



# Thanksgiving

## Our Way

By Brette McWhorter Sember

For many families, Thanksgiving means an extended family get-together, piles of food, adult and child tables, football games on TV, a living room full of stuffed bellies and a kitchen bustling with cooks. For many years, my husband and I participated in this tradition. However, we always hated it. One side of the family was always insulted that we would not be attending their celebration. One year we tried to cover all the bases, eating dinner at one house and dessert at another. We vowed never to do it again though, after being asked by a relative at the second house to wait in the living room until the family was ready for dessert.

Thanksgiving was always the holiday that made us grimace. We never looked forward to the long meal, the frequently bad food and the thought that we would have to do a repeat performance in a few weeks for Christmas. Once we had children, it all became more complicated and distasteful. We continued to go, but never felt we were celebrating anything.

My lack of attachment to Thanksgiving as a holiday began as a child. I never felt there was anything important about it. In my family, the day seemed to be about who could make the strangest stuffing (oyster, currant, pork, etc.) or the most non-traditional pie. It was necessary to have too many hors d'oeuvres, eat dinner later than seemed reasonable and stay at the table forever.

We never had mashed potatoes or pumpkin pie because my mother disliked them. There were no discussions of thankfulness or the origin of the holiday, it was just another long night with relatives. I came to dread Thanksgiving and that feeling followed me until my husband and I took a stand.

When our first child was two years-old, we decided to stay home for Thanksgiving. We went "cold turkey", so to speak. It was a completely novel concept for us. We declined all invitations, dealt with the hurt feelings and stood our ground. We chose our own menu (traditional stuffing, real

mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie), cooked our own small turkey and ate in our jeans and sweats. We didn't worry about good dishes, cloth napkins, pantyhose or candles. Nobody had to sit and watch an elaborate turkey carving ritual — we hacked it up in the kitchen with an electric knife. Our kids could get up when they were done. The TV stayed off. The day was a huge relief. We actually felt relaxed! After dinner we began unpacking the Christmas decorations. Thanksgiving was a warm, comfortable beginning to the holidays and not just another interminable evening to tolerate. We really felt ready to

face the coming season.

We were so happy with how the day went that we have continued and expanded the tradition. Thanksgiving has evolved into one of our favorite holidays — a day to focus on one another. We don't leave the house unless it is to play outside. We watch the parade and cook with our kids. While the turkey roasts, we play games and relax. As we eat, we talk with our children about what we are thankful for. We really listen to each other and feel completely relaxed. Every other holiday, we have obligations — somewhere to go or someone to see. Now we visit our extended families on those occasions.

Thanksgiving has become a true holiday for us. We have no obligations to other people on this day and it is a way to start the holiday season off in a gentle, calm, family-oriented way. We focus on the things in life we are most grateful for and devote the day to them. Our tradition has also helped us to really feel that we, in and of ourselves, are a Family — a self-sufficient unit that stands by itself and deserves to be honored. Thanksgiving has become a day to celebrate our connection with each other.

While other families may travel cross-country, sit at long tables, eat food they don't like and chat with relatives, we give Thanksgiving to ourselves and our children and find we truly do have reasons to be thankful. ♦

