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Moose, Toques and Back Bacon with Karen Evenden: A time of giving thanks

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Decorations in the garden

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I often tell people that Canada was so happy to have me immigrate that they held a holiday in my honour!

Okay this is not strictly true, but the Thanksgiving Day holiday usually falls around my birthday, meaning that there is a long weekend for me to enjoy an extra long birthday celebration.

Unlike Thanksgiving Day in the USA which is a celebration of the pilgrims settling in the New World; Canada dedicates its holiday with the same name to celebration of the harvest. The first Thanksgiving Day in Canada dates back to an English Explorer Martin Frobisher.

Frobisher held a celebration in the province which is now known as Newfoundland, to give thanks for his safe passage to North America in 1578.

Over the years other settlers held special feasts of thanks including French and American settlers and the date changed numerous times accordingly. In 1879 Thanksgiving Day was declared by Parliament to be celebrated on the 6 November. The date still continued to change over the years and at one point, after World War I Thanksgiving was celebrated in conjunction with Armistice Day, which was later renamed Remembrance Day.

Finally in 1957 Parliament pronounced: "A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed ... to be observed on the 2nd Monday in October."

I remember during my school days in the UK, young school children had a tradition of creating a Harvest Festival food basket which was donated to senior citizens of families that were considered less fortunate.

In Canada, in a country thirty eight times the size of Great Britain it's not surprising that many relatives in the same family may live thousands of miles from each other. Thanksgiving therefore is a significant holiday and is one of those rare periods where adult kids actually make the effort to go and visit their family. To be unable to visit at Christmas is acceptable, albeit unfortunate, but heaven forbid if you miss Thanksgiving!

Traditionally many families celebrate the weekend with a large family meal, often with turkey and pumpkin pie. Some cities host a Thanksgiving parade, such as the Kitchener-Waterloo Ocktoberfest Parade and the Canadian Football League holds a televised double-header event called the Thanksgiving Day Classic.

In the spirit of the holiday some families go all out and decorate their houses in honour of Thanksgiving, adding harvest scenes in their gardens or decorating the interior in a fall (autumn) theme.

Canadian children learn about the history of Thanksgiving in school and often make pictures of pilgrims and turkeys, act in historical plays and are encouraged to give thanks for the harvest, their families and many other blessings.

For some of my friends and me, the Thanksgiving Holiday is another long weekend to escape the city. We head out to the mountains; enjoy a hike amidst the stunning fall colours and return to a warm fire, a glass of wine and a slap up roast turkey dinner.

Over dinner, we go around the table and share what we are most grateful for from the past year. Amongst family, friends, and love, the answer for me is obvious; thanks again for the birthday holiday Canada!