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**OUT in the MOUNTAINS**

# Thanksgiving Traditions

BY KATIE DYER

**T**his summer I went to my first gay wedding, marking the progressive change occurring in the tradition of marriage. With Thanksgiving approaching I began thinking about the traditions followed on this holiday. How do people decide which traditions to continue, and which to let go of in order to make room for new ones? Who do people spend the holiday with, their family of origin, or their family of choice?

Traditionally, I spend the holiday with my family of origin. Like clockwork my mom makes a green bean casserole just like her mom used to make on Thanksgiving. We have squash with maple syrup, potatoes from the garden, turkey, and homemade stuffing with sausage (a dish I sorely missed during my vegetarian years). My brother makes the cranberry sauce, sitting propped up on a stool in front of the stove stirring and stirring until the last berry pops and the sugar has thickened. We don't usually eat breakfast, but we make appetizers of olives, pickles, deviled eggs, celery sticks filled with cream cheese, and Chex party mix. We get out my grandmother's fancy punch bowl and the matching cups to go along with it. Our traditions are based around the food we eat.

About five years ago, my sister had her first baby, and she stopped coming over to our house for turkey dinner. She began spending the holiday with her husband's family. Initially this change was hard for me to take. I missed her presence and was not comfortable with this break in our tradition. I wanted her to be cooking, to fill her plate, and to lay down with us on the couch after dinner, overstuffed from too much food. I also understood that she had another family to share her time with. Now five years and two kids later, their family comes over after dinner. We

enjoy slices of pumpkin, chocolate cream, and apple pie. My sister is there to laugh alongside me when my brother gets out of control with the whipped cream and he piles a huge spiral on top of his plate.

As I'm getting older, it has become increasingly important to me to acknowledge my family base within my community. For the first time, I am thinking about having a Thanksgiving with my friends in addition to my traditional Thanksgiving with my family of origin. My girlfriend goes down to New York City to spend the holiday with her family, and at this point in our lives it feels odd to not celebrate the holiday together. I can

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feel my old traditions stretching to fit my current needs, and ultimately falling short. Perhaps it's time for a change, and what that change will look like, I still don't know.

I wanted to find out other folks' thoughts on this topic so I asked a few Burlingtonians about their Thanksgiving traditions.

John Pilcher, a gay mid-twenty-year-old, will be having Thanksgiving with his family of origin. For him, one shift in tradition occurs with his family composition. His parents were recently divorced, so this year he will spend the day with his mom and her new boyfriend. John remarked that it's important to him and his mother that they spend the holiday together. His mom even suggested that

they have Thanksgiving without her new boyfriend, but John is supportive of his mom's new relationship, and as such, is open to the change in tradition. One thing remains the same as always: he is still looking forward to cooking cranberry chutney. This dish is more about the smell that fills the air than the actual product, which usually is too tart to eat. John will most certainly uphold his ten-year tradition of eating lasagna for his meat-free Thanksgiving.

Jill Hoppenjans, 30 years old, currently spends the holiday with her partner's parents, who keep a kosher Thanksgiving. Traditionally she makes her own butter for the occasion, but in a kosher meal you do not have dairy and meat in the same meal. As a result, she has let her butter-making tradition go. A tradition she keeps intact, however, is a paper-plate turkey decoration that her little brother made in school many years

ago. On the plate is a poem that Jill knows by heart. She recited it for me on the phone:

*For biscuits high, for pumpkin pie,  
For turkey stuffed with dressing,  
For corn and peas, for all of these,  
We ask dear God, your blessing.*

For whatever you end up doing this Thanksgiving Day, be it keeping old traditions, or creating new ones that better suit your current needs, I wish you a happy and healthy holiday. ▼

*Katie Dyer works as a baker at Great Harvest Bakery, works for COTS, and writes from the Burlington apartment she shares with her partner.*