

My favorite holiday

Cartloads of pumpkins as yellow as gold,
Onions in silvery strings,
Shining red apples and clusters of grapes,
Nuts, and a host of good things.'

Chickens and turkeys and fat little pigs,
Oh, these are what Thanksgiving brings!

For all the years of my childhood, I can remember my grandfather reciting this simple poem on or around Thanksgiving. He always stood up to recite it and used his best, stage voice. He gave special emphasis to the word "nuts," and always finished with a hammy "thank you, thank you, thank you," in the style of Jimmy Durante. I have no idea who authored this colorful ditty, only that he learned it in school. I miss him.

Thanksgiving has always been my favorite holiday. I think it's because it's all about food and family. When I was a kid, we usually spent the holiday at my father's parents' house in Worcester, Mass. I have an interesting group of cousins. Two of them are half Chinese, one is adopted and of Puerto Rican descent and another is adopted and multi racial. My Zayde once sat at the head of the table and commented that he felt like he was chairing a meeting of the United Nations. What we all had in common was our grandparents and a shared love of the holiday.

One of my favorite childhood traditions was walking into my Bubbie's kitchen and having her passing out jobs as soon as we walked in the door. I often got tasked with making the centerpiece—sometimes with other cousins and usually supervised by my Uncle Jeff. Bubbie would give us a pile of fruits, nuts, maybe a tray to put them on and then we'd be off in a corner creating a life-sized turkey or other symbol of the season with the accumulated stuff.

Later in the day many of the cousins would line up against the doorframe between the kitchen and den, where all of our heights were recorded over the years. It was fun to see who'd grown and by how much. As kids, the biggest milestone in my family was always to see if we had grown taller than Bubbie, who topped out at 4-feet 10-inches. Most of us were there by the age of 10. I am not very tall, but I remember being very impressed with myself when I could rest my chin on the top of her head.

Uncle Jeff was the most spirited one in the family—really just a



Flotsam and Jetsam

By Donna Drago

big kid. He always brought dance music and a tape player to every family event and instead of watching football on the couch after dinner, he'd insist that we get up and dance off the calories. Zayde wouldn't participate in the dancing, but he'd sit nearby and watch with a big smile on his face. Bubbie would say he was "kvelling," which, in Yiddish, means something like being overtaken with the joy of the moment.

After Bubbie decided she was too old for holiday entertaining, I took over Thanksgiving and have had the job for close to 20 years. This makes me more or less an expert on putting together the traditional meal.

On Wednesday afternoon, the

day before the holiday, I make my homemade cranberry relish, which also includes orange rind and pineapple. I also put together the stuffing, which is an adaptation of the recipe on the box of Bell's Seasoning—one of my all-time favorite scents. I set the table and get out all the serving pieces to make sure they are clean and ready to go. I take the turkey out of its plastic bag, clean out the giblets and put it on the roasting pan. I rub it with olive oil and some herbs, and then it goes into the refrigerator, covered with foil. It's all ready to go into the oven the next morning. All this takes less than two hours.

On Thursday morning, the turkey goes in first, followed a couple of hours later by the stuffing, which I cook separately, but then add some turkey pan juices over the top near the end.

On top of the stove, I make either mashed sweet potatoes or butternut squash, depending on my mood, and then add a green vegetable—usually either string beans or Brussels sprouts. My mother contributes the mashed potatoes

because I hate to peel potatoes, so I don't have to deal with those. By noon, I am done and ready to entertain guests.

This year, my daughter is in charge of pies, and I am delighted that she wants to take up that job.

I serve hot cider, beer or wine to family members as they stroll

in and give everyone a couple of hours to catch up on family matters before I serve dinner. That's all there is to it.

Have a very happy Thanksgiving with your family and enjoy the quirky traditions that make all of us special and unique.

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Dec. 6 Tree Lighting
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