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# Seasons' givings



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Ned Waldman chatted with Candice Kimrough, center, and Betra Alnaimat, both 15, as they looked for books at the holiday event Waldman hosted recently at Barnes & Noble on Nicollet Mall. Alnaimat has been a patient at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester and asked her friend Candice to attend.

## Hannukah, Christmas are special to Ned Waldman, who honors both events.

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The overlapping of the Hanukkah and Christmas holiday periods poses no problem for Ned Waldman, who was born to Jewish parents but spent his first 6 years living with a Catholic family.

He celebrates both traditions, honoring both faiths with a range of good works.

He gives gifts to sick children,

hosts an annual holiday party in conjunction with the Ronald McDonald House and reads Christmas stories at nursing homes.

Waldman was in his element at the annual party he hosts with his son, Brett. They dispensed hugs and treats to a group of more than 30 kids and parents who came to Minneapolis from the Ronald McDonald House in Rochester for a turkey dinner and a trip to Barnes & Noble on Nicollet Mall. Later,

they watched the Holidazzle parade from the second-floor windows.

Each child also got to choose a book to take home, compliments of Ned Waldman.

"They've been through so much pain," he said, his voice breaking, "but they're just such beautiful children. It means everything to me, seeing these kids."

**Traditions continues:** Former publisher is big on books. **B7 ▶**

# He says: 'Time is so precious'

## ◀ TRADITIONS FROM B1

Waldman, 73, of Hopkins, has had Crohn's disease since college, has been on dialysis for more than a year and just completed radiation therapy for throat cancer.

"Time is so precious," said Waldman, who recalled working 70 hours a week in his two publishing businesses — the wholesale distributor Bookmen Inc. and Waldman House Press — before retiring in 2003. The Bookmen Inc. was sold several years ago; Waldman House Press is now under the umbrella of Tristan Publishing, Inc., headed by son Brett.

Now the elder Waldman, a member of Bet Shalom congregation in Minnetonka, has more time for some favorite activities — meeting people and reading aloud from two Christmas classics that he published, "A Cup of Christmas Tea" and "Peef, the Christmas Bear," both by Minnesota author Tom Hegg.

### **A Catholic caretaker**

Waldman's love and respect for Christmas began more than 70 years ago. Born Aug. 17, 1933, in Minneapolis, Waldman never knew his Jewish mother, Bayle Bookmen Waldman. She died from a staph infection when he was just 2 months old. His distraught father, Morris, moved to California, leaving baby Ned with housekeeper Adele Molitor.

They lived a block from her house of worship, the Basilica of St. Mary. When Molitor took Ned to mass with her, "I genuflected like a good Jewish boy would do," he said with a smile.

Christmas time was special. Molitor brewed her own version of Christmas tea, filling the tiny apartment with the aroma of orange peel and cinnamon. With money always in short supply, Molitor ironed blouses to make a no-frills living. They'd wait until Christmas Eve to buy a tree when they could get a Charlie Brown-style reject for 50 cents.

But she never tried to force her faith on him. "She honored my religion," he said, crediting her example for strengthening his own beliefs.

When he was 6, Waldman's relatives decided that it was time he learned more about his heritage and religion.

### **A permanent home**

After a year with maternal aunt Gertrude Rutchick, Ned went to live with another maternal aunt, Millie Stillman. But Molitor visited weekly.

"It might have been easier for her *not* to see me," Waldman said, but she continued her visits, and both aunts encouraged them, especially Stillman. Molitor watched proudly when he read from the Torah at his bar mitzvah at age 13.

### **1.7 MILLION CUPS OF TEA**

"A Cup of Christmas Tea," celebrating its 25th anniversary, has sold more than 1.7 million copies. Written by Eden Prairie author Tom Hegg, "Tea" is the story of a man's reluctant holiday visit to an elderly aunt. Hegg, who wrote the story in 1981, collaborated with St. Paul designer/illustrator Warren Hanson. Their 5,000 self-published books sold out the first season. Publisher Ned Waldman of Waldman House Press bought the rights in 1984. And the rest, as they say, is history.

"Aunt Millie was very obedient to Judaism and Adele was a devout Catholic, but there was a strong respect and love between the two," Waldman said. Once, Aunt Millie even filled in as the old lady for a reading of "A Cup of Christmas Tea."

Waldman spent some part of every Christmas season with Molitor until her death in 1984, except for the two years he was in the Army, stationed in France near Bordeaux — where the base commander asked him to play Christmas carols over the loudspeaker.

"It was a great honor," said Waldman, adding that "Silent Night" is a favorite song.

### **Prescription for happiness**

Waldman's affiliation with the Ronald McDonald House began five years ago when he started dropping in while being treated at Mayo Clinic in Rochester. One little boy from Chile especially touched Waldman's heart. Gustavo Correa was being treated for the rare Proteus syndrome, more commonly known as Elephant Man's Disease, affecting his left leg. When Correa and his parents faced deportation for overstaying their medical visa, Waldman and others appealed to immigration officials. The family was allowed to stay and start the process to become American citizens.

"This boy has the will and the hope and the strength to make it," Waldman said.

Checking in with a Barnes & Noble manager at his party event, Waldman expressed dismay that his group had chosen only 71 books. "We bought 100 last year," he said. "Pick out some more and take 'em back to the house."

The next week, he spent several days in Wisconsin, reading "A Cup of Christmas Tea" at nursing homes and "Peef, the Christmas Bear" to children at a Moose Lodge function.

"I hope to give 1,600 "Christmas Tea" books before Christmas," Waldman said. "It's part of my joy — giving things away."