

## Reflections on an almost normal Thanksgiving

**A**MERICAN LIFE has not quite been restored to whatever normalcy preceded the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still here for another Thanksgiving.

Travel is expected to increase somewhat from 2020, but many Americans are still celebrating with smaller gatherings or even alone for a second straight year.

That doesn't mean there's nothing to be thankful for. Perhaps, if anything, it gives West Virginians and the rest of the country more time to reflect, and even more to be thankful for.

As is tradition, we reprint some wise comments about Thanksgiving and the concept of thankfulness.

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"Thanksgiving comes to us out of the prehistoric dimness, universal to all ages and all faiths. At whatever straws we must grasp, there is always a time for gratitude and new beginnings. . . . One of life's gifts is that each of us, no matter how tired and downtrodden, finds reasons for thankfulness: for the crops carried in from the fields and the grapes from the vineyard." — J. Robert Moskin, "The Heritage of Judaism," *Look* magazine, Oct. 5, 1965

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"Strange to see how a good dinner and feasting reconciles everybody." — Samuel Pepys, in his secret diary

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"Food for all is a necessity. Food should not be a merchandise, to be bought and sold as jewels are bought and sold by those who have the money to buy. Food is a human necessity, like water and air, and it should be available." — Pearl Buck, *To My Daughters, With Love*

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"Sit down and feed, and welcome to our table." — Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

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"The original Thanksgiving was the last time we were nice to the Indians." — Charleston reformer Bettijane Burger

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"It was dramatic to watch [my grandmother] decapitate [a turkey] with an ax the day before Thanksgiving. Nowadays the expense of hiring grandmothers for the ax work would probably qualify all turkeys so honored with 'gourmet' status." — Russell Baker, *The New York Times* Nov. 27, 1985

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"I declare that a meal prepared by a person who loves you will do more good than any average cooking, and on the other side of it, a person who dislikes you is bound to get that dislike into your food, without intending to." — Luther Burbank, *The Harvest of the Years*

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"Ever since Eve started it all by offering Adam the apple, woman's punishment has been to have to supply a man with food and then suffer the consequences when it disagrees with him." — Helen Rowland, *A Guide to Men*

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"Heap high the board with plenteous cheer, and gather to the feast / and toast the Pilgrim band, whose courage never ceased." — Alice Williams Brotherton

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"Twas founded by the Puritans to give thanks for bein' presarved from the Indyans, and. . . we keep it to give thanks we are presarved from the Puritans." — Finley Peter Dunne ("Mr. Dooley")

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"The custom of saying grace at meals had, probably, its origin in the early times of the world, and the hunter-state of man, when dinners were precarious things, and a full meal was something more than a common blessing; when a bellyfull was a windfall, and looked like a special providence." — Charles Lamb

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"Some people always sigh in thanking God." — Elizabeth Barrett Browning

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"Blest be those feasts with simple plenty crowned / Where all the ruddy family around / Laugh at the jests or pranks that never fail / Or sigh with pity at some mournful tale / Or press the bashful stranger to his food / And learn the luxury of doing good." — Oliver Goldsmith, *The Traveler*

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"A man hath no better thing under the sun than to eat, and to drink, and be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labor the days of his life." — Ecclesiastes 8:15

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"The Bible tells us so often to give thanks, to praise God, and to acknowledge all his benefits. Surely it's not that God, like us, needs appreciation for his own well-being. It must be because he knows that when we learn to give thanks, we are learning to concentrate not on the bad things, but in the good things in our lives." — Amy Vanderbilt, *Guideposts* magazine, September 1957

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"The true essentials of a feast are only fun and feed." — Oliver Wendell Holmes

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"Come, ye thankful people, come, Raise the song of Harvest-home; all is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin." — Henry Alford

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"When mirth reigns throughout the town, and feasters about the house. . . when the tables beside them are laden with bread and meat, and the winebearer draws sweet drink from the mixing-bowl and fills the cups; this I think in my heart to be the most delightful of all to men." — Homer

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"Here let us feast, and to the feast be joined discourse, the sweeter banquet of the mind." — Homer, *The Odyssey*

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"There is no love sincerer than the love of food." — George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*

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"What I say is that, if a man really likes potatoes, he must be a pretty decent sort of fellow." — A.A. Milne, *Not That it Matters*

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"A good meal makes a man feel more charitable toward the whole world than any sermon." — Arthur Pendenys

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"They eat, they drink, and in communion sweet, quaff immortality and joy." — Milton, *Paradise Lost*

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"The whole of nature, as has been said, is a conjugation of the verb to eat." — William Ralph Inge, *Outspoken Essays*

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"So once in every year we throng upon a day apart / to praise the Lord with feast and song in thankfulness of heart." — Arthur Guiterman

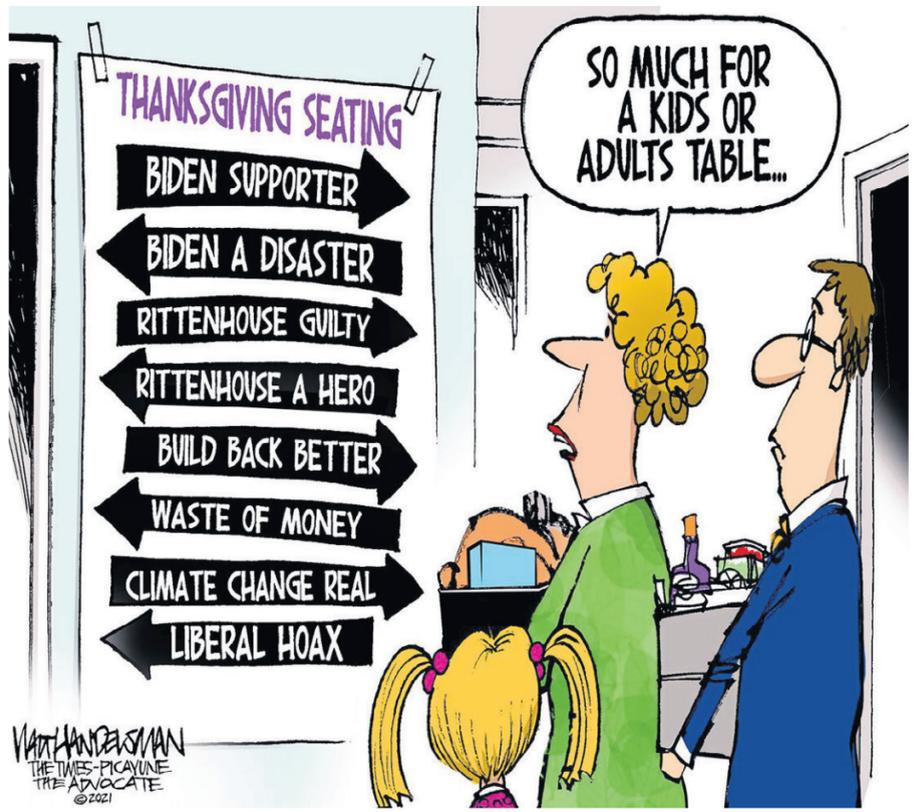
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"Ah! On Thanksgiving Day, when from east and from west / from north and from south come the pilgrim and guest / What moistens the lip and what brightens the eye / what calls back the past like the rich pumpkin pie?" — John Greenleaf Whittier

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"Their tables were stored full, to glad the sight, and not so much to feed on as delight." — Shakespeare, *Pericles*

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"God is great, God is good / and we thank him for this food / From his table we are fed / From his table we are fed / From his table we are fed." — traditional child's grace.

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"A two-pound turkey and a 50-pound cranberry — that's Thanksgiving at Three Mile Island." — Johnny Carson

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"Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we, thine unworthy servants, do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men." — The Book of Common Prayer



## Looking forward with thankfulness

By ERICKE CAGE

**A**S WE CELEBRATE Thanksgiving, I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to the students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends of West Virginia State University throughout the Kanawha Valley, around the state of West Virginia and across the nation that make it such a special place to work and study.



ERICKE CAGE

Since my arrival in the Mountain State, I have been continuously inspired by the deeply rooted sense of pride and spirit of community expressed by all those who live and work here. It reminds me of my upbringing in a small town in southern Virginia where neighbors helped neighbors and the success of one was celebrated by all. And at this time of year, we have much to celebrate and be thankful for.

As interim president of West Virginia State University I recognize the vital role that institutions of higher education play in the

state and region and the importance of being active and giving back in the communities we serve. Paying it forward is not only part of our mission as a land grant institution, it is also part of the fabric of West Virginia and its people.

West Virginia State University's reach extends to all 55 counties of West Virginia. Through the university's Extension Service we are positively impacting the entire state of West Virginia through programs relating to 4-H, agriculture, health and nutrition, community and economic development and more.

With our Healthy Grandfamilies program we are helping provide guidance and solutions to grandparents throughout the state who are raising their grandchildren. West Virginia ranks second in the nation in the number of grand-family households and work done by our university is helping to address this great need in society.

As a community centered institution, we are always looking for new and innovative programs to serve West Virginia and its needs. Last fall we launched a nursing program in response to the growing health care needs of the state, region and nation. We are cur-

rently exploring launching a cybersecurity program because that, too, is a growing area where we know the university can make a difference for West Virginia and its business community.

We have also launched a fundraising campaign for our Marching Swarm marching band to raise funds for new uniforms and instruments. We recently invited area high school band members to campus to watch a football game and participate with our band. We know this kind of activity adds to the overall college experience and adds pride in the community. Other plans are also in the works to ensure that 2022 will bring even more reasons to celebrate.

Thanksgiving is a reminder for each of us to be grateful for the many gifts that we have received and I am thankful for the opportunity to serve as interim president of West Virginia State University and for the warm welcome I have received. I hope you have a happy and peaceful Thanksgiving with your loved ones, family and friends.

Ericke S. Cage is interim president of West Virginia State University.

## The power of forgiveness is palpable and life changing

By J. TIMOTHY DIPIERO

**A** FEW WEEKS ago James Whitsett, an employee at the Holiday Inn Express here in Charleston, died suddenly of a heart attack. Ironically, he had a wonderful heart for people and a big, infectious smile. He often spoke of God's goodness. Just from the number of mourners present and the moving testimonials given, James obviously impacted a lot of folks in a powerful way.

There is a reason for that and why his story needs to be retold. You see, James received God's forgiveness in such a tangible way that it radically changed his life.

From a large family in Huntington, James was a popular student and star basketball player at St. Joe. After high school, he got involved with drugs. On the night of Jan. 9, 1982, he was in a crazed, violent state. He viciously beat and robbed a young woman in Huntington. He got a life sentence for his crime.

For over 12 years, this young woman, Victoria Baker, who became a wife and mother, was tormented by her harrowing experience which caused her great fear, especially if she had to be away from her home at night. Victoria and her husband, Huntington attorney Don Baker, loathed James and wished the worst for him. They wrote letters to the parole board urging the members to never release him. On top of that, Victoria battled cancer for 10 years and had to endure multiple surgeries and radiation treatments.

Then, after years of treatment

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and a profound, spiritual experience, she was cancer free.

Grateful for her physical healing, yet acutely aware of the emotional damage she still carried, she determined that she could only get completely well by meeting her attacker.

Against her husband's wishes, she insisted on visiting James, who was in a work release center in Charleston hoping to make parole. Victoria was extremely nervous and had no idea what she would say to James. To her surprise, the first words out of her mouth were to ask him to forgive her for how much she had hated him for so long. Incredible that she was asking him for forgiveness, James broke down and said he was the one that needed forgiveness from her. The power of forgiveness was palpable and life changing, as James and the Bakers experienced healing on the spot.

The story doesn't end there. The Bakers wrote letters to the parole board in support of his request for parole. Further, she and her husband had James and his mother over for dinner periodically and over nearly 40 years James was close to the Bakers

and their children until the day he died.

At a time in our country when we put down folks and are unforgiving because of political or religious views or because of a person's nationality or the color of their skin, we can all benefit the story of Victoria and James.

Their story was written up in the *Guideposts* magazine many years ago. My hope is to forward this *Guideposts* story for distribution to our state prison population so those who have hurt others can seek forgiveness and see the power of forgiveness.

And I hope victims of terrible crimes can experience the healing this woman did by forgiving her assailant. Forgiving the really horrible hurts can only occur with God's help, and even then, it is far from easy.

But to those of us who profess to be Christian, Jesus not only repeatedly preached about the need for forgiveness. He showed us in His weakest state, alone and unjustly suffering while hanging on a cross, with perhaps the most meaningful words of His ministry, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." I once read a quote that has stuck with me, "Forgiveness sets a prisoner free, only to discover the prisoner was me."

Included in the moving testimonials given at James' funeral were those from Victoria and Don Baker, each of whom expressed their deep love for him and how he had significantly changed their lives for the better.

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