

Community Comment
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Sam Pennisi

Thanksgiving

With so much attention and media time given to the election since the first of the year, I truly am surprised at the arrival and departure of Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is probably my favorite holiday. It's about families gathering together in gratitude for what we have. Let's face it, we spend too much time fretting about what we don't have the rest of the year.

A tradition that we created without really trying was to get together with friends we more or less raised children with and now talk about grandchildren. We have known these friends for a long time and enjoy their company. My oldest daughter is a little miffed that we don't spend the whole day with her family but we do still have half a day together. This tradition started when our kids went off to college. Our day is filled with the chaos of a family with young children in the afternoon, and a quiet adult dinner in the evening. That is a great holiday.

Many cultures have long traditions of celebrating a good harvest. Ours is a little unusual in that it combines the harvest with the recognition that we know how tenuous the first families whose goal it was to build a life on this continent really was. Many didn't even survive the voyage from Europe. Much of the reason for their survival to a first harvest was because of the natives. And we know that relationship was strained at best. But they did survive and I know people that are descended from that group. And the rest is history with all the negative and positive events along the way.

I am grateful for their spirit.

My grandfather came in 1906. He came through Ellis island in New York. He settled in Omaha Nebraska and worked in the shoemaking industry. He claimed to have had some training in Sicily, but he was only 16 and lived in a small, rural village. He and his younger brother each owned their own shoe repair shops and became part of the middle class in America. They did this with hard work and risk taking but they succeeded. They understood that the way up in this country was education. If my Mother had been a boy, she would have gone to college. But that was reserved for the boys in our family. Her younger brother would have gone to college, and started just long enough to earn the right to become a 90 day wonder when he enlisted for duty in World War Two. He was a talented musician and made a career of it after being wounded in France at the Battle of the Bulge.

My parents made it clear my brother and I would go to college. I expected this from my mother but my dad only got through the fourth grade. I don't know where this vision came from for him. They couldn't help much but they encouraged us every step of the way. They were right. Higher education opened more doors for us than any other track

would have. Today, both my daughters teach in Arcata. They are making a difference for other kids who are motivated to make their way and contribute to this great land of opportunity. They are a product of public schools, teach in public schools, and carry on the tradition of the founders of this country.

Ah Thanksgiving. I have a lot to be thankful, and grateful, for.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.