

“The whole Lippert family was gathered here at the home of my gay brother John and his partner Jeff: me and my partner Enrique, my sister and her husband, my mother (who was still with us then but wasn’t very well), my other brother and his wife, my aunt. What struck me was how just right and ‘normal’ it was that we would all be here, and at the same time, how extraordinary.” Bill Lippert

Tania Kupczak

(OITM contributing writer, web editor, ad manager)

I don’t really have any family Thanksgiving stories because my parents were both immigrants – my dad was from Ukraine and my mom from Austria – and neither of them liked turkey. We didn’t celebrate Thanksgiving as such. Because both my parents had the day off, we’d have a dinner together, but it was usually chicken, and it wasn’t a big deal.

When I got to high school, I’d go to my best friend’s house, and she was the youngest of seven kids. They always had a huge turkey and all the traditional dishes – sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, stuffing, all that.

In 1997 I was invited to Thanksgiving at my friend’s family’s farm in New Jersey. I bought a tofurky, a tofu “turkey.” I packed it in a Styrofoam ice chest with snow and drove down there from Vermont. When I got there at first they were all excited about the tofurky. It hadn’t snowed yet in New Jersey. So when I opened up the ice chest, they were more excited about the snow than they were about the tofurky.

We took the tofurky out and set it on the lawn and had a snowball fight. We did eat the tofurky, but I don’t remember anything about it.

Richard Slappey

(MPM Board of Directors, book publisher)

One of my best Thanksgiving memories is a smell. My grandmother lived in a great big ol’ white house with a kitchen off the back. I had 14 aunts and uncles and 44 cousins – I was the oldest – and we all gathered at grandmother’s house. I enjoyed sharing one of the sleeping porches with my cousins, but being the oldest, I felt that grandmother favored me.

As soon as I heard her stirring out of her room – and that would be before the sun came up on holidays – I’d sneak out and go down the long dark hallway to the swinging door into the kitchen. As soon as I hit the door, I’d be assaulted, engulfed by warmth and the wonderful aromas of all the good things Matt (the cook) and my grandmother were preparing.

Grandmother would be there giving her Christmas fruitcakes – there were always six of

them – one last dosing of brandy. And the sweet, sharp tang of brandy would flow in and around everything else. She’d give me a hug and a kiss and say, “Come sit down, how’d you like to have a treat?” And she’d cut me a big piece of one of those fruitcakes that had just been dosed, put a big smear of butter on it, and toast it until it was crispy and brown – and she thought the alcohol had burned off – and swimming in brandy and butter.

It’s that smell of hot brandied and buttered Christmas fruitcake on Thanksgiving morning that stays with me.

Kristin Pettit

(OITM contributing writer, retired English teacher)

At our Thanksgivings in Miami, we always had to have Hoppin’john for good luck. It was field peas and rice, and we also had it at New Years. Other than that we mostly had the usual stuff: turkey, cornbread stuffing with sausage, these horrible green beans with some kind of gloppy white sauce and mushrooms. My family was from the north, so we did a lot of the traditional foods, like pearl onions in milk sauce and giblet gravy. I always made the gravy. We also had Potch – mashed potatoes with pieces of rutabaga mixed together with butter and real cream. I also always made the cranberries with oranges and limes. And there was booze. Lots of booze.

The men always wore white shirts and ties – it was very formal. And the men always carved. My grandfather was a beautiful carver. The cuffs of their shirts were always rolled up to carve, and then they were rolled back down and the cufflinks went back on. We got to wear a sweater outside – if it got to 65 degrees, that was cold enough for a sweater.

I remember it as a festive time for socializing in the neighborhood. And our extended family was there, grandparents, aunts, my Uncle Louie, and any stray relatives came too. No TV and no radio were allowed. People talked. Or we went to these high school football championship games that were held at the old Rosebowl, before it became Joe Robbie stadium. It was at night, and they had people who would throw fire-batons at half-time.

Later on, when we were

older, it was beach parties and bonfires on deserted keys, and stuff like that.

Bill Lippert

(Samara Foundation director, state legislator)

The thing that sticks out in my mind isn’t from my childhood, but just last Thanksgiving. I remember looking around and noticing that the whole Lippert family was gathered here at the home of my gay brother John and his partner Jeff: me and my partner Enrique, my sister and her husband, my mother (who was still with us then but wasn’t very well), my other brother and his wife, my aunt. What struck me was how just right and ‘normal’ it was that we would all be here, and at the same time, how extraordinary.

Of course John and Jeff would be hosting and Jeff would be cooking the bird and the fixings. We were there in their house in a suburban development outside of Harrisburg Pennsylvania. It was so simple and ordinary and extraordinary at the same time. I stepped back and was able to notice this blessing of ordinariness. And I know that it’s not that way for everyone. I aspire to helping it be that way for everyone.

Al Perkins

(MPM Board of Directors, longtime lesbian activist)

We’ve had some difficult family Thanksgivings in the past, but now we have the Cronos [gathering for women over 40, mostly lesbian and bisexual] Thanksgiving that we have here, I think it’s 11 or 12 years. The most women we’ve had is 35, and because I live in a small condo, everybody sits on the floor. But nobody seems to mind. It’s a vegetarian potluck because I’m vegetarian and I call the shots. We always eat very well. We talk and sometimes we watch a video.

We have it the Sunday before Thanksgiving in order to free people up to go to their families if they want. But for me I think this is the real Thanksgiving.

One year we had a tofu turkey. Another year – it’s potluck, and everybody asks “What should I bring,” and I always say, “Bring whatever.” Well that year, it was all desserts. It was great – we sat around and ate pies and cake all

afternoon. Now it’s pretty balanced.

We’ve watched a lesbian comedian on video – Suzanne Westenhoefer. As always with a large group of people, some eat and go home, they have things to do. But a small group of people hang out and talk. We have some of the same women here every year, and some newcomers. This is the real Thanksgiving for me.

Stuart Granoff

(GreenLanders cartoonist)

When I was young there were two kinds of holidays: those that were American and those that were Jewish. Thanksgiving was an American thing, light and happy, as opposed to the somber High Holy Days. We were American, and my grandparents were immigrants, so we participated and understood and embraced Thanksgiving as Jewish and American.

In school I heard about a nice man called Squanto, but when it came to understanding the brutality of the Discovery / Encounter / Invasion, the tone was more “Oh well!” than “What can we learn about ourselves from this?” I just could not digest some part of the unreflective, presumptuous American experience.

Therefore, when I encountered Thanksgiving, and my father at the head of the table, asking us each to think of what we might be grateful for, that was easy. But I knew all along that most of the Pilgrims did not honor even the idea of religious freedom for all – that the mob, or the town, could turn on a feared and despised group. I have more personal experiences of being feared and despised, and also fearing and despising, now that I’m gay and all grown up.

Otherwise, Thanksgiving was the same as for everybody else, I think. There was a large, long-cooked bird, a sweet potato thing but not with marshmallows, a festive late-in-the-year air. I liked real cranberries with orange and sugar. I returned for this one time every year, and so this most American of holidays (not the giving thanks part, but the mythic origins and bulletin-board construction-paper features) became a real family holiday. Now I spend Thanksgivings with my partner and our own extended family. ▼



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