

Cross Border Relations

I'm dreaming of a white...thanksgiving? Yes, we had snow on Thanksgiving Day here. I still can't believe it; I'm watching my laundry line dancing in the sun today. These past two weeks it's been a tossup whether the clothes will dry or freeze first. Most days, I surrender and bring them inside to the radiators by nightfall. Today, though, there's a nice breeze and loads of sunshine. I have an even chance, as the weather is still hovering above freezing. Highs of 3 Celcius. At least we're not in Oslo. They're in the negatives!

So, last week I left off with the various errands I had to complete before we celebrated Thanksgiving. I set off for town on Tuesday, to see if the locksmith did sharpen knives, as rumor had it. I didn't bring the knives with me because I was doing more shopping and I would be in town again on Wednesday, for yoga. I found myself talking to the oldest man behind the locksmith counter. He fixed me with a bleary smile, once he understood my errand, and said, "Are you a wee chef?" (Wee here means cute or nice.) I explained the upcoming Thanksgiving dinner. "We used to sharpen knives all the time. But now, you see, the machines are buried back behind everything on the counter (he gestured to a very messy counter) and well, we just don't do that anymore." I could see him thinking and waited patiently. Sure enough, he talked himself into helping me out. "But it's like this, pet. I'm basically retired. However..." If I came back by four, he would see to it himself. It was now nearly 3 pm. So, I hied myself back to the house (30 min) wrapped up the knives securely, and raced back (22 min.) He sharpened them with sparks flying, to the raised eyebrows of the other staff. When they were returned to me, he asked me if I had a steel. I remembered the sword-shaped sharpening tool my parents always used and said, no, and I wasn't sure where to get one. He gave me directions to a catering supply store in Distillery Lane, which had just one left. I was able to smooth off the burrs he'd left on the edges, and they now slice turkey and cut onions with barely any effort. However, I was due for a surprise the next day. Our cousin Marian arrived with a housewarming present of an electric knife! It did a beautiful job on the turkey, and I think Dan especially appreciated its speed.

We had quite a time finding pumpkin, though in the end cranberry sauce was a easy as a trip to Tesco's. No one ate much of it, anyway.:) I even tried an African food store, but found only plantains. Finally, on Thanksgiving night, Dan arrived home from SuperQuinns bearing a real, live pumpkin, albeit a sort of greeny, tannish squat thing. I baked it and got about 6 cups of pulp from it, but once drained, it only yielded about 2 1/2 cups! We needed 4 to make two pies, so I augmented with a bit of defrosted butternut squash (which after smelling it I realized it was raw...) and extra sweet potatoes left over from making the rolls. Friday I made the rolls and taught one of my students, who arrived an hour early to find me up to my ears in bread dough. That night, Dan made the pie crusts, then left for a night out with the boys. I worked on everything until about 1 am (assembled spinach gratin and 7 layer dip). Dan got home at 3! I still can't believe he was first up on Saturday morning. We picked up wine and chocolates at Aldi's, then went to the butcher's to pick up the turkey. We had asked for a 15lb turkey, been told we needed a 17 lb one, then arrived to find a 22 lb monster! We visited the farmer's market for carrots & parsnips and to let Naomi the Muffins know where she could find a pumpkin for her own celebration on Sunday.

We ran into Marian again at the butcher's, and she was so ill that she looked miserable. She couldn't come because of her cold and she had just had a painful tooth removed. Deprived of our most loquacious guest, I rearranged the seating order again. At this point, we still didn't know if Kevin and his family were coming (5.) Meanwhile, Dan got the turkey ready, then made deviled eggs. I started peeling innumerable potatoes for mashing. At 2:30, half hour away from the arrival time, we received a call from Paul, another cousin. (Eamonn, Dan's uncle, has four children: Paul, Kevin, AnnMarie, and Michelle.) He was a block away and wanted to be sure of the directions. Dan and I tore upstairs to change and were just in time to welcome them a half hour early! Paul and Rosie came with Rory (5.) Around 3 pm, AnnMarie arrived with her kids Conall (6) and Aoife (2) as well as Jessica, Kevin's daughter. At this, I guessed the rest of his family wouldn't be coming, so I hastily set up a place for Jess and put the rest of the name cards away.

Michelle arrived with Eoghan (7 mo.) and Marian's husband, Brian, arrived with their daughter, Lisa (19.)

The kids loved their table and swarmed over it demanding to know where they were sitting and jealous of Aoife's Harry Potter plasticware. Thank goodness for the backyard and the football. Grandma Beckett's high chair did its first service in Ireland, and just like in the States, all the kids had to try it out, even little Eoghan, before Aoife was settled in it for dinner. The cousins were interested in the furniture and china we'd brought. Grandma's Calyx pattern coffee cups got special interest--apparently you wouldn't find them that big over here. We had a great dinner and great conversation, even through the giggles & squeals from the kids' table. I named this update "Cross Border Relations" because like many big families, the various branches hadn't met in years. Brian and Lisa were interested to meet the cousins from Belfast, some of whom had been as young as the little cousins the last time they had seen the relatives in Dundalk, if they had ever met. After dinner, they compared notes as to the friendliest county in Ireland and settled on Derry. Talk turned to the racism problems in the North, before we all reconvened to the living room, where Dan was trying to teach the little cousins Monopoly and chess. Everyone even got to speak to Michael and Cathy via webcam, which they thought was really cool. In between cooking, I managed to catch Conall asking, "What's it like in America?"

I think the most amusing part of the evening was when we tried introducing pumpkin pie to a whole room of adults and kids who'd never had it. For the children, I called it gingerbread pie in a sudden flash of inspiration, and AnnMarie helped to coax them to try it by saying "She's mashed a whole lot of gingerbread men up and made pie." Meanwhile at the adult table, I mouthed "pumpkin pie" and they settled to discussing what it might be like. It was a definite hit with about 2/3 of the adults and exactly half the kids. I received an email from Paul just today saying that Rory is now a pumpkin pie addict. (I sent some home with everyone.) It was also interesting trying to send leftovers home with everyone. I guess it's not the custom here, but I was determined not to be stuck with the remains of a 22 lb turkey and loads of other items. Hopefully, some of the food made it to the relatives who couldn't make it: Marian, Eamonn, Jim (AnnMarie's husband), and the rest of Kevin's family.

We fell asleep early and left most of the cleaning up til Sunday. We went to a neat craft fair in Carlingford to say hi to Frances the Beads and found a few Christmas presents. At a food fair down the road, we recognized many of the farmer's market folks and had some amazing mulled wine. I had a great conversation about lebkuchen with the German baker, Jana. She and I exchanged phone numbers and will hopefully get together sometime. Today, I'm doing mountains of laundry, both from the party and from the leadup to the party. I will also be teaching the two students who couldn't make it on Friday. Their dad, our landlord, has been trying to get the plumber to come fix our bathtub, which leaks down into the living room. It's been broken for over a month now. Luckily we have a shower too. On Friday, he sent me a note saying that the plumber swore on "stacks of Bibles" that he'd be with us midweek. Now we have a new character: John the Stacks of Bibles!

Here's the link to our house photos. Once Dada and I get organized, we will post more photos periodically. If there isn't one of the outside of our house yet, check back in a day or so. I forgot to send it to Dada earlier.

<http://becketts.ws/heather/ireland/frameset.htm>

Off to more laundry,
Love,
Heather

