

AT THANKSGIVING, GRATITUDE FINDS ITS WAY HOME

By **Dr. Peter F. Folan**
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Every Thanksgiving, as kitchens fill with the scent of roasting turkeys and cornbread cooling on the counter, I'm reminded that the dining room table has always been more than a place to eat. It's where we learn who we are—where gratitude takes root and love takes shape. In my family, our table didn't just serve meals; it built our home.

For as long as I can remember, Thanksgiving meant gathering in my parents' house on Munroe Street. I can still see myself as a kindergartener, while my father, a World War II Navy veteran, and my mother, the Martha Stewart of Munroe Street, welcomed family, friends, and neighbors. Everyone was invited, and somehow there was always room for one more.

My mother always wore a fancy apron and kept a dishtowel draped over her shoulder. She was the last to sit—only when everyone else had what they needed. The china gleamed, the Waterford sparkled, and the silver was polished. Around that table, we shared stories, laughter, and the kind of lively debate that usually ended in grace.

Over the years, that table witnessed every chapter of our

lives—birthdays, graduations, Christmas mornings—as if the chairs remembered our names. There were solemn gatherings too: quiet dinners before each of my parents' funerals, when the air was heavy, but love held us up. Our table knew our joy and our sorrow. It was where we laughed until we cried and cried until we could laugh again.

When I married and had children, life came full circle. I bought my childhood home when my oldest was in kindergarten. A new table, the same dining room—the same rhythm of gratitude and belonging continued. But this year is different. For the first time in forty-five years, my family won't celebrate Thanksgiving in that house. We moved. The room that held so much of our story now belongs to someone else.

Change, as it always does, tugs at the heart. There's an ache in closing a door for the last time, but I've come to understand that a house is only the frame—home is what we carry within it. The love that filled those rooms doesn't stay behind; it travels with us. Gratitude turns any house into a home.

When we host others this season, let's remember we're called not just to feed them, but to honor who they are. True hospitality

isn't about impressing anyone; it's about making room for them. My mother never sat down until everyone else had what they needed. Her generosity inspired belonging.

Gratitude was something she practiced long before I understood the word. It wasn't a moment before the meal; it was the way she moved through the world. Even when life was difficult and she battled leukemia, she still set her table with care. Thanksgiving isn't something we feel only when life is easy. It's a daily habit that helps us see how much good surrounds us.

This Thanksgiving, I'll sling a dishtowel over my shoulder, and we'll gather around a new table, laughing over old stories and sharing new ones. Though the table may be different, what gathers around it hasn't changed: the people, the laughter, and the way love builds a home.

As we bow our heads before we eat, I'll think of my mother making sure everyone was welcomed. Her hope was always to set a table where each person belonged and felt cherished. Her love built a home and a family, for which I am deeply grateful. With every meal we share this year, may gratitude find its way home, reminding us of who we are and how we belong.

Happy Thanksgiving.