

My Family Folklore
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Writing a paper on your family folklore is much more difficult than it sounds. First you need to define just what the words family and folklore mean to you. When you have the definitions clear in your mind, you may find there is too much information. You need to be selective about what to include. There is no way you can get everything down on paper. Deciding on a good definition of family was very arduous. The definitions I found in a dictionary are not realistic. It tried to make the definition into, a neat package. Its definition did not always work in actuality. My definition of a family would have to be a group of individuals who live and care for each other. My family consists of my mother, Dianne Warren Koenig, my father Milton James Koenig Sr., my sister, Karen Blanford Koenig, my brother Milton James Koenig Jr., and myself Helen Dianne Koenig. My mother grew up on a farm in Marion Co., Kentucky and my father grew up in a section of Louisville, called Germantown. They are both from very different backgrounds. My mother came from a close family network, where her grandfathers F.M. Warren and Edward Columbus Thompson (born on Columbus Day) were both community leaders. As children we would visit my grandmother, Helen Warren, in Marion Co. and when we would be introduced as her grandchildren were treated differently. For example once when Karen and I went to the Marion Public Library and asked if there was any way we could check a book out, even though

we were not residents of the county and just visiting. The librarian asked who we were visiting and when we told her who, she automatically recognize my grandmother's name and said of course we could. My father's grandparents, William and Anetcha Koenig came over to America from German in the early 1930's. They settled in Louisville. My father's father, Milton Henry Koenig, married a Catholic, Irmalinda Roth, against his family's wishes. His family disowned him and there was little contact with that side of the family after the marriage. Our family folklore reflects where our family came from and where it will go.

Like many families, my family named its children after relatives and close friends. There are some exceptions to finding a name from a family member or friend. Two of my cousins are named after soap opera characters Lauralie, a character from Ma Barker and Harley, a character from Guiding Light. Laura Brown, shortened from Lauralie, is now a forty year old, mother of three, who lives in Louisville. Harley Cooper is almost two years old and also lives in Louisville. One of my cousins, Jamey Knight has been called Bebo since he was a small child, when his sisters nicknamed him. He is now 26 years old. He was not only called this at home but also at school. Bebo in recent years has started to introduce himself as Jamey. My mother named my sister and me, Karen and Helen, names she hoped people could not shorten or make nicknames from. She

did not want us to go through life with nicknames, but most of my relatives see nothing wrong with cute nicknames. One of my younger cousins was named Benjamin Joseph Brown. Everyone called him something different: B.J., Ben, Benji, and even Joe.

My father used a few key phrases or saying on a regular basis. In the winter when there was ice on the roads, he would say "the road is slicker than snot." When making plans to do something, he would say "I will if the good Lord is willing and the creek don't rise." Another phrase was "Home again, home again, jigidy jig." He said this every time we came home. The rest of the family began using some of his sayings, but we shortened them without any loss of meaning. For example: "if the creek don't rise."

My mother also had some sayings, but they deal more with superstitions. Some examples would be: if you see or feel something, a specific thing is going to happen; "my nose itches someone's coming with a hole in their britches"; or "if you forget what you are about to say than it must have been a lie."

When my mother's family gets together there was an undeclared contest between her brother and cousin, Ed Warren and Ricky Penick, to determine who could tell the most outrageous stories from their childhood. They usually started out with an ordinary tale about being caught in some sort of mischief by their father and uncle John Warren. Then they begin to tell

these whoppers that they swore were the absolute truth. They were very good story tellers. Some of these stories were about practical jokes played on their sisters and cousins, and other embarrassing events in their lives. Another of their favorite subjects was the mischievous boys from where they grew up.

In one story, a couple of these boys sold a dead frozen horse to a drunk man at a bar. The man got on the horse, which the boys were holding up; and proceeded to whip the horse, because it did not respond to his verbal commands. Then the boys let the horse fall down, and proceed to get angry at the drunk for whipping to death a fine piece of horse flesh and left the drunk to take care of the dead horse. My uncles always played the role of witnesses to these interesting acts.

Holidays were always very important to my family. We try to celebrate every holiday. Saint Nicholas's Feast Day on December 6, is the holiday, on which we would give each other things to use during the Christmas season. For example we would give shirts, earrings, Christmas tree ornaments or whatever we could think of to give. We still do many of the things we did as children on these holidays. We still give each other Easter Baskets. My mother gives each of us one, and we go together to get her one. On many holidays the gifts, we give are most likely to be books; since we are a family of readers. Many of the things we give are something we already have or made ourselves. My mother gave my sister some of her Christmas

items, such as lights, ornaments, and glass figurines, for my sister's apartment last year. My family celebrate days that are important to the our family only. Every year my family celebrates the day my parents moved into our house. There is usually a birthday type cake, and sometimes we have people over for a dinner party. Holidays are important, because they bring my family together. While my sister lived away from home, in another city, my mother would mail my sister's gifts to her or on her next visit she would receive them.

The time between Thanksgiving and the week before Christmas was my mother's favorite time of year. She started baking the day after Thanksgiving, just like her mother and her mother before her. Many of her recipes had been passed down from her mother and grandmother. Her bourbon balls or fruitcake would be a good example of some of these recipes. By the time the week before Christmas came around, my mother had become very cranky. She never had done everything she wanted and that drives her crazy. By Christmas Eve, you just tried to stay out of her way. She did not calm down again until after Christmas day. Every year, we reminded her how crazy it was the year before, but she still did it anyway.

When a family gets a new member, by marriage or by birth, the family's traditions are altered. Some traditions have to be modified for other reasons. It was the tradition in our family to go to church on Christmas Eve, return to our home,

and open our presents. When we were done opening our presents, we would go to my aunt Marianne's house and watch her children open their presents. My parents did this every Christmas Eve, from their first Christmas together to just a few years ago. They would be still doing it, if one Christmas Eve the weather hadn't been so bad my parents did not want to go out. We spend Christmas day with them at my grandmother's house anyway. We stayed home and enjoyed the time together much more than when we go to my aunt's house. Since that year we have not gone to her house on Christmas Eve. However, we have become a stop on the way to her house by many of our relatives. Sometimes when traditions change it is not a good thing, but sometimes it is for the better. This tradition started because my aunt Marianne was the first sibling to have any children. Everyone went to her house to see her children open their presents. Since there is a major age difference between my cousins and my sister, my brother, and myself; we do not have very much in common. My eldest cousin Laura Brown is almost twenty years older than me. Meaning this tradition has been in effect for almost forty years. Since we have broken this tradition, we have enjoyed staying home and watching old Christmas movies, not worrying about having to rush anywhere. Thus, and a new tradition is born.

When we return from my Grandmother Koenig's house on Christmas day, we usually are still very hyperactive from the

day's activity. When we get home, we played the games we got as presents or we played cards. Card games play a major part in some of our family gatherings. I remember as a child, going to my mother's family reunion where all of her uncles and aunts sat around tables and played different card games. They mostly played poker but there were a few other games going as well. My mother told me her father taught her how to play poker and checkers even before she started school. My mother's family lived on a farm, and this was one of their modes of entertainment. They did not get a television until my mother was fourteen.

For years my parents have played cards with neighbors, relatives, and anyone else they could find. This love of card games, and games in general, has passed down to their children, my family played different types of games whenever we get together. This was something we all could do together, without having to spend money or leave our home.

My mother likes any game of chance. She buys lottery tickets and saves her change every year for when the churches start having their summer picnics. At St. Ignatius's summer picnic were many booths of chance including my mothers favorites, the cake, plant, and craft booths. One reason she enjoyed these games was she had extremely good luck. At the church picnics, she always played the same number, six. The reason for this was she was born on the sixth day of the sixth month, in the

year nineteen forty-two. When you add the four and two together you again get six. Not only are there all of those sixes, but she also married my father on August sixth in 1966. I had tried using the number six, but it has never work for me. My mother told me that I have to find my own lucky number.

Some folklore will be lost from one generation to another. My Grandmother Warren made many quilts during her life. She also was a painter. None of her children picked up either of these skills. Some of her grandchildren have tried, but nothing has come of it. She lived with us, in Louisville, for about six years, and now lives in a nursing home. When I was a young child, she showed me some of her quilting techniques, but I forgot most of them.

Both of my parents have crocheted during their lives. My father has not crocheted in years, but my mother still does. My sister and I were taught how to crochet when we were still children. My sister has completed many different items, but I have not been able to finish as many. I do not have their patience. We also do other crafts such as cross stitch and hook rugs.

When I traced my family's food folklore, I noticed something which struck me as odd. My mother cooks more like her mother-in-law than her own mother. My mother's mother never really taught her how to cook. Therefore, when my mother married my father, he taught her how to cook foods he liked. He taught

her how to make many different German dishes, including sour meat and German potato salad to name a few. Looking back it was weird going to my mothers parents' house and eating. Most of what they cooked was different from the way my mother did. Some of their recipes are now lost forever. I remember my grandmother making this interesting spaghetti in the oven. I recently asked my mother for the recipe but she had no idea how her mother made it. The only thing that was actually passed down was some of my mothers grandmother's baking recipes.

Some folklore can be made by an incident in a person's life. My parents do not really trust doctors. Before they will go to see one, they will try every other alternative. This includes folk medicine, such as chicken soup to cure a cold or drinking bourbon and water to cure a tooth ache. They also believe in waiting it out. They believe if you wait it out it will usually go away. This practice is sometimes harmful. I remember, when I was about fourteen, having an ear ache and telling my parents. They said that if it still hurt after a few more days they would take me to the doctor. This caused me a week of sleepless nights. Two years ago, I had a wisdom tooth coming in, and it had infected one of my other teeth. Instead of telling my parents about it, and having to wait a week. I borrowed the money and had the tooth pulled. My parents did not trust any doctors. One incident, that happened over twenty years ago shaped my parents' views. My father injured

his knee at work and when he went to see a doctor, he was literally told to take two aspirin and call him in the morning. My parents were not pleased with this diagnosis, but they trusted the doctor knew what he was doing. When they called the next day, the doctor told them there was nothing he could do and my father might as well get use to having knee problems. He has had knee problems ever since. My parents have warped this into their own idea of waiting a period of time, in case you get better on your own.

A few years ago he was almost unable to walk, so he went to a different doctor and all the doctor did was drain his knee of fluids and everything was fine. The doctor told my father that if the first doctor had done this, he would not have had his knee problem for the last twenty years. This experience changed the way my father viewed doctors. Even though he no longer suffered from his knee problem, he still distrusted doctors.

After writing this paper, I have realized why somethings are the way they are in my family. Talking to my parents about these things has been very enjoyable and educational. I learned much more than what I could put in a paper for a class. This is an on going search. Everyday folklore is lost or changing. Without someone watching it, most of it will be gone forever. Also doing this paper has made my family look at things differently. It has made us think about our past and our future.

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