

“Thank-filled Memories”

Thanksgiving has never been my favorite holiday celebration. I don't find parades interesting; although my mother has always loved to watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. Traditional Thanksgiving Day foods are fine, but with the exception of mashed potatoes they were not foods I have wanted to gorge on. Then there are the football games which seem intended to put people to sleep even if they did not overeat. Yet these are games that my sister loves to watch.

Despite the flat feelings I have for this holiday there are a two memories I have that stand out. One has to do with walnuts. The neighborhood in which I grew up had once been a walnut orchard. In the vacant lot across the street from my house were several prolific old walnut trees. During the summer my siblings and I would climb them and each fall we would take bushel baskets across the street and fill them with walnuts. By Thanksgiving Day they had dried and we would spend the morning on the pavement in front of our garage cracking the shells and picking out the meat. There was not much about it that was fun. It was hard work for little hands, but what was special was I got to do the work with my dad.

My father was not home a lot when we were children. He worked six or more days a week and twelve to fourteen hours a day. But on Thanksgiving morning we had him all to ourselves. Of course, just about anything I did that involved being with my father was special. It did not have to be fun or entertaining as long as I was with him. I admired him and I wanted to be like him.

My other special Thanksgiving Day memory is more recent. It actually happened just a few years ago. For some reason I was able to get home to Fredericksburg early on Thanksgiving Day. I am not sure why, but my brother suggested we go explore the land that had been the nursery business my father ran. In the years since he had to stop running the business, the land had become overgrown. Areas that used to be open fields are overgrown with tall trees and vines. There is not much to remind us of the rows of small shrubs where we chopped weeds every summer for much of our youth.

That afternoon my brother and I roamed the familiar, yet unfamiliar, ground we worked as teens. We took ourselves back through memories that we share with no one else. We remembered the quirks of the men with whom we worked, other youngsters who worked with us, the hot summer days, the AM radio, thermoses of iced tea, and so much more. I have never felt closer to my brother in my entire life. It is amazing and wonderful, because when we were working those fields I never thought my brother would end up being my best friend.

Despite my blasé attitude toward all that is supposed to make Thanksgiving Day memorable—parades, food, and football games—I have come to be thankful for the gift of simple time spent with my father and my brother; two men who touched me through simple, unadorned activities. Two men who gave me the gift of their presence in ways that they may never have realized were so important to me. Those times are what I give thanks for this Thanksgiving Day and every day.