

Part I: Definition of Family

Family: A group of people who come together in times of need and celebration; who will also protect and love you no matter what the circumstances are.

Part II: Family Food

Home cooking is the same as “comfort food” to me, which is really anything that I grew up eating that reminds me of my Mom or grandmothers.

My favorite home cooked meal prepared by my Mom is pork chops and rice. It is a casserole and makes the best leftovers! All it is is fried pork chops, wild grain rice (Rice-a-Roni is the best brand), and cream of mushroom soup. It takes a while to prep because you have to fry the pork chops and cook the rice. Once the pork chops and rice are done, you cut the pork chops up and spread them across the bottom of the casserole dish. Then you mix the rice and the soup (add milk to make it creamy) and pour it on top of the pork chops. Bake it for 30 minutes at 350 degrees. My Mom always made green beans and Pillsbury Crescent rolls with it. This is my Mom’s “signature” dish. When I first started spending time with my best friend, Caitlen, my Mom made this for dinner and now it is Caitlen’s favorite meal. One time my Mom made a bunch of pork chops and rice for a potluck, and after it was over there were still plenty left over, but my Mom didn’t want to bring it home in case someone else wanted it. It took years for us (my siblings, me, and Caitlen) to “forgive” her.

My Nana makes the best tuna fish casserole! Her and my Papa are Catholic, so they make this dish quite often during Lent. I always forget the recipe when I make it so I always have to call her and write it down again. But the recipe is very simple. You use canned tuna, bow-tie pasta, a can of cream of mushroom soup, a can of cream of chicken soup, and a can of peas. You just mix it all together and bake it for 30 minutes at 350 degrees. When I was younger my Nana would watch us a lot while my Mom worked. This was a quick and yummy meal she would

make for me and my siblings. It was a nice change because it was fish and not beef or chicken.

My favorite meal my Grandma made was fried pork chops. Very simple to do and they were yummy. I never helped her make it because her kitchen was very small, but I would sit at the table and talk to her about EVERYTHING while she cooked. After my Grandma died I called my Aunt Jill to figure out how to make it. She told me to use canola oil and thinly sliced pork chops seasoned with salt and pepper, and you just fry them. My Grandma always served them with mashed potatoes (no gravy), some type of veggie--corn, green beans, or steamed mixed veggies--, and biscuits. The first time I made it by myself it tasted just like she had made it. Whenever I think about her or miss her, I will make that meal so that I feel “close” to her.

Part III: Family Tradition

Christmas is an important holiday celebrated in my family. Our traditions have changed over the years due to different circumstances, but there are a few things that never changed. My family decorates the whole house with different holiday items, we exchange presents, and we have a Christmas “party” where we invite other family members over.

One thing my Mom always does is set up the Nativity Scene on top of her entertainment center. She will set it up when we set our tree up, but not take it down until after January 6th to celebrate the Epiphany. Christmas (even though it has been proven that Jesus was not born December 25th) is the time that most of my family recognizes the birth of Jesus Christ. We go to church on Christmas as a family and spend the rest of the day opening presents and spending time with one another.

My in-laws celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve. They do not recognize Christmas as the time to celebrate the birth of Christ, nor do they set up a Christmas Tree. I thought this was strange at first, but as I have spent the past few

Christmases with them I realize their traditions aren't much different than what I was used to. Even though they don't celebrate Christ's birth, they still have church in their living room, recognize Christmas as a time of fellowship, and they sing worship songs. They also decorate their houses in everything Christmas--they just don't put up a physical tree. They exchange presents, have a Christmas dinner, and play games and music. It is really like being in a Christmas movie!

I have carried on some of these traditions in my own house. I set up a Christmas Tree. I bought a (smaller version) of a Nativity Scene and keep it on my entertainment center--mimicking what my Mom does.

Because I am a newlywed, BJ (my husband) and I are still trying to start our own traditions. He is okay putting up a tree, even though he didn't do that growing up. We did start a tradition when we were dating that we continue to do each year. The day we set up our Christmas Tree (usually around December 1st) we write each other a note and put it in a plastic ornament on our tree. On the day we open presents (sometime between December 20th and 25th) we read our letters to each other. It is a time for us to reflect on our year and our relationship. We keep them in a scrapbook so we can see how our relationship changes year after year.

We both grew up where our families would drive around and look at Christmas lights, so BJ and I do that together now. We drive through neighborhoods, but we also go to the place in Sherwood and drive through their display. And we go to the Saline County Courthouse and walk around to see all of their fun and cute decorations. We'll go by ourselves sometimes, but go with someone in our family other times.

This coming Christmas will be our first Christmas as a married couple, so we probably won't change our traditions much from the past few years. I know as we start to grow our family we will combine more of our traditions together for our children.