

All in the FAMILY



Strange traditions that run in your families

“Hey man, I like that shirt!”

My sister and I are next door neighbors, and several years ago we had a yard sale together. Her husband came over to check out the merchandise and decided to purchase one of the polo shirts that my husband was discarding. He made his 25-cent purchase and took his new shirt back across the ditch.

A few years later, our families cleaned out our closets again and scheduled another joint yard sale. I saw my husband browsing around and then noticed him heading back into the house with an item tucked under his arm. Later when I asked what he had gotten, he proudly showed me his purchase. “I really liked this shirt that Freddy was getting rid of,” he said. “So I bought it from him for a quarter.” Upon closer inspection I discovered that Garry had unknowingly repurchased the very shirt that he had discarded in the yard sale pile a few years earlier!



Thus began our family tradition of two brothers-in-law exchanging The Shirt. It has been ceremoniously gifted back and forth every Christmas. Each time it is unwrapped, one of its joint owners is sure to comment, “Hey man, I like that shirt!”

Carol Murphy, Rose Hill, Four County Electric

Hamburger celebrations

Our family celebrates major purchases and events with a very special dinner: a simple hamburger sandwich.

Buy a new car? A hamburger! New house? Hustle to hamburger haven! Graduate? A hamburger! A new baby? Stop at Burger King on the way home! No fries, no shakes allowed. Just hamburgers.

This family tradition began out of necessity when we were married. As newlyweds we decided to pool our meager savings to buy a little five-room home. We really had to dig into all the corners for money to complete the deal, and even so the realtor had to float us a short-term loan to meet closing costs. After signing our financial futures away (it felt like that), the realtor quipped, “Guess you will be celebrating with dinner out.”

Coolly, Tom replied, “Indeed we will.” I wondered what secret source of money he had found in the last 30 minutes.

Tom proudly led me to a diner and ordered one hamburger. Floating on our newlyweds’ cloud, we laughingly cut that hamburger in half and toasted our new home with the most delicious water. Then, smiling, we paid the bill in nickels, dimes and pennies.

Thus, a 43-year-old tradition was begun.

Shirley Uber, Randleman, Randolph EMC

The Creepy Crawler Hunt

While growing up, my son had a tradition of his own: The Creepy Crawler Hunt. From the age of 2 until he was a teenager, he spent every free moment outside looking under rocks and tree stumps to see what lurked underneath. Or he ran in the field chasing dragonflies and butterflies. Many times I would hear him say, “Mommy, come



see what I found!” or “Mommy, look what I caught!” He’d be standing there with a small garden snake, a grasshopper or a toad caught on his daily Creepy Crawler Hunt.

He’d ask, “Can I keep them?” I’d explain they need freedom to live their lives to the fullest; plus, we were out of dragonfly or toad food.

He’d smile at me, whisper to his treasured catch, walk away and let them go.

I’m now going through the empty nest syndrome. He’s 19, living in California, trying to live his life to the fullest. Now I have carried on the family tradition. I wander around the yard or field searching for those creepy crawlers, capture them and find my mind yelling out, “Jeremiah, come see what I found!” And I simply smile.

Sherry Sizemore, Lillington, South River EMC

It’s been a real hard year

My husband, Danny, likes to take an English walnut apart, remove the meat, put a \$100 bill inside and glue it back together. He then wraps it up as a Christmas gift. He tells the person who receives it that it’s been a “real hard year.”

He did this to each of our kids when they were grown. After they married, he pulled the same trick on their spouses. Our kids had to warn them not to “lose the walnut.” I’m sure they wondered if being a little crazy was a trait their children might inherit.

I think the answer is yes.

Billie Regans, Charlotte

Using old toys

We decorate our Christmas tree with all the Happy Meal toys that we have collected over the years. This started when my daughter was 2 and my son was 1. They also include some of their favorite small toys. Each year we take out all the toys and place them on the tree. We chat about which ones bring back our favorite memories. We tried one year to have a more traditional tree, but it was not the same. Now we have two trees, one traditional and one Happy Meal tree. My kids are now 14 and 15.

Another tradition we have is that 12 days before Christmas the kids search their belongings for gently used items to leave for Santa. Each of the 12 nights they bring out one item. On Christmas Eve, Santa collects their items to give to other children, and he leaves them gently used toys he brings from "other children." This way I could explain thrift store purchases and also get rid of 24 items at the same time, making room for new Christmas presents.

Keli Swank, Griffon

To avoid gaining weight

As children, my brother and I would spend hours running around the yard, catching fireflies and filling our coffee tins with them. My mom told us that if we filled a whole can with fireflies, then she could make a lightning bug pie and it would glow. Needless to say, no matter how hard we tried, we were never able to fill up that coffee tin. (Or so my mother said.) We never did have lightning bug pie.

And at Thanksgiving, it was a tradition on my father's side of the family to have the kids jump up and down after every Thanksgiving meal. My grandma had told us that if we jumped up and down after we ate, all the food would go to our big toes and we wouldn't gain any weight. So we jumped and jumped after each meal. It never stopped me from gaining weight, but the good news is, my big toe never got any bigger.

Dori L Hess, Fayetteville

Crossing state lines

When I was growing up as the middle child of three girls, my parents did not have a lot of extra money. Each year they would save enough to take us on a summer road trip. They loved to travel, and this time on the road as a family is something I will never forget.

My parents started a tradition before we were born that every time they would cross a state line, they would lean over and kiss. Even as we would drive through the night, I would hear them blow a kiss quietly to each other and know we had crossed into another state.

This tradition lives on within our own families and helps me to remember not only the good times we shared as a family, but also the love that my parents share.

Danielle Skuda Isaak, Lincolnton, Rutherford EMC

Tricks for Dad

In our family, on April Fools Day, we try to play big jokes on my dad especially because he's always doing jokes on me and my sister all through the year. He should've been born on April Fools Day. He only missed it by two days.

Here are a few things we did to him on April Fools Day.

One year we lined up all his vehicles in his yard with a big "For Sale" sign on them, even his classic cars. He moved them real quick. And he got a few calls!

Another year we put up a big sign at the end of their driveway saying "It's a Boy" and tied big blue balloons to their mailbox. My parents were in their early 60s.

Another time our dad and mom left up their Christmas lights. So we sneaked out to their house and plugged them up. They never knew it until the next day.

Our dad's in heaven now, probably laughing with the angels.

We love you, Dad!

Sharon Hardin, Rutherfordton, Rutherford EMC

Sisters Day

As a child, I never understood why there was a holiday for everyone except the kids. There was a Mothers Day, Fathers Day, Grandparents Day, etc. So my sisters and I came up with our own holiday, Sisters Day. We came up with a date, July 17. On this day we would exchange gifts and do something fun together. We convinced our parents to take us shopping to buy gifts for each other. Each of us wrapped our gifts with anticipation of the special day. We couldn't have been more excited about "our day."

In the years that followed, we kept our tradition by going to a movie or going out for ice cream, anything as long as it was together. We decided every year, even when we were all grown up, we would get together and do something special during the month of July. I can't say that it has worked out every year, because we are now spread out across North Carolina, but it does help us to remember our special bond as sisters and as best friends.

Amy Lee, Newport, Carteret-Craven Electric

The annual documentary

While my grandfather was still alive, on December 23 of every year, he would make the entire family watch an old History Channel documentary on the Holocaust and Adolf Hitler. My mother's side of the family escaped Poland during the Holocaust, and my grandfather wanted to make sure that all of his children and grandchildren knew how lucky we were for the lives that we had. As a child I didn't appreciate what my grandfather was trying to teach us. But as an adult I am grateful for the courage it took him and my great-grandparents to run from Poland, and I still make a point to watch that documentary every year. 📺

Emma Greening, Charlotte



Thanks to everyone who sent in stories of your family

traditions. You can see more at our Web site. Check out our new "I Remember" series on page 18 to learn how to submit your stories and pictures.