

boys, aged seven and nine, into the senior statesmen of their generation. In a house filled with four children under the age of five, my boys simply need more to do.

I think what it comes down to is that life is a race against time. Last Christmas, I began to feel that the time for change was coming; I just wasn't sure exactly when the change would happen.

It's hard to break a family tradition, especially when you recognize the potential for hurt feelings. Any change involves a risk—the risk of hurting the ones you love. While

we sit at home, our family will probably be gathering lumps of coal for our stockings.

But we made our decision, and it's final. This year, at least, we are taking a break. My wife and I are appropriately wracked with guilt. We know that there may be some hurt feelings. But in our family, like most, I think the love is unconditional. When the next Christmas rolls around, I'm sure they'll greet us with open arms.

*David Levin writes frequently on family topics. He lives in New York City.*

presents and share meals. One night out of the eight our son gives up a gift and instead chooses a charity to which his father and I send a check. Soon we will begin to teach the same lesson in generosity to our little girl.

## Sharing and Giving

With the gifts we give them, my husband and I try to make it plain to our children that we are taking note of their interests and their accomplishments as well as their hearts' desires. The point is to show them not how much we spend on them but how much we respect them and pay attention to who they are. So the pretty enamel chopsticks we presented to our son last year signaled our pride in the growing sophistication of his palate. And our daughter's musical Winnie-the-Pooh jewelry box was meant to acknowledge her love for that little character and the delight she takes in draping herself in enough necklaces and bracelets to sink a ship.

I realize now that in making Hanukkah special for my children, I've made it special for myself. There are few sights I treasure more than that of my strapping son helping his little sister unwrap her first dollhouse. There are few sounds more precious than his voice as he says the evening's blessings—each year with a little more assurance than the last—or her giggles as he helps her safely light the night's allotment of candles.

So if Hanukkah, like Christmas, is a family holiday that celebrates a miracle, to me it is now doubly dear—a miraculous holiday that celebrates our family. **CTW**

*Bette-Jane Raphael is the mother of a son, Jake, and a daughter, Rose.*

# OUR HANUKKAH

*Amid the Christmas sparkle, our family's holiday comes to life* BY BETTE-JANE RAPHAEL

**W**HEN I WAS A CHILD, I CONSIDERED Hanukkah a poor substitute for Christmas. While I always looked forward to my mother's potato latkes and my grandfather's Hanukkah gelt—silver dollars he gave to me and my cousins as gifts—there was no way they could stack up to the glitter of Christmas. With wreaths on most front doors, and all the neighborhood stores bedecked in the distinctive red and green of the season, Christmas was clearly the holiday of choice. So while I accepted my parents' caution "that it was not our" celebration, I secretly wished it was.

It's been a long time since I wanted to celebrate Christmas. In fact, my joy in Hanukkah increases every year, along with the cherished memories it engenders.

## Closeness and Love

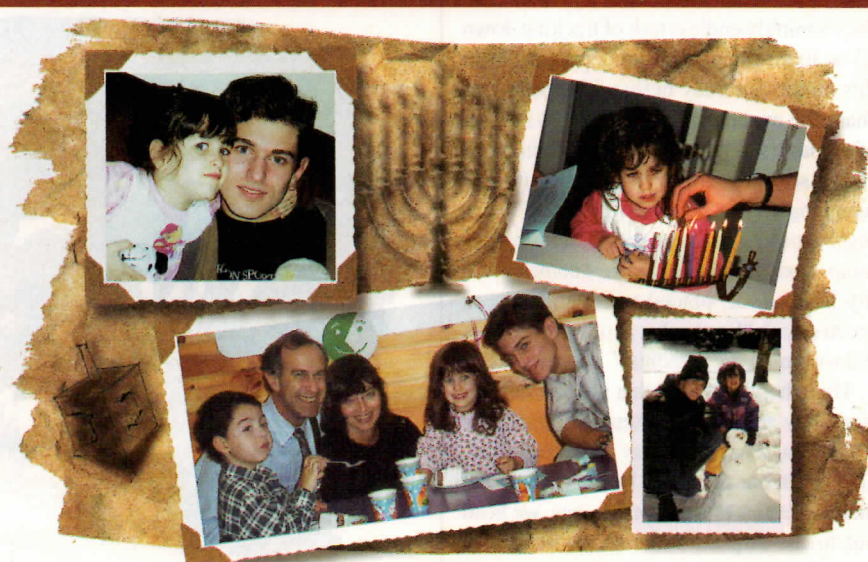
This change in attitude took place when I became a wife and mother, because, for me, the holiday is all about family—and religious identity. The fact is, my husband and I never wanted our children to feel the way I once felt. We never wanted them to feel like outsiders; we never wanted them to wish they were anything but what they were.

So from the beginning we vowed to teach our son, now 16, and our daughter, now 5, that while we can all enjoy the festiveness of the Christmas season, the quiet but genuine joy of our holiday, our Hanukkah, is second to none. To teach that lesson, every night for a week and a day sometime dur-

ing December, we all take part in a ritual that celebrates not only an ancient miracle but a present bounty of closeness and love.

We never leave one another at Hanukkah. Nobody goes away on a business trip or an out-of-town visit. Nobody comes home past a preschooler's bedtime. As the December darkness deepens outside, the four of us gather to say the prayers and light the candles and play games of hot and cold as the children search for their hidden gifts.

But if we are never less than four, we are often more. Hanukkah is a time for sharing, for reaching out to friends and family and those in need. So we make calls and send



*In New York City, close friends help kindle the Hanukkah lights.*