

life & happiness

IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU—YOUR WANTS, YOUR NEEDS, YOUR MOODS, YOUR DREAMS

The independent woman's holiday survival guide

No, you don't need a house, a man or 2.5 pajama-clad kids to celebrate the season.

"If your life isn't set up for a traditional celebration, just invent your own traditions," says Judy Ford, author of *Single: The Art of Being Satisfied, Fulfilled, and Independent*. Here's how unmarried women are creating happy holiday rituals all their own.

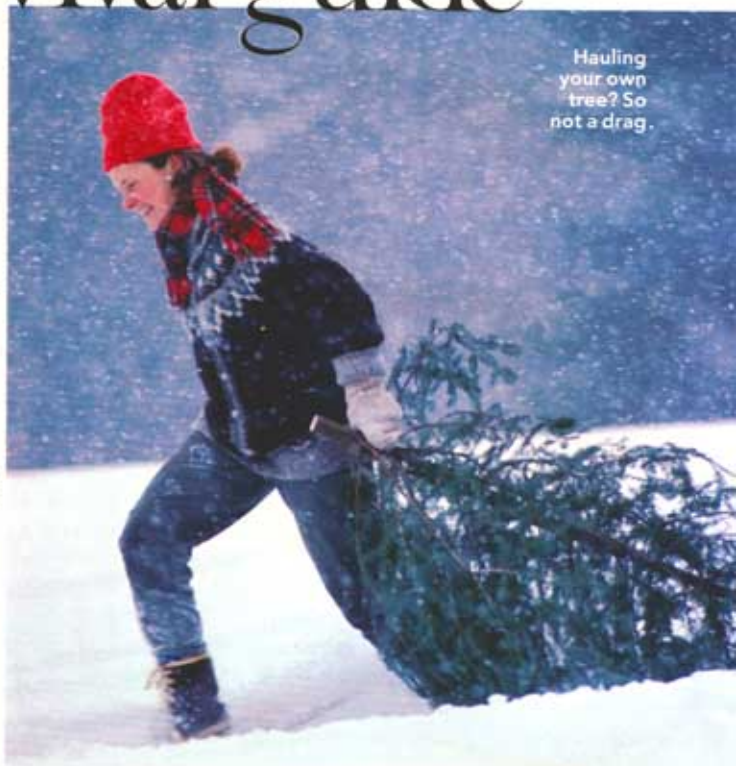
If you're far away from family: "I always host a gag-gift party for homesick friends. We all trade cheap, silly gifts—even getting a dumb candle can make you feel loved."—AMY LEVY, 36, LOS ANGELES

If you want to burn off holiday stress: "This year, a friend and I are running a half marathon. Training for it together has given me a sense of accomplishment and independence during a time that's typically a little lonely." —STEPHANIE HANSEN, 26, SEATTLE

If you're on family overload: "The day after Thanksgiving, I do a potluck dinner. Everyone brings food and all their crazy family stories from the night before."—DEBORAH FINKELSTEIN, 28, SANTA FE, N.M.

If you miss Mom's cooking: "I supply the basics—flour, sugar, eggs—and throw a cookie-baking party. Everyone brings recipes and takes home tons of sweets." —MICHELLE COLFORD, 32, BAYSHORE, N.Y.

—KAREN J. BANNAN



Hauling your own tree? So not a drag.