

Traditions

by BRIAN LOCKHART

With Christmas approaching, there are many traditions that go along with the holiday season.

A tradition is, of course, something you do, just because that's the way it has always been done.

You may have a family tradition like putting the Popeye Christmas ornament on the tree every year because Uncle Eggbert started it off in 1935 when he returned from his road trip with a souvenir and every year Popeye gets a prominent place to hang.

I'm all for traditions ? they can be something personal, or on a larger scale like a national tradition of climbing onto your chimney during a summer solstice and waving your underwear at the clouds to ensure a good harvest season.

However, a tradition for the sake of it has a lot of drawbacks.

I once had a discussion with the executive members of a small town fair committee, who were lamenting the fact that they had low attendance every year.

I pointed out the fact that they hold their fair on a holiday and the reason for low attendance was because a lot of people go out of town that weekend. I suggested moving the fair date back by one week when everyone had returned home.

?We can't do that,? I was told. ?It's our tradition. We've held the fair on this weekend for 150 years!?

It may be their tradition, but they have also had low attendance ever since the automobile was invented.

?We went through it, so now it's their turn.? That's another reason for traditions that make absolutely no sense at all.

There are clubs, groups, and other organizations that have ridiculous traditions of initiation or hazing based on the fact that ?We've always done it that way.?

In many cases, those initiations are humiliating or downright dangerous. Over the past few years, many cases of outright abuse have been in the news.

What kind of tradition is it, to force some 18 year-old kid, to down a full bottle of whiskey at a frat party? There's been more than one kid who ended up with alcohol poisoning, falling from a balcony, or dying from being forced to drink way too much, as part of an initiation ritual.

But that's the tradition and the way they've always initiated new recruits.

At one time, medical students in residency, (if I have that term correct) were given 36-hour shifts at hospitals. I'm not sure if the practice still goes on, and I couldn't find anyone to verify for me, but it did occur. The reasoning was that new doctors must be exposed to a variety of situations and learn how to deal with them.

Except, being attended to for a medical emergency by someone who is so exhausted they lack proper judgment was creating a lot of problems.

I watched an investigative news show on this, where they tried to find a reason why someone who was being counted on to make potentially life or death decisions, would have to do so after being sleep-deprived.

After trying to find the real answer, all they could come up with was a bunch of older doctors who said, "We had to do it, now they have to do it."

Traditional dress is another area that sometimes needs to be done away with. Yes, I get it - your great-great-great-great grandmothers wore grass and dirt hats and ankle-high wooden boots when it was onion planting time. Does that really mean the current generation should don the same costume a couple of centuries later during the annual festival in the town square? Maybe it just belongs in a museum.

There's an army unit in Europe, that during ceremonial events, wear their traditional uniform. The uniform looks something like a cross between a ballet dancer's tutu and a clown school graduation suit.

You would think that some high-ranking military figure, would finally come out and say it's time to put that thing in a closet and start dressing like soldiers. But no, tradition dictates this military unit should look ridiculous every time they're on parade.

I'm all for carrying traditions as long as they are good ones. I guess the argument is that what may not be good for some, may be good for others.

But still, I think the River Dancers should chuck tradition and move their arms when they dance.