

By James Walker

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Thanksgiving? Yes, there is much to be thankful for

It has been a joyless year and I, for one, am glad it is drawing to a close.

I can only hope as the year closes out, that it takes with it the tension and emotional toll that has defined 2020.

I am looking forward to the holiday season and its message of good will toward fellow men.

There is no need to recount the problems we faced this year as they continue to impact everything we do -- and everything we are unable to do.

But there is a need to remind ourselves that despite a year that is still challenging our resolve on many issues, there is still a lot to be thankful for.

For me, it is my family and the fact that we are still together as a unit despite our own brushes with COVID-19 that has broken the hearts of so many families.

Our Thanksgiving will be a little different this year as we decided to heed the advice of health care professionals and celebrate virtually, even though we love getting together.

It is Friday morning as I write this and I will be having a virtual dinner later in the evening that my niece Robyn has dubbed "leftover Fridays."

While we will not be physically sitting down together -- and we won't have the comfortable smell of turkey and sides wafting through the air as we mingle -- I have no doubt we will have a good time.

And it will be laughter that fuels our celebration of a holiday that has brought us joy but also sadness.

We will remember my brother Charles and my nephew Isaiah, who we lost during the Thanksgiving holiday of 2018.

But we also will laugh about Thanksgiving of 2019 when a bizarre thing happened with the old, big stove in the basement where my sister-in-law was cooking the holiday turkey.

The knob that controls the oven was stripped and we couldn't turn it off.

Not even shutting down the gas turned the fire off -- and that poor bird in the oven just kept on cooking.

What was worse, it had gotten too hot to get near the stove to get it out.

Without going into further details and the comical antics, firefighters saved the day and eventually, a rather sad-looking turkey made its way to the table.

But the crowning glory of most Thanksgiving dinner tables didn't look so kingly among the other meats and sides.

And no one was rushing to carve it.

It was at that point that Akiko Kugita, my niece Elaine's godmother who had flown in from her native Japan to share the holiday with us, stood up.

Casting a dubious look at the turkey and summing up those details I wouldn't go into, she declared "I think we should call this the shoulda, coulda, woulda Thanksgiving."

With that declaration, she picked up a carving knife and asked "who wants ham?"

And we roared with laughter and held out our plates.

It is those memories -- sometimes sad and sometimes good -- that make this particular holiday special.

Thanksgiving is not only a time to be thankful but also a time when the family unit is celebrated and memories are made that will last a lifetime.

I don't think anyone can argue that family and laughter is the embrace we need as we shift and adjust toward a new reality.

No matter which way readers celebrated the day of thanks, whether with family or as part of an effort to help others, I hope in some way it revitalized your spirits.

I hope that whatever you did, big or small, it reminded you that with loss also comes life, and with difficult times comes another day to put them behind us.

Yes it has been a joyless year but the time of good will is here to lift our spirits.

Being with family and helping our fellow man are the two constants that have always made us feel good as a people and pulled us together as a nation.

And they always will.

Thanksgiving? Yes, there is much to be thankful for.