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The Christmas Pickle

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Hailey Johnston
Logan, Utah
November 2017

The Christmas Pickle Calendar Custom

Informant

Hailey Johnston is a 19-year-old sophomore at Utah State University studying Marketing. She was born in American Fork and raised in Pleasant Grove, Utah. She currently lives in Logan, Utah. She is a waitress at Firehouse Pizza in Smithfield. Hailey has 4 siblings and is the second to youngest kid in her family. She is one of my roommates. Christmas is hands-down her favorite holiday.

Context

Hailey told me about this custom as we ate lunch after classes on a Tuesday afternoon. We sat in the kitchen in our Logan apartment and the topic came up as we counted out how many days of school were left until Winter Break. Hailey and I were joined by our other roommate, McKahll, for lunch. I sat across from Hailey at the table and we were both munching on food as we talked. It was a very relaxed atmosphere because we are good friends and eat lunch together almost every day. It was pretty quiet because we were the only people home. McKahll interrupted once or twice as talked, but that was the only other noise. This custom always takes place at Hailey's parents' house in Pleasant Grove. The Christmas tree is a crucial part of the tradition, and so they always gather in the living room. All her immediate family members are present and participate—some more sincerely than others. Her dad always hides the pickle and is the person most excited about finding it. Her in-laws and older siblings only half-heartedly participate, and her baby brother almost always finds the pickle first. This tradition takes place on the night of Christmas Eve right before dinner and takes about 15 minutes. This is strictly a family custom; no friends are ever invited. Because the Johnston's love Christmas, their tree is always up by mid-November, and the pickle ornament is placed on the tree when it is initially set up. However, her father hides it in the tree Christmas Eve morning, and it is often forgotten about until Christmas Eve night.

Text

We do- we just barely started doing this a couple years ago actually but, we have like a pickle ornament. Have you ever heard of that? [I shook my head “No” here] Where you like hide it in the tree somewhere and then whoever can find it first gets the small present.

Texture

Hailey told me about this custom in a way that indicated she found it a little silly and trivial. She mentioned multiple times that it is a custom that started up only a few years ago, and it isn't her favorite family Christmas tradition. She was surprised I wasn't familiar with the tradition and went into detail once I started asking questions. She recounted the tradition with low energy and not much body movement. She rolled her eyes and told me the present that the pickle-finder

receives “is usually something really dumb”. During the pickle hunt, Hailey and her little brother get intensely competitive until one of them finds the pickle. Her father gets really involved and cheers them on loudly, but her mom and other siblings (and their spouses) dutifully poke around the tree a little and do it to please Mr. Johnston. For half the family members, it is exciting and fun and energetic, and for the other half it is a minor event and they don’t add much to the noise level or energy level. Hailey is somewhere in between. Hailey herself described the atmosphere as “fun”, but that as the years go on and her siblings age, it’s become more “low-key”. Hailey seemed overall pretty indifferent to this custom.

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Utah State University
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Dr. Lynne S. McNeill
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