

# Along the track

## Tradition

The kitchen in the old house I grew up in was a multi-functional space. We started the day around the table in that room, and we ended the day there too. It was a gathering space around a huge open fire, a place where meals were prepared and eaten, it was where the news of the day was shared, not easy in a big family when everyone is talking over each other. It was the entertainment space where we listened to the radio (no TV back then) and played cards or other games or just read by the fire. Sometimes in the cold of winter that seemed to go on forever, it was a shared space for odd, rescued lambs that joined us by the fire until they could make it on their own. It was a space where visitors were welcomed, and prospective partners were introduced. No-one came to the front door – they always knocked on the kitchen door. It was also a prayer room where pictures of the Sacred Heart and of Mary shared the wall space with a framed photo of Archbishop Mannix, long regarded as someone who should be declared a saint by my father and other Irish at that time. It was the place where we recited the rosary together every night, no matter what and no matter who may have been visiting at the time, regardless of their religious affiliation. It was a room where traditions were born, and stories became family legend.

Ultimately, we left that room and we began our own traditions. We married locals, others from interstate and others from overseas. They brought their customs and traditions, and our lives, values and beliefs were enriched by them. We moved on to create new family traditions and it was great to visit each other and experience the past and the new.

Family life needs traditions, its own customs, practices and rituals. They are essential parts of the glue that holds it together, that helps give it life, its uniqueness. They enable a family to foster a sense of belonging and security, to celebrate a shared history.

While some traditions are passed down through generations, families can and should create new traditions that reflect their uniqueness, that reflect their values and interests, their shared stories and the new ones they are creating. Sometimes it is worth asking ourselves, in my family what is here to celebrate, what should we give thanks for? What are we creating here together, what should I take from the past but also what should I take from 'the now'?

What are the customs and rituals that are part of our family life. They don't have to be religious, although it is pity if at least some are not. What family stories do we tell, what memories do we treasure? Do our family customs accommodate diversity and change so that they don't become rigid or exclude others, even family members.

But traditions are not always created in the home. Pope John Paul II spoke to the Aboriginal Australians back in 1986: *The silence of the Bush taught you a quietness of soul that put you in touch with another world, the world of God's Spirit. You lived your lives in spiritual closeness to the land, with its animals, birds, fishes, waterholes, rivers, hills and mountains. Through your closeness to the land you touched the sacredness of man's relationship with God, for the land was the proof of a power in life greater than yourselves. Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them. Share them with each other and teach them to your children. Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost. ...* (edited) The late John Paul II said to them in Alice Springs, November 1986

Good advice to all of us. The house I grew up in was small, yet it seemed spacious, mostly because the centre of the home, the kitchen, served many purposes. It was, in modern parlance, a multi-functional space. What sort of spaces are there in our home, all in one room perhaps – a welcoming or gathering space, a place for shared meals, a space that invites prayer, or story telling or sharing news? Is there a space for family memorabilia? What will our children take away from what we are creating together here? Tradition is not about clinging on to the past but enabling our children to eventually go out and create their own.

Regards  
Jim Quillinan

Email: [jquillinan@dcsi.net.au](mailto:jquillinan@dcsi.net.au)