
Thanksgiving: The Best Holiday

By Harvey R. Heller

I have used this space to tell stories about who I am and to introduce you to our group. My stories aren't about me, but about people and events that have had a profound impact on me. For our last installment of 2015, I have chosen the obvious.

I have always loved Thanksgiving. It marked the beginning of a holiday season that concluded on New Year's Day. As a child, we would travel from Grand Rapids, Michigan to South Bend, Indiana to be with my grandparents. They spoiled me to excess. I ate whatever my heart desired and enjoyed the company of my extended family. I never wanted to leave. (I may have mentioned not wanting to leave my grandparents' home in a prior writing, but so be it. They were the greatest.)

I always thought it would be great to go to a restaurant for Thanksgiving. We did that once after my grandparents passed away and it stands out as a hollow holiday experience.

We now celebrate Thanksgiving at my sister-in-law Debbie's home. I've gone from packing a bag and traveling to Indiana to walking 3 houses away! This is truly a special day. Our children and grandchildren come in from New York for the long weekend. The rest of our extended family comes from near and far. The email discussion about this much anticipated holiday starts about a month before the actual event. As I am sure is the case in most families, a dish is assigned to every family. These assignments have been carefully vetted over the years to ensure that the food is superb.

It all starts at around 4:00 with great appetizers and wonderful conversation. Dinner of course follows. I only pick at dinner because I hold out for the inevitable incredible array of homemade desserts that are yet to come. More about this later.

Between dinner and dessert is the annual family bingo game. The family bingo game has 30-40 participants and is a virtual contact sport. My late father-in-law was the original bingo caller. After he passed away in 1998, the reigns were

turned over to Debbie's father, Sam. When Sam passed away a few years ago, I got the call! This was not an easy decision for me because during bingo I had always taken a quick nap. No more. I am now on the firing line and I love it. I call the numbers by their nicknames, create nicknames based on the grandchildren, and even test the crowd by calling some numbers in Yiddish. The atmosphere gets to a fever pitch each year at the peak of which I invariably get accused of palming a bingo ball or some similar form of cheating. (I'm an honest caller but, as I said, it's a contact sport with this crowd!)

Then comes the moment I've been waiting for: dessert. A parade of homemade food fills the table and the line forms. I am literally overwhelmed. I feel as though I can't count the number of pies, homemade ice creams, rice pudding, cookies, cakes, and oh yes plenty of fruit (which only gets a slight nod!)

This holiday is so great because there is no agenda such as a religious observance. It is a multigenerational gathering where everyone enjoys the time together. (Truth be told, there was an angry food fight one year that involved a waste of some truly great rice pudding, but what can you do?)

Those of you who have gotten this far in my rambling must also truly appreciate just how special this time of year is. It's not the gluttony of the day that makes this my favorite holiday, but the warmth of being with family and friends.

Thanksgiving and the spirit of the holiday marks the beginning of the end-of-year holidays: Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and the other holidays that follow. These holidays all seem to engender an interpersonal civility that is not as pervasive at any other time of year (with the exception of the rice pudding debacle noted above!). Lawyers from the plaintiff's bar and defense bar gather at various watering holes, leave their advocacy at the office and greet each other with a warmth that is often absent in our adversarial system.

Although our adversarial system, designed to find the truth and secure justice, requires that litigators are opponents, the spirit and civility of this time of year should provide myself, my colleagues and adversaries with a perspective that we should not forget once the new year is upon us and we are back at the tasks for which we have been trained.

No real lesson here, just a perspective born of nearly 40 years as a lawyer. I hope you enjoy this time of year.

My partner Richard Mitchell has written an [interesting article](#) containing his perspective on arbitration. Recently, the arbitration process has come under some scrutiny. Rick provides our perspective.

We will not publish in December but look forward to catching up with you in January. Thank you for reading this and for your continued positive feedback.

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