

"Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Welcome to Vintage Americana, exploring and restoring Rural American culture. I'm your hostess, Holly, and this is episode 38, Attitude of Gratitude. We're going to take a look today at the history and traditions of Thanksgiving. And have a bit of discussion about the practice of gratitude, and how it can be eroded by its opposite vice: entitlement. Hopefully, we can head into the holiday weekend with our hearts and minds set to be grateful, give thanks, and enjoy time spent with family and friends.

Let's start by shaking loose the trappings that most of us mentally put on Thanksgiving. Those of us of a certain age can certainly remember elementary school class parties that involved pilgrim hats and bands with feathers made out of construction paper and Jiffy cornbread muffins. Years of mythologizing tend to make us regard Thanksgiving as an unbroken chain of festive meals that have happened like clockwork every year since 1620. And this is just nonsense. The Peanuts special notwithstanding.

Feasts of Thanksgiving have been present in most cultures for centuries. That first celebration of survival did not automatically morph into the holiday we celebrate today. There were Thanksgivings celebrated sporadically and on various dates in different places. But not until Abraham Lincoln did the holiday become a formally recognized celebration - and acquire a fixed date. He was the last in a line of presidents beseeched by Sarah Josepha Hale - editor of Godey's Ladies Book - to institute a national holiday. Given that Lincoln, over his term, issued 9 proclamations for days of Thanksgiving, it's not surprising that Sarah finally succeeded in her 36-year project during his tenure.

Lincoln affixed the date on the last Thursday of November. FDR later moved it to the 4th Thursday, which may seem like a distinction with no difference. But, in those rare years where there is a 5th Thursday in November, retailers complained that the holiday was too close to Christmas. You thought Black Friday was a new thing? Nope. The holiday shopping season goes way back.

So, if it isn't the direct descendent of that mythologized "first Thanksgiving" at Plymouth, neither is the holiday as "brutal," "dark," or "troubling" as a perusal of modern so-called "think pieces" in the media would like us to believe, either. That view attempts to shove the holiday into a shape entirely confined by an ideology that is largely foreign to its

inception and its purpose. In other words, we're not going to go there, either.

Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday. And yes, I am aware that our neighbors to the North celebrate a similar holiday. Much of that is diffusion from the American tradition, dressed up with some examples of "feasts of Thanksgiving" from Canadian history. But Parliament didn't make it official until 1957, so I'm going to stand by my characterization.

To quote O. Henry, author of "Gift of the Magi," among other works:

"There is one day that is ours. There is one day when all we Americans who are not self-made go back to the old home to eat saleratus biscuits and marvel how much nearer to the porch the old pump looks than it used to. Thanksgiving Day is the one day that is purely American."

Wherein we come to the first pillar of Thanksgiving: Going Home. More people head home for Thanksgiving than for any other weekend of the year - if Bureau of Transportation statistics are to be believed. And most of us drive. About 91 percent. Truly, over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's House we go!

The Christmas Classic "Home for the Holidays" is really more fitting for Thanksgiving. Heading home for Pumpkin Pie? Check. The traffic is terrific? Check.

What have I said before? Shared meals are important. And Thanksgiving is purely a shared meal. We may add other activities onto the weekend, but the meal is the on common denominator. Favorite recipes predominate. The menu is much more circumscribed than even Christmas.

And my recommendation would be - resist the temptation to deviate from that pattern. Oh, you can fix something you've never tried before. Or do something new with the turkey. (maybe not fry it. Have we gotten past the silly tradition of attempting to burn down the neighborhood by frying turkeys whole, yet?) My husband likes to take the turkey apart, roast the breast, sous vide the leg quarters, and tuck the rest away to make stock later. But don't throw the whole thing out and attempt to introduce your entire family to a new cuisine at Thanksgiving. Maybe fix a side dish of curried roasted root vegetables. Or forgo the canned cranberry sauce in favor of one made fresh. Let the rest be familiar.

Why? Because we associate food with memory, nostalgia, and contentment. Don't upset the applecart by yanking the tablecloth out from under people who might not be expecting it.

In other words, make a concerted effort, whether you are chef or diner, not to introduce unnecessary conflict into what is intended to be a meal meant for family togetherness. Which means - do not take the advice of those aforementioned pundits and political types to pick fights or "educate" (and I hope you can hear the air quotes) your relations at the table. We can disagree with people and still love them. And if we love them, we can sit down for one meal a year in peace and stick to topics that are not incendiary. Even if you don't even LIKE Uncle Clem - don't provoke him for the sake of your Mom, who is playing hostess this year. Get it?

This need to use family gatherings as a place to pick these kinds of fights (where they are both damaging and inappropriate) is a symptom of that vice of entitlement I mentioned in the intro.

If you feel entitled to shove your own views up the nose of your family members at a holiday gathering, you might need to stop what you're doing for a minute and reassess. What you are doing is the opposite of contemplating what you should be grateful for this year. Instead, it's the embodiment of believing that you have both the right and the self-appointed duty to do it.

In fact, you do not. You're not entitled to disrupt anybody else's holiday. Or regular day. But let's work on just not pushing an agenda for one day of the year.

Before you even leave for the gathering, try to practice gratitude. And make no mistake, it IS a practice. Like anything else, the more you practice it, the better you get. So sit down and make a list of all the things you are grateful for. And while it might very well include things like food, shelter, etc. try to think beyond what your elementary school self might have written down for the class bulletin board.

Are you grateful this year that societal changes pushed you into starting that side hustle that's starting to really pick up? Great! Or that enforced reduction in social activities helped you break some bad habits? Also fabulous. Did you take the time to learn a new skill?

Heck, did you learn something about cooking from scratch? Exercise that gratitude and make a loaf of homemade bread to go with Thanksgiving dinner. Even if nothing earth-shakingly positive has happened, you can probably think of something. I'm grateful I have a stable job, and am not put into the position of making hard choices right now.

I do hope you have the time and ability to participate in "Tie One On Day," the day before Thanksgiving. I talked about it in the last episode, but in short you make a fresh loaf of bread or other baked good, wrap it in an apron, and deliver it to a neighbor who might need a bit of a pick-me-up. Because, really, what better way to demonstrate gratitude than an act of sharing. (Hint: if it seems like your neighbor might be spending the next day alone, consider if you have room to set an extra plate...)

Some families even make a tradition of sharing statements of gratitude before their meal, either by writing them on pieces of paper for someone to read or by going around the table and sharing. If this sounds good to you, do it! I happen to come from a family of raging introverts and such a suggestions would go over like a lead balloon. But, on the other hand, a reading on gratitude and giving thanks is much more in keeping with how we close out the meal. Besides, it gives a little time for dinner to settle before dessert!

Leaving aside the food traditions (if you want the ins and outs of all of those, just turn on the Food Network anytime during the month of November), what other traditions does your family have for the weekend?

For my family (and I'm pretty sure we're not the only ones), Thanksgiving weekend marks the start of the Christmas season in earnest. And, while I'm a big fan of taking the time to enjoy each holiday on it's own (rather than the frankensteinian creation of HallowThankMas pushed by the retail industry), I also remember that the local radio station played nonstop Christmas music the day after Thanksgiving. It would play softly on the kitchen radio as we relaxed for the weekend.

Do you have a family favorite Christmas movie? One of the joys of 9,231 streaming services is that you can probably find it somewhere. Make time over the weekend to settle down and watch it. Whether you cuddle up together in your PJ's for a morning movie or wait until evening and make popcorn and hot cocoa, it's a great way to spend time together in a way that again, minimizes friction and builds memories.

Our Christmas movie? "White Christmas," with Bing Crosby. Which ought to surprise exactly nobody. It's got everything I love - good music, great dance routines, and a sweet, gentle storyline. Plus, Bing. You can't go wrong with Bing. And it includes a lovely little tune that is NOT a big production number. In "Count Your Blessings," Bing and Rosemary Clooney give musical life to the idea of practicing gratitude. I invite you to fire up youtube and give it a listen. I'll drop you a link in the show notes.

When I was young, Friday was the day that a good portion of the family hit the woods for the last weekend of deer hunting. Which served the purpose of emptying out the house a bit for those of us who would rather nap. And gave Mom time and space to remove the turkey leftovers from the carcass. Some went back into the 'fridge for sandwiches. And the rest became turkey croquettes - our traditional after-Thanksgiving leftover meal.

There's another tradition you can incorporate into your weekend: Find a leftover turkey dish and set out a lighter spread. Paper plates are appropriate for this second day nosh. And the traditional end to the meal in our house is, "Who's turn is it to burn the dishes?"

Christmas music, Christmas movies, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, or maybe the Disney Christmas special are all options for non-football viewing families. Or non-football playing families. I'll be honest, this was never a thing for us. Usually, the snow was much too deep for this to be an option.

Since it was such a quiet weekend, it was often one where my grandmother would spend some time teaching us the basics of some sort of craft. Plastic canvas embroidery when I was around 7, crochet when I was a little older. Since she was usually making just a few more things for the upcoming church bazaar, it was in her interest to keep little fingers busy so she could work.

Now, carrying on the theme, it's often a time where I'll work on some Christmas crafting of some sort or another. And try to enlist at least my oldest in a little of the same.

Is your family, on the other hand, more inclined toward hard-charging Black Friday shopping? You do you, Boo. Come together over the dining room table after the big meal and plan your expedition. Make sure to try to take everybody's needs and preferences into account, so that the day ends up without anybody feeling resentful - which is sort of the opposite of Thanksgiving.

I'm going to make a bit of a suggestion for you, too. While it's always tempting to run with the Bulls, so to speak, after that big screen TV from the Big Box retailer, think about whether or not your crew might prefer making this year's Black Friday a "shop local" outing.

You might have to do a little convincing, so float the idea before the holiday itself. And, be willing to concede a stop or two at a major retailer. Sometimes we all have things on our lists that just don't conform to any given plan. But if this sounds like something you and your would enjoy, do some planning in advance. Map out which interesting small businesses are in easy reach of your home base, and of each other. Double check hours - it's probably a good idea to call since there may be special holiday hours AND a lot of these businesses are staffed and run by a couple people - who might have forgotten to update their Facebook page.

Do check that Facebook page, though. Sometimes small specialty shops do interesting - and funny - things for the weekend. I've known a local craft supply store that offers a discount to shoppers who show up before 10 AM, in their PJs. These sorts of things require you to know that's what you have to do, decide if it's worth it to you - and maybe allow time to go home and change before you hit the next place on your list.

Many a delighted gaggle of Black Friday shoppers also stop off for lunch somewhere in their travels. So don't forget to add that to your map. And see if you can skip the chains and also have lunch at a local restaurant. They might even have a gift certificate you can add to your bag for somebody on your list.

When you return home with your treasures you can certainly relax on the couch with leftover Pumpkin Pie from the day before. Or - you could consider continuing the comraderie with a wrapping party. Ask everybody to bring a couple of rolls of paper and ribbons to the gathering, and spread out wherever there is room to wrap those newly-purchased treasures. This is, after all, something many of us regard as something of a chore sometimes. And many hands plus good company and appropriate Christmas tunes make for a much more enjoyable time spent doing it!

For some families, much of the holiday weekend is spent watching football. But for those who aren't as absorbed in the games, it's also a good opportunity to break out some games. I'm dating myself here, I know. But back when I was young, there was but

one TV in the house. Which meant that if it was occupied - by football or anything else, then something else was required to entertain the rest of the family. This is how I learned games like dominoes, Yahtzee, rummy, and watched the grown-ups play Pinochle. I admit, I never did really figure out the rules for that one. Hopefully I won't be disowned by the entire State of Michigan for this one, but Euchre was never on the list. I didn't learn that until high school. However, I am required by the Code of the Michigander to include it here.

But the holiday weekend provided both time without other demands on us and enough people in one space to be able to play some of those games. Snacks were nibbled and laughter ran freely. Everybody stayed up later than we meant to. This is also when a lot of old stories came out. A word to the wise among the younger set - prick up your ears and listen to these. You'll learn a lot of things about your family. Those stories are your history, too. Be grateful for them. In fact, receiving them with a gracious attitude may draw out even more.

The entire weekend is, in fact, a golden opportunity to connect with older relatives and allow them to pass things on. I mentioned my grandmother and her needlework lessons earlier. It can also be a golden opportunity to learn to make that special dish. Ask Aunt Mary to teach you to make her famous chestnut stuffing. Or wait until later in the weekend and get Grandma to make her special Christmas cookies with you. There is no way to lose in this bargain - you get to spend time with her, you get to learn her special tips and tricks (which are usually NOT written on the recipe card), AND you get to go home with a tin of cookies.

If you're visiting another relative for the holiday, try not to leave them with all the hosting effort. Offer to bring something. And, if you're planning a game evening or football watching party the next day, definitely bring something even if your host or hostess says they have it covered. Is there ever a time when more snacks are not better? Or offer to bring a cooler stocked with soft drinks. The refrigerator may be full to groaning with food for the meal before and leftovers afterward. Your hostess may not have thought of it, but may be grateful for the option.

Of course, after a big meal, snacks, cookies, etc. what really feels good is a nice walk. In Michigan, of course, it's not the best idea to go for a walk in the woods during deer season. But a walk along a country road is still pleasant. In fact, there is a word in Dutch - *uitwaaien* - which means roughly, "to take a walk in a brisk wind to clear one's

head." Definitely a good idea after all that food!

So, find your shoes, grab your coat, and go for a walk. If you live in town, or are close to one, stroll through the streets as dusk approaches and see who has their Christmas decorations up. The competition is fierce in some neighborhoods!

I'm going to encourage you to actually spend time with your family this Thanksgiving. Now, granted, sometimes distance and circumstance make that impossible, short of someone propping their iPad up on the table so you can Facetime with everyone. In which case, accept whatever invitation presents itself - don't feel like you are an imposition. Most families would much rather have you sitting at their table between Aunt Mildred and Cousin Bobby than think about you sitting at home alone in your apartment. While it's a family-oriented holiday, that doesn't mean there isn't room for the stranger at the door - so to speak. Hospitality is equally important.

And if you haven't received an invitation - then invite a few people over for dinner yourself. Or, volunteer to serve the meal at a local church or soup kitchen.

Remember that being grateful doesn't necessarily mean that your relatives don't sometimes drive you to distraction. Or that some of them aren't mean-spirited or self-absorbed. Of course they are. We all are.

But I do find it a little distressing that recent cultural trends have elevated the "Friendsgiving" concept into something that takes precedence. If you want to get together with friends because everyone is at loose ends for the holiday - that's fabulous. Some of us, as adults, don't have parents here anymore nor extended family near enough to join.

However, if you're deliberately skipping the family celebration to hang out with "your tribe" - because they affirm all of your opinions and don't ever make you feel badly about anything... I encourage you to reassess.

We're not meant to spend all of our time surrounding ourselves with people who simply agree with us, nodding along like bobble-head dolls. Part of BEING people involves dealing with little conflicts, finding commonality - and loving people even when we disagree with them. A little more of that, especially in our current age, would go along way.

Besides, do you really want to miss seeing your sister's kid trip with the pickled beets and dump them right into Aunt Edna's lap?

I thought not.

Take a minute right now to get out a real pad of paper and a pen. You might write out a list of things you're grateful for. You might write down a memory of a relative, now gone, who meant a lot to you. Maybe there is a holiday tradition your family no longer participate in that you miss (Did you all gather at Grandma's, and now Grandma is gone)? Get yourself a bit into the spirit of Thanksgiving.

Then call someone you're going to spend the day with. Talk about your plans. If you're hosting - ask them to bring something. People like to be asked to participate. If you're a guest, ask if you CAN bring something. Maybe even extra chairs, a card table, or couple of large serving bowls. Or some games! Make a playlist of Christmas music and save it to your phone. Pack your bluetooth speaker (I don't think anybody has kitchen radios anymore, and if they do, radio stations don't play commercial free Christmas music on the day after Thanksgiving, anyway).

Make a cup of coffee, tea, or cocoa, and think about all the things you're grateful for. And everytime your brain starts trying to say, "Yes, but Cousin Merl told me I was fat at Christmas when I was 12..." or, "But I don't have the finances to build a new house like Tony and Gina and I don't want to hear them go on about it..." yank it back onto the path of what you are grateful for.

Nothing is more toxic to your contentment than an ironclad sense of entitlement. And nothing breaks down a sense of entitlement quite like gratitude. Give it a try, free of any "but I deserve" sorts of caveats.

I pray for the Good Lord's blessings on all of you, and safe travels for anyone who will be off to see family. Join hands, let bygones be bygones, or at least set them aside for the weekend. Eat food, enjoy good company, and think about all the good things we enjoy.

I, for one, am grateful for all of you! I appreciate your listening to the podcast and visiting on Instagram. Take pictures of your Thanksgiving spread this year, or your family around the table, and tag me. Share stories of your favorite traditions. Visit the

blog at brambleberry meadow.com. I've got a free apron pattern there for you. This year, the Sunday of Thanksgiving is also the first Sunday of Advent. So, next week we'll talk a little bit about that. Consider it a continuation of giving thanks, and an encouragement to find some quiet time in the holiday hurly burly to reflect.

For now, I have a lot of things to get done before my children start their Thanksgiving break - unexpectedly early due to some sudden changes to the school calendar. Which means I have this morning left to go get supplies for my Tie One On Day apron, among other things. I'm grateful for - a local fabric store that sells quality supplies!

Are you coming?