Poultry seasoning [R2]
- White pepper [R1]
- Sage [R1]
- Nutmeg [R6]
- Lemon pepper [R5]
- Ground cinnamon [R8]
- Ground ginger [R8]
- Pure vanilla extract [R8]



Canned Goods:

- 1 or 2 (14.75 oz.) cans chicken broth (or more for back up) [R2]
- 1 (16 oz.) can pumpkin puree (not pumpkin pie filling) [R8]

Dried Goods:

- Wondra flour or Pillsbury's fine flour (they're in canisters and shake out) [R1]
- Sugar (have at least 2 pounds on hand for baking, cranberries, coffee, etc.) [R3] [R8]
- Coffee for dessert (perhaps decaf?)
- 1 box Mrs. Cubbison's BREAD Stuff Mix (or use Pepperidge Farm on the East Coast -- NOT the cornbread kind) [R2]
- 1 envelope of turkey gravy mix
- 1 box ginger snaps [R8]

Dairy:

- 2 pounds unsalted butter (freeze any remaining) [R1] [R2] [R4] [R6] [R7] [R8]
- Heavy cream (you need 3/4 cup) [R8]
- 1 cup milk (for making potatoes) [R4]

- Orange juice (1 cup) [R3]
- 3 (8 oz.) packages cream cheese [R8]
- Eggs (4) [R8]

Bakery:

- Rolls for 12 (at my house, that would be 3 dozen!) [R7]

Frozen:

- Rolls for 12 (good alternative if you don't do bakery rolls)* [R7]

Shopping List Legend:

[R1] – [R6] = Recipe 1, Recipe 2, etc... Each recipe is assigned a number which corresponds to the shopping list. This is handy if you need to alter any recipes or omit a certain recipe from the menu.

RECIPES

Simple Roast Turkey

🍴 Serves 12 with leftovers

INGREDIENTS:

1 turkey (15-pound or more - I will probably go bigger for more leftovers)

One stick of unsalted butter, softened

Salt and pepper to taste

1 recipe Thanksgiving Dressing (see recipe)

(un-stuffing option: one carrot, one stalk of celery, a large onion, a green apple, some thyme)

Thyme

Sage

Water

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

You will usually find a package of giblets (innards) in the neck cavity of the turkey. Remove those, place in the fridge and I will tell you what to do with them later. Right now, it's bath time for old tom. Rinse the cavities (the neck and bottom) and outside of the bird with cool water then pat dry with paper towels.

Sprinkle the cavity of the turkey lightly with salt if desired. If you are not stuffing the bird, throw a washed carrot cut in half, a large onion cut in half and a celery stick cut in half into the cavity, sprinkle a little thyme and some salt and pepper. You can also add a half a green seeded apple, quartered if you like. I would



also throw a little sage and thyme in there and mix everything up with my hand (about 1/2 a teaspoon each). This will just help to flavor the drippings, which in turn will help you make scrumptious gravy. Do not salt the cavity if you will be stuffing the turkey.

If you will be stuffing the bird, don't do it now. Wait to do that till just before he hits the oven. Remove a rack from the oven, and position the last rack to be the second to the bottom ledge (in other words, not the very bottom). Turn on the oven to preheat, 500 degrees.

Place the turkey, breast side up, on a rack in a shallow roasting pan (the rack will help the whole turkey brown). Rub your bird down (using your hands) with a cube of softened, unsalted butter (this isn't one of those calorie conscientious meals). You will want to get under the skin and over the skin too (unless putting your hand under the turkey's skin creeps you out). Put 1/2 cup of water on the bottom of the pan. If you are using a meat thermometer (which is advised), place the thermometer in the thickest part of the thigh muscle, but do not allow it to touch the bone or you will get a false reading.

Now, stuff the bird if you are going to stuff it. I have recently become a dressing convert after years of stuffing my bird. I used to stuff and I love the stuffing, but I have found that stuffing the turkey is one of the reasons the turkey dries out, so my stuffing has become dressing now. A part of me mourns the loss of that delectable stuffing that came out

of my turkey, but the other part of me is thrilled with the moist results of my turkey.

Place the turkey in a preheated 500-degree oven for a half hour. Set your timer! The reason for the intense beginning heat is that this will allow the fat under the skin on the bottom of turkey (remember—you've got her sitting on a rack in the roasting pan) to melt and help brown the skin on the bottom. No more mush bottomed turkeys! Also, the turkey will begin to turn bronzy brown, which you want. After the initial 500-degree zapping, turn your oven down to a respectable 325 degrees. Do you feel better now?

Follow the timetable on the turkey packaging for approximate roasting time. Place a tent of foil loosely over the turkey when it begins to turn golden brown, exposing only the drumsticks to the oven. Roast the turkey until the meat thermometer reads 180 degrees (for a whole turkey) and the juice is no longer pink when you cut into the center of the thigh (it should be clear). The drumstick should move easily in the socket when lifted or twisted. When the turkey is finished roasting, remove it from the oven and let it stand at least 1/2 hour for easiest carving. However, it's even better to let it rest an hour. That way you can count down the rest of the meal. Keep the turkey tented with foil so it will stay warm.

Pan Gravy

👉 *(Recipe 1 continued) - Serves 12*



INGREDIENTS:

Turkey broth (recipe of sorts, included. Keep reading)
Wondra flour (yes, buy this)
White pepper
Salt and pepper to taste
1/2 carrot
1 stalk celery
1/2 large onion, quartered
Water

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

Remember I promised you I would tell you what to do with the giblet pouch? Now is the time. In that drippy bag, you are going to find a big old turkey neck, the heart, gizzard and liver. The heart, gizzard and liver are great treats for the dog, but unless giblet gravy is your heart's desire (sorry, couldn't help myself), in my opinion, they have no place in a gravy boat.

First off, get your turkey neck, a half a carrot, celery stalk and a half an onion, quartered. Throw them all

together into a medium sized saucepan and fill about three quarters of the way up with cold water. Put the pan on a medium-high heat, bring to a boil, then lower the temp and allow to simmer for about an hour or so. Throw a lid on the top and turn it down even lower and allow it to cook for another hour. Strain broth from solids (toss the solids) and set aside for later gravy making. If it is hours away from that event, refrigerate



the broth.

HITTING THE GRAVY TRAIN

Okay, the turkey has been removed from the pan and is resting comfortably. Skim the big greasy globs of fat from the roasting pan and place in a medium sized saucepan (there should be about three tablespoons or so of fat, depending on the size of your bird). Next, take an equal amount of Wondra flour and add to that turkey grease (I know this sounds yucky, but you have to trust me). The heat should be about medium-high and you need to whisk away to your heart's content until the roux (pronounced ROO) is golden and thick, and naturally lump-less. This roux procedure will take you all of five minutes—very easy, you can't mess this up. Set your beautiful roux aside.

Now back to the roasting pan. Add a cup of your reserved turkey neck stock to the roasting pan and turn up the heat (you will probably need two burners for the job) and bring it to a boil. Using your wire whisk, scrape up all the browned bits off the bottom of the pan. Those browned bits contain concentrated turkey flavor that will make your turkey gravy absolutely to die for. Don't skip this step. Now add all the golden roux in the saucepan you just made, into your roaster and whisk like your life depended on it. In just moments, a beautiful, velvety bronzed gravy should be emerging and filling you with the joy of accomplishment. Salt and pepper to taste, and add a pinch of white pepper.

I am an admitted snob when it comes to gravy making,



but even cookbook authors have their limitations when it comes to making enough turkey gravy. Truth be told, a turkey doesn't make as much gravy as necessary for the gravy hounds undoubtedly sitting at your very holiday table. You know the types—they use three ladles of gravy on their potatoes alone before even tackling the turkey on their plates. It is because of them that I came up with this trick. Actually, I take that back. My sister did this and I was shocked at how good it was. I didn't know she had done this at the time or I probably would have thrown myself prostrate on the stove begging her not to ruin the gravy.

Here's what she did: she added a package of dry turkey gravy mix (and the accompanying water) to her already made gravy. No one was the wiser—including me! I was amazed at how much gravy she had and too, was thrilled that I (an admitted gravy snob, plus a hound myself) was able to amply ladle gravy without being scolded about “saving some for the next guy”. She told me about the sneaky gravy extension trick after I had polished off Round One of The Meal and noticed there was still gravy left. I nearly needed smelling salts when she told me what she had done. I tried this trick at home and it is simply fabulous. This kind of mix stuff I will do on special occasions, but I will never admit to it, so don't tell a soul you heard this from me.

Muzzie's Fabulous Stuffing

 Serves 12

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound bulk breakfast sausage
- 1 box Pepperidge Farm Stuffing mix (NOT cornbread type)
- 2 stalks of celery, chopped
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 1/2 tablespoons butter, plus a splash of vegetable oil to keep the butter from burning
- 1 good handful of parsley, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon poultry seasoning
- 1 (14.75 oz.) can chicken broth (as needed - you won't need the whole thing)
- Water

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

First off, cook the sausage in a skillet with about an inch of water, over a medium-high heat. You won't be frying it—you'll be poaching it. Use a potato masher to mash the sausage into smallish pieces. You want it thoroughly cooked and not browned and greasy, and not into tiny bits either. Keep half the remaining water. Throw the cooked sausage and sausage water you kept in a bowl and set aside—we need to use the skillet again.

Now in that same skillet, heat the butter and oil together over medium-high heat. Add the onion and celery together and cook till nice and soft, about 8 minutes. Into a large mixing bowl,



add the sausage, sautéed veggies and remaining ingredients except the chicken broth. Toss everything together and add a little chicken broth, a bit at a time, to get a soft texture. You will use about a quarter of a cup of chicken broth or maybe a little more, depending on how dry your dressing is. You want it moist, not

drenched. Definitely don't soak the stuffing/dressing with chicken broth. Save any remaining broth for the gravy. Place dressing in a lightly greased casserole dish to be baked later (in a 325 degree oven, covered for about 1 hour; see time line for timing. You will bake the dressing an hour before show time.

Orange Cranberry Sauce

 Serves 12

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 cups fresh or frozen cranberries (1 pound bag)
- 1 cup water
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 1 cup orange juice

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

Rinse the cranberries (even if they are frozen) in a strainer with cool water, and remove any stems and bad or blemished berries. In a large saucepan, over medium heat, heat the water, juice and sugar to boiling stirring occasionally. Continue boiling 5 minutes longer to assure sugar is completely melted, stirring occasionally. Add the cranberries. Heat back to boiling over medium heat; stirring occasionally. Put a lid on the saucepan and continue boiling about 5 minutes longer, still stirring occasionally, until you hear the cranberries begin to pop. Remove the saucepan from the heat, give it a good stir and allow to cool for about 20 minutes. Pour the cranberry sauce into a bowl or container and allow to completely cool before refrigerating.

Old Fashioned Mashed Potatoes

👤 Serves 12

INGREDIENTS:

12 good sized Russet potatoes, peeled and quartered

Unsalted butter

Milk

Salt and pepper to taste

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

Fill a large pot with water and as you prepare the potatoes, throw them in after quartering them. After you are finished, drain the water if it looks dirty or murky and fill it up with fresh water. You need to adequately cover the potatoes, but there should be at least a couple of inches of cooking room.

Place the pot of potatoes on a burner, turn up to high and get the potatoes boiling. You can put on a lid on it (it will boil faster) but stay in the room so it doesn't boil over. When it starts to boil, bring the heat down to a simmer and cook until fork tender (about 20 minutes or so, depending on how big your potato quarters are).

Now carefully drain that heavy pot. See if you can draft a big burly guy to do it for you. If not, please be careful!

To your steaming pot of potatoes, add butter. How much, well I don't want to be quoted on how much I use on Thanksgiving (hey, it's a special occasion!), let your conscience be



your guide.

Next, salt and pepper to taste and add about 1/2 cup of milk. That's a starting place. Now pull out your potato masher and put some elbow grease in it or get the big burly guy to do it. DON'T use the electric mixer on these gems! Potatoes have starch in them and when you over handle them (as in whip the daylights out of them with an electric mixer), the starch develops making your lovely mashed potatoes look more like wallpaper paste that needs thinning. Don't go there! Use an old-fashioned potato masher or potato ricer (same kind of deal, only there are little holes in the bottom instead of the usual zigzag pattern of the normal potato masher).

FlyLady does her potatoes earlier in the day and puts them in a crock-pot on low with a little butter on top to keep them from drying out (and the lid on too, of course). I think that is ingenious. However, one word of caution is that with so many variables with crock-pots, you need to make sure yours will work for this task and the "low" setting isn't too high. My old one works for this job, my new one is too hot. See what I mean? Test run a small batch first if you are able.

Oven Roasted Sweet Potatoes and Onions

 Serves 12

INGREDIENTS:

- 8 medium peeled sweet potatoes, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 4 medium red onions, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons lemon pepper
- 1 teaspoon salt

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Combine all ingredients in a 13 x 9 inch baking dish. Toss to coat and bake for 35 minutes or so, until the taters are fork tender and nicely browned.

QUICK TIP: BUY the rolls! Buy the rolls from a good bakery or the frozen dough kind are good. Make sure they're of a good quality. And BUTTER, not margarine. I use unsalted, but get whichever butter you prefer.

Sautéed Green Beans with Nutmeg

👤 Serves 12

INGREDIENTS:

12 handfuls of green beans
2 tablespoons of unsalted butter
1 splash of olive oil
Generous dash of nutmeg (or you can grate it fresh—
I have a grater and it's awesome!)
Salt and pepper to taste

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

When you go to the grocery store, count out by the handful, how many beans

you will need. Give each adult one handful, and count one handful per two small children. Yes, use your hands, grab a handful of beans, plop it into a plastic bag and consider it a serving.

I know...that doesn't give you pounds. Well, it's the best way I know to give you a good idea of what to buy. Who cares if there isn't a weight? (it's probably close to 2 and a half pounds anyway, if you're cooking for 12). Here's what you do with those beans:

Wash beans and string them (pull the string starting at the stem and pull to the bottom). Then snap them in half (or cut them or leave them whole if they're thin and small). Steam them in a veggie steamer or boil them in a skillet half full of water. When they turn bright green, they're finished. (They will still be a little undercooked). Strain them and set aside.



In a skillet, heat the butter and oil over a medium-high heat and add the well-drained beans. Add the salt and pepper to taste and sauté them for about 2 to 3 minutes. Add a touch of nutmeg and sauté another minute or so. Beans should be tender, but not mushy.

Pumpkin Cheesecake

 Serves 8

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1/4 cups gingersnap cookie crumbs (crush about 20 cookies in a plastic bag with a rolling pin)
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter, melted
- 3 (8 ounce) packages cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 (16 ounce) can pumpkin puree (NOT pumpkin pie filling)
- 4 eggs
- 3/4 cup chilled whipping cream (need to whip it with 2 teaspoons sugar and a teaspoon of vanilla)

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. In a large mixing bowl, mix the cookie crumbs and butter. Press evenly on the bottom of a 9" spring form pan inches. Bake 10 minutes, then let cool. Reduce oven temp. to 300 degrees. In another large bowl, beat the cream cheese, sugar, the cinnamon and ginger on medium speed until smooth. Add pumpkin puree. Now add in the eggs, one at a time on low speed. Pour into the cookie crumb pie shell. Bake your cheesecake until center is firm, about 1 1/4 hours. Cool to room temperature. Cover and refrigerate at least



3 hours. (But in your case, you did it two days prior at least).
To loosen cheesecake from the sides of the pan, unbuckle the
side and carefully remove. Serve a dollop of whip cream on the
cheesecake. This recipe is to die for!



IDEAS FOR HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

CELEBRITY TALK SHOW

Put a small jar or basket in the middle of the table and fill it with the sort of questions celebrities get asked on talk shows (see cut-out sheet of questions at the end of this section). It's fun to see how much you learn about even the folks you've known all your life! This program provides questions for you, but feel free to add your own! Each person at the table picks one. If they don't want to answer it they can pass or pick another question. Everyone is welcome to answer the same question, or everyone can choose a different question.

THANKFULNESS TREE

Materials: Construction paper in red, yellow or orange if Thanksgiving, or white to represent "stars" for the December holidays. Pencil; scissors; string; bare tree branches about 2 to 3 feet long; vase for branches.

Trace the maple leaf (or star shape depending on the holiday) using the template provided. Once you have



the template, use a pencil and outline the shape on the construction paper. Cut out as many shapes as you wish. If your children are very young, you may want to do this part ahead. Spread the leaves across the table, and let everybody write things on the shapes for which they are thankful this year. Poke a small hole in the shape, thread with string, and hang on the branches. Afterwards, save all the leaves, either gluing them into a scrapbook or stuffing them in Ziploc baggie marked with the year.

THANKFUL BOX

Put a cardboard box with a slit cut out into the top on the kitchen counter the week before the holiday with a pile of blank paper and pencil next to it. Everybody writes down things they're thankful for. Read them out loud during the feast, and guess who wrote what.

HANUKKAH RESOURCES:

Produced by an organization of observant Jews, www.virtualchanukah.com is a rich resource for Hanukkah history and activities. There are stories, prayers, and a feature called "Share a Mitzvah," where people can record a good deed they've done and read about others. A less religious approach is at www.childfun.com.



com/themes/han.shtml, whose crafts and activities include making a menorah out of Play Doh.

NATIONAL DAY OF LISTENING

StoryCorps is an independent nonprofit project whose mission is to honor and celebrate one another's lives through listening. Since 2003, tens of thousands of everyday people have interviewed family and friends through StoryCorps.

On the day after Thanksgiving, consider setting aside one hour to record a conversation with someone important to you. You can interview anyone you choose: an older relative, a friend, a teacher, or someone from the neighborhood.

You can preserve the interview using recording equipment readily available in most homes, such as cell phones, tape recorders, computers, or even pen and paper. StoryCorps offers a free Do-It-Yourself Instruction Guide (find it at their website, www.storycorps.org) which is easy to use and will prepare you and your interview partner to record a memorable conversation, no matter which recording method you choose.



You can also go to their website and create a free CD to keep at home and share; it is also archived for generations to come at the Library of Congress. Try to make a yearly tradition of listening to and preserving a loved one's story. The stories you collect will become treasured keepsakes that grow more valuable with each passing generation!

LITERARY "ADVENT" CALENDAR:

"Advent" comes from the Latin word for coming, and many Christians find that using the full month before Christmas to concentrate on the meaning of the holiday helps to balance the materialistic messages that bombard us this time of year.

Take every holiday-related book you have (or any books that your kids might enjoy!) and wrap them. Write a number from 1 to 24 (This idea could also be used for each of the eight nights of Hanukkah!) on the front of the package. If you don't have 24 books, use a few from the library before they're due. You could even check out Amazon—many of their Christmas titles are priced below \$10. And then, every evening after dinner, open the night's book and read it together.

A Wish to Be a Christmas Tree, Colleen Monroe
The Little Shepherd Girl, Juliann Henry
Humphrey's First Christmas, Carol Heyer
December, Eve Bunting
The Best Christmas Pageant Ever, Barbara Robinson
Merry Christmas, Curious George, H.A. Ray
How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Dr. Seuss
Christmas in the Big Woods, Laura Ingalls Wilder
Carl's Christmas, Alexandra day
Olivia Helps with Christmas, Ian Falconer
The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey, Susan Wojciechowski
Toot and Puddle: I'll Be Home for Christmas, Holly Hob-
bie
Who is Coming to Our House? Joseph Slate
Olive, the Other Reindeer, J. Otto Seibold
Mr. Willouby's Christmas Tree, Robert Barry
Christmas Far, Marilyn Ray
The Polar Express, Chris Van Allsburg
The Great Mrs. Claus, Chris Shoemaker
*The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree: An Appalachian
Story*, Gloria Houston

Night Tree, Eve Bunting

Big Susan, Elizabeth Orton Jones

The Donkey's Christmas Son, Nancy Tafuri

The Night Before Christmas, Clement C. Moore

One Hundred Shining Candles, Janet Lunn

Night Tree: Eve Bunting wrote the holiday book by this name which is listed above: the story is based on an actual family's Christmas ritual. The family in the book visits the same pine tree in some nearby woods each year on Christmas Eve, and they decorate it with treats for birds and other wildlife. You, too, can follow this ritual. Beforehand, make a garland of cranberries and breakfast cereal (popcorn works too), and roll pinecones in birdseed after slathering them with peanut butter. After decorating the tree, sing carols and drink hot chocolate from a thermos.



IDEAS FOR HOLIDAY GIFTS

THREE GIFTS

Some families give each of their kids only three gifts, explaining that Jesus received three gifts from the wise men. You could creatively follow this practice by giving each child a book, a game and a toy.

GIFT EXCHANGE

One way to limit excess is to pick names out of a hat, so extended family members have to shop for only one person.

HEIFER INTERNATIONAL

Everyone in my family chips in so that we can buy a farm animal for another family. Heifer has over 50 years experience in donating farm animals to people all over the world. If you'd like to give a donation in someone's honor, the picture book *Beatrice's Goat*, about how a Heifer goat changed the life of a real African girl, makes a big impression, and would be a great companion gift along with the donation. (www.heifer.org)



KIVA

The world's first person-to-person micro-lending website, empowering individuals to lend to unique entrepreneurs around the globe. The book *The Kabul Beauty School: The Art of Friendship and Freedom* by Deborah Rodriguez would also make a great companion gift along a donation made in honor of a friend or family member. (www.kiva.org)

MONEY AS A GIFT

For a long time I didn't think it was very thoughtful to give money as a gift. I even thought giving a gift card was a better option. I've changed my mind about gift cards since I learned that many of them go unused and there is even a good chance the store where you got the card will go out of business before the recipient can use it. (Kohl's and Circuit City are two examples here in Asheville.) So I've taken another look at the idea of giving money as a gift.

The fact is that it *does* allow the recipient the flexibility to use the money any way he or she wishes. It seems very likely that whether it will be used to help purchase that special something on their wish list or an added deposit in their savings account, money



will *always* be appreciated. It really is the ultimate clutter-free gift!

If you want to add a more personal touch, you could include a note saying that you know they are saving for a vacation or want to upgrade their computer or start a quilting project and you want to help.

You could also dress it up with a festive red envelope, which is a Chinese tradition. If you want more creative ideas for giving money as a gift, I recommend the ELM (Everybody Loves Money) DVD. One of the ideas is to roll up a bunch of bills and place in a Lifesaver's roll of candy. The recipient thinks they are getting candy, but then you encourage them to open it and they are delighted to see the roll of money!

Go to www.housefairy.org and click on ORDERS and you'll see the ELM DVD at the bottom. You can get the DVD or immediately "download" the program and watch it on your computer. (The program is \$13.95 and includes ideas for giving money for all occasions.)



IDEAS FOR HOLIDAY CARDS

I'm a huge fan of internet sites like Smilebox.com that will send beautiful e-cards to everyone in your email address book. Who doesn't love to save time, money and paper waste?

For people to whom you want to send a "real" card (for me, these are about 40 folks for whom I want to write a more personal note), you can still order them from the comfort of your home. With services like www.snapfish.com, you can upload an image of your family and make a beautiful, personalized holiday card and they will send you the set with envelopes ready to mail.



HOLIDAY PARTY PLANNING

I usually have several parties around the holidays. Below, you'll find a basic template that will serve you well for hosting any kind of party you'd like to have. There's also a schedule for a party that begins at 6 pm, but of course, you can set your party for whenever you want, and work back from there!

Here's my best party advice: Be a guest at your own party. That means that you have everything done before your first guest arrives so that you can really enjoy your company.

Try to be the first person your guests see when they arrive and the last person they see when they depart. Greet each guest warmly. Ask to take their coat and immediately offer them a drink and show them to the food.

I've provided an easy, delicious menu, but if you don't have time or the energy, all of these items are readily available at any specialty grocery store.



MENU:

(*RECIPES POSTED BELOW.)

*Cranberry Punch

Red and White Wine

*Brie en Croute

Pimento Cheese (pick up from any good grocery store). Serve on little rye bread squares

*Smoked Trout Crostini (Sunburst Trout Farm in Asheville offers amazing smoked trout and I think you can have it shipped anywhere. Link?)

Pickled veggies (okra, carrots and peppers), grapes and apple slices

Candied Walnuts

*Winter Minestrone

Whole Wheat Rolls (I use Laurey's here in Asheville.)

Dessert Tray (I use Laurey's in Asheville, NC - (828) 252-1500. I ask for small – think one or two-bite sized – squares of brownies, raspberry Linzer bars, and lemon bars.)

At least two weeks before the party:

Invite friends using www.evite.com or a similar service on the internet.



A few days before (ideally with your Sunday grocery shopping trip)

Call bakery and place order for rolls and desserts. (Or plan to buy them from your specialty grocery store.) Buy groceries. Make sure you have plenty of plates, tableware, napkins, paper towels, toilet paper and garbage bags!

Two nights before party

Prepare/chop vegetables for winter minestrone. Soak the beans.

The night before:

Prepare soup.

Set out platters, plates, tableware, candles, and wine glasses (I tie different colored ribbons around the stems of glasses to help keep the guests' glasses separate.) Make sure a tablecloth is clean and ready for the table.

The morning of:

Set table with tablecloth. Gather extra chairs and place in gathering space, if you think you'll need them. Make sure bathrooms are clean and have plenty of toilet paper and clean hand towels. Clear a



space where you will be storing coats.

The afternoon of:

3 pm

Defrost puff pastry for Brie en Croute. Pick up rolls, desserts, and flowers.

4 pm

Prepare Brie en Croute and Smoked Trout Toasts.

5 pm

Put Brie en Croute in oven. Prepare mixer for Cranberry Punch. Wash and dry grapes. Cut apples into slices. Fill water pitchers. Start to play holiday music if you haven't already. Put butter in dish on table.

5:30 pm

Start to warm soup on the stove over low heat. Get dressed. Light candles.

6 pm

Put food on table. Have a glass of wine and celebrate!

After the party

Accept any and all offers for help to clean up!



SHOPPING LIST

- 17.3 ounce package Puff Pastry sheets (1 sheet)
- Dried cherries or cranberries
- Pecans or walnuts
- Fresh rosemary leaves.
- 1 Brie cheese (round)
- Crostini or french bread
- Cream cheese
- Smoked trout
- Dried cannelloni or cranberry beans, or a mix of both
- Onions
- Carrots
- Celery
- Garlic
- Dinner rolls
- Fresh thyme
- Butter for rolls
- One leek
- Turnips
- Potatoes

- 
- Cabbage
 - One 750 ml bottle Cranberry Fusion or other good quality vodka, chilled
 - Cranberry-flavored mixer, such as Rose's Cocktail infusion, if available.
 - 6 cups cranberry-raspberry juice, chilled
 - Orange juice
 - 1 lemon
 - 1 orange
 - 1 bottle sparkling wine



RECIPES

Cranberry Punch:

One 750 ml bottle Cranberry Fusion or other good quality vodka, chilled

½ cup cranberry-flavored mixer, such as Rose's Cocktail infusion, if available.

6 cups cranberry-raspberry juice, chilled

3 cups fresh orange juice, chilled

Juice of one lemon

1 orange, thinly sliced

1 bottle sparkling wine, chilled

INSTRUCTIONS:

In a punch bowl, or a large pitcher, combine all of the ingredients except the wine. To serve, fill the glass halfway with the punch and top with sparkling wine.

Brie en Croute

½ of a 17.3 ounce package Puff Pastry sheets (1 sheet)

1 egg

1 T. water

1/3 cup dried cherries or cranberries, softened*

¼ cup chopped toasted pecans or walnuts

¼ cup honey



½ tsp. chopped fresh rosemary leaves.

1 (13.2 ounces) Brie cheese (round)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Thaw pastry sheet at room temperature 40 minutes or until it's easy to handle.

Heat oven to 400 degrees. Beat egg and water in a small bowl.

Unfold pastry sheet on lightly floured surface. Roll sheet into a 14-in. square. Stir fruit, nuts, honey and rosemary in bowl. Spread mixture onto center of square. Top with cheese. Brush edges of pastry with egg mixture. Fold two opposite sides over cheese. Trim remaining two sides of square to 2-in from edge of cheese. Fold sides up onto cheese and press edges to seal. Place seam-side down onto baking sheet. Decorate top with pastry scraps or additional rosemary if desired. Brush with egg mixture.

Bake for 20-25 min, or until pastry is deep golden brown. Let stand for 45 minutes.

*Soften cherries or cranberries in ½ cup hot water. Let stand for 1 minute. Drain and pat dry.

Smoked Trout Crostini

Buy crostini already made or toast slices of French bread. Top with softened cream cheese and pieces of smoked trout (or smoked salmon).

Alice Water's Winter Minestrone

(adapted from The Art of Simple Food, 2007)

🍴 Serves 8

- 1 cup dried cannelloni or cranberry beans, or a mix of both
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 celery stalks, finely chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped
- 5 thyme sprigs
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 tsp. salt, plus more for seasoning
- 1 small leek, diced
- 1 pound turnips, peeled and cut into bite-sized pieces
- ½ pound yellow potatoes, peeled and cut into bite-sized pieces
- ½ head of cabbage, chopped
- Extra-virgin olive oil and grated Parmesan cheese for garnish.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1) Soak beans overnight in 4 cups of water. Drain and transfer to a heavy pot, then add water to cover by 2 inches. Bring to a boil. Lower the heat and skim off any foam. Simmer gently for 2 hours until the beans are tender. Add more water if



necessary during the cooking. Drain; reserve the cooking liquid.

2) Heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil in a heavy-bottomed pan over medium heat. Add onion, carrots, and celery. Cook for 15 minutes, or until a rich golden color. Add garlic, thyme, bay leaf, and 2 tsp. salt. Cook for another 5 minutes.

3) Add 3 cups of water, bring to a boil, and then add leek, turnips, and potatoes. Cook for 15 minutes. Add salt to taste. Meanwhile, in a separate pot, boil cabbage in salted water until tender, drain.

4) Add cooked beans to the soup, along with 1 cup reserved cooking liquid and boiled cabbage. Cook for 5 minutes. If the soup is too thick, add more bean-cooking liquid. Remove the bay leaf and thyme sprigs. Pour soup into a tureen or bring the pot to the table or the guests to the pot on the stove (what I do). Ladle into bowls; garnish with olive oil and Parmesan cheese, then season with salt. Serve with rolls.



HOLIDAY PLAYLIST

Classical

- Vivaldi: Concerto In C For 2 Trumpets, RV 537
Antonio Vivaldi: Cto. for two Trumpets and Orchestra in C Maj.
Arcangelo Corelli: Cto. Grosso (Gmin), "Christmas"
Arcangelo Corelli: Cto. Grosso (F)
Tomaso Albinoni: Cto. for Oboe and Strings (B flat) 7

Favorite Albums

- Louis Armstrong: Christmas Through The Years
Yolanda Adams: What A Wonderful Time
Squirrel Nut Zippers: Christmas Caravan
The Brian Setzer Orchestra: Boogie Woogie Christmas
Vince Guaraldi Trio: A Charlie Brown Christmas
Sarah McLachlan: Wintersong

Single tracks

- Tom Petty: Christmas All Over Again
Luther Vandross: The Christmas Song
These two—from the album "A Very Special Christmas"
Mary J. Blige & Sheryl Crow: Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree
From the album "A Very Special Christmas" - Live from Washington, DC
Mariah Carey: All I Want for Christmas Is You

From the album "Merry Christmas"

Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band: Merry Christmas Baby

U2: Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)

These two from the album "A Very Special Christmas, Vol. 1"

Pretenders: 2000 Miles

From the album "Holiday – EP"

Wynonna: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Limited Edition Christmas – EP

John Lennon: Happy Xmas (War Is Over)

From the album "Lennon Legend"

Miscellaneous songs friends have sent my way

Pearl Bailey: Five Pound Box of Money

The Tim Fuller Experience: Silent Night

Elvis: Blue Christmas

Clancy Brothers: Jingle Bells (Buala Bas)

Eartha Kitt: Santa Baby

Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters: Mele Kaliki Maka

The Ventures: Sleigh Ride

Elvis: Santa Claus is Back in Town

Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross: Deck us All with Boston Charlie

Bing Crosby and David Bowie: Little Drummer Boy/Peace on Earth

Louis Armstrong: Cool Yule

James Brown: Merry Christmas - I Love You



NEW TRADITIONS YOU MAY LIKE TO TRY

Notes of appreciation





TRAVEL CHECKLIST

Departure Date: _____

Length of trip: _____

Return date: _____

Driving? Yes No

If so, is car serviced? Yes No

If not driving, travel arrangements:

Flight Info	
Departing flight #, times and location:	
Coming home flight #, times:	
Date/method of purchase:	
Confirmation #:	





Hotel/Lodging Info	
Hotel name and address:	
Dates of arrival/departure:	
Date/method of purchase:	
Confirmation #:	

Additional travel arrangements: _____



Pet care info: _____

PACKING LIST:

Everyday outfits

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Dressy outfits

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Outerwear (scarves, gloves, etc.)

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Underwear

- _____
- _____

Shoes

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Toiletries

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Tickets

- _____
- _____

Gifts

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Traveling money _____

Purse _____

Snacks

Sporting equipment

Cell phone and charger

Laptop



EXTRAS

On the following pages, you'll find:

- 1) A form for preparing your gift list
- 2) Questions for the "Celebrity Talk Show" activity (see page 28).
- 3) Templates to use for the cut-outs for the "Thankfulness Tree" (see page 28).

Enjoy!

“CELEBRITY TALK SHOW” QUESTIONS

How has your life been different than what you'd imagined?

What are the most important lessons you've learned in life?

Who would play you in a movie?

What are you appreciating right now?

What do you do to give yourself a happiness boost?

What would we be most surprised to find out about you?

How would you like to be remembered?

What is your earliest memory?

What is the happiest moment of your life?

What's your happiest holiday memory?

What would you do with a million dollars?

What are three things that make you most happy?

What does your future hold?

Are there any words of wisdom you'd like to pass along?

Who has been the biggest influence on your life? What lessons did they teach you?

What do you look forward to most about the holidays?

What are you passionate about?

What do you think would make the world a better place?

What are you proudest of in your life?

Who has been the kindest to you in your life?

What is the kindest thing anyone has ever done for you?

What are you most grateful for?

What is the best book you've ever read? Which book do you recommend most often to other people?

“THANKFULNESS TREE” PATTERNS

