

Family

The Making of a Family

by Cheri Goldstein

Across the table sits Uncle Keith. Next to him are Aunt Janet and Auntie Libby. Across from them are Aunt Jackie and Auntie Fran. Cousins John and Burke couldn't be here. Claire is busy trying to put the finishing touches on the gravy. Holly is making sure the kids have their seats at the "children's" table. And here I am, sitting down to the holiday meal with my family.

This scene isn't unlike the scenes that are played out every holiday throughout the country. What makes this different is that there isn't a blood relative in the crowd. Our birth families are scattered across the globe. Some of them will call today, maybe.

We have joined together as a family, and families spend holidays together. In just the year and a half that I have known these folks, they have made me more welcome than the majority of my birth family

ever did. They never glare or make rude comments when I touch the ones I love.

So, how did this holiday family come into being? Our families are created by love, and they are not necessarily composed of the people we grew up with. All it takes is bringing the people we care about together and creating our own traditions. After all, holidays are created out of traditions. Each person in a family brings to the particular holiday pieces of their own remembrances.

Traditions are the little things that we do to make this day different from the rest of the year. That can mean watching a parade in your pajamas in the morning, drinking egg nog in the afternoon, having pasta with your turkey dinner, saying a special prayer, or standing under the mistletoe until everyone in the room kisses you.

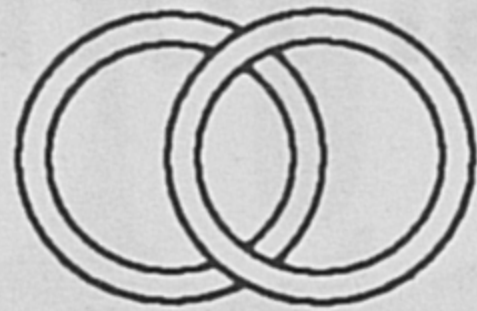
For many of us, holidays cause sad feelings to surface. Some of us remember good feeling from our childhood and cannot understand why we cannot duplicate them now. In our house, both of these situations

hold true, and it's still sometimes an effort to believe that the holiday will be a joyous one with little accompanying stress. We are working to make the holiday and subsequent traditions what we want them to be both now and as a solid base for the future. The feelings we want to have surround our holidays are created by us. We know each subsequent holiday will be easier as it becomes more familiar.

At our house, when a holiday is in the offing, we look around to see who might be alone and we invite him or her to join us. No holiday in our house is ever a calm, quiet event, so one more won't change things. And if there is one more, then why not two more or three or four? We invite anyone who might be alone, and if they want to come, fine, and if they don't want to come, at least they know that the choice is theirs and not because no one remembered them.

Once an idea is put into place concerning a holiday, it's easy to go wild and make it what we want it to be. Holidays do not need to remain a heterosexual privilege because only "they" have families. We have families too, and it is about time that we reclaimed the idea of family and made it our own.

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