

## FESTIVUS FOR THE REST OF US!

*Here's the story of a not-so-hallowed holiday tradition  
that's way better than any of the actual hallowed  
holiday traditions because it comes from TV.*

### C HRISTMAS, SHMISTMAS

The world changed on December 18, 1997. On that cold winter's night, families near and far gathered 'round the warm glow of their television sets to watch the holiday episode of *Seinfeld*. In one fateful scene, the cantankerous Frank Costanza (Jerry Stiller) tells Kramer (Michael Richards) how the Costanza family celebrates the season:

**Frank:** Many Christmases ago, I went to buy a doll for my son. I reached for the last one they had, but so did another man. As I rained blows upon him, I realized there had to be another way.

**Kramer:** What happened to the doll?

**Frank:** It was destroyed. But out of that a new holiday was born... a Festivus for the rest of us!

**Kramer:** That must've been some kind of doll.

**Frank:** She was.

Festivus, explained Frank, does not revolve around materialism, but around something much more profound: familial disappointment and feats of strength (both of which were featured prominently in the episode).

### TAPE DELAY

But Festivus wasn't invented by a mere TV character; it was invented by a TV writer—or rather, by his father. The story goes back to way before *Seinfeld*—all the way back to 1966 when Daniel O'Keefe, an editor at *Reader's Digest*, celebrated the anniversary of his first date with his wife, Deborah, and named the party “Festivus.” Inspired by Samuel Beckett's absurdist play *Krapp's Last Tape* (about an older man who listens to tape recordings of his younger self), O'Keefe started making his own tapes, into

In carvings dating to back to 800, the Norse hero Gunther plays a lute with his toes.

which he'd air his grievances about life. These tapings became incorporated into Festivus as the rest of his family joined in and recorded all their complaints, too. But that's not all—the holiday also featured wrestling matches between O'Keefe's three sons.

Many years later, O'Keefe's son, also named Daniel, became a writer for *Seinfeld* and recounted his family's odd holiday tradition to his fellow writers. They agreed it would make for a funny episode. Little did they know they would be creating an actual new holiday.

### FIGHT CLUB

Since the show aired, Festivus has taken on a life of its own. Every December 23, friends and family gather to celebrate the holiday. If you want to join in, you're welcome to it, but you have to celebrate properly, or you'll be, as Frank would call you, "weak." So here's how to celebrate Festivus:

1. **The Aluminum Pole:** Festivus's only decoration, the stark, unadorned pole symbolizes resistance to the commercialization of the holidays. No tinsel is allowed: Frank says it's distracting.
2. **The Airing of Grievances:** During the Festivus dinner, celebrants go around the table and tell friends and family how much they've disappointed them over the past year.
3. **The Feats of Strength:** The head of the family must be wrestled to the ground in order for Festivus to end. He or she chooses an opponent (the weaker, the better); and the two wrestle until one is defeated, or they find something better to do, or they get tired, or the police show up.

To make all three of these traditions even more fun, try celebrating the holiday with a wine called Festivus Red, bottled by Oklahoma Winery Grape Ranch. "It's the perfect wine for the un-holiday to end all holidays!"

### IT'S A FRICKIN' MIRACLE!

But the most special part of Festivus is the "Festivus miracle." As miracles go, it's only slightly better than no miracle at all, but that's what makes the Festivus miracle so special: It can happen to anyone. All you need is to have something happen to you that doesn't totally suck, and you can declare it a Festivus miracle. Say you find 35 cents in your pocket when you were only expecting to find a quarter. That's a Festivus miracle! Or your shoes stay tied all day. Now *that's* a Festivus miracle!