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Editor: Dick Bernard

Co-Editor: Jerry Marie Forchette

TWO GREAT HOLIDAYS

by Ernest Ebert
Grand Forks ND

Thanksgiving Day in the United States was set aside in the last century as a legal holiday for the expressed purpose of providing an opportunity for its people to give thanks to God for the blessings of the past year. It is celebrated with church services, family gatherings and gatherings of friends. It is one of the great American feast days. Christmas as well as Thanksgiving exemplifies in a special way the spirit of being thankful and sharing. What better time to offer up thanks than at the end of a growing season? What better time to share than on the anniversary of the birth of the Lord?

Giving thanks for the fruits of the earth predates the Pilgrims but it can be said that they set the pattern for our modern Thanksgiving Day, or days, when they and their Native American friends feasted and gave thanks for three days. Sometimes, the Ebert family celebrates for four days! Be it one day or four, it was and is a wonderful way of expressing thanks to God and love for our fellowmen.

At Christmas time we oftentimes express our caring by presenting gifts to those who are near and dear and to close friends. This custom began on the first Christmas Day when the Kings from the East and the shepherds from the nearby countryside, brought gifts to the stable in Bethlehem. Those gifts were wrapped in love and that love was returned by the Savior in overflowing measure to all mankind on the first Good Friday.

In terms of both Christmas and Thanksgiving as well as the rest of the year, our generation of Seniors, in a material sense, have been blessed beyond our mothers and fathers and far beyond our grandmothers and grandfathers.

We are thankful this day.

We hope you have a good Thanksgiving Day. A Merry Christmas with love. A Happy New Year with love.



AUTUMN - A TIME FOR ME TO REFLECT
by Sammi Whipple

Ed. Note: This article first appeared in the September, 1991, Title V Indian Education Newsletter in the Anoka-Hennepin School District.

As far back as I can remember as a child, living in an all Indian Community, I had no idea what it was like living in the outside world of my snug, secure reservation environment. I somehow thought that everybody lived like we did and did the same things that we did. As a small child, I never thought that we were poor because all the other Indian families and my friends were all in the same economic class. No one was better than anyone else. I guess in a way my family was a little bit better off financially than some since both my mom and dad worked outside the home.

As Autumn approaches, it reminds me

of winding down the summer fishing season. And for my family, as well as many other families, commercial fishing is a major way of life on the Red Lake [MN] Reservation. I remember my dad coming home from work, eating, then leaving to go out and set the several nets in the lake. At sunrise, dad was up again and out "pulling" the nets out of the lake before we got up. He would come home, clean up, then leave for work. Once dad would leave for work, the remainder of the job was left to my mom and the kids. We would all pile in the car and go to the lake to take the fish out of the nets, sort the fish, pack them in ice and prepare them to be picked up by the "fish" trucks. The "fish" trucks would then take the boxes to Redby for processing at the fishery. Then our final job was to hang the nets. This was the fun part. My brother and I were always paired up to hang nets together. Of course we fought to hang the sides of the nets which held the floaters since it

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Bringing home the wild rice

By Jim Northrup

Sawyer, Minn.

Ricing was good this year for our family. Harvesting wild rice is one of our favorite seasonal activities. Turning the wild rice into food gives us a chance to do what our parents and grandparents did at this time of the year. We know their parents and grandparents made rice also. We feel connected.

In this era of machines, we still make rice the way the old people did. In an economics class many years ago, I learned the way we make rice is called labor-intensive. We just call it a lot of hard work.

First, the rice must be harvested. We go to the area lakes and rivers to gather rice. In spite of the many doom-and-gloom predictions of a bad year for wild rice, we found enough for our needs.

For a while there, everyone was a wild rice expert. It was common knowledge that the rice crop was bad this year. If I had one person tell me the crop was bad, I had 25 people saying that. Unfortunately, most of the people talking about the bad crop have never spent a day on the lake ricing. It is so much easier to talk about ricing than it is to actually do it.

While out on the lake we saw many of the same animals that are in zoos. We saw eagles, ducks, coots, otter, muskrats and a bear.

As longtime ricers, we know how important it is to clean the rice of debris. Rice heads, leaves, lily pads and moose ears are constantly removed from the wild rice. Once we got

the rice sacked up and the canoe loaded, we came home and spread the rice out in the sun to dry.

I showed my 13-year-old son, Joseph, how I like to build the fire under the parching kettle. He split wood while learning.

My wife Pat and I took turns parching the rice. The smell of the fire and parching rice spread out from our back yard. A friend tried to compare the smell of parching rice to something. He quit when we told him it smelled like parching rice. We paddled many miles in that black kettle.

Pat set up her dancing pit. She used her clean handmade moccasins to grind the hulls off the wild rice. A pleasing sound came from the pit as she moved her feet.

While fanning we watched the rice turn from brown of the hulls to green of the rice. The fanner moved around with the wind so the hulls would blow away.

Our grandson Aaron played while we worked. He learned not to get too close to the fire. He learned not to stand downwind while we were fanning the rice. Aaron taught us that he likes to eat rice out of the fanning basket. We gave him a choice between rice and a candy bar. He chose the rice.

This was my son Joseph's first time out on the lake ricing. This season was his first as a ricer. Joe learned how to pole the canoe from the front. At one point he wanted to quit, but we were out in the lake so he couldn't. Joe finally got the hang of it and found the right speed for the knocker in the back of the canoe. After watching other ricers and his

dad, Joe got a chance to knock rice. He got advice from some of his elders.

When we got home, Joe built the fire and parched our day's harvest. By the fourth batch he knew when to take the rice out of the kettle. I decided to give him the rice we gathered that day. Next he will use Pat's dancing pit to loosen the hulls. After that he will fan it and clean it. He will then have about 20 pounds of hand-finished rice.

Once again ricing was a media event. Channel 9 from the Cities was there to record Joe's first-time ricing. They didn't come for the family event, we were just out ricing when they showed up. A magazine called Martha Stewart Living sent out an art director and photographer from New York to record the labor-intensive process of turning wild rice into food.

The Creator gave us food again. We know what lake our rice comes from. We even know what part of the lake it grew in. The family members now have new ricing stories to tell.

Only 11 more months until ricing again.

Jim Northrup, a member of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, lives in Sawyer, Minn.

Star Tribune File Photo

Parching wild rice in a container set near a fire: Just call it a lot of hard work.

meant less tangles. Once we made it past this hurdle (and I'd always win the fight [as] my brother is younger than me) we could complete our jobs and go home. By mid-morning we were finished and ready to do our chores at home.

For us fishing was a summer job and by September we were ready to move on to wild rice processing. Although I never was involved directly in ricing in the lakes and swamps, I was involved in the processing of the rice. Even the small children were involved in the process. My job involved dancing or jigging on the rice. This process consist[ed] of - while wearing new moccasins - walking or stepping on the grains to loosen the husks from the seeds. After several hours of taking turns, this work can be very tiring. For some reason, I believed my dad when he used to tell me that I did

the best "jigging" job of anyone that he knew. I guess that explained why I was so eager to do it longer than my brothers or sisters. As I got older (and lazier) I realized that dad told me this to get more work out of me. 19

After going through all the processing of the wild rice, our rice was stored for the winter. By this time we were ready to head back to school for our formal education and the long winter ahead of us.

