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The 1985 Customs and Habits of the Ttiurp Family:
An Analysis of a Suburban Nacirema Family*

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Abstract

The Ttiurps are an exceedingly average American eastern seabord family. In the year 1985, the notable events were: a marriage, a finished degree, a published book, a presidency, trips to foreign countries, and a coronation.

Introduction

It has recently come to the attention of the scientific community that a large body of folk anthropology exists known as the family newsletter. This article represents the first attempt to scientifically systematize this literature and to analyze the unusual habits of the Ttiurp family.

The Ttiurp nuclear family consists of five members: the parents and three male children, all now of age. The family takes its gypsy and nomadic tendencies from its European and Georgia mountain ancestors. It has its headquarters near Washington, D.C., owns five automobiles, at least 20 appliances, and a real 700 pound safe. Ordinarily one member of the family lives at the headquarters on a permanent basis (when she is not abroad), the sole purpose of this being to water the plants and keep the home-made canned goods from freezing (the technical term for this role is "jam sitting.") The other members have established semi-permanent base camps in northern New York State and in Philadelphia (the latter location being where most of the extended family lives). It has been found that one family out of 250 has to resort to this method of living for the purpose of pursuing work and education. Previous research has classified this pattern as nomadic. However, this is not a proper label for the activities of the Ttiurp family, since they are not for the purpose of gathering food and following herds. Hence, the authors would like to propose a new term for this life pattern: "voyageant" (derived from the French term meaning travel). The major methods of interaction among family members are by People's Express, Ford Thunderbird and Allnet. This article will analyze the physical, emotional and psychological impact of voyageant patterns on this family.

Method

A series of telephone interviews were the principle tool to obtain information about individual family members. Phonecalls may not be the best approach to research in Outer Mongolia, but they pose no problems with the Ttiurps, because each of them has access (in one way or another) to at least six phones and they collectively award more than \$3000 per year to the telephone system.

Results

The main voyageant, Naed, has accumulated more than 50,000 miles over the past year, hopping between Buffalo, Newark and Washington. In between his many hours in the air were born a

book (with Jeff Rubin) on social conflict and a special issue of the Journal of Social Issues (with Ken Kressel) on mediation. He was awarded, as well, an NSF grant for research on mediation, which will allow him to do more traveling to research sites at Buffalo, Elmira, and New York City. Being director of the Social Psychology Program keeps him busy at his base camp together with a couple of courses here and there. With the passing away of his 96 year old aunt Ida, he and his brother conducted a very moving ceremony at the Philadelphia Cherry Street Meeting, with many old China hands in attendance. Keeping his stamp business going occupies much of his spare time at headquarters. He has become so accustomed to commuting that he often does not know whether he is in the air or on the ground.

In the service of her trade, international education, Ecnarf, the mother of the family, left the headquarters on several journeys to examine faculty and student exchanges in Mexico, England, France, Germany and Haiti. The last of these trips, on which she was accompanied by Naed, also involved a visit to her brother and his charming family. Both Ecnarf and Naed enjoyed the beauty of Haiti and found the people to be warm and good natured despite their poverty. She also made daily journeys from her headquarters to the swimming pool and her office and twice a week to the airport to deliver and pick up Naed, totaling more than 15,000 miles per year. She makes sandwiches for Naed's entire work week.¹ To compensate for loneliness, she spends long hours at the office and often has dinner with her many supportive friends. She has recently been crowned "Empress" by her fellow employees, and who knows how many more thousands of miles she will have to travel as a result?

After a mere six years of courting, the eldest son, Erdna, married Mik Noxid in August. Being from a voyageant family, it was no surprise that he chose a spouse from the farthest corner of the country, Maine. This was, in fact, where the ceremony took place--a joyous opportunity for the nuclear and extended families to get together and celebrate the joining of two clans. Mik was fortuitously released from the voyageant pattern when she moved with her professor from the University of Virginia to Cornell University, which is not too far from Erdna's base camp in Syracuse. Together, they set up a new base camp in Cortland, which is half-way between Syracuse and Ithaca. Each morning, Erdna goes north to his job as a computer engineer at General Electric, Syracuse (he finished his masters degree in that field at Syracuse University this year), and Mik goes south to Cornell.

The last two sons have a more sedentary voyageant life. Luap's work site, at the University of Pennsylvania, is only six blocks from his base camp. He continued to work on his corn

¹Our investigators intercepted a bag lunch inadvertantly left by Naed at the Newark Airport and found that it contained the following items: 3 hummus pita-bread sandwiches, each 8 inches in diameter; 3 peanut butter and honey sandwiches, 4 inches square and 3/4 inches in depth; 3 pieces of cake; an apple and 2 bananas.

plant experiments, trying to correct plant mutations with hormones, on his way to a masters degree. He also enjoyed weekly hikes through Philadelphia, exploring the history and architecture of the city. Selrahc's life was even more sedentary, as he lives right at his work site at Haverford College. Besides going to classes, he and another student were elected leaders of the resident sufferers/studiers at the college, i.e., co-presidents of the Student Government. Other activities at his base camp included volleyball, ice hockey, and peer fraternization (also known as partying). Last summer, he worked at the immigration service. Though some readers may picture him chasing aliens across the border at midnight, his actual activity was mainly chasing cursors across computer screens. Both Luap and Selrahc participated in their brother's marriage ceremony as ushers. It is common for brothers of the groom to serve in this capacity in Acirema, but it was nevertheless a great pleasure. They had to travel a total of 1200 miles to participate in this ceremony. Afterwards, they and their parents enjoyed a brief family vacation, in a voyageant style, in a picturesque Maine fishing village and at Mt. Desert Island.

Figure 1 provides a graph of the Ttiurp family finances over the year. The discontinuous sections of the curve represent changes at the beginning of each semester due to negative grants from several educational institutions.

Conclusions

It appears that with a little TLC, such a voyageant life pattern does not cause too much disturbance to the normal life of a family. However, further research is recommended on this subject.

References

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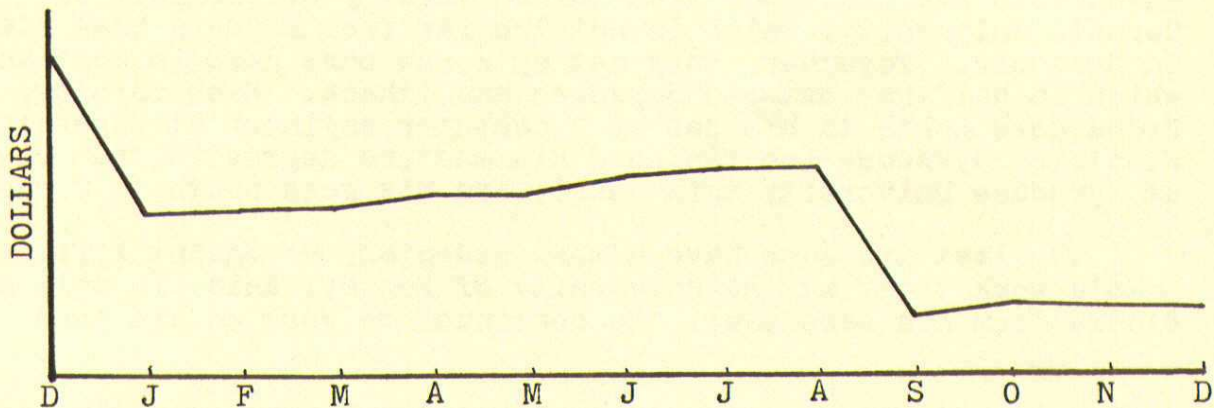


Figure 1. Family finances over the year

Have a great new year, Dean and France Pruitt
Andre, Kim, Paul and Charles