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Christmas Eve Pizza

Ben Bowen

benjamin.bowen@aggiemail.usu.edu

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Jennifer Bowen McKinney
Rebecca Bowen Holt
Ben Bowen
North Logan, Utah
November 26, 2017

Christmas Eve Pizza Holiday Custom

Informants: Becca Bowen Holt is the youngest daughter of Wallace and Debbie Bowen's family, out of five total children. She and her husband live in Logan, Utah. Jennifer Bowen McKinney is the second eldest daughter in the Bowen Family. She and her husband live in Rexburg, Idaho. Ben Bowen is the second youngest of the family, attending Utah State, and an aspiring novelist. Each of them are proud of their Italian ancestry, and of the story of their ancestral migration and conversion, which all lead to the creation of the lives they now lead.

Context: As is well known by her children, Debbie Bowen's maiden name is Sara, (pronounced SAH-rah). Her father, Stephen Sara, was full-blooded Italian, born in New York. He converted to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints after his last military mandate to Korea (Mr. Sara was employed by the navy, but whether he was enlisted in the navy is uncertain. His work there remains classified to this day) and moved to Mantua with his wife Carol Hubbard. (Mantua is pronounced MAN-tuh-way or MAN-uh-way by locals). As is told below in the text, Mantua was settled mostly by families with Dutch heritage. Noticing this, the Sara family chose to follow their Italian heritage and make food on Christmas Day that would remind them of their ancestry and of Italy. The Christmas Tradition continues today, along with others.

The Bowen Family, through Debbie, has continued the tradition of eating pizza together with immediate family, in addition to watching *It's a Wonderful Life* in order to remind the Bowen Family of the spirit of Christmas and the meaning of life. They recognize that this tradition is a specifically Sara family tradition that has remained part of this immediate family's practices, and that if anyone who was not related to them were to attend, the pizza dinner would feel rather odd. Also, if any family members were to be missing, it would feel equally strange to be eating pizza alone. Indeed, when conversing together about the idea of folklore and while trying to identify folklore within the family, they recognized a time when a friend of one of the family members arrived at the Bowen Home during the holidays. They remarked on how odd it felt when the young woman, unannounced and unexpected, rang the doorbell and sat among the family members while watching a festive film together, but how much more commonplace and comfortable it might have been if such a thing had occurred during a regular day of the year.

Text:

Becca: Our mom's family, her dad is Italian, and when they moved to Mantua everyone in Mantua is Dutch, primarily Dutch, who has very traditional ham, Christmas dinner, and they went 'You

know what, we're Italian, we should do something different', so they made homemade pizza, crust and everything for Christmas dinner.

Ben: Christmas Eve Dinner

Becca: Yeah we do it on Christmas Eve

Ben: Oh, so *they* did it on Christmas dinner

Jenn: Yeah, that's because we get all together, we would, for most of our, childhood we'd get together with that family for Christmas Day, and we'd have regular, you know, we'd have whatever, it was the same as ever, it was bring just potluck like it always is with that family. I guess that's another part of folklore for our family is, anytime we get together with that family—

Becca: It's like Thanksgiving

[Discussion of a separate family tradition to always bring food to family gatherings as if it is Thanksgiving]

Ben: So, for the pizza tradition we —

Becca: We continue to make pizza every year

Ben: And we always do it on Christmas Eve

[Talking over one another]

Becca: We do it Christmas Eve

Jenn: Yeah, Mom makes the dough, in the early afternoon so it can rise, and then we usually make two sometimes three, as our family's grown we made a little more, and then we just get to choose and pick and whatever we want a topping with it. It's usually ham and pineapple for one at least and definitely pepperoni for another but we've added —

Becca: Peppers and olives ...

Jenn: Red onions and mushrooms.

Ben: It's also very nice, thick bread crust that's cooked on a *stone*.

Jenn: Mm-hmm. Yeah, it wasn't always cooked on a stone

Ben: yeah we cook it on it *now*

Becca: [Talking amidst all the conversation:] That was only, like, seven or eight years ago

Jenn: That's been recently

Ben: Yeah, that's pretty recent but it's always been hand-made

Jenn: Yeah, always hand-made. With mozzarella, and her homemade sauce, homemade pizza sauce, which is, *superior*, in every way

Becca: [laughs]

Jenn: We all feel like [laughs] we all feel like Mom's pizza is superior to any other pizza. Um, then and we usually eat it with ranch, bring it to the table, and usually have a green salad with it, 'cause Mom's really good about having us, all eat, healthy

Ben: Healthy food

Becca: And then we'll watch

Jenn: [In the background, as if she is quoting a movie:] Healthy food [laughs]

Becca: Uh, White Christmas, no we'll watch *It's a Wonderful Life* Christmas Eve, usually *White Christmas* is on the first snow.

Jenn: Yeah White Christmas we've watched when it snows for the first time in the season

Ben: That's a separate tradition, but it's cool

Jenn: And *It's a Wonderful Life* for Christmas Eve. Yep.

Texture:

At the time of collection, Becca's attitude was recitative and stiff, but soon relaxed as the mood between the three siblings became nostalgic. They spoke fondly of their mother's pizza recipe, and its manner of confection. They focused a great deal on the foodway of pizza, but also thought of it not as a foodway but as a specifically Christmas Eve tradition, which is to say that the texture of the actual event is such that the pizza itself and eating it became less of a food and more of a reminder of Christmas Eve and their Italian heritage and family togetherness in a way that eating homemade pizza on a random day in March would not accomplish. The texture of their sibling dynamic is almost exactly the same during the collection as the texture of eating homemade pizza around the table and watching *It's a Wonderful Life* together. They often talk over one another and repeat what the other says, as well as bluntly correct one another.

Benjamin Wallace Bowen
Utah State University
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Lynne McNeill
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