

"ALONE AGAIN (NATURALLY)."

I overheard this morning, "How was your Thanksgiving?" And the standard rejoinder, "Great. Kids, family, friends."

My dining reservation was for a party of one: myself. My guest list? A fur-bearing clowder.

Thanksgiving is a quasi-religious American holiday mostly remarkable for its epic meal and immoderate togetherness. Our forebears rejoiced in the harvest's bounty, their gratitude verging on gluttony. Norman Rockwell's images of blushing countenances astride a groaning, mouthwatering table rekindles the nostalgia that precedes the nausea. And who could dispute that we have much reason to be grateful relative to the lower standard of living and strife in so many other countries?

I have a confession. I am appreciative of being left alone on this or any other day by choice not exclusion. The conventional alternative occasioned -- a destination, inclusion, and diet-be-damned overindulgence. My homie pal, Jared (*who appears in A Schizoid at Smith: How Overparenting Leads to Underachieving*), was hosting his own brood and had extended a heartfelt, "We'd love to have you" invitation. I declined, rationalizing the distance without a car and the driving for him. But was that the real reason?

Schmoozing always comes second to solitude and kinsfolk for all these years in absentia rekindle a wince-inducing ache. Even reading an employment ad with the catchphrase "like family" rankles. My homegrown memories of dissension, one-upmanship, backstabbing, and constrained conviviality linger. But my holiday wasn't Travis Bickle (*Taxi Driver*) or another looney loner's either. I attended two community gatherings and thoroughly enjoyed their sincere spirit, hearty comestibles, and the biggest boon of all, being exempted from socializing. No small talk, feigned interest, back slapping, hugging, or interaction that feels stilted.

My boycott might sound misanthropic, Grinch-like, or perverse to some. Let me elaborate. While I wasn't on kitchen duty with Dina baking pies, my pre-holiday preparation involved routing meals to the handicapped, Christmas trees to the indigent, cans and bottles for those who redeem them, and even relinquishing my umbrella to a poor, sodden soul. Schizoids are not supposed to care. If I may not wish to mingle, I do feel, particularly for those in need, ostracized and marginalized through no fault of their own. So does this mean that I'm atypical or that SPDs get a bad rap? Probably something in between.

The Tree of Life shooter, Robert Bowers, is a landsman but I would never dream of pulling a trigger. Heck, I release insects and rescue plants. Some schizoids are unimpaired and some are so befogged they may seem stoned. Many can manage autonomous jobs and even marriages. Yet manifold numbers plummet into homelessness through incapacity. What I do know is that as varied as we are, a

personality disorder or maladaptation isn't elective, it's a problem and a pain. Being alone on a major holiday is the least of it. Count your blessings that you have a place you may call home, a roof over your head, on a red letter or any day. There are my brethren out there that never will.

Thanksgiving also reminds us of family values and upbringing. Our roots and that elusive consideration of how we got where we are in life remain a conundrum. Remember then that if a parent goes to work on a child, some years later that child may not be able to work. Forcing a kid into withdrawal has dual consequences. The afflicted suffers repetitive harassment to the tune of, "You don't think!" "You don't listen!" "You're always late!" And a litany of rejections and dismissals. Contemplate the financial onus: the parents could become their offspring's lifelong benefactors. Are parents terrible or well-intentioned motivators? Folks, you may have crippled your child's ability to self-support, be fulfilled, successful, accepted socially, and all the other ramifications of what is generally regarded as a well-adjusted existence. Two lives intertwined, co-dependent, and at odds with the parental zest for super achievement. SPDs "just get by," as my clinician often asserted.

Holidays symbolize love. If a child never felt it at home, everything thereafter will be tainted. Come Christmas, I will again be alone which probably seems Charlie Brown pitiable to you, Hallmark, and all the other "most wonderful time of the year" boosters. To me it's habitual and my peripheral involvement is as participatory as I care to be (which doesn't mean I don't care.)

On Thanksgiving we sit surfeit. A banner day of reflection, pumpkin pie, gross indigestion, and in a turkey tryptophan stupor, blobbing out before the tube with fleeting consideration for what family really means. Beyond the head of the household's furnishing the basics: structuring daily chores in addition to routines, funding getaways and those occasions that create remembrances, even mayhem, all cobbled together as collective scrapbooking. Parents, give pause to ponder more importantly what you are really providing developmentally and whether those lives can become caretakers of their own.