



Carmelite Spiritual Center

11-02

8433 Bailey Road * Darien, Illinois 60561 * 630-969-4141

Dec. 9, 1999

Life is Worth Giving

TRULY THE BIGGEST TURKEY IN TOWN

BY Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

Childhood memories of holidays and other special occasions are often the most vivid. During World War II, there were a number of shortages on the Home Front. The Government, through the OPA (Office of Price Administration), attempted to distribute food and other supplies equally.

And so people back home tried cheerfully to accept rationing and shortages to make sure the Armed Forces had what they needed to continue the war.

But as time went on, and pre-war supplies were depleted, civilians felt the shortages more. Although there were few complaints, and people turned to Victory Gardens and scrap drives, such efforts were not entirely sufficient.

It was in the Fall of 1943 when some supplies became very scarce. The nation had switched almost completely to a war economy, and items for civilian use, even with ration stamps, were difficult to find.

-more-

Fr. Kevin/ BIGGEST TURKEY/ 2

But people in general cheerily made do with what was available. The ~~NEWS~~ ^(NEWS) that came over the radio and in our newspapers served to encourage people with victories in North Africa and the South Pacific. We were "on the road" to victory!

It was that Fall, however, when it was announced in our area that turkeys would be in very short supply.

No Turkey for Thanksgiving! It seemed an incredible impossibility!

On the Saturday before Thanksgiving, my Mom and I started out on a shopping trip to find a turkey for our Thanksgiving dinner. We went to all the neighborhood butcher shops and supermarkets.

But the reply was always the same. "No turkeys. Don't you know there's a war on?"

Undaunted we continued to trudge from store to store, mostly at my urging since Mom had already begun to consider an alternative for our Thanksgiving dinner.

"I just don't think we'll ever find a turkey this year," cautioned my Mom.

"Let's take just one more chance, Mom," I rejoined.

Our last chance was a large meat market in the downtown section of our city. We walked into the place with a faint glimmer of hope but the empty display cases soon eroded that.

-more-

Fr. Kevin/ BIGGEST TURKEY/ 3

"Any turkeys left?" my Mom inquired.

"You can see we're almost out of any meat," explained the kindly butcher.

My hopes for a Thanksgiving turkey dinner seemed to vanish completely.

"Nothing at all?" Mom asked again.

"Wait a minute," the butcher replied, "we have one left but it's too big for a family dinner."

"How big?" Mom asked with some hesitation in her voice.

"It's about 30 pounds," he replied and went to the refrigerator to bring out what seemed to be the biggest turkey I had ever seen.

When I noticed Mom's hesitation, I fairly shouted, "Oh, Mom, please get it. I'll even carry it home."

"Well, if it's that important," she replied, "we'll buy the turkey but it seems bigger than you are."

It was true that I was pretty thin at 12 years old and didn't even weigh too much more than the turkey. But what really mattered was that we would have a real turkey for Thanksgiving dinner.

After wrapping the turkey, the butcher handed it to me with some misgivings.

"Ooof!" I said as I first began to feel the full weight of a 30-pound refrigerated turkey. But out the door we went as I struggled to find a comfortable way to carry the huge bird.

Fr. Kevin/ BIGGEST TURKEY/ 4

Fortunately the bus stop was only a block away where we boarded the [Red Bus for the trip home. People stared at me and then smiled. Perhaps it was because they could scarcely see me sitting and holding the huge turkey.

When we got off the bus at Lexington Avenue where we lived, Mom checked to see if I could still carry the turkey.

"Sure," I assured her as I wended my way down the street. Neighbors asked what I was so energetically carrying, and some offered to help. But I felt a sense of accomplishment that I just didn't want to share with others.

When Dad arrived home from work at the Western Electric Company, he asked Mom if she had been successful in finding a turkey. Without a word, she opened the refrigerator to display the biggest turkey in town. She had to remove much of the food in the bottom section to make room for the turkey.

During the week before Thanksgiving, my brothers and I worked hard [to grate loaves of bread to make stuffing for "Tom," as we had dubbed our turkey, and to help Mom prepare for the roasting.

"You'd better start cooking this bird on Monday," suggested my Dad.

As it turned out, we started on Wednesday evening, and left the turkey in the oven overnight. It took about a dozen or more hours to complete the process in time for Thanksgiving dinner.

-more-

Fr. Kevin/ BIGGEST TURKEY/ 5

As we gathered around our big kitchen table on Thanksgiving, we offered our prayers of thanks. As an immigrant from Ireland, my Dad always added a prayer of thanks for our new and better life in America.

"God bless America," was his fervent prayer.

Other prayers were added, especially for peace and family members away at war.

But just before digging into our dinner, Mom paused. "We owe Kevin thanks for carrying home this huge turkey. If it hadn't been for him, we might not be eating turkey today."

I felt so proud. I had, indeed, brought home the biggest turkey in town.