

Dear Friends,

Our family has much to be thankful for this year. My dear father suffered a major stroke in May, and after many prayers, much diligent work on his part, and the devoted and loving service of my stepmother and the care center staff, God has mercifully allowed him to return home to his beloved A-frame in the woods this past month! We are so blessed to have him with us still and to watch his gracious acceptance of this next chapter in God's story for his life. He's thriving in his own home environment. This year, instead of the Thanksgiving spread at our house, we're looking forward to hauling our biggest turkey (16 out of 20 survived until butchering day this year! Much better than our 6 out of 20 last year!) "over the river and through the woods" to Grandpa's house this year!



The Forster children and friends with Grandpa at the care center after having a Civil War camp at his place this July.

Mayflower Dinner with the Forsters



The Forster family, Thanksgiving 1988

Ever since the children were very little our family has managed almost every year to share a "Mayflower Dinner" together. We want our children to appreciate the story of the believers who risked their lives to worship freely in the New World.

Monday or Tuesday of Thanksgiving week we locate the most cramped, uncomfortable, and damp place around our house and proclaim it the Mayflower. At our old house, when the kids were tiny, we squeezed between some storage shelves in our dark, damp, musty basement. At our home here in Gaston, we climb the steps to the attic

over our office and are always able to find an accommodatingly crowded and dusty spot to use.

During the previous week we make some hardtack-style of bread and leave it out to age a bit. I also purchase some salted beef (the kind that comes with thin little slices all rolled up in a glass jar) and a small bottle of ale. (You can just use stale water if you prefer to not use ale. Our kids have all proclaimed the ale “yucky.” We just use it to be more realistic.)

We set up the CD player in the attic with a CD of ocean sound-effects and turn it up good and loud. We put the hardtack and meat in some old wooden bowls, and bring out a couple battered tin cups to go with the ale. We usually dress up in “Pilgrimmy” clothes, and then we climb up into our “Mayflower” with our food, a candle, and some books. We turn off all the lights, and huddle in our designated corner while we pray and eat our meager meal to the sounds of the CD-sea. We try to imagine what it must have been like to be squeezed into a 90-foot long ship with 132 people, with the inevitable smells of chamber pots and sea-sickness, the crying of weary children, the darkness, the dampness, the pitching of the ship on the waves, and the fatigue of many long days and nights sailing over the endless sea.

We read passages from selected books. Over the years we have read **Pilgrim Stories**, **Boy on the Mayflower**, **The Landing of the Pilgrims**, **If You Sailed on the Mayflower**, and **Of Plymouth Plantation**.

We pray, thanking God for the courage and sacrifice of the Pilgrims, and we ask Him to make us strong and obedient to follow Him wherever He chooses to lead us. We always come away from our “dinner” more appreciative of the Pilgrims and their commitment to worship God in freedom.

Most years we follow this meal up with our “Plymouth Dinner.” We go downstairs and finish filling everybody up with fish chowder, bread, and cheese by candlelight, while we continue to read about the ways God sovereignly cared for the Pilgrims after they reached America.

Things to Prepare Before Your Mayflower Dinner:

The following is a summary of the basics, if you would like to try this meal with your family.

2 or 3 weeks before Thanksgiving:

Obtain a CD of ocean sound effects, if desired. We use **Echoes of Nature: Ocean Waves**, from the Laserlight Series. The same series also has a CD of thunderstorm sound effects. Both of these are available from Amazon.com for a reasonable price at:

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/B000001V38/ref=pd_bxgy_img_2/102-6910708-4272953?v=glance&s=music

The week before Thanksgiving:

- Make hardtack (a biscuit recipe without the shortening works well, or search for a more official recipe on the internet). Leave it out somewhere safe to get a bit stale.
- Gather books about the Pilgrims and select passages to read.

Suggested titles:

Pilgrim Stories, by Margaret Pumphrey

Boy on the Mayflower, by Iris Vinton

The Landing of the Pilgrims, by James Daugherty

If You Sailed on the Mayflower, by Ann McGovern

Of Plymouth Plantation, by William Bradford.

Many accounts are also available on the internet. Search on "Pilgrims on Mayflower" for many resources. Mayflowerhistory.com is a good place to start.

- Gather simple materials for costumes , if desired. Thrift stores are good sources, or make fancier costumes if you think you'll want to use them over and over.
- Gather metal or wood dishes and cups
- Purchase any special grocery items
 - Salted beef
 - Ale, if desired
 - Fish for chowder, if desired

- *Select location for your meal (dark, damp, and a bit musty, if possible)*

Monday or Tuesday before Thanksgiving

- *Assemble materials for your “Mayflower Dinner”:*
 - Candle, candleholder, and matches*
 - Dress-up clothes, if desired*
 - Salted beef and hardtack in bowls or on plates*
 - Metal cups*
 - Ale or stale water*
 - CD player and sound effects CD*
 - Books to read*
 - Camera (if you want to catch a few pictures)*
 - Books you have chosen to read*
 - Rags to mop up any spills if you have little ones*
- *Prepare your “Plymouth Dinner” if you are planning to serve it after the Mayflower.*
 - Fish chowder (Use your own recipe or open a can or two of clam chowder)*
 - Whole wheat bread*
 - Cheddar cheese*