Thanksmas

“Tradition is family, family is love, love is forever, and forever is a long, long time.” This quote, written by my dad many years ago, serves as a motto for my family. We often recite it at family get-togethers, with grandpa starting us off, “tradition is family…”, and everyone joining in an amusing unison by the end. Tradition has always been an important part of the Daley family history.

My grandparents raised my dad, his seven brothers and two sisters in the rural town of Madelia, Minnesota. They instilled strong values into each of the children, teaching them to be respectful, hard working and most of all faithful. God came before everything in their lives including the need for money and materialistic items. The church played an important role in the lives of my grandparents. They passed this tradition of faith to their children, and each of them have passed it onto us grandchildren. I am blessed to be a part of a loving, strong family.

In February of 1964 my grandparents lived in a two-bedroom country home with seven kids; the home they lived in before the farm. Although it was not much, they got by just fine, until one night the house caught fire and burned down. Everything was gone. Father Frank Enright, priest of the Madelia Catholic Church, was generous enough to throw the family a shower at the church to help replace the things they lost. As a special gift, Father Enright gave my grandparents a nice bible.

This bible became more than just a holy book to my grandparents. It not only symbolized their love towards God, but it also symbolized hope for the future of the family. No matter what happened, they would get through life’s hard moments with faith. The family moved to a farm only a few miles away, started fresh, and stayed there many years. My grandparents, like most people, experienced many more heartaches throughout their lives on the farm, including the death of a son and daughter, my Aunt Laura and Uncle Tom. No matter what challenge God gave them, they made it a tradition to read out of their special bible every Sunday, and it stayed a part of their lives until all of the kids left home.

This particular bible is not just an average one. The book has an ornate flare, with white leather covering the exterior. ‘Holy Bible’ is scripted on the front in gold print that matches the gold trim of each page. It is truly a beautiful book. When I was little, I remember thinking the book weighed as much as my older brother. Although my perception as an eight year old was a bit skewed, The Bible is still about five inches wide. The pages are of thicker quality, printed with small letters, and there are no pictures to look at. The inside of the front cover has over 30 signatures and dates written in different color ink. Some would think they ruin the value of The Bible, but to my family, it makes The Bible mean so much more. Although this book isn’t necessarily special, being that millions of copies of the same book were made, the meaning of this bible come from what its used for, not the fact that it looks different than other bibles. The bible cost Father Enright nothing, as most bibles for the church were provided for free. Whether or not it has monetary value is not important to my grandparents. The book is a gift that they will keep forever.

Before they knew it, my grandparents became empty nesters and their children, including my dad, started creating families of their own. The Bible stayed with grandma and grandpa at the farm displayed on a bookshelf in the living room. Until my grandparents moved to Eau Claire in 2000, all of our family gatherings took place at the farm in Madelia. One in particular, Thanksmas, became a favorite holiday tradition.

Every year my family gets together on the weekend after Thanksgiving to celebrate Christmas. “Daley Thanksmas” includes playing cards, lounging around, drinking and laughing. The love and happiness during the times we are all together is contagious. The fun continues into Saturday, where we cook a huge feast and prepare for the arrival of Santa (or as the older cousins would say, Dave the neighbor.) After we eat, grandpa passes out song books (the same ones every year) and we sing Christmas carols. We always try to sound our best for grandma, but Daley’s are known for not taking anything too seriously, so we usually end up laughing at someone for singing too loudly.

After we finish singing ‘Deck the Halls’ my grandma grabs The Bible from the bookshelf and picks someone to read our favorite Christmas passage. After they finish reading, they sign their name on the inside of the cover and date it as well. We started this tradition many years ago, and we have yet to repeat any signatures. All of my aunts, uncles, and cousins have read from The Bible now, each of our name’s include a date of when we read. My cousin Erin just got married in December, so I’m sure her husband will be the next to carry on the tradition.

Father Enright will never know how special this bible is to my family. A simple gift to my grandparents during a hard time has turned into an object, a family heirloom, that symbolizes the unconditional love of a family, no matter what. To others, this bible would be just another book. The cover wouldn’t spark any memories, the names on the inside would be unfamiliar, and they probably would throw it away for a new one.

In some ways, my family uses The Bible like Maggie would treat the quilt in *Everyday Use.* Maggie appreciates every part of the quilt, and knows the history of how it was made. Looking at The Bible, nobody would know that it was a gift to a family that lost everything they owned in a house fire. The stories, the memories that this bible holds belong to my family and it’s a tradition for us to use this gift to bring us together. Maggie would agree that the history is most important when it becomes a part of the family tradition. Also, Maggie believes in using the quilt every day, not putting it on display. This aligns with how my family uses this specific bible. Instead of being afraid to wear out the pages of the book, my grandparents continue to use it year after year just like when they received it so long ago. The need to preserve it is not as important as getting use out of it.

In the future, I hope the tradition of reading and signing The Bible stays alive with my family. The Bible stays at my grandparent’s house, and until they pass away it will stay there. In a sense, keeping The Bible on a bookshelf at my grandparent’s could be parallel to how Dee would use the quilts if she had them. I want the tradition to carry on, and we can’t do that if someone loses or destroys The Bible. I see where Dee is coming from by wanting to display a piece of family history to preserve it. In the end, it’s more important for our family to use and even write in The Bible to continue our tradition than it is to keep it on a bookshelf.

The Bible, with all the signatures of my family members, will continue to represent hope for my family. Hope for the future, that we keep our faith strong no matter what comes our way in life. My grandpa was recently diagnosed with cancer, and this bible and everything that it represents for my family will be a source of hope yet again. This bible is worth more to my family than a bible made of pure diamonds would be worth. The history and tradition behind the cover means more than just a pretty bible, and it will be a part of my life forever.