stories about growing up, and her grandmother taught Emily many of their Swedish family recipes.

When Jake and Emily's dad remarried, Emily's family moved into Sharon's big house, about 30 miles away. Holidays are now spent with her father's family or Sharon's relatives. Although Dad will drive Emily over to see her grandmother and other relatives on Christmas morning, Jake prefers to stay with his stepbrothers to play with their toys. Sometimes, Emily feels as if she is the only person in her family who misses their old life. No one talks about Mom on her birthday or on the day she died. Emily reminds her brother, but Jake does not remember much about her. Emily fears that she will lose her precious memories of her mother.

From the moments of childhood where interactions with our peers affirm and challenge our sense of self, as was the case for Josh, to the life-changing tragedies that transform our family relationships, such as the death of Emily's mother, communication patterns serve as the foundation of family identity. Identity is represented in how we answer the question "Who am I?" or "Who are we?" We are challenged in life to understand ourselves as individuals within our web of relationships, including our family.[1] In Chapter 3, we examined the family from various theoretical perspectives; here in Chapter 4, we focus on the patterned meaning-making function of families. Through communication, family members manage their everyday lives and construct their collective identity. In order to understand the significant role that meaning plays in the relational development of identity, we will first address how families use communication to form relational cultures. Second, we will explore how shared meanings are developed through key communication patterns starting with family communication rules. In the remainder of the chapter, we will explore family communication patterns more fully by focusing on family secrets, family networks, and family narratives and storytelling. As you read this chapter, a systems perspective, social constructionism, and narrative theory, which we discussed in the first three chapters, will guide your thinking about families as meaning-making systems that co-construct their realities through communication.

FAMILY COMMUNICATION FORMS AND RELATIONAL CULTURES

Each of us learns to interpret and evaluate behaviors within our family system while simultaneously creating a set of meanings that may not be understood by an outsider. For instance, one of our students shared a family ritual that started in her childhood. On Christmas Eve her father would shout, "Carrot Time!" and the entire family would go out onto the lawn and toss carrots onto the roof of their house. This seemed an odd practice to the various friends (and later, the fiancé) she brought home for the holidays. Although Carrot Time started as a ritual for young children