



Hope Hall visiting her family in Texas in 1970

our aunt, who was a teacher from San Antonio, we'd do school programs. All the girls would dress up with black patent leather shoes and white ironed dresses with big red bows. All the holidays were important in our family but especially Christmas. We liked giving back. It was my father's job, but our joy," she recalled.

Hall is still spreading smiles all these years later. She's active with the Loveland Church congregation and works in the nursery every fourth Sunday. She's called the "woman of the neighborhood" because she brings cookies and bread to those in need, distributing the food to those who are hungry, during the holidays and throughout the year.

"My father taught us all to help people, especially those in need. You give. It's that simple," Hall said. "And what better time of the year to give than during the holidays. I love that time of the year. We get together as a family and enjoy each other.

Rizek and Alice Abusharr

Hometown: Claremont

Job/community service: Rizek is director emeritus at the Jerusalem International YMCA; Alice helps with programs at Pilgrim Place, where they live

"We have millions of stories that we could share with you as Palestinians living in Jerusalem. Of course, many of our most cherished memories are of Christmas when the tragedies and the pain of occupation is lessened," said Rizek Abusharr, who spent 46 years with the Jerusalem International YMCA before retiring 10 years ago.

As a 14-year-old, Rizek volunteered to fill small bags of sweets that would be handed out at YMCA children's parties. Later as an adult, he remembers the joy of watching the smiling faces of Jerusalem's orphans and disadvantaged young people as they came to similar parties. "To this day, I remember the children from the blind school who came to the parties who would ask, 'When is the next one?' They were given gifts, and for many those were the only gifts they would get all year," he said.

He and his wife, Alice, said every year for Christmas they looked forward to decorating a tree in the YMCA lobby and enjoyed seeing the massive, historic 152-foot-tall YMCA tower strung with colorful lights so that it could be seen from every corner of the city.

"Christians are a minority in the city, but there is something about Christmas. We would be joined at the YMCA by Jews and Muslims who enjoyed the pageantry," he said.



Alice and Rizek Abusharr with sons, Raja and Nabil, circa 1977

The Abusharr family's holiday would begin on Christmas Eve with a trip to Bethlehem at noon.

After a trip to Manger Square, the family would make its way to Shepherd's Field in Beth Sahour where it is told that shepherds saw the star proclaiming Jesus' birth. "There would be a service in a cave there at about 4 p.m. and then there would be roasted lamb so everyone could eat rice and lamb in pita bread," he said.

The YMCA's United Carol Service was conducted, and then it was off to the Abusharrs' home church, St. Andrew's, for services at 9 p.m.

"The bells would all be ringing and the church had carillon in the towers that would play and could be heard from everywhere. The sounds of the bells were just beautiful," Alice said.

It's quieter in Claremont for the family. Rizek and Alice will be spending Christmas in Atlanta with one of their sons and his family.

It will be a world away from Christmases long ago, but some things never change. When the couple talked about their holiday years in the Holy Land they remembered the hustle and bustle, the color and pageantry, but mostly they remembered the peace that seemed to envelope them.