Real holidays: The past remembered

By Rita K. Farrelly

The old black-and-white wedding photo was taken Oct. 12, 1935.

Today, the smiles on the bride and groom are still natural and fresh. My mom is 20 years old, dark-haired, confident, lovely; my 32-year-old dad is slim, handsome and prematurely gray. His dimpled grin suits the bachelor who waited, a little longer than most, for the right girl.

My father was a banker, so family life revolved around holidays. "I proposed on Lincoln's Birthday," he joked, "because I had nothing else to do. I got married on Columbus Day so I'd always have off on my anniversary." And, my mother would add, "no excuse for forgetting it."

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For sure, it's a boon to the tourist industry and mass-merchandisers. There's more time to market to the public. And, yes, there are probably efficiencies and reduced overhead costs for many large companies. For two-income families, there's an opportunity to stagger work hours and perhaps ease child-care arrangements.

But something has been lost. For one, there are too few midweek breathers: Wednesday holidays that we once knew. A single day offered too little time to go away, but just enough time for an adventure, a wonderful "day trip."

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Most of our family's were by car. My father knew how to get about half-way to everywhere. My mother's humming "Let's Get Lost" was a signal to stop and look for a "Mac." Not the kind that serves fast food, but the one standing on a corner, as in "Hey, Mac, can you tell me the way to . . .?" I remember thinking how great it was that my father always knew the guy's name and that it was usually "Mac," occasionally "Joe." Feminist that I am, I still don't think to ask a "Mary" or "Sue" for directions. Mac and Joe always knew the way.

We've also lost a bit of history: a memory of not just what happened but when. "Virtually when" is just not the same.

Then there's the confusion. How many times do we now ask each other: What's open and what's closed? What's running, but on a reduced schedule? Is there mail delivery? How about the banks? The financial markets? Libraries?

Ah, well. For my brother, sisters and our extended family, this much is clear: Columbus Day will always be Oct. 12, not Oct. 9, as this year's calendar indicates.

The date marks not just the Discovery of America, but the Discovery of Us!

And this I know: On Oct. 12, we'll toast not just Christopher Columbus, but one special banker and the girl he wed 60 years ago.