

Traditions: Bringing Folks Together

Summer is just about officially over. The kids are back in school, regular activities have begun, Guides, Princesses and Trailblazers are in full swing, fall sports are underway and school open houses are scheduled. It's all very jarring: a rude awaking after a summer of fun, especially the All-American tradition of the Family Summer Vacation. Yes, indeed, the family vacation. A time honored tradition that gives our families shared memories which we talk about for years to come and cling to, now, as the leaves begin to fall and we begin the long decent through the warm days of autumn into the dark days of winter. I hope you went on a family summer vacation. Maybe you flew somewhere, went off to see relatives, visited some great destination in America, or just packed the kids and luggage into the minivan and hit the road. Regardless, what a tradition we have as Americans! Every summer we travel and discover other places and get to know each other, and suffer the irritations of siblings in a confined space environment.

My family and I went to Washington DC. We took an airplane to Baltimore, followed by an hour-long car ride to our hotel on the Potomac River overlooking the Washington Monument. As we drove along in a rental car, leased without an entertainment package, it became obvious, painfully so, why car-makers have placed TV screens and DVD players in our vehicles. The kids were bored without them. And boredom from lack of entertainment spawns creative ways to disturb your siblings. It starts small but soon escalates so much so that after enduring my son and daughter teasing each other, their normally good humored Dad was just about ready to bark the age old command, "If you kids don't stop, I'm pulling over!" It was at that moment that an old game from my childhood came to mind. We simply called it: "Beetle."

Remember when Volkswagen introduced the Beetle back when we were just small kids. It was also affectionately referred to as the Volkswagen Bug. The Beetle became the most famous car in the world and, with a cult like following, Bugs were everywhere. As a result, a kid's game emerged designed especially for road trips. Remember "Slug Bug!" Every time you saw a Beetle you'd punch your sibling in the shoulder and yell out "Slug Bug!" So, all eyes were glued to the road looking for the next Bug. But this game had an obvious and serious flaw. It did nothing to settle the back seat sibling battles.

Since Slug Bug was not bringing us together, my parents reinvented the game, removed the slugging, and called it "Beetle." So, the Esteys would pack up the station wagon. (Remember the good old station wagon? It was eventually completely replaced by the Minivan, then the SUV. No self respecting Baby Boomer or Generation X-er would be caught dead today driving a station wagon. But they're making a comeback and we're driving 'em. They're called Crossovers!)

Anyway, let's return now to the Esteys packing up their fake-wood paneled station wagon and hitting the road back in the day. Instead of "Slug Bug," we had the "Beetle" game. Us kids would be looking for Volkswagen Bugs, while Mom kept a tally and the little Esteys climbed over each other to get a look out of every side of the station wagon to locate the ubiquitous Beetles. But Mom and Dad got what they wanted: a semi peaceful road trip, and the winner (the kid with the biggest tally of Beetles) would receive some treasure – a Five & Dime trinket. That tradition now lives in my family, reborn somewhere along the Potomac River, just moments before I nearly lost it and pulled to the side of the road.

Traditions give our lives shape and meaning. We come to anticipate these traditions, looking for them time and again, with anticipation, sentimentality, and hope for their continued defining of our relationships with those people who are important to us.

My Illini Princess Tribe is important to me and my daughter and we look forward to every event and gathering. Although the mighty Illini Princess Tribe is only about 4 years old, we have already developed traditions that have become an excited expectation for both kids and dads alike. One of our traditions is a Post Pet Parade Picnic. We head over to a Tribal member's house and have a barbeque and picnic. There are activities for the kids, our great tribal chefs cook up their favorite campout recipes, the wives visit, and dads and kids horse around long into the evening. It's a great feast which brings out the gourmand in all of

us, but more importantly, the Illini Post Pet Parade Picnic brings us together as fathers and children, with the moms getting to know each other and our tribe. But as I write, I can almost taste the seafood risotto or bacon wrapped, stuffed jalapenos.

Maybe your own tribe as a similar tradition, or maybe you have other traditions unique to your tribe. If not, start some. Be inventive and create traditions for you and your fellow tribal members. Tribal traditions will bring you together and you'll get to know each other.

As a Federation, we have many traditions that have survived the test of time. At the Fall and Spring Campouts, we stage our Induction and Passage Ceremonies. These happenings are greatly anticipated. Just take a look into the eyes of any child as they sit with their dads in one of these ceremonies. Trailblazers, too, have traditions that are anticipated with great excitement, such as canoeing the Tippecanoe River and staying at Camp Tecumseh the second weekend of every September, year in and year out.

Another fine Federation Tradition, unique to Indian Guides and Indian Princesses, is building Tribal Property. Little Braves and Little Princesses, with the help of their dads, construct Tribal Property at each tribal meeting. Some big projects may require multiple meetings, and maybe require the work of the dads alone. Then the little Guides and Princesses can personalize their own portion of these big projects. It's fun and Tribal property provides tribal identity.

Look at the Arapaho Guides. They have great property and paint everything red or blue. Rocks trees, spear heads, name plates. It doesn't matter. All the red and blue is very impressive to every kid and dad at any campout. The Seneca Princesses have settled on purple as they unifying color. The Ogalala Sioux does the same thing with red and the Dakota has made black and yellow their signature. What great traditions! These Tribes get their kids excited about their Tribal Property. And the dads, too, get as jazzed as the kids. Tribal Property is a source of pride in shared projects that unite tribal members. Tribal Property is also part of our many friendly contests at Campouts. If you think the kids don't care, just watch the excitement on Sunday mornings at Campouts as the Tribal Property winners are announced.

Building tribal property is assuredly a fun way to interact with your child. So, Tribal Chiefs, as you plan your Tribal Meetings make sure to remind the dad hosting the meeting, (or maybe anoint a creative, handy dad to lead your tribal property efforts), and include time for constructing tribal property at every meeting. If you are stuck looking for resources go to our website: www.yigp.org. Take a look at Keokuk's Corner and read, "Meaningful Tribal Property." (While you are in Keokuk's Corner also read the tip called, "Tribal Meeting.") Or look at the "links" tab where we have a link to a company which specialize in easy to construct Native American artifacts. Order from there or simply go to the local stores, buy supplies and use your imagination.

Not sure what to build first? Go to our web site, click on "Campouts" then click on "Administrative" then click on the "Tribal Property Judging Form." Use this form as a Check List for Tribal Property which you should construct. But don't stop with the score sheet. Use imagination and create new and wonderful Tribal Property. Make use of the over-head air-space in camp dining halls, be inventive with your digital camera and printer, plastic buckets make great collapsible totem poles, look around, pay attention, focus on the new ways to expand and create Tribal Property. The ideas will come, then get to work. Your only limit to Tribal Property is your imagination.

So dads, as you plan and assemble for Tribal Meetings, prepare in advance to knock us out with great tribal property, and in the process build traditions, relationships and memories. Just hop in the old station wagon . . . err minivan, or crossover, and load up on tribal property supplies. Your kids will enjoy the bonding time with dad and, maybe, on a future crisp Fall, Winter or Spring Sunday morning, the kids in your tribe might find themselves with another ribbon to add to the bounty of ribbons tied to your Tribal Totem.

Tom Estey, Federation Chief, Silver Cloud