

1-9-01

Tradition

Traditions that come to us ready made are interesting, worth our attention, and an important part of our lives, but right now I am intrigued by traditions which I have participated in and watched evolve. A number of years ago, our family combined our Thanksgiving dinner with that of the Brooke family. We agreed that we would honor each other's customary Thanksgiving dishes. That included Frank's Sally Lunn bread and our cranberry jelly served on a special plate. We had agreed that giblet gravy was a part of both families' customs, but I was unprepared for the existence of slight differences in the way the cook made the gravy.

Since the meal was at our home, I cooked the gravy my family had always enjoyed. Helen liked my gravy but had never had it before with sliced hard-cooked eggs. The egg ingredient happened when the turkey hen Mother roasted did not have the partially formed eggs that had always been a part of the packet of giblets included. We kids had always vied for the privilege of eating the progressions of developing eggs; the egg ingredient was always important to us. Mother, too, felt that the egg was a vital part of the giblets, so she cooked a couple of eggs, which she sliced into the gravy just before serving it. Helen and her family had never been privileged to eat my mother's gravy but liked the addition of egg slices. I like to think that perhaps a new Brooke family tradition was started that Thanksgiving Day at our house.

We, however, have never incorporated Frank's Sally Lunn into our dinner, much as we liked it, because I never have been tempted to make one and Frank never again shared his with us.



Our Brussels sprouts tradition is something else. The vegetable had always been an unacknowledged part of our Thanksgiving meal, but when our sons objected to eating the dish and their Aunt Martha insisted that they each try one sprout, we discovered that the vegetable really was important to our meal. We still include it in the menu even though now George and Roland make a fuss about the one sprout that tradition says each must have. I realized how important the dish was the year when I forgot it and Roland, the one who objected the most to eating it, was sorely disappointed about its absence. It's truly a tradition now, and the daughters-in-law and grandchildren are clamorously insistent that George and Roland conform with their one necessary requirement of tradition.

This Christmas I witnessed what well may be the demise of one of our Christmas traditions. Somewhere during the growing up days of George and Roland, we started giving each of them a box of Whitman's Sampler chocolates. In the beginning the boxes proved to be noteworthy because the boys felt we were recognizing an important step in their maturity. I found it convenient to repeat the same candy gifts for several Christmases until one time when I decided we deserved a more up-scale taste. But, according to the boys, the more expensive candy simply would not do. Since then, we have always conformed to the rule of Whitman's.



Now I have cause to wonder. This last Christmas, when Roland and his family returned to Salem, I discovered that they had left their box of Whitman's rather conspicuously behind. An oversight? Possibly, but when I discovered that George and family had left their box of Whitman's when they returned to Dallas, I felt that both families had sent a distinct message. I have almost a year to think of a satisfactory substitute for the Whitman's Sampler. Maybe not. Perhaps that's just a tradition which has lived its time and can be left behind.

Would anyone like a chocolate?