

The Old Shoebox Newsletter

October 16th 2008 Copyright by Marlo E. Schuldt <http://heritagecollector.com> Vol. 2 #13

The Importance of Family Traditions

What things do you value most?

If you had to evacuate your home, what five items would you refuse to leave behind? Here's a few hints to get you thinking:

- Old photo album.
- A lock of hair.
- Lucky coin.
- Family photo.
- Christmas tree ornament.
- Old recipe box.
- Grandma's wedding ring.
- Old flowered serving bowl.
- Shotgun.
- Walking stick.
- Journal.
- Pocket watch.
- Tape recording of your dad.
- Piano sheet music.

What makes an item important to you?

As you attempt to answer this question you may be swept away into a daydream journey to places not visited in years. Soon you find yourself immersed in a flood of memories associated with the object.

The old recipe box may conjure up a trip to grandma's house on Thanksgiving. You remember the wonderful smell of Grandma baking her famous cookies. You sneak into the kitchen for a hug and cookie from Grandma. You remember the secret signal – a wink from grandma indicating when it was the right time to sneak a cookie fresh from the old rusty green oven.



The old chipped flowered serving bowl reminds you of the homemade potato salad traditionally served at special dinners. You may be surprised and your spirits lifted as some of the exaggerated family stories echo through your mind. You recall the fun and enchantment of those family gatherings.



It's not the value of the object that's important to you. It's the memories, experiences and family traditions associated with the heirloom that makes it priceless.

What's a Tradition?

For our discussion, a tradition will be defined as an event or behavior routinely presented at a special occasion. A tradition may communicate values embedded in an activity, story, song, food, dedication or structured event.

- Opening Presents on Christmas Eve.
- Thanksgiving Meal with Cranberries and Candied Yams.
- Easter Egg Hunt.
- Twelve Days of Christmas.
- Watching the Miracle on 42nd Street on Christmas.
- Potato Salad on Thanksgiving.
- Homemade Root Beer and Ice Cream on the 4th of July.
- Family New Year's Resolutions.
- Speeches made on various occasions.

- Grandma taking each Grandchild birthday shopping & to dinner.
- Cutting your own Christmas tree.
- Sunday dinners of roast with potatoes & carrots or fried chicken because they could cook while we went to church.
- Decorating graves on Memorial Day.
- Grandpa fishing with a cane pole you had to hang out the back window because it didn't come apart.
- Mom always used dried hamburger or hot dog buns to make dressing for the turkey.
- Having the same meal every Christmas Eve.
- Opening a joke gift on Christmas Eve.
- Grandma and Grandpa arriving each Christmas Eve from out of town.

(The Classic Roast Beef Story) A young wife always cut the end off the roast before she put it in the pan. Her husband asked her why she did this. She said, "I don't know. Mom always did it so I do." The next time they saw Mom she asked her what significance cutting off the end of the roast had. Mom said, "There's no significance. The roast was too big to fit in the pan so I always cut the end off."

Why Traditions are Important

As we get older we discover why our parents insisted on making preparations to include traditions on holidays and special occasions. Traditions are important for the following reasons:

- Helps define who we are and the beliefs we hold near and dear to our hearts.
- Enriches the occasion by providing tangible experiences such as eating a special desert, singing family songs, or retelling an old story.

- Provides the continuity everyone anticipates with an event.
- Makes an event more personal and memorable.
- Compliments friends and relatives invited to participate in a special personal family event.
- Strengthens and renews the bonds of those participating in the event.
- Become anchors that strengthen beliefs and the foundation of a family.
- Renews and links ancestral heritage of the distant past with the present family.
- Allows a family to make and grow new traditions to leave their mark and influence on future generations.

Creating a Tradition

A tradition can be fun for all ages and easily incorporated into any recurring family event. Traditions can be as simple as singing a song at a birthday celebration.

A birthday cake with burning candles, room lights out, surrounded by the family creates the perfect environment and focal point of a birthday celebration. We sing three “Happy Birthday” songs. The traditional song, another happy little rhyming song the kids like and one version sung horribly out of tune. Uninitiated participants are aghast for a few moments until they realize we



are making such a terrible accompaniment as a form of endearment followed by a hearty laugh and clapping. The out of tune version communicates how the older members feel about the increasing number of candles appearing each year along with new aches and pains.

Preserving Traditions

Traditions need to be handed down to stay alive. Unfortunately our children may not sense the value of traditions as young adults. However, they may recall the events of their youth when they marry and start a family. Watching an old video clip or reading about a family tradition makes it easier for them to rekindle the tradition.

Ways to preserve traditions:

Video. A brief video clip captures the unique song or event.

Pictures. Candid shots are the best to communicate the nuances of the event. Photos carefully taken with the glow of the candles on the face of the honored guest are priceless mementoes.

Audio. Use a tape recorder or digital voice recorder to capture stories and the voices of those attending. These recordings will become priceless in years to come.

Written Narrative. Take time to write the words to old songs. Summarize a tradition and indicate why it’s important and who started the tradition. Include a section on traditions in your history.

Share the tradition. Use Heritage Collector to create a slide show with photos, narration and music. Send the gift CD/DVD to your children and grandchildren. This is a perfect way to preserve and share traditions.

Create and print a storybook or scrapbook with photos and captions of the event and accompanying traditions.

Seasonal Traditions

Each year presents opportunities to spice up family celebrations by sharing family traditions associated with the occasion.

New Years. Singing, dancing, fun parties, New Years Resolutions and banging noisy pans at midnight and a special kiss accompanied with "I love you," are typical traditions. A special speech or family blessing may also be expected from the senior member at a New Year's dinner or party.



Christmas Ornaments. Old trinkets and decorations only appear once a year making them special to examine. Take a few minutes before opening presents to tell about an old ornament, who it came from and something special about a parent, relative or person from a past Christmas.

Each time we go to Yellowstone Park my daughter shops around for a new Christmas ornament to link Christmas with special family vacations. Her tree is becoming a history of family experiences with her children and husband.



Our first year of marriage found us as poor struggling university students. We could not afford a Christmas tree so a tree branch was

"borrowed" from the landlord's walnut tree. We could not afford to buy ornaments so we made our own. We put the black walnuts we gathered from the front lawn to good use. We hollowed out each nut saving the meat for a few cookies. Next we glued the shells together and used a piece of string to hang it on our tree. We scrounged up enough money to buy some gold spray paint and painted the walnut shells. Next they were rolled in gold glitter. We made twelve. Now over 30 years later we still have two gold walnut ornaments we hang on the tree. This year we will tell our children and grandchildren how these now ugly and darkened old ornaments beautified our first Christmas tree (branch).



Christmas Eve. German tradition of opening gifts on eve of Christmas.

Twelve Days of Christmas. When our family was young we selected a family that needed a little extra help to make Christmas special. One year our children chose a struggling young family with several little girls. Our children refurbished some of their favorite old dolls and toys. Each night at a different time we all hid in the bushes to deliver our special treasures. Later we heard how the faces of little girls beamed each night when they received their new dolls and toys. It became the highlight of our Christmas that year. A valued tradition we all learned from and remember to this day. A tradition I know our children will carry on with their children.

Christmas Movies – Polar Express with homemade train tickets given to each child and grandchild to boast their self-worth and confidence. Miracle on 42nd Street. The Greatest Gift.

Thanksgiving Stories. This year we will use our digital voice recorder to preserve all the

fascinating stories that we may never hear again from a dad or mom, grandpa and grandma or relative that might not be there next year to share the story.

Recipes and Family Favorites

When we partake of special dishes made from old recipes we have a chance to taste and experience exactly what our parents and grandparents enjoyed. This provides an opportunity to reminisce and relate to their lives and history. It's time to get out the old recipe box or call up a relative so you can make some family favorites for the next gathering.

- Homemade Ice Cream.
- Homemade Bread and Rolls.
- Grandma's pineapple cookies.
- Mom's "Million Dollar Fudge"
- Pioneer Soda Pop from soda springs.
- Root beer made from extract and dry ice.
- Bratsiles.



Aunt Elda making bread for Swiss Days.

Songs and Nursery Rhymes

Did your parents sing little songs to you? It's time to get the family together and sing the songs again and record them. Nominate someone to write the words to the music. These make great traditions to teach and hand down to all the children in the family.

Ways to Share Traditions

Use your computer and family history software.

Heritage Collector Software

Slide Shows

TV /DVD

Create Special Collections

Music

Recipes

Old photos

Histories & Traditions

Use a digital voice recorder to record stories.

Scan old photos and recipes.

Use a microphone to record family stories.

Use Audacity freeware to create narrative and to capture stories from a cassette recorder.

Associated Newsletters and Resources

GPS – A Family Geocache

Pioneer Soda Pop

Buying a Microphone

Copyrighted Material

Please remember the newsletters are copyrighted. If you would like to include a newsletter or excerpts in your newsletter or publication, please e-mail me for written permission.