

What's In A Relative's Name?

By Hap Hansen

At one time or another, almost everyone I've ever know has made quiet reference to a 'crazy old uncle' or a 'crazy old aunt.' I think I had one of each, plus one or two I am not sure of. Although they really weren't my aunt and uncle, I believe they came under the category of second cousin once removed or some other distant relationship that is quite difficult to describe and nearly impossible to understand.

The names I use in this writing for relatives have been changed to protect the guilty. In those bygone days, some unusually named relatives weren't considered crazy, only eccentric. I know my eccentric Aunt Mergatroid never went to a psychiatrist, primarily because those specialists were only available in big cities where they were kept busy. Besides Mergatroid didn't have time to travel, she just stayed in the root cellar until sundown, at which time she emerged to gather her needs for the day and to sleep. There was something about sunlight that seemed to bother her. I know she never worried about skin cancer!

Then there was unusual old Danish Uncle Engelbrat. Incidentally, his mother's name was Ingabur, both of which are popular Danish names. He had crossed eyes that rarely blinked. There were times my brother and I swore that he was staring at us simultaneously, and we were sitting on opposite sides of the room! He was a nice man and was treated with respect and dignity by the entire family. Even though the extent of his conversation was a frequently uttered "Feels like rain." Sometimes he also talked to himself and no one interrupted because the answers he provided to himself seemed to be satisfactory to him.

Then there was the distant cousin, Henrietta, who came to all the family weddings, receptions and funerals. She was a large lady and she always consumed enormous amounts of food as though it would be her last meal on earth. And always, after a huge meal and mounds of dessert, she would enter the kitchen and watch while others cleaned up the remaining food and dishes. And always, she would grab a fried chicken leg and say, "I'm not hungry, I just want to get this sweet taste out of my mouth." We marveled at her ability to consume prodigious amounts of food and on sad occasions she would always say, "He's gone, he's gone, I just can't eat!" A disturbing thought.

What if we get to the afterlife and discover our 'crazy' aunts and uncles, such as Mortimer, Chantilly and Pollyanna who preceded us are in charge of deciding our fate? And they will base their decisions on how we treated them in this life? Were we understanding and compassionate? Or were we abrupt, callous and overbearing? I think I will be a little nicer to my relatives from now on. No matter what their name happen to be.