

Family History and Reunions



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Each year our family plans various family reunions to recapture the memories of family fun and to reconnect with our loved ones. The most basic family reunion includes a potluck dinner of favorite dishes that the family can share with new family members. Typically, we bring some of our children or grandchildren to these events so that our extended family can be acquainted with our newest family members. At one memorable event, a future son-in-law asked my husband for permission to marry our daughter. At another, a son-in-law was introduced to our extended family. We regularly use the reunions to introduce new grandchildren to the relatives. Most recently, our 10-month old twin granddaughters were the celebrities of the reunion. One granddaughter warmly greeted the relatives and was happily held by many. The other only wanted to be held by grandpa and wailed each time a new relative was introduced.

Many times, relatives will bring culturally relevant recipes that have been shared throughout the years at holiday dinners. My grandmother would make a German carrot vegetable casserole that was very flavorful. Another family member would bring a selection of appetizers that were made with care. One cousin specialized in making platters of delectable desserts that included home-made pies, cakes, brownies, and cookies. A son-in-law made his spicy tortilla dip while another cousin barbecued spicy chicken, ribs, and salmon. A newer attraction has been a taco bar that includes many spicy toppings. As the children and family share their recipes, family members reminisce on how favorite family recipes evolved over time.

Another noteworthy feature of these events is the sharing of photos and documents from times past. Typically, various family members bring a selection of items that have been in storage for years. They share these artifacts with the family to recall the history of the family. A couple of weeks ago, my cousin shared a letter that my dad had written to her grandmother over 50 years ago about a mission to which they were both donating funds. Unfortunately, the mission was never built. Each family member added another memory about this project. It would be interesting to learn the real story behind the letter but all the family members involved are no longer alive. The discussion gave all of us the fond memories of how each family member worked together on this project.

I enjoy scrapbooking and have created several books that document various generations of my family. The family

loves looking at these books at reunions while the older members share the history of celebrations and events. I taped my great aunt, who was the oldest of our family clan at the time, as she told us stories about the grandfather that I never met. My grandchildren love looking at their individual personal growth books that I have created for each child. My grandchildren also give me their art creations and school work samples that are integrated with photos in these books. I journal developmental milestones for each grandchild a couple of times a year that document their favorite activities. They also dictate stories to me that are included in these books. I plan to give each child their collection of milestone books when they settle into their homes as young adults. One daughter plans on keeping these books as another opportunity for her family to reminisce at future family gatherings.

The most important outcomes of our family reunions are to connect us to our heritage. My grandchildren are excited that they have family members from many different cultures. The children are excited to learn a few basic words in different languages that add depth to these events. We typically incorporate diverse art projects and music at our family gatherings.

As we enter into the new school year, our children can share their reunion activities with their friends and classmates as teachers introduce the fall holidays of diverse cultures.

Happy reminiscing!

Mary Ann

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