

Cantankerous Aunts and Uncles

By Hap Hansen

I had difficulty trying to write about today's subject, until I looked it up in the dictionary. Cantankerous means difficult or irritating to deal with. Then it dawned on me. Oh! That was my aunts and uncles. All their names have been changed in this story to protect the guilty, but the situation remains the same. In those bygone days, those unusual relatives weren't considered crazy, only just eccentric or cantankerous.

I remember old Uncle Charlie. He had crossed eyes that rarely blinked. There were times my brother and I swore that he was staring at both of us simultaneously and we were sitting on opposite sides of the room! He was a nice man and was treated respectfully by the entire family, even though the extent of most of his conversations was a frequently uttered, "Feels like rain!" Sometimes though, he talked to himself and no one interrupted because the answers he gave to his own questions seemed to be satisfactory. Until it came to politics. During political arguments in my family, which were frequent, Uncle Charlie would suddenly exclaim, "All those dad gummed Democrats should be voted out of office!" Then a few minutes later, he would shout, "Every idiot Republican should be voted out of office!" Once, out of curiosity, I asked, "Uncle Charlie, who do you vote for?" Almost angrily, he said, "I don't vote! None of those idiots deserve my support!" That was the end of my questions.

Then there was the distant cousin who came, uninvited, to all the family's weddings, funerals and receptions. She was a large lady and always consumed food as though it was going to be her last meal on earth. And always, after a huge meal and mounds of dessert, she would enter the kitchen, grab a chicken leg and say, "I'm not hungry, I just wanted to get that sweet dessert taste out of my mouth!" We also marveled at her ability to consume prodigious amounts of food on sad occasions such as funerals, all the while saying, "He's gone. He's gone. I just can't eat." After all that, she would enter the kitchen and cantankerously criticize the quality and taste of all the food she had consumed. Fortunately, all the folks working in the kitchen would just roll their eyes and shrug.

A disturbing thought: What if we got to the afterlife and discovered that our cantankerous aunts and uncles who preceded us were in charge of deciding our fate, and they had to base their decisions on how we treated them in life? Were we understanding and compassionate? Or were we abrupt, callous, overbearing and cantankerous? I think I will be a little nicer to my older relatives from now on.