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HOW TO SURVIVE A FAMILY REUNION

by William C. Anderson

It ranks right up there in popularity with an Internal Revenue Service audit and a root canal. I refer, of course, to the family reunion.

Psychologists can probably tell us what kind of gene mutation we all have that makes a clan want to occasionally flock together and clutch one another like a family of baboons being threatened by a stalking hyena. Happily, this rite of spring seldom happens more than once a year and, if carefully watched and controlled, the familiar bonding may be prevented from getting completely out of hand.

Big Red and I have prided ourselves on keeping family reunions to a minimum. In fact, by resorting to subterfuge and chicanery, we have been able to stall off get-togethers for nearly 10 years. But, alas, our good fortune was not destined to last forever. Last year, bowing to pressures from both our families, we were euchred into holding a family get-together.

Looking back on the mutiny, however, things could have been much worse. We had to cancel the watermelon-seed spitting contest because Uncle Bus couldn't find his teeth, and the family home movies had to be canceled because they got mixed up with Cousin Spike's collection of porno flicks, which really made inroads on the popcorn before we realized the mistake.

But the main reason we cut our losses to a minimum was because we capitalized on past experiences. I would like to share some of these with you because—like it or not—sooner or later you're going to get hooked into attending and/or planning a family reunion. When that happens, the following tips and anecdotes just might help steer you around the rocky shoals of calamitous clan conventions.

Timing is, of course, paramount. Reunions should always be planned during warm weather, as this will help keep the ankle-biters and Pamper-puddlers outside of the house as much as possible.

If someone's home must be used, a large backyard is recommended for big gatherings, so the children can eat outdoors with the dog.

To further discuss location, never—but never—have the family reunion at your house. Not only did we not have this recent reunion at our home, we didn't even hold it in our town. Instead, our planning committee wisely decided to hold it in a neutral zone, in the middle of the state.

Consequently, some 38 assorted clan members met in a little town called Stanley, Idaho. Here the Middle Fork of the Salmon River provides great white-water rafting, and the Sawtooth Mountains are so rugged they can even weather a family foofaraw. The reunion dinner was a smashing success—barely marred by the baby moose that was smuggled into the dining room by the younger set. And after a day of rafting, the troops were so tired, they barely managed to wreck one dance hall before retiring.

The following day, we moseyed over the scenic Galena Pass and into Sun Valley, Idaho. Months before, we had nailed down tickets for the ice-skating show that featured Kristi Yamaguchi, the cute little whipstitch who won the gold medal in the 1992 Summer Olympics figure-skating competition. If you must have a reunion, remember to keep clansmen busy with all sorts of interesting activities—preferably in the next state.

Now we come to a most important facet of your upcoming confab. It is essential that you go armed with a few choice reunion bromides with which to impress your relatives. As a public service, the following quotes overheard at our last reunion may be used. Some of these have a few whiskers, but they are all apropos.

For instance, to quote Aunt Alice: "Successful reunions are all due to successful planning. I always eat lots of garlic before attending. That way, people

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