



# THANKSGIVING

## *A Joyous Celebration of Diversity and Inclusivity*

### FOR LGBTQ+ FAMILIES

#### INTRODUCTION

I met my partner's parents for the first time at Thanksgiving. As the day approached, I couldn't help but feel a mix of excitement and nervousness. They were devout Mormons. My partner assured me it would be fine, but I couldn't help feeling trepidation about how they would receive me as their son's partner of four years. Walking into their home, I felt the fear melt away. I was greeted by a warm and loving atmosphere. The genuine affection and acceptance I felt from his family immediately put me at ease.

#### A CELEBRATION OF AUTHENTICITY

Their home was a reflection of their hearts—beautiful, authentic, and without pretense. There was no judgment, only love. The air was filled with laughter, genuine conversations, and a sense of unity. The quieter, gentle peace of the home was unlike my family's Thanksgiving celebrations.

At my family's house, the energy was different. My loud New York family, with its blend of boisterous personalities, seemed like a brass band in comparison to the more reserved and conservative



nature of my boyfriend's family. The chaos was always joyful, albeit less peaceful than the other Thanksgiving gathering. As we sat down for the Thanksgiving meal, I couldn't help but notice two unexpected guests—homeless individuals who had been invited by my well-intentioned, progressive-minded mother.

#### HARVESTING LOVE

When we bowed our heads to say the blessing, silence fell over the room. I could sense my father's discomfort and concern over the presence of these strangers at our table. The tension was palpable, threatening to overshadow the spirit of gratitude



that the day should embody. It was at that moment, my mind reflecting on my boyfriend's family, that inspiration struck—a way to bridge the divide and infuse the room with love and acceptance.

Drawing from the tradition I had witnessed at my boyfriend's family gathering, I suggested that we go around the table, each sharing what we were thankful for. I started by expressing my gratitude for my loving parents who had supported me unconditionally. My sister Maureen followed, acknowledging her gratitude for her siblings' love. Monica, my other sister, shared her excitement for her new house, temporarily overlooking the presence of the homeless guests.

Then it was my brother Michael's turn, who at the time, was on the brink of ending a long-term relationship. Unexpectedly, he expressed gratitude for me, his gay brother, for finding love and being treated with respect. The room fell silent, absorbing his words, and a wave of understanding washed over my father's face. He had often struggled with accepting my sexuality, but at that moment, he saw the love and happiness my relationship brought me.

Next, my brother-in-law Marco spoke, expressing gratitude for the good health and love within the family. It was then that Maryann, one of the our guests, bravely shared her gratitude for the meal and her recent completion of cancer treatment. She expressed thanks for a newfound apartment.

A man named Cleophis, the other guest, stood up and shared his gratitude for the love in all its forms—the love between siblings, between spouses, and even the love shared by two men. He spoke of his time in the Navy, hinting at a story he would save for another day. He mentioned the three buses he had taken to reach our gathering, revealing his commitment to being present.


As Cleophis shared his gratitude and stories, a subtle concern flickered across his face. He seemed troubled as if a weight had settled upon his shoulders. Sensing his unease, I gently inquired about his thoughts. Cleophis looked at me, his eyes filled with a mix of sincerity and worry. "You know," he began, "I couldn't help but notice that Keith's name doesn't start with an 'M' like the rest of you."



Surprised by his observation, I paused for a moment, reflecting on the tradition my family had of giving names starting with the same letter to siblings. Cleophis, despite being an outsider in this gathering, had astutely noticed this detail. His concern for my perceived exclusion touched a chord within me. With a smile, I responded. "You're right, Cleophis. Our family has a tradition of 'M' names, but that doesn't mean we exclude others. It's about love and acceptance, regardless of the initial letter. Keith is embraced as a cherished member of our family, just like you are today." Relief washed over Cleophis's face, and he let out a deep breath. It was a reminder that sometimes, even in the face of our own traditions, we can inadvertently create a sense of exclusion. But at that moment, we had the opportunity to reaffirm the importance of inclusivity and understanding.

Cleophis, with newfound comfort, continued sharing his stories with a renewed sense of enthusiasm. As he spoke, it became clear that his concern for my name was not merely about a letter, but rather a reflection of his own longing for acceptance and unity.

spoke, it became clear that his concern for my name was not merely about a letter, but rather a reflection of his own longing for acceptance and unity. In a remarkable act of kindness, my father offered to drive Cleophis home, breaking down the barriers that had initially separated us. The room was filled with gratitude, understanding, and the realization that love knows no boundaries. It was a Thanksgiving that transcended stereotypes, prejudices, and preconceived notions.

As we bid farewell to our unexpected guests, the true essence of the day became clear — we had come together as a diverse group, accepting and loving one another without judgment. The power of gratitude, empathy, and compassion had transformed a potentially divisive gathering into a celebration of unity. In the end, Thanksgiving had taught us all a valuable lesson. It reminded us that love knows no boundaries and that genuine connections can be formed when we open our hearts and embrace the differences that make us who we are. It was a day to be truly thankful for the transformative power of love and the capacity to see beyond our perspectives, allowing unity to flourish in the most unexpected of circumstances. 



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