

Diane's Blog
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Thanksgiving – My Favorite Holiday

Every Thanksgiving while I was growing up, my family did go over a river and through some woods to get to my grandparents' house for Thanksgiving dinner. It was a lively affair with twenty-three around a big, long table, twelve of us being grandchildren. The youngest stared in awe at the big turkey, picked the crusty bread cubes off the top of the extra pan of stuffing, and giggled as we snatched pitted black olives from the relish tray and stuck them on our fingertips. My grandmother noticed every time, and knowingly asked, "So who ate all the olives?" We slyly put our hands behind our backs, shrugged our shoulders, and said, "We dunno, Grandma," and then raced to the big staircase to nibble away. My childhood memories of Thanksgiving dinner are fond indeed – the flavors, the smells, the long buffet of food, and the big piece of pumpkin pie. It has always been my favorite holiday.

As a hungry-for-home-cooked-food college student, I rallied my friends in the dorm to make Thanksgiving dinner together. The small dorm kitchen had a motley collection of battered aluminum saucepans, chipped Pyrex baking pans, charred wooden spatulas, and slightly melted rubber ones. The dishes and silverware were mismatched, but nobody cared. We borrowed a roasting pan and some big mixing bowls from the college cafeteria. Several of us walked to the supermarket with empty backpacks and came back loaded down with a turkey, fixings for stuffing, sweet potatoes, broccoli, fresh cranberries, pumpkin pie filling, and ice cream. To the music of the Grateful Dead, we cooked and sang, laughed and danced, and ate a candlelit turkey dinner that lasted for hours. Red and gold maple leaves had been gathered and stuck into empty beer bottles for table decorations, and bandannas served as napkins. It was perfect.

Nineteen seventy-eight was the year I got married, and it was also the year of the twelve pound turkey for two. What did I know – I was in my first kitchen, and this was our first Thanksgiving as a couple. We were far from family, missed the holiday traditions, and wanted to start our own. The smallest turkey we could buy was twelve pounds – seemed reasonable to us. So did six pounds of sweet potatoes and two bags of bread cubes for stuffing. No one ever told me that a turkey has two cavities (one is more obvious than the other), or that a packet of giblets could be found in the undiscovered neck cavity. After several calls home for advice and many hours of cooking, we dined sumptuously on enough food for about fourteen. As I recall, we dined for many days thereafter on the remains of that same meal.

As my children have grown and are now young adults living in New York, I think back as to how they have helped shape the Morgan family Thanksgiving traditions. They survived the year-of-endless turkey as I wrote my first Thanksgiving cookbook and were, unfortunately, away at college when I wrote this new version celebrating the regional Thanksgiving traditions. Well, at least from my perspective, it was unfortunate, with so many test batches of holiday foods in the kitchen and so few mouths to feed. I'm grateful my husband has an endless appetite for leftovers.

Braving the hordes of travelers during the long Thanksgiving weekend, my children flew home last Thanksgiving, along with my son's girlfriend, to join us in celebrating this fall harvest feast.

They have just booked their flights home for this upcoming holiday. Nothing delights me more. Last year, I had many helpers in the kitchen, fully engaged in wanting to roll pie dough, learn to make stuffing, and prepare our family favorites – Fennel Gratin, Streusel-Topped Sweet Potato Casserole, Green Beans with Shallot Crisps, and, of course, Blueberry-Cranberry Double-Crusted Pie. In the background old movies played on the little TV in the kitchen, in particular, The Wizard of Oz. It was a day to remember and cherish. Our close friends joined us for dinner and it was a lively evening around the dining room table – as so many Thanksgivings have been. Two weeks ago I lamented the passing of summer, but now, with all the fall produce at the market and the leaves starting to turn, I'm ready to plan this year's Thanksgiving dinner. I don't think it's too soon.