

Finding Thanksgiving

Newly arrived in the USA
Embedded in my new Texan family
The accents, a BBQ place with a bear at the entrance,
A family of large hearts -
And Thanksgiving.

Turkey in November
(where I came from it's a December bird)
Everything pumpkin - and the pies.
(My first one made directly from the can into the ready-made crust.
My Texan husband laughingly asking where the rest of it was –
The milk, the eggs, the spices?)

Anxious plans for who, where and when and how?
Travelling before the day, on the day, after the day?
How far and for how long?

Bemused by the 'Football'
Endlessly playing on the Television.
Amazed at mountains of food
Endlessly regathered on the tables.

Women in the kitchen, men in the television room
Children straggling from place to place.
Finally, everyone heaving themselves back home –
Or directly to bed from the sofa.

Thanksgiving – Who is the giver?
For what the thanks?
From where the holiday
And for whom?

Years later, freed from the family thanksgiving,
(My daughter with her Dad and the Texan family)
I spend all day in Powells' bookstore
Far from the world, surrounded by books and other Thanksgiving refugees.
We nod briefly and bury ourselves back in a book with a cup of coffee
Against the falling, foggy, Oregon November night.

Or invited by kindly, concerned friends
To sit at food-heavy tables with families.
Football bursting from the television
Careful conversations to avoid controversies.

It's not Christmas but closely related
At least they haven't worked out how to make you buy gifts
– yet.

Asking again -
Thanksgiving – Who is the giver?
For what the thanks?
From where the holiday
And for whom?

Then, one year
Cautiously, carefully, consciously
Invited
To sit at the table with some new friends.

A quiet gathering arrived.
5 couples with long histories,
A middle-aged man and his young daughter
A man older than all of us
- and myself.

Peaks of energy - everyone in the kitchen.
No television to be seen (or heard).
Laughter at the 'Peas and Onion' dish – my version
(Later a sought-after favorite if only to recall the first effort.)

Food on the table, we sit.
The couples side by side, peaceful in their company
The father and his little daughter, holding her Raggedy Annie
The old man at one end
- and myself.

Quiet descends.
We breathe.
Look at the one sitting beside us.
One by one, we name what our gratitude is.

- To the reservation who took me in when I was adrift and alone.
- Gratitude for this child and the chance to be a good Father this time.
- For the patience and kindness you've shown.

- For the one who stayed with me through the madness.
- For being here today when so many cannot be.
- For the buddy who saved my life, then lost his.

- Gratitude for laughter after long nights of despair.
- For the stories dug up from the blackness and then given away to the light.
- For all the tears shed that we shared.

- For the children and grand-children I've had.
- For the hope that lights from your love.
- Thank you for being my Dad.

I don't have to ask -

Who is the giver?
For what the thanks?
From where the holiday
And for whom?

I have been privileged to meet with Gratitude
Sitting right here, at this table.
With people whose experience of gratitude is
Profound, wordless and painful.

Scarred with deep courage
Knowing life's a precarious, finite thread
They rescued this particular holiday
With gratitude for every heart-beat shed.

My gratitude is for
Every heart-told story
Every listener in compassion
Every life expansion
Every hope, and love whispering
Gratitude's confession.

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