

# Thanksgiving celebrati

## Countryside

From the poem Harvest Time  
by Pauline Johnson:

*Pillowed and hushed on the  
silent plain,  
Wrapped in her mantle of  
golden grain,  
Wearied of pleasuring weeks  
away,  
Summer is lying asleep to-  
day, ...*

*.....  
The north wind kisses her  
rosy mouth,  
His rival frowns in the far-off  
south,*

**Shelia  
Smith**



*And comes caressing her  
sunburnt cheek,  
And Summer wakes for one  
short week, ...  
Awakes and gathers her  
wealth of grain,  
Then sleeps and dreams for  
a year again.*



The celebration of harvest, Thanksgiving, fell late in November in Indiana where I grew up. It was set apart by hunting wild geese and an extended family feast that celebrated all life and ... a touch of gluttony. My cousin, who once polished off the meal with two whole pumpkin pies, was an object of awe.

I happily helped pluck the goose harvest, carefully saving the great wing quills and later reassembling them into their original pattern. I was fascinated by the intricacies of avian anatomy and the patterns of feathers. This required a lot of time, scotch tape and the patience of the ladies in the family, who never seemed to mind if I played taxidermist on the kitchen table.

Canadian Thanksgiving, the harvest of Indian poetess Pauline Johnson, seems to me to fall at a more appropriate time. We no longer feast on wild goose but the spirit of thankfulness, the symbols of harvest and a sense of unity with family and friends is the same.

I was visiting Steve Smith at Talking Earth Pottery trying to decide just which piece of art work my mother and aunt would like best when I visit them this Thanksgiving. Steve's wife, Leigh, incorporates native legend and reality into the designs she etches on her husband's clay pots and sculptures.

Yellow leaves drifted past the window of the log house where the Smiths display their treasures not consigned to galleries elsewhere. Steve's yellow lab shifted closer to the wood stove, thoughts of tail-wagging deep in amber eyes.

Steve and I talked of harvest and legend, art and religion. In the American tradition the settlers held the first Thanksgiving with the Indians, who had shown and given them so much.

Steve couldn't remember any stories from native lore about Thanksgiving specifically. The holiday is, after all, a white man's tradition. But after awhile, as he wrote out the meaning of the symbols on the vase I selected, he told



me a story borrowed, he thought, from the Cree.

"The Indians always referred to themselves as the people or the human beings in their stories to show just that they were a different species ... not better than the other animals," he told me. He asked if I knew the legend of the loon.

I admitted I didn't.

The loon, it is said, tried and tried to warn the people that winter was coming. Be prepared, his wild cries echoed across the lakes. And he lingered there in the north to warn the people that Koserake (winter) was coming until the last frost painted the land. So the Great Spirit gave the loon a handsome necklace and scattered snowflakes across his back so that when the people saw him in the future they would remember to be prepared

for another winter and be thankful to the loon for warning them.

Thanksgiving for Steve is a daily process. The key, we agreed, lies in respect for all living things.

I still recall what one of my children said, many years ago, when called upon to name something for which he was thankful. He pondered the question seriously.

"I'm thankful I know enough to give thanks," he said earnestly.

I'm not sure he knew this was profound. But it is this quality of being thankful that links us with all life and at the same time defines our humanity.