

THANKSGIVING

It's been half a lifetime since I spent the holidays with my original family. I was 25 when my parents started the long and fractured process of divorcing. I think if I had only known that last Thanksgiving would be the last Thanksgiving, I would have paid more attention.

Not long ago, my favorite aunt passed away. She was the one who always hosted Thanksgiving, who always saved for me the critical job of making the onion dip. The Maker Of The Dip was a position in which I took great pride, because it started before I was tall enough to see the top of the counter and lasted through my young adulthood. When I moved away from Chicago in my thirtieth September, newly married and incredibly homesick, I called her and my uncle that first Thanksgiving and could barely choke out the words: "I wish I was there making the dip."

I think it's human nature to want to go back, to get a do-over, especially when things ended poorly. There was much broken in my family that could not be repaired, at least not in an earthly timeframe. Most of the people I celebrated with all those years ago have passed; others are estranged, with more than just miles between them. During these most wonderful times of the year, I often have a foot planted in the past and future, missing the now. But this present-blindness causes such useless loss. I practice stopping and thinking of the strangers who've become like family, who consider us kin. I think of the care of the C/Kathies, my friend Bonnie's quick, dark wit, Mollie's generosity, Melinda's grace, Alan's conversations, and Colin's and Brian's home repair help. I think of my girl having a way different foundation than I did, by the grace of God, and how her life will be different. I think of what we've built and survived—our little family of two.

So, even as I have the old snapshots scrolling through my head—the black-and-whites of childhood holidays and people long gone—today one of us will be cooking stuffing in our jammies, and one will be eating it for breakfast, also in her jammies, while watching the Macy's parade. We've carved out our own traditions over the years. And I will also silently drink a toast to my aunt Patty, the great trainer of the Dip Maker, and ask to be just slightly more mindful of today. Though I love it, this season can hijack my attention so I focus on what I seemingly don't have.

I'm praying to see what I do.

Which holiday traditions have you carried over to your kids, and which have you left behind?

Whom do you consider "family" these days?

One Verse for Thought:

Go back to your homes, and prepare a feast. Bring out the best food and drink you have, and welcome all to your table, especially those who have nothing. This day is special. It is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve over your past mistakes. Let the Eternal's own joy be your protection!

—Nehemiah 8:10, VOICE