

Happy Holidays

Twisted Turkey Traditions

By Lou Fancher

Thanksgiving amplifies the oddest quirks of the American family. Glorifying our love affair with bountiful buffets—consumed in preparation for watching televised sports to excess—the holiday is prime territory for peculiar, even perverse traditions.

My own fondest memories were formed early on. After gorging for hours, my three sisters and I would lie, like four Midwestern sardines, close together on the living room floor. Mom, or less often, dad, would shoot pictures to show our bellies, rising like miniature Mount Diablo's from underneath our shirts. Our stomachs' altitude was proof of the good meal they'd provided.

Although there are no photos to help me recall the process, making stuffing is stamped just as irrevocably on my Thanksgiving Day mind. Again, the four of us would join forces: wadding soft, fluffy Wonder White Bread into balls, stuffing our cheeks to bursting and laughing hysterically as we began to resemble chipmunks, more than girls.

I might have loved stuffing, for all the fun it generated, if it wasn't for the Family Recipe. My mother would take a perfectly delicious blend of bread, spices

and butter, and ruin the entire thing with just a few stalks of celery. I even *liked* celery—raw and filled with peanut butter. But cooked? The mushy, fibrous wedges, despite my filtering, would somehow find their way into my mouth. Spitting wasn't an option, so I resorted to a gagging sound, followed by a rapid infusion of milk, which usually earned me a stern "Louise!" from my otherwise easy-going father.

But one year, as dad delivered a portion of turkey onto my plate, the meat slipped and submerged itself in my glass of milk. Mysteriously mortified in front of visiting relatives, he shushed me. To my great delight, I was allowed to refuse the celery-laced stuffing a few minutes later: thus leaving my milk intact, the turkey hidden, and my father's slip, undiscovered.

Stuffing also prompted an embarrassing moment when I became a parent. My son, about 5 years old, entered the kitchen, just as my husband was exploring the inner cavities of our bird. "Mom! Mom!" he cried in dismay, "Dad has his hand stuck in the turkey's butt! Come help!" While that was a funny moment, his insistence on repeated retellings of the story, at full volume,

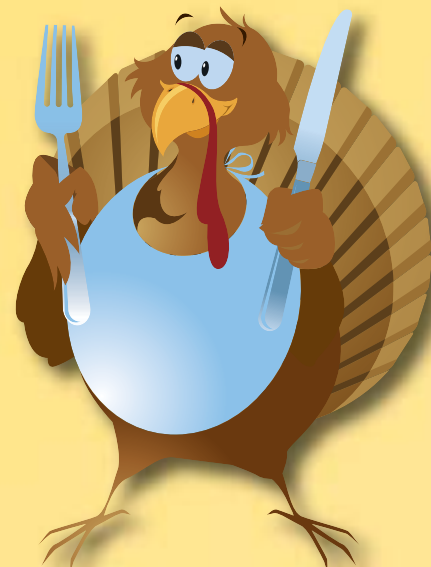
whenever and wherever the occasion suited him, was less amusing.

As Thanksgiving approached, I began to worry that my memories and family traditions placed me in an odd, freakish category. As usual, I turned to the internet for comfort. Here is what I found:

Most Frightening Turkey Recipe

Deep fried turkey*, which requires gallons of peanut oil, and a very, very large stockpot, is frightening on many levels. If you don't burn yourself on all that boiling oil, the saturated fat content may send your cholesterol levels to the moon (although there seems to be some disagreement on the actual fat content of a deep fried turkey.)

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I've been thinking this week not only about the things in my personal life for which I am thankful, but also about why I'm thankful for Lamorinda. I started to write about the many people who make our community work; how nice it is to chat easily with the people next in line at the grocery store, whether you know them or not; how wonderful it is that all of the parents at the park look out for all of the kids, not just their own; and the heart-warming culture of philanthropy. It sure wasn't like this where I grew up. Soon my ramblings began to resemble a holiday carol – people smiling in passing, wishing happy holidays to total strangers, offering help to those in need...

So there you have it. We live in a place where the holiday spirit thrives year 'round. Are we privileged? You bet. Though some of us are more privileged than others, the great thing about Lamorindans is that we all do what we can, and we do it all the time. Every issue of the Lamorinda Weekly, including this one, illustrates my point.

Since I can barely carry a tune, carol-writing is probably not my forte. So instead, begging your indulgence, I'd like to tell you a bit about some of the women for whom I am thankful. They write for you. With dedication to their craft and our community, and in their own unique voices, they raise this newspaper to a higher level. Three have been with us since our first, somewhat challenging, year.

French by birth, Sophie Braccini writes in her second language. She has the uncanny ability to be in three places at the same time, and her articles report details and nuances that many would miss. Her French sensibilities mystify me at times and I may never completely understand her, but she is a warm and loving friend, a charming hostess, a substitute teacher, an active volunteer, and the doting mother of three children.

Andrea Firth is also a local mom, with teenage twins, who grew up in the newspaper business. A medical writer by trade, it took a little while for her to find her voice. She can observe the most contentious situation and distill it down to a fair and factual report. When faced with an issue that seems unfathomably complex, Andrea is the woman for the job. She is also an avid runner and would do anything and everything for her kids or to help a friend.

Cathy Tyson and her husband not only raised their two boys (now in college) in Lamorinda, they grew up here themselves. Equally at home chatting across the garden fence or tennis court, Cathy's cut-to-the-chase style informs our pages and her signature wit shines through in almost everything she writes (she's also the genius behind our most memorable headlines and police blotters). She is a woman of grace, a friend in any weather, and is more comfortable in her skin than anyone else I know.

There are many others who make this newspaper what it is; Lucy Amaral, Lou Fancher, Jean Follmer, Caitlin Graveson, and our terrific photographers, columnists and sports writers. You'll get to know more about them in the future.

I usually refer to working for the Lamorinda Weekly as 'community service.' None of us makes a living doing this. Whether it's a hobby, a vocation or a calling, we love what we do and we do it because we believe in our mission – to inform and to celebrate life in Lamorinda, for which we are all very thankful.

From all of us at the Lamorinda Weekly – we wish you peace and joy this holiday season!

-Lee Borrowman, Editor

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