

A Thanksgiving Tradition

By Gregg McMullin

More than 250 million people across our nation will celebrate Thanksgiving, the holiday that comes on the fourth Thursday of November each year. Thanksgiving has many different meanings to people but to most Americans it's a day to set aside their dietary everyday lives and indulge in a more culinary tradition. It's a day to cook, watch football games on television, visit with extended family members and over eat the gracefulness of our kitchens. But Thanksgiving as we know it today hasn't always been this way. In fact Thanksgiving goes back a few hundred years when times were much simpler.

If you'll remember from studying the Pilgrims in school, a group of colonists had sailed from their mother country to settle in the New World. During their first winter the colonists had a tough time, especially trying to feed everyone since they had arrived too late to grow many crops. During that first winter, many of the colonists died from disease and others to starvation. A local Indian tribe befriended the colonists and showed them how to grow many crops, including corn, and brought other new foods to the settlers.

In 1621, the 53 surviving Plymouth colonists and the Iroquois Indian tribe shared in what many believe was the first Thanksgiving when they came together to celebrate their first harvest. It wasn't your typical celebration since it lasted for three days and it took place towards the end of September. The actual first Thanksgiving feast occurred in the summer of 1623 when the colonists gave thanks for the end of a long drought.

During the American Revolution in 1777, the Continental Congress decreed that the 13 colonies would set aside a day to give thanks for their victory over the British at Saratoga. From then on, it became more of a tradition to celebrate a day of thanks sometime during the year. Abraham Lincoln appointed the last Thursday of November as a day for giving thanks across our young nation. Since then, each President has issued his own Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, designating the fourth Thursday of November as Thanksgiving Day. President Franklin D. Roosevelt made Thanksgiving an official national holiday in 1941 with the approval from Congress.

For many people, Thanksgiving Day isn't just one day but rather a series of days to prepare for and then a few days from which to recover. Many families will travel great distances to visit family and friends. Airports will be crowded and the freeways jammed the day before Thanksgiving. It will be a hectic adventure attempting to get to our destinations, but somehow we'll all persevere. And on the day after, also known as Black Friday, we'll complain that we ate too much and then go to the malls to start our Christmas shopping.

Think back to the Pilgrims and what their day might have been like and our inconveniences won't sound so bad. Contrary to beliefs that first Thanksgiving wasn't celebrated on one day in November, but rather over a three-day period that started on September 28. Since the colonists believed that a thanksgiving was a religious holiday

to give thanks for a specific event, this was more of a time to celebrate the new harvest and give thanks for their bounty of food as well as a way to say thank you to the Iroquois tribe.

For many years, it wasn't a celebrated event each year. The fact is it would be some 10 years after the first one was organized that the colonists would celebrate another day of giving thanks. It really didn't become a yearly tradition until 1817 when the State of New York adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom.

Today we think of turkey as the main menu item to build our feast around. The Pilgrims, on the other hand, didn't exactly think of a turkey as their main celebratory food item. In fact venison, wild fowl, lobster and seal were the main items during the first Thanksgiving feast. During the harvest many of the new vegetables weren't ready or available, so the celebrants dined more on the meats and fish they had hunted and what the Indians had provided.

During that first celebration, there were no pumpkin pies or other pastry treats that we today take for granted because the Pilgrims didn't have sugar and had very little flour. The pumpkins they did harvest were for boiling and were served in a different way. They did however pick fruits like plums, cranberries and dried other types of fruits to enjoy during their meal.

For entertainment during the holiday, we now enjoy watching the traditional pro football games on hi-definition televisions. The National Football League plays games on Thanksgiving and this year, the Detroit Lions will play in their 75th straight Thanksgiving Day game. In the backyard, we'll play the Turkey Bowl football game between friends and relatives or run a 10K Turkey Trot in the morning to work off some extra calories before we sit down to our festive meal in the afternoon.

The Pilgrims' children played their own games such as hide-and-seek, a form of catch that worked their skills for shooting a bow and arrow, leapfrog, and relay races either on land or in the nearby ocean. Children were also encouraged to test their minds with riddles or tongue twisters as a way to take a rest from their chores. The adults would play similar games with the Indians to pass their time during their three-day celebration.

We as a nation have much to be thankful for, so celebrate our Thanksgiving Day holiday with reverence since it is a holiday unlike so many others. With other holidays, there is either a religious or patriotic theme as the focus. For Thanksgiving, it's a day to be thankful for what we have around us, no matter how much or how little we have. This is the day to be thankful for what you have in your life--not for what you want out of it.

So as we sit ourselves down to a time-honored traditional Thanksgiving meal, be thankful for the many things and people in your life because it could be much worse. And remember that as bad as you might think you have it, there are people who have it much worse than you and are giving thanks.

Happy Thanksgiving from your friends at the Herald. •

FOLA - Foundation of Local Art



Songwriter/Singer Ruut.



FOLA Foundation of Local Arts Fundraiser for Young at Art MB Mayor Manhattan Beach Portia Cohen, FOLA Artist Jennifer Hellman, Angela Silverman, FOLA Board Member

Habitat

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which further limits the work she can do. Local help agencies "have lots of programs for senior citizens," she lamented, "but not for people in-between like me." As a result, Hill said her house looked "crummy."

Enter the Habitat volunteers, who were repairing a neighbor's house but ran to her aid when they saw Hill lapse into a seizure. "They called the paramedics; they stayed with me," said Hill. "Those members went the whole nine yards."

After learning more about Hill's predicament, some of the volunteers encouraged her to apply to the repair program. Shortly thereafter, about 20 A Brush With Kindness volunteers showed up on her doorstep and asked where to begin. "I just love them," Hill said of the volunteers. "They became family. We laughed, we ate together. They were so sweet...and they did more than I ever thought they would. I feel so surprised and blessed."

Mullin says Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles is looking for additional volunteers from anywhere in the South Bay to work with A Brush With Kindness, particularly through the holiday months. "For homeowners who may be struggling, the upkeep of their homes usually falls to the wayside," said Mullin, and "the holidays add additional financial pressure."

A Brush With Kindness will give families looking for a meaningful way to spend some of the festive season together or companies, like Architectural Mailboxes, that want to "give back" to their community, a unique chance to "meet and connect" with neighbors and other volunteers, work alongside

homeowners themselves, "get their hands dirty and pick up a few tricks of the trade along the way," she said.

Troyer, whose mother taught her the importance of helping others, believes volunteering with Habitat for Humanity has helped her employees "see the rewards," in helping those in need. That's especially true for those on her staff "not necessarily raised to put others first," she said. When she considers how fortunate she and those around her are "in this economy, to be employed, to be in business," Troyer said she can't help wanting to give a boost to others. Her Compton-based company, she emphasized, "supports that type of behavior."

Farentinos, in turn, credits Troyer for his altruistic focus. "I have no shortage of ideas," he said, but it was his wife's ability to lead and organize his dreams into definite plans of action that gave him the impetus to follow a more service-based life.

"Once you do make an effort to help others, it all has to do with the wonderful feeling you get as you're doing it," he said. Added Troyer: "You'd have to be with a sub-zero heart, not to feel the gratitude that comes back to you."

As for Hill, the grandmother from South L.A., "now, every time I pass by my home, and pass by it again and I grin from ear to ear because it's mine," she said. "My house is gorgeous!"

To volunteer with A Brush With Kindness or recommend a homeowner who needs repairs, visit the Habitat for Humanity's Greater Los Angeles website at <http://www.habitatla.org/abwk.asp> or call (310) 323-4663. •

Amanda Geiger never saw the drunk driver.

Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk.



Photo by Marcel Haez

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