



## Nothing Says Christmas Like ...

By Kerri Pomarolli

Is it just me, or is it weird that I spent the blessed holiday of Christ's birth at Pechanga Resort and Casino playing slots with my family and eating at the \$19.99 buffet?

We were all staying at this condo in San Diego, and, of course, my mom didn't want to cook, so she found out we were close to all these Indian casinos. Despite her Southern belle, Protestant appearance, she has a severe slot-machine addiction.

Since Christmas was on a Sunday, we had to find a local church so "God would bless our gambling," mom said. Anyway, we ended up arriving 30 minutes late to mass and had to sit in the back in the "pagan" section. As we were going up for communion, my husband Ron had no idea what to do, so he stood behind me in line quoting Catholic bits from his friend's comedy acts. I'm sure he's going straight to hell for talking in the communion line. I learned that in Catholic school.

As we drove away down the windy, nature-filled road, it appeared like a pink flashing beacon: Pechanga Casino. Ahhh ... what an oasis. I felt like the Griswolds in *Family*

Irish Korean, had won \$112. Our family upped the ante by adding a slot tournament, and we each started with \$10. Whoever won the most with their \$10 in 30 minutes would keep everyone else's winnings. When we came back together, my little brother Mark had won \$108. I immediately reverted to my childhood, chanting, "We win! We win!" like an 8-year-old, and Mark and I started going at it because he wouldn't give up his share of his winnings even though he had lost.

By this point, we were making a full spectacle of ourselves in the middle of the casino, and it reminded me of all those fond family car trips fighting with my brother growing up. Ahh ... the memories. Even though it's 20 years later, we aren't any more mature. Ron said, "Kerri, let him keep the money!" My mom sided with Mark; he's a social worker, so she rationalized he needed it more. Dad is legalistic like me: "A rule is a rule; hand it over, son!" Yesssss!

We ended up fighting all the way through the buffet line as we stared at all the other lost souls celebrating Christmas by gorging themselves into a carbohydrate coma. It was pathetic, but we were right there in it, and who were we to judge? "All you can eat" are holy words in my family ... always have been.

After three rounds of dessert I decided to take all the casino winnings and donate them to the kids who were living at the orphanage where Mark worked. So everybody won. I thought maybe God would forgive our gambling family if we gave Him the winnings. I think He was too busy laughing.

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Vacation movies.

As we walked in, the smoke from all the chain-smoking old ladies and men in blue jeans and T-shirts that say "I'm with Stupid" permeated our lungs, and we knew we were home. Immediately, my dad gave everyone in the family \$15 cash and 45 minutes to see who could make the most money from it. Whoever won the most would get everyone else's money. By the way, my little brother's roommate was with us, joining in our holy tradition. He owns a tattoo parlor, which only adds color to his personality, according to my mother. She was trying to be polite, resisting the urge to read all of his tattoos that say "I love Mother."

Off we went, and within minutes my husband, with the luck of the

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This article was added on December 19, 2006.