

Unsolicited Advice from Old People: Coping with Your Daughter-in-Law During the Holidays

Written by Gladys Loeffler



The holidays are a special time for families to get together and grow closer. But, your daughter-in-law will probably try to sabotage it. I'm going to do my best to write a few columns about how to celebrate a joyful holiday season with your family, but none of it will ever happen if you don't first learn how to deal with your daughter-in-law.

When you invite your son for Thanksgiving or Christmas, he's going to stammer around and say, "I'm not sure," and hand the phone to your daughter-in-law. She will say, "Let's have it at our house this year. It's so difficult to travel with young children hundreds of miles to LaCucaracha. I can order a turkey dinner from Luby's, and we can eat on these festive paper plates I found." Take-out holiday meals on paper plates – the nerve! We might as well eat TV dinners! Besides, what would we women do with no meal to prepare or dishes to wash while the men are watching football?

I take a diplomatic approach and 'splain to her my husband's back is acting up, and we won't be making any long car trips around the holidays. If they want to do their own thing, then we can just "sit at home all alone and eat leftovers, if that's the way she wants it." It's a good idea to tell your son you will be all alone, as well. He's going to respond much better to your guilt statements than she will.

It's also smart to secretly manipulate the grandchildren. Just say you want to talk them on the phone about how their soccer game went, but really say something like, "Grandma is making your favorite pies and has a special surprise that won't fit in the car waiting at my house."

Well, if your daughter-in-law is anything like mine, she couldn't boil water if her life depended on it. One of the main purposes of cooking a holiday meal is to try to teach her how to cook and properly clean a kitchen. Don't get me wrong; I really don't want her actually "cooking" in my home – just following my directions, learning our traditions. She can sit around watching Paula Deen 'til the cows come home, but it's no substitution for the learning environment of my kitchen. I should be clear that I absolutely love Paula Deen, and mean her no offense by that last statement.

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Last year, she said they were going to bring some Cajun turkey frying contraption, Stove Top stuffing, and something called “yams,” since I had been sick. Lord, I don’t think I could ever be ill enough to do without my sweet potatoes or eat Stove Top stuffing for Thanksgiving dinner instead of my mother’s dressing recipe. You would have to bury me before that would happen. And, did I miss something? I don’t remember any Cajuns at the first Thanksgiving. Lord, give me patience.

My daughter-in-law may wear the pants in her family, but she’s no match for me. She always gives in sooner or later and shows up with some store bought dessert or tamales on Christmas Eve. I always tell my husband, “Lord, this girl can’t tell the difference between Christmas and Cinco De Mayo.

Before every holiday gathering, I call that furniture rental place and order a few extra recliners for the men. We line them up in the living room so they have plenty of room to relax while watching football. When I start hearing a chorus of snoring coming from the living room, I know I’ve done my job well.

My daughter-in-law still thinks it’s acceptable to sneak in the living room to avoid preparing the meal, setting the table, and doing the dishes. I remember the first year they were married, she asked me where she was supposed to sit since we only had enough recliners for the men. I had to smile and ‘splain to her, “Sweetie, women don’t sit down during holiday get togethers.” She still doesn’t seem to understand her place in this tradition. I caught her last year sitting in my son’s lap watching the game. I had to get her aside and ‘splain that this kind of behavior is completely inappropriate in front of the children.

I just pray that one day she will be able to learn our traditions and prepare a fit meal when the good Lord takes me home – Bless her heart.