



**HIGHER
GROUND
AUSTRALIA**

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MERRY CHRISTMAS, HAPPY HANUKKAH, AND HAPPY NEW YEAR

We all have our own family traditions as we celebrate our religious festivals at this time of the year. Of course, here in Australia, our celebrations tend to be low key and casual as Christmas falls in the middle of the hottest time of the year.

Generally, Australians brought their Christmas traditions from the British Isles and from Europe. It was a way of holding onto long-held family rituals, particularly in the way food was prepared. The Christmas dinner is probably the one time in the year the extended family gathers to enjoy a shared meal, exchange gifts, and to reminisce about past celebrations, passed members and most importantly, to wish good health to one another for the coming year.

When I was a young child and until I was ten years old when we moved to Queensland, we spent every Christmas with my maternal grandparents. Living in Kerang, a northern Victorian Mallee town, Christmas Day was always hot. It was not unusual for it to be 110 degrees F (43C) in the shade. The heat bounced off the cracked, baked ground, but it was far cooler outside than it was in the kitchen, where the combustion oven was stoked up and a variety of meats and vegetables were roasting slowly since dawn, a depression-era pudding steamed gently on the stove top. A small electric oven was set to keep plates and food warm until it was time to eat at the trestle table set up in the lounge room. Uncles, aunts, cousins, half-cousins, people we called aunty and uncle and other people we knew would either join us for dinner or would stand behind the table and talk if they had already eaten in their own houses. The noise was deafening as everyone, it seemed, talked at the same time. Squashed around the table, Christmas dinner always started with the snapping of crackers. The tissue crowns were placed on our heads for the duration of the meal; riddles were read out and the toy or token found inside was placed on the side plate for safe keeping. The heat caused the colour from the tissue crowns to transfer onto our foreheads. Nobody liked the green or blue crowns because it took days for the colour to disappear. We embarked on a lavish feast of turkey, lamb, ham and sometimes roast duck would make an appearance if someone got lucky down at the lake. The best part of Christmas Dinner was the pudding. A recipe from my great grandmother on my dad's side, it was cooked in a cloth. We would always find a sixpence in our slice and licking the sticky crumbs was one of those childhood/childish pleasures that I remember.

When we moved to Queensland, the rituals remained, but the dinner was served cold. Cold turkey, seafood, and ham with salad. It simply didn't 'feel' like Christmas.

Today, I celebrate with the family; a traditional hot Christmas Dinner of roast turkey, ham, and vegetables. My Irish husband introduced me to potato stuffing for the turkey, which everyone loves. I still make my great-grandmother's pudding in the cloth but we no longer put five-cent pieces in the pudding.

Today, because of the diversity within our family, our Christmas table includes friends and relatives of different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Christmas is a time for giving and for sharing. I think that over the decades, the ability to take the best traditions and rituals from our blended families and turn them into something uniquely ours is the true essence of Christmas.

From all of us at Higher Ground Australia, we wish you all a happy holiday, stay safe, warm (or cool), and enjoy your special days.

Alfie the Christmas Tree

(John Denver)

Did you ever hear the story of the Christmas Tree
who just didn't want to change the show?
He liked living in the woods and playing with squirrels;
He liked icicles and snow;
He liked wolves and eagles and grizzly bears
And critters and creatures that crawled.
Why bugs were some of his very best friends, spiders and ants and all.

Now that's not to say that he ever looked down on the vision of twinkling lights;
or on mirrored bubbles and peppermint canes and a thousand other delights.
And he often had dreams of tiny reindeer and a jolly old man
in a sleigh full of toys and presents and wonderful things,
and the story of Christmas Day.

Oh, Alfie believed in Christmas all right, he was full of Christmas cheer.
All of each and every day and all throughout the year.
To him it was more than a special time, much more than a special day.
It was more than a beautiful story; it was a special kind of way.

You see, some folks have never heard a jingle bell ring
And they've never heard of Santa Claus.
They've never heard the story of the Son of God;
And that made Alfie pause.
Did that mean that they'd never know of peace on earth?
Or the brotherhood of man?
Or know how to love, or know how to give? If they can't, no one can.

You see, life is a very special kind of thing, not just for a chosen few;
But for each and every living breathing thing, not just me and you.
So in your Christmas prayers this year,
Alfie asked me if I'd ask you
to say a prayer for the wind, and the water and the wood,
and those who live there, too!

Christmas for Cowboys

(Steve Weisberg)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZh2IM-FQms>

Tall in the saddle we spend Christmas Day
Drivin' the cattle on the snow covered-plains.
All of the good gifts given today,
Ours is the sky and the wide open range.

Back in the city they have diff'rent ways,
Football and eggnog and Christmas parades.
I'll take the blanket, I'll take the reins,
Christmas for cowboys and wide open plains.

A campfire for warmth as we stop for the night,
The stars overhead are the Christmas tree lights.
The wind sings a hymn as we bow down to pray,
It's Christmas for cowboys and wide open plains.

It's tall in the saddle we spend Christmas Day,
Drivin' the cattle on the snow-covered plains.
So many gifts have been opened today,
Ours is the sky and the wide open range.
It's Christmas for cowboys and wide open plains.



Christmas Like a Lullaby (John Denver)



Christmas like a lullaby steals across the land
A breeze upon the water, rainfall upon the sand
We celebrate a baby born from spirit into man
And Christmas like a lullaby steals across the land

It's morning in Australia; In fact it's Christmas day
And Colorado never seemed so very far away
Back where night has fallen and it's still Christmas Eve
And snow is on the mountains where I always hate to
leave

Here I am down under with a brand new family
And Christmas bells are ringing
And there's presents 'neath the tree
I know that it's been said before and now I know it's true
That home is where the heart is
And Christmas lives there too
And on this morning Peace on Earth
Is still our fervent prayer
And I can hear it being
Whispered softly everywhere

And guns are called to silence
And anger called to still
And brotherhood and sisterhood
Surrounded by goodwill

Christmas like a lullaby steals across the land
A breeze upon the water, rainfall upon the sand
We celebrate a baby born from spirit into man
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