

COLLINS THANKSGIVING

By James Collins

794

Thanksgiving is a totally unique American feast where families are brought together to celebrate all the blessings they have received for that year. Each family develops their own customs and rules of engagement at these events. The Collins family Thanksgiving has been going on for years and continues to grow and spinoff clones with minor variations as to the rules and regulations. The high point of its history consisted of a gathering with 27 people in a house up in Nashua, New Hampshire. A long table consisting of many little tables in line stretched from one room, through the second and into a third. There was no formal seating plan. You selected where you wanted to sit and it was immediate seating.

As to the rules of speaking, there were no Roberts's rules of order. The conversations were raucous, and loud including laughter, sounds of glasses clinking and happy children running. On top of this noise was a background of several varieties of music blaring in three different rooms. Little children were laughing and sometimes dancing to music as it moved them. Across a table holding 27 people there were 4 to 6 conversations going on simultaneously. The TV room had the football game of the day blaring with various members of the feast drifted in out and to hear the score then come back to join in the eating and drinking. It was a regular three-ring circus. Everyone was loud and boisterous and if a dog was present, it barked like crazy at the excitement and all the action.

At this momentous event, we all welcomed my son's new fiancé. She had met the family before, but not under such animated conditions. She waited patiently for an hour to be able to join into the conversation – not a chance. The loudest presenter was the matriarch of the family my wife's mother who was in her 60s. She would not voluntarily give up the speaker's position under any conditions. If you tried to break into her presentation, she would try to drown you out by shouting over you. No quarter was given. The louder you roared, the more likely you might be heard. If you were quiet and mannerly, you didn't have a chance. Mary eventually figured out the rules, raised the volume of her voice, overwhelmed my mother-in-law's voice and got control of the floor. Ever after that day, Mary learned how to get her point across when dealing with the Collins family.

The first spouse to one of my children was Mary McNaughton who came from a large Irish – Scottish family who were equally loud and boisterous. However, they allowed all the members of the family to speak in turn. This was the environment she came from. She was dumbfounded to find that the Collins Thanksgiving was a winner takes all kind of event. Her family had rules. We did not. For example, her family had rules as to when the dinner was over. Her father Jack decided, and announced the dinner was over and all the family rose as one and took the dishes to the kitchen. My wife and I witnessed this custom when we went to their house for a wonderful dinner party. We were the only ones left sitting at the table at the end of the two-hour measured and enforced event. Jack said, "We're done." Everyone rose and left except us. We did not know the convention.

However, a Collins Thanksgiving dinner typically ran on for 5 to 8 hours with no formal break. Our son's new fiancé had never experienced any such an ongoing chaotic event before. She was overwhelmed. Each of the next three potential spouses experienced the same mind-numbing event. With all the excitement and laughing they knew they were

welcomed and felt they belonged, but were overwhelmed by the lack of rules. To this day, they call themselves '*the outlaws*' to differentiate them from the rest of the in-laws. They still have an informal meeting at every Collins event because they say they want to maintain their independence and their individuality as the family is overwhelming, boisterous, exciting, loving and confusing. It is interesting to note that when they throw a party they have acquired all the same informal rowdy attitude, which has been noted and commented on by their neighbors.

Growth forces fragmentation. The New Jersey contingent started with two families and separated into two separate Thanksgiving groups in the New Jersey area. Each has more than a dozen members. My brother-in-law's contingent is now located in Connecticut and has over a dozen members. We expect that the Collins Thanksgiving party philosophy will continue for generations with no rules but lots of love and happiness. Present events, in the cloned Thanksgiving parties occurring in other states, give hope to this premise.

THE END