

Castle.Arden.Celebration.v1

[00:00:00] " A True American Thanksgiving" by Arden Castle

[00:00:07] Thanksgiving is my family's favorite holiday. Celebration spans two days in centers around spending time with my grandmother and cousins. Cooking is a big part of our tradition. And each of my cousins are in charge of a different part of the meal. Before dinner, we all join hands and share the things that we're thankful for. The holiday is full of new faces and new traditions every year, but that is what makes it special to us.

[00:00:33] The day before Thanksgiving, my cousin sister, and I go to my grandmother's house to prepare the ingredients. She cooks us dinner and we go over the main dishes and sides on your yellow sticky note. My grandmother triple checks the list and puts us to work as soon as we're done eating dinner. While my cousin makes the cranberry crunch, I dice the vegetables for the stuffing. The process used to take hours, but as we've grown up, we manage to finish prepping in under an hour.

[00:01:00] [00:01:00] We return in the morning to walk through Downtown Sunnyvale. In the cafe at the corner of the street, we all order hot chocolates to keep our hands warm. My grandmother carries a brown paper bag, and we begin hunting for the best fall leaves strewn across the street and in the gutters. She insists on checking each one before adding it to the bag. When we find enough leaves to decorate the house, she takes us home for the final prep.

[00:01:24] The appetizers are placed on plates and dishes are lined up to be popped in the oven. I walk through the living room and carefully placed the leaves around the room. My grandmother gives us the final approval and then we all go home to get dressed up.

[00:01:39] In the afternoon, my family begins arriving at my grandmother's house. Everyone brings the same dish that they bring every year, but the consistency is what makes it exciting. After mingling and enjoying each other's company, my grandmother ushers us all to find seats at the table. We sit and fold out tables and chairs in a long line through the middle of her living [00:02:00] room. Before serving ourselves, we all join hands and go around the table sharing what we were thankful for this year. Family and health are two of the most common answers, and my aunt and grandmother always shed tears of love. By the time we get around the table, the food is cooled down, but I love that we were willing to sacrifice having a hot meal to take a few minutes, to be thankful.

[00:02:21] After dinner, my grandmother brings out musical instruments and games. We have a "hootenanny" and play kazoos and bongos and other plastic instruments out of tune. Then, " we switched to games and people break off into smaller conversations. The night dies down and everyone jokes about "rolling home" because they're so stuffed. We all help do the dishes and take leftovers home to enjoy for the rest of the week.

[00:02:43] This celebration is something that we look forward to all year, and that is because we've made it our own. It is a time to be thankful for the people that have made it into our lives and to share a meal with those who are valuable to us. Since all my aunts had been

remarried at least once, there are always [00:03:00] new people at the table and people that we may never see again. Our family lacks a consistent structure, but we've used this holiday to embrace it and widen the definition of family.

[00:03:11] In a broader sense, our Thanksgiving is uniquely American in the way it has evolved and become what we want it to mean. The first Thanksgiving has been documented by the colonizer and fits into the master narrative: it meets our needs for celebration and cohesion. My family's multi-day celebration is an extension of American culture. Being a predominantly White family, we have the power and freedom to construct and practice traditions in ways that align with our values. Many people do not have this freedom, especially native Americans. I've struggled with this American holiday because of the inherent narrative that frames this holiday as a success and tradition that is able to be continued without reconsideration.

[00:03:52] Specifically, Thanksgiving makes me think of bell hooks. When she says "to be in the margin is to be part of the [00:04:00] whole, but outside of the main body," I understand this to mean that Native Americans are painted as part of the story of Thanksgiving, but not as the center of the story.

[00:04:10] In kindergarten, we put feathers on brown construction paper to dress up as "Indians" and wore button up shirts to dresses as pilgrims. Our dress up celebration was told in jest, but from the perspective of the center. In addition to being offensive, it is painfully minimizing. I can only summarize this feeling through bell hooks line, "speaking about colonization and the reality of what it means to be taught in a culture of domination by those who dominate."

[00:04:39] As much as I love Thanksgiving in my family, I understand our ability to adapt the narrative just as the colonizers have. I can assume that our celebration is roughly similar to other Americans, but we have added our own elements that make it meaningful to us, while still calling it Thanksgiving. The power of naming and the power of deciding [00:05:00] what counts as a Thanksgiving celebration is a reminder of the social power that my family has and the subtlety of privilege.