Stories of Traditions

Whatever the occasion, be it a holiday or celebration of a tradition, families often come up with their own rituals. While interviewing people regarding their family traditions during the holidays, one of the funniest stories I heard was the family member who was assigned the task of bringing the cranberries each year. However, he could not just “bring” the cranberries—they had to be part of a different recipe every year. To date these recipes have included cranberry salsa, butter, ice cream and many other creative mixtures. Another family gets out their sleeping bags and air mattresses and camps out together in one bedroom every Christmas Eve so that they can greet Christmas morning as a family. Each year they stay in a different room so that everyone gets a chance to be the host for the evening. They enjoy hot chocolate and popcorn, read Christmas stories and fall asleep listening to Christmas music.

One family with older children celebrates Christmas Eve around a fondue pot, a good way to slow down and enjoy different flavours and great conversation. At least until the chocolate fondue comes out for dessert, then laughter erupts as the chocolate is smeared on each other’s noses, cheeks and fingers. Once they deal with their sticky fingers they sit around the tree and sing Christmas carols and then open a special gift of homemade pajamas to wear to bed that night.

Many of the people I spoke with shared stories of traditions connected with food. For hundreds of years food has been a staple of gatherings and celebrations. A Polish tradition on Christmas Eve is the breaking of unleavened bread while everyone expresses their wishes for each other for the coming year. Sharing food is important to one family who lives along the Christmas parade route in their small town. Each year they provide hot chocolate and treats to family members who join them to watch the parade. At first they had around ten guests but once the word got out more friends and relatives came to watch the parade and now they have around twenty-five people gathering to share this tradition. Each family I spoke with had their own unique ways to celebrate the holidays such as listening to Handel’s Messiah, clapping before each present is opened and opening a basket filled with family activities and games each Christmas Eve. One couple marks each year they have spent together with stuffed pink penguins, one has arrived each Christmas to celebrate the seventeen years they have been married.
Traditions are often expressed through gifts such as handmade pajamas, mitts, sweaters and even wooden breadboxes. Some families exchange baked goods, jams and other culinary treats. One unusual tradition involves a tiny gift hidden inside of a walnut each year which is cracked open on Christmas Eve. Holiday parties with co-workers and friends may involve gift exchange games and funny stocking stuffers or secret Santa gifts. Of course, the holidays would not be complete without school concerts, community activities and shows, religious and spiritual practices, decorations and sparkling lights.

As important as all of these traditions within families are, many people also shared stories of volunteering, donating and taking time to serve others as part of their holiday celebrations. Food, clothing, gifts and time are shared freely as we acknowledge our shared humanity and wish for peace and justice for all.

So… our wish for everyone is that you take some time in the next few weeks to reflect on your own stories of tradition, ritual and celebration. Share your stories with others and find ways to immerse yourself in all of the precious moments that make up your own special traditions.

Wishing you all peace and joy this holiday season!

How do you know when you are crossing the line from being able to manage your debt to over-using credit? Are you swimming, treading water or drowning with your debt repayment?

Do you:
- Use your credit cards as a necessity instead of a convenience?
- Do you borrow to pay for your daily living expenses?
- Do you miss payments or due dates?
- Are you near the credit limits on most of your cards?
- Do you borrow from one card to pay another?
- Is your debt growing month after month?

If you do any of the above, consider building a monthly budget and determine how much debt you can pay off each month. Cut back on your expenses, pay off your high interest rate debts first, get a consolidation loan, and seek credit counselling.

Credit counselling agencies provide a range of services for people in financial difficulty. Credit counsellors can help you find the best strategy to pay off your debt. They can also offer information and assistance on how to make a budget and stick to it, how to use credit wisely, how to improve your credit score and credit report and how to stop getting into debt.

If you would like to schedule an appointment with a Credit Counsellor contact us at 519-433-0159 x 8497.