

Happy Thanksgiving everyone! At home in the United States this week, people are decorating their homes for Thanksgiving, or “Turkey Day,” that is celebrated every year on a Thursday at the end of November. Thanksgiving is a seemingly unimportant holiday, but its secular traditions have been passed down for generations by most Americans. Particularly in my family, it is one of the most important holidays of the year!

Thanksgiving is a holiday for giving thanks, and as the story goes, it traces back to the first Pilgrims who established our country. When the first settlers arrived, they had a hard time adjusting to the new terrain and the new climate, they had trouble with agriculture and there wasn’t enough food so many people died. Supposedly, the Native Americans worked together with the Pilgrims and showed them how to cultivate food, and the first Thanksgiving was a commemorative feast for both Native Americans and the new settlers to celebrate their unified success. To this day, Thanksgiving is always meant to be a big feast to give thanks for the friends and family that we love.

In some families, Thanksgiving is just another day when everyone gets together for dinner. However for my family and many other families as well, Thanksgiving is the only time a year when the whole family gets together. The United States is so big that even though my family all lives on the East Coast, it sometimes can take 10 or 12 hours to get from one place to another by car. Because of the distance, and everyone’s busy schedules, I don’t often see all of my aunts and uncles, cousins, or even my grandparents. This is the one time of the year when my Mother’s whole family gets together at my Aunt’s house to relax and enjoy each other’s company. Thanksgiving also marks the beginning of the Christmas season. Once Thanksgiving is over, it is time to break out the Christmas decorations and start listening to Christmas music for the next month.

The most important thing about Thanksgiving is seeing my family, but since we have all been going to the same place for about 15 years now, every part of the long weekend has become a tradition. We always have the same food: turkey, cranberry sauce, stuffing, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, green bean casserole and corn. It is not Thanksgiving if any one of these items is missing. And you can’t forget dessert! There are always a few pies that my mother and grandmother make on Thanksgiving morning, including Mince Meat pie, which most of us don’t like! I don’t know what is in Mince Meat pie, and I never want to eat it, but Thanksgiving wouldn’t be the same if it wasn’t on the table with everything else and if there wasn’t an argument about how it is the most disgusting dessert ever made. Arguably the most important part of the meal is leftovers. It is such an obscenely large feast that there is tons of food left over,

and we always eat turkey sandwiches for the rest of the long weekend until all the food is gone.

It is hard to explain why Thanksgiving is so important. For someone who has never celebrated it, it seems to have no real meaning. But just being together with my whole family to relax for a whole weekend is a tradition that I want to go on forever. Since yesterday was a national holiday in Japan, one of my American friends who lives in Osaka suggested that our group of friends from the first JET orientation in Washington, DC get together for our own Thanksgiving dinner in Japan. To be honest, I wasn't very enthusiastic about the dinner. To me, Thanksgiving is a time to spend with family, and I thought it would just be more depressing to spend it with friends that I don't see very often. I was still happy to see my friends, so I went along. We ordered some food from a foreign grocery store to make all the traditional dishes, and although there was no turkey, we had chicken, mashed potatoes, stuffing, green bean casserole, and all the other necessities for a successful Thanksgiving dinner. We even found a pumpkin pie! Although I wasn't with my family, I realized I was with friends whose families were all doing the same thing at home later this week. Everyone's families have similar traditions, and it was fun to share such an important holiday with different people who still appreciate the meaning of the holiday.

I think it is hard to explain why Thanksgiving is so important. But after 15 years of the same dinner and the same long weekend with my family, it is hard not to be a little homesick this week. I got a package from my mom this week with a can of cranberry sauce and some turkey so I can make turkey sandwiches later in the week. At first I thought it was be too depressing to sit by myself and eat a turkey sandwich on Thanksgiving, but now that I have had the chance to celebrate with my friends, it seems only right that I have turkey sandwiches for the rest of the weekend. Now I can finally listen to Christmas music, too!