

A New Year's Feud In the Land of MAGA

Dear Uncle Dan,

I hope you are well and still making friends. I'm sorry to hear the parole board turned you down, but there's always next time. While shopping for Christmas, I ran into your ex, and Vera's crude remarks tell me communication with her is a no-go. (She's still bitter about your entanglement with your secretary.)

Since you and Vera are incommunicado, I thought I'd fill you in on the family reunion Hattie and I hosted here at Hoskins Crossing on New Year's Day.

We dispatched invitations, and relatives from across the country made the effort to join us on the farm for this gala affair. The Manhattan crew – your son John, his wife Sylvia, and their college kids, Eric and Annie – flew in from New York. Uncle Billy and Aunt Lanie drove up from Roanoke, four of the cousins from Texas took the train for a lark, and even the five Millers made the trek from California. All the Richmond folks came, driving over on the morning of the party. You probably don't remember the relatives from Hattie's family you met at our wedding, but twenty or so of them showed up as well, several from here in Virginia, a cousin from Memphis, a sister from Boston, and two from Washington D.C.

All told, about 50 guests, ranging in age from Hattie's 85-year-old grandmother to our own three-year-old Timmy, committed to the party. Hattie loves planning and cooking, the house was still festive with Christmas decorations, and I'd even hired a bartender to disperse the spirits and add to the fun.

The guests began arriving mid-morning on New Year's Day. By noon Hattie and a few of her relatives were carrying roasted turkeys, hams, black-eyed peas, salads, and a dozen side dishes and desserts to the long table we'd set up in the dining room.

By mid-afternoon, people were mingling, the drinks were flowing, and guests were grazing the buffet when Uncle Billy and Aunt Lanie arrived, late as usual. Aunt Lanie wore a MAGA pin on her blouse, and Uncle Billy was sporting a red MAGA cap.

"Like the hat, man," Jack from Texas said. "I've got one of my own, but you have guts to wear it."

Before Uncle Billy could blink an eye, college kid Eric said, "That hat sucks, man. And so does the idea. America was never that great. You should be embarrassed."

Uncle Billy stared hard at Eric, but removed his headgear, saying, "I'll take it off, but only because I've forgotten my manners. I don't usually wear a hat in the house."

It might have ended there, but John stepped up beside his son and offered an obscenity regarding President Trump and his supporters. (I won't repeat the many obscenities I heard in the next 30 minutes, as I am sure you get enough of those from your companions.)

That was the first shot. Your son and Uncle Billy started trading insults, others joined them, and soon Sylvia was shouting at Aunt Lanie to take that obscenity off her blouse. Some of us were trying to calm the waters, but then Sylvia had to go and poke Aunt Lanie in the chest with her forefinger.

That's when all hell broke loose.

Aunt Lanie – never one to take an insult sitting down – pushed Sylvia away. Sylvia pushed back, Aunt Lanie took a swing at her, and before you could say “Auld Lang Syne,” half a dozen fights broke out. Jack from Texas had John in a headlock, college kid Eric and his sister Annie had Uncle John down on the floor – to be charitable, they probably didn’t know about his bad hip – and nearly all the other guests over the age of 12 were either punching or trying to break up the brawl. One of Hattie’s cousins was shoved into the buffet table, causing it to collapse. (Weirdly, when this happened, the old joke popped to mind – “What do you get when you drop a platter of turkey? The downfall of Turkey, the overthrow of Greece, and the breakup of China.” It might have been funny, but I was too busy trying to pull a Tennessean off a Californian.)

At one point, Aunt Lois sat at the piano, tickled the keys, and began warbling, “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me...” That was as far as she got, because one of the Washington crew chunked a leg of turkey at one of his cousins, missed, and whapped Aunt Lois in the back of the head, knocking her forward and causing her to break her nose on the piano.

Eventually, we separated the warring forces. There we were, the house a wreckage of food, three broken lamps, and a busted television remote control, John bleeding from his nose, Uncle Billy with a pronounced limp, Eric with a black eye, Aunt Lanie with a torn blouse, Aunt Lois with her broken nose, women weeping, men swearing, and everyone disheveled and breathing hard. Timmy even lost his bowtie during the melee.

That was the end of our grand reunion. Everyone left, some apologizing to Hattie and me, some huffing off without a word. I drove Aunt Lois to the urgent care center, waited for repairs to be made, paid the bill, drove her to her hotel, and returned home to find Hattie in tears and her two sisters,

along with their families, still trying to clean up the mess.

I don't foresee any future reunions.

America's a crazy place these days, Uncle Dan. Hattie says it's because people have made politics their god. Her sister, Clara, thinks some members of our Congress are raving lunatics. Myself, I don't know what to think. When politics comes up in the office, I see some employees, supporters of Trump, I'd guess, go dead silent and drift away. Intimidation is at work even there.

So I'm curious, Uncle Dan. Do you and your fellow inmates throw fists and shout obscenities because of politics? Or do you have better things to do and more sense than some folks?

Your loving nephew,
Doug

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