

A Family Tradition

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Course: English 101

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How many times does an activity have to take place in order for it to become a family tradition? Thanksgiving dinner is always one of my favorite holiday activities. I usually attend a feast prepared by my mother and then, later in the evening, my husband and I will eat at his grandfather's house. I decided that I wanted to begin serving Thanksgiving dinner at my house in order to bring the entire family together.

I was so excited that Thanksgiving dinner 2005 would be served at my house. I was going to have seventeen people eat over. I decided that I was going to cook the same items that my mom has been cooking for the past thirty-four years. I called my mom and asked her for her recipes for turkey, oyster dressing, artichoke and string bean casserole, and lemon icebox pie. As I drove to the grocery store to pick up the ingredients, I wondered if my siblings would enjoy Thanksgiving dinner at my house as much as they did at my mom's house. I wondered if I was beginning a new tradition or maintaining the old tradition. The food that I was cooking was certainly traditional.

As I was in the grocery store, I began thinking about my husband's family. My father-in-law, Gary, definitely has his own way of doing things. He has two sons, whom he named Gary. I recalled my husband telling me I must name all of my sons Gary, because it's a family tradition. I feel this is entirely ridiculous. My husband gets these bizarre thoughts from his father. My sister-in-law was required to name her son Gary and now my husband wants me to name my sons, "Gary." I call my husband "Louis" by his middle name because it gets too confusing having so

many Garys around. Is Gary truly a name of family tradition? One might say that. It may also be said that Big Gary's demand is somewhat egocentric and confusing to others and his offspring. I feel that my husband's claim of the "Gary tradition" does not constitute a true family tradition.

On Thanksgiving, I woke up at four in the morning to begin cooking the food. I recalled the past Thanksgiving and thought how my mother always burnt the dinner rolls. I assured myself that I was going to break this tradition, and the dinner rolls would be perfectly baked. I was excited and nervous. I prayed that I would have enough food as I set the table.

As guests began to arrive, I happily prepared our Thanksgiving meal. The aroma of baked turkey filled the air and my mouth began watering. Louis assisted me in taking out our lightly browned, twenty-three pound, overly stuffed turkey out of the oven.

Louis said, "Kristy, Thanksgiving will be so nice when we have more little Garys running around, won't it?"

"Louis, I really would rather name our first son another name. How about Louis?"

He replied, "I promised my dad that I would name my sons after him."

I looked at Louis with sad begging eyes, with the same look my poodle, Yogi, has when he wants something that I am eating. I said in a sweet voice with a soft smile, "Louis, Gary is not even a family name, your dad was named after Gary Cooper."

Louis replied, "It's a family tradition."

I replied, "That's a Vietnamese tradition, and there is not a single person in this family with slanted eyes."

I placed the dinner rolls in the oven and cried out, "Dinner will be ready in five minutes."

Everyone gathered around the table, and sipped on their wine. All of a sudden the smell of smoke filled the air. My mom screamed, "Fire! Fire, in the oven!" Everyone rushed over to the

oven. Louis opened up the oven door and flames were dancing all over the place. He picked up some dishrags and smothered the flames. I took the rolls out of the oven, which could easily be mistaken for coal.

My sister Kathy said, "Wow, some traditions are hard to break."

I replied, "Would anyone like one?" Everyone started laughing. We opened the windows in the kitchen and the putrid smell of smoke started to leave the room. Everyone served their plate, and sat at the dining room table.

Judy, Louis' mother, said in her sweet, soft, Southern Mississippi voice, "It's so nice to have the entire family together for Thanksgiving dinner."

Kara, my sister-in-law, replied, "Everyone is here except for Mark."

I thought to myself, that's odd that Mark, Big Gary's brother, is not here; I invited him.

Big Gary replied, "Mark is still mad at me about the ladder."

Louis replied, "You guys are always mad at each other for something."

We said grace and began to eat.

Louis said, "What is the matter with Mark this time?"

Debbie, Louis' stepmother, said, "Ya'll are still arguing over that. You'll need to get over that; that happened months ago."

Kara replied, "This should make for good dinner conversation, tell us what happened."

Big Gary said, "I'll tell you what that jerk did. I went to store a sign inside of the shed that Louis is renting from Mark. I carried my sign to the shed and I saw Mark on the roof. I said politely, "Hey Mark, how are you doing?"

He replied, "Just filling some holes on the roof. What are you doing?"

I said, "I am storing my sign in the shed."

Mark screamed from above, "Oh no, you are not. This is my shed, and you cannot store it here."

I replied, "I am storing my sign in the shed because my son is paying you to rent it, and he said that I could."

Mark replied, "Well, I am saying that you can't."

I saw my ladder leaning against the shed and said, "Isn't that my ladder?"

Mark replied, "Yes."

I grabbed my ladder and began walking to my truck.

Mark screamed, "Hey! Hey! What are you doing?"

I replied, "I'm taking my ladder."

Mark screamed, "How am I supposed to get off the roof?"

I said, "Learn how to fly asshole."

Everyone began laughing.

Miss Judy said, "Sometimes, I wish I had the balls you have Gary."

We all began to eat dessert.

I said, "Big Gary, how long was Mark on the roof?"

He replied, "About three hours. My mom finally got in touch with me and brought the ladder back over there. Apparently, Mark had his cell phone on him."

I said, "I wonder where Mark is eating?"

Hazel, Big Gary's mother, replied, "I am going to take a plate home to him."

I wondered if attending Thanksgiving dinner at my house would become a tradition for Mark, or if a plate of food at home would be. As everyone began leaving my house, I was relieved and happy that my dinner was a success. I wondered how many times I would have to

repeat this day in order for it to become a tradition.