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From Generation to Generation

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Sometimes we just pass on things because they were passed on to us. Traditions are good for us; they ground us. However, if they are not examined from time to time, we may find we do things without any good reason other than “That’s the way we’ve always done it.” Here’s an example of what I mean.

A young husband who watched his new bride prepare her first holiday meal for their family noticed she cut off the small end of the roast before putting it in the pan for baking. “Why do you do that?” asked the husband.

“I don’t know, but that’s the way my mom always did it,” she replied.

Later that evening, Mom arrived early to assist with last-minute preparations. “Mom, why did you always cut off the small end of the roast before putting it into the pan for baking?” the young bride asked.

“I don’t really know,” came the reply, “but that’s the way your grandmother always did it. Why don’t you ask her when she arrives?”

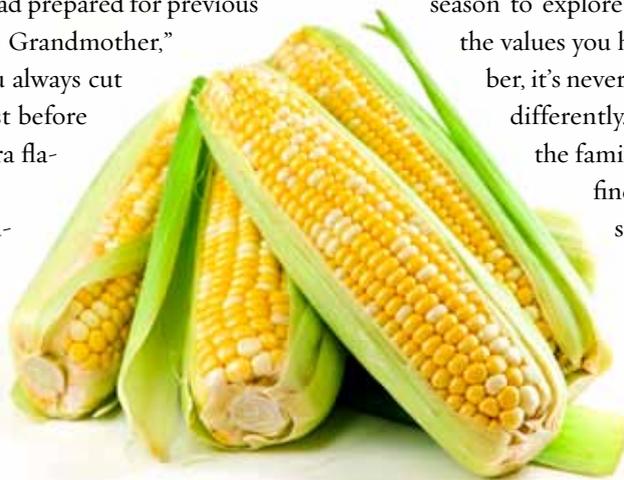
After the prayer of Thanksgiving, everyone passed the serving bowls around the table, and conversation ensued while everyone enjoyed the holiday roast, which had been baked to perfection. Grandmother commented that it was just as good as the ones she had prepared for previous holiday meals. “By the way, Grandmother,” asked the bride, “why do you always cut off the small end of the roast before baking it? Does it create extra flavor or something?”

“Oh, no!” said Grandmother. “I always cut off the end of the roast because I don’t have a pan big enough to cook the whole thing.”

I’m reminded of another “tradition” involving food that had a different outcome. Friends tell us of a couple they know who, early in their marriage, began a tradition, of sorts, in relation to eating sweet corn. The young bride, knowing her husband liked the sweet, more tender ears of corn, always took the less tender, more mature ears of corn for herself, leaving the others for her precious husband.

After several seasons of sweet corn, in exasperation he said to her one day, “Why do you always have to take the more mature corn? That’s the way I like it best!” She was so shocked and hurt! Actually, she preferred the sweet, more tender ears herself, but had willingly made a sacrifice for her husband. Her motives were pure, but she didn’t fully understand her husband’s preferences. Thus, a tradition was held in her family for some time — and it wasn’t meeting either one’s needs.

Why not take a few minutes with your family this season to explore the traditions you celebrate and the values you hold for these traditions. Remember, it’s never too late to begin doing something differently. I invite you to keep and celebrate the family traditions that are working, and find new, creative ways to make desired changes within your family.



Susan E. Murray is a professor emerita of behavioral sciences at Andrews University, and she is a certified family life educator and licensed marriage and family therapist.