

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS



JOINING A FAMILY: John Beam and fiancée Grace Lim with her brother John (holding daughter Laura) and sister-in-law Gwen Lim; seated are her parents, Patricia and the Rev. Andrew Lim.

Will two cultures forge a new Christmas tradition?

By **GRACE LIM**
Herald Staff Writer

Panic sets in after two phone calls. First, my fiancée's best friend has bought a nonrefundable round-trip ticket from Austin, Texas, to Cincinnati, where he is to be an usher at our wedding. Unfortunately, we're getting married in Cleveland. Only five hours away.

Then my mom calls with a warning: "If Johnnie calls me Mrs. Lim one more time, I'm going to ignore him."

By being polite, my fiancée, an Anglo of European ancestry, has unwittingly insulted my parents, who were brought up in traditional Chinese homes where future parents-in-law are called Mamah and Bapah.

John, who has been a good sport about accepting the Chinese way, is a little incredulous: "Your dad wants me to call him 'Bubba?'"

Come Christmas morning, I will be on a plane leaving sunny Miami for bitter, cold Cleveland. Three days later, we will be married.

That is, if we survive the meeting of the in-laws and/or the clash of the cultures.

My dad is a man of faith. He is pastor of a Taiwanese Christian

Church. John's dad is a man of science. He is a physicist teaching high school physics in Houston.

They will meet for the first time, two days before their only daughter and only son get married.

My head hurts just thinking about it.

John will have to contend with the Lim clan. My dad has 11 siblings, most of whom, along with their families, will be at the wedding. John still hasn't gotten over the Chinese way of numbering relatives. Instead of Uncle John or Uncle Amos, they are Number Two Uncle and Number Three Uncle.

Even though I poke fun at getting married in Ohio, it is still the place I call home. I was 6 when I set foot in Akron after leaving Taiwan. It was in Akron where my brother and I saw our very first snowfall and made a snowman with a huge body and a tiny head. It was there where we learned Christmas is not only a spiritual day, but a commercial one, too. It was there where our dad bought our first Christmas tree, a blue and silver one.

And it will be there that John and I will start our new life together — close to my old family and my new one.