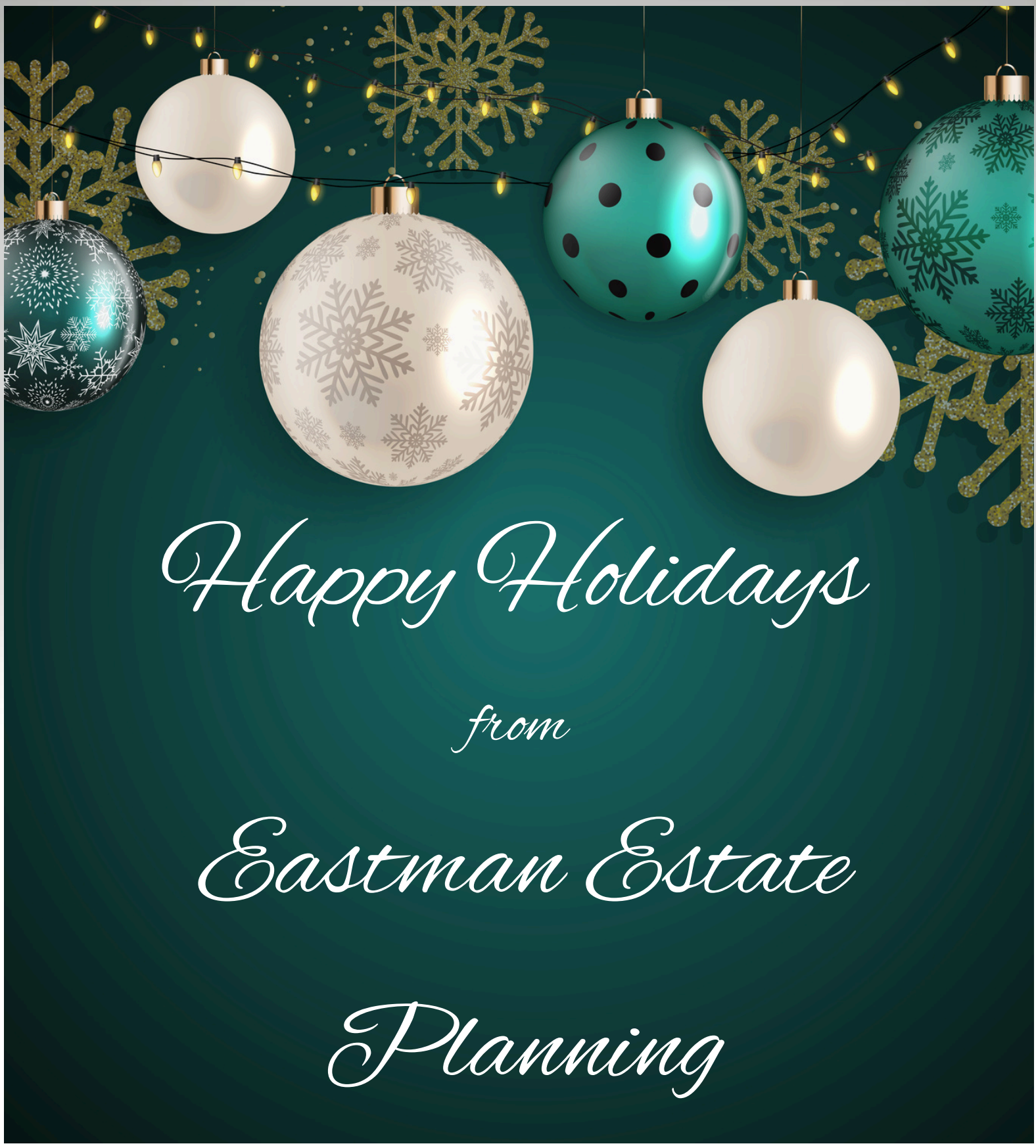


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*Protecting legacies, one family at a time.*

# December

## Honoring the Departed

Death is a universal experience, but the ways people honor and remember the dead vary widely across cultures. From quiet rituals of remembrance to vibrant celebrations of life, traditions around the world reflect deep beliefs about mortality, spirituality, and the enduring bonds between the living and the departed. Here are just a few:

The United States: Memorial Day and Personalized Tributes
In the United States, traditions vary greatly due to cultural diversity. One national observance is Memorial Day, when people honor military personnel who have died in service by visiting cemeteries, leaving flags, and holding parades. On a personal level, many families choose customized memorials, from online tribute pages to annual family gatherings, blending traditional and modern forms of remembrance.

Mexico: Día de los Muertos
Perhaps one of the most well-known traditions is Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), celebrated in Mexico and parts of Central America. Families build ofrendas (altars) decorated with photos, food, candles, and marigolds to welcome the souls of loved ones back for a brief reunion. Far from a somber occasion, it is a colorful and joyful celebration, emphasizing that death is a natural part of life and that those who have passed remain present in spirit.

Japan: Obon Festival
In Japan, the Obon festival, usually held in August, is a Buddhist tradition honoring the spirits of ancestors. Families clean and decorate graves, light lanterns, and perform dances known as Bon Odori. The festival often ends with floating lanterns set adrift on rivers or the sea, symbolically guiding the spirits back to the other world.

# December


Ghana: Fantasy Coffins and Funerals

In Ghana, funerals are major community events, often marked by music, dancing, and elaborate ceremonies. One unique tradition is the use of fantasy coffins, crafted to reflect the life, profession, or passions of the deceased—for example, a fisherman might be buried in a coffin shaped like a fish. These funerals are not just about mourning but also celebrating a life well lived.

Madagascar: Famadihana

Among the Malagasy people of Madagascar, the ritual of Famadihana, or "turning of the bones," involves exhuming ancestors' remains, rewrapping them in fresh cloth, and dancing with them during a family gathering. It is seen as a way to honor the ancestors, maintain a connection with them, and ensure their blessings for future generations.

Ireland: Wakes and Storytelling

In Ireland, traditional wakes blend mourning with storytelling, music, and fellowship. Family and friends gather in the home of the deceased to share food and drink, offering comfort to one another while telling stories about the person who has passed. This ritual emphasizes both grieving and celebrating the individual's life.

Tibet: Sky Burials

In Tibetan Buddhist tradition, sky burials involve placing the body on a mountaintop where it is consumed by vultures. This practice reflects the belief in the impermanence of the body and the importance of generosity—even in death. The ritual is both practical, given the rocky terrain, and deeply spiritual, symbolizing the return of the body to nature.

While practices differ, these traditions reveal a shared human desire: to honor, remember, and stay connected with those who have passed away. Whether through solemn rituals, joyful celebrations, or symbolic offerings, cultures across the world remind us that death is not only an end but also a continuation of the ties that bind us to those we love.

# November

## Paralegal Tip - Donna Schubert

I love having my house smell good, especially for the holidays when friends and family come over. However, I often don't have time to place cookies or other pastries in the oven for that festive aroma. Here is a great option:
To create that Christmas smell, make a stovetop potpourri by simmering water with festive ingredients like orange slices, cranberries, cinnamon sticks, and cloves.

**Ingredient Ideas:** Sliced Oranges and/or lemons, cranberries, cinnamon sticks, whole cloves, rosemary sprigs, fresh pine, or cedar sprigs. You can also add apple cider or juice, vanilla extract, star anise, or nutmeg. The options are endless, and you are the chemist.

1. Combine all your ingredients in a pot on the stove.
2. Cover your ingredients with water or apple cider.
3. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to a gentle simmer.
4. Let it simmer, adding more water as needed, and the scent will fill your home.

Hints:
Set a timer on your phone or oven to go off every 15 minutes to remind yourself to check the water level and also to turn the burner off when the house smells delicious. Make extra mixtures and keep in plastic containers.

# December Cream Cheese Sugar Cookie

Cream Cheese Sugar Cookie

- 1 cup butter, room temperature
- 6 oz full fat cream cheese, room temperature
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 1 large egg + 1 egg yolk
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp cream of tartar
- 3 1/2 cups flour, spooned and leveled

Cream Cheese Frosting

- 1/2 cup butter, room temp
- 2 oz full fat cream cheese, room temp
- 2 cups powdered sugar, spooned and leveled
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- Gel food coloring (optional) & Sprinkles, for decorating

**Butternut Bakery**

In a large bowl using a hand or stand mixer with the paddle attachment, mix the butter, cream cheese, and sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 1 minute. Scrape down the bowl and mix in the egg, egg yolk, and vanilla until smooth. Scrape down the bowl and mix in the salt, baking powder, and cream of tartar until combined. Mix in the flour. When your mixer starts to struggle with the thick dough, remove from the mixer and use a rubber spatula to ensure the dough is well combined. It's VERY thick and sticky, so this requires a little elbow grease! Dump the dough out onto a sheet of plastic wrap lightly dusted with flour. Coat your hands in flour and pat the dough out into a 1" thick rectangle. Wrap and chill for at least 1 hour or overnight. When ready, preheat the oven to 350F and line a large baking sheet with parchment paper. Roll the dough out onto a floured surface to ¼" thick. Cut out as many cookies as you can and place them about an inch apart on the baking sheet. With any leftover cut out cookies, store in the refrigerator. Bake for 8-10 minutes (9 was the sweet spot for me), or until they look dry on the surface but just barely done in the middle. In the meantime, you can re-roll the dough scraps, continuing to store any cut out cookies in the refrigerator until it's time to bake them.Let the cookies rest on the pan for about a minute, then transfer to a cooling rack before baking the rest of the batch.

*FROSTING:*

Mix butter and cream cheese until smooth. Mix in the powdered sugar one cup at a time, followed by the vanilla. It should be thick and smooth. Mix in a few drops of gel food coloring if desired. Spread the frosting on the cooled cookies and immediately top with sprinkles. If you wait too long, the sprinkles won't stick so frost one cookie, add sprinkles, then move on to the next. Now they're ready to enjoy!