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Cornerstone

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Christmas Day

One of my favorite holidays of the year is Christmas because all my family gathers together to celebrate the holiday season. Every year the Christmas celebration is held in LeMars, Iowa. The tradition has been passed down through many generations and it is now held at my Grandma's house. My mom's side of the family is very large and from all over the United States. No matter where you live, no one ever misses the Christmas celebration at my Grandma's house.

LeMars, Iowa is about five hours away from where I live, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. We always leave Christmas Eve to head over to my Grandpa and Grandma's house. My family is very religious, so once we arrive we always go to 5:30pm mass. Majority of my family will not arrive until that next day but we like to head out a day early to help my Grandma get ready for the gathering.

After mass, we head back and always order broasted chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, macaroni and cheese, and potato wedges from K.F.C. (Kentucky Fried Chicken). It is a tradition to sit down around my Grandma's table and enjoy a stress free meal that has been pre-made. Before we begin eating, we always give grace. We pray and go around to say what we are thankful for, then proceed in eating our meal. After we are done eating, we go into the living room to talk about who's going to help prepare the food tomorrow. We make sure to go bed early since we have a long day ahead of us .

The next day comes quicker than ever and we are ready to start preparing for the party. We begin by setting out all the tables and chairs in the garage, basement, and living room. We make sure that there are table covers on every table, so that we don't have to worry about cleaning up after the gathering is over. After all the tables and chairs are set out, we get ready to go to church again on Christmas Day. Before we leave for church, we set the ham and turkey in the oven because it takes awhile to cook.

Since the church is in walking distance, majority of my family arrives before it begins so we can all walk over together. After church is over, we walk back to Grandpa and Grandma's house to get all the food prepared before everyone arrives. My two younger brothers and I try to help out as much as possible when preparing the food. It is a tradition to make my grandma's speciality, Oreo whip cream fluff. I always try to help her make it because we need to prepare a lot. The fluff is always a huge hit at every gathering we have. We run out every year since everyone loves it. Not only that, it is super easy to prepare. I also like preparing the mashed potatoes and gravy. My brother's normally help my mom make the stuffing and the green bean casserole. Since we have a huge family, we have to prepare huge sizes for each food choice. My aunt Dianne always comes with the deserts, normally bringing some kind of cake and Blue bunny Ice Cream.

Once all cooking is complete, my brothers and I help set out all the food on my Grandma's counter top so that it is easily accessible for all. We serve buffet style so that people can help themselves. The rest of the family that didn't go to church, starts arriving at 12:30pm. Before anyone can get food, we must have a family prayer giving thanks to God. After the prayer

ends, everyone heads straight for the food. It is great to catch up with everyone you haven't seen in awhile.

After everyone is done with their meals, we all proceed to the basement to help clear the tables and bring chairs down to the basement from upstairs for the Christmas program. What we have done in the past is everyone brings gifts for family members and we hand those out for everyone to open. Someone is designated to share all the good news of what has been going on in the family (i.e. job promotions, baby news, college news, etc.). After that is all said and done, we end with singing classic Christmas carols. We have a book for each family member, so everyone can sing along. Everyone gets the opportunity to pick their favorite Christmas carol and everyone continues with singing it.

When the celebration is over, many of the adults proceed to the hotel suite that my Grandma rents for us. We have a tradition to go back to the suite and play games for the rest of the night. We always head back to Grandpa and Grandma's house to sleep that night and head out the next morning back to Cedar Rapids.

I am so grateful to have a family that has traditions like this. It is a such a great time and unforgettable experience to get to see everyone. Not only that, it is one of the best meals I have throughout the year. I say this because not only it's a great meal but I get to spend Christmas with some amazing people that I don't get to see that often. That is why Christmas is one of my favorite holidays.