



# my holiday “break”

A respite from tradition gave one woman time to heal—and a new reason to celebrate.

BY LESLIE GOLDMAN

Lounging poolside in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, I sigh contentedly as the sun warms my bikini-clad body and an icy piña colada chills my hand. My husband, Dan, and I will get massages later this afternoon, and then we’ll dine at a cute Mexican restaurant in town. For a moment I’ve forgotten that it’s the most emotionally loaded day of the year for me: Thanksgiving.

When I was young, the fourth Thursday of November was a joyous holiday, full of savory smells and a warm sense of family. In high school I grew more health-conscious, squeezing in an extra-long workout just so I could indulge, guilt-free, in Mom’s creamy marshmallow yams. But during my freshman year of college, those minor weight concerns evolved into a full-fledged eating disorder. Egg whites and salads fueled my daily hour-long runs, helping me drop 25 pounds from my already slender 5’11” frame. Needless to say, a day dedicated to gorging yourself wasn’t something I was prepared to celebrate. I recall my plate, empty save for a

smidgen of stuffing, my skeletal body dwarfed by the dining-room chair. My most vivid memory, however, was of my parents and grandparents; they stayed noticeably silent, but their frightened looks spoke volumes.

Throughout college I battled anorexia the only way I knew how: by treating it as a food—rather than a control—issue. For me, Thanksgiving was about swallowing turkey with a smile, doing a gastronomic song and dance to prove to everyone that I was cured. “Don’t worry about me!” I screamed with each forkful. “Look! I’m even eating pumpkin pie!”

Postgraduation, I finally began seeing a therapist to chip away at the roots of my disease. Sadly, a crucial step in my recovery was to physically separate myself from my family on Thanksgiving; I needed to reintroduce the holiday in a neutral environment. So that year I flew out to my then-boyfriend’s family home in rural Wisconsin, far from a gym or foods I considered “safe.” At dinner we went around the table, each saying what we were grateful for. I thanked his family for their hospitality, and my parents, 300 miles away, for granting me the space to start healing.

A few years and one relapse later, Dan and I created our own goofy name for the holiday: Blumeria. It was a chance for us to start fresh and for him to support me and my recovery. Blumeria took us to Puerto Rico, where arroz con pollo replaced the turkey and trimmings;

another year we flew to Las Vegas with Dan’s family, where we watched Cirque du Soleil and ate sushi. Over time, the focus shifted from eating gut-busting amounts of food to

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seeing Thanksgiving in its essential light: as a day of appreciation for all the people in my life and the strides I had made to reclaim my health.

We’ll be celebrating with my parents this year.

Our Blumeria will merge with their traditional Thanksgiving for an evening filled with laughter, stories, and yes, food. I’m excited to take my rightful seat at the table once again and eat until I’m satisfied.

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