

THE BEST THANKSGIVING EVER

A TEN-MINUTE MONOLOGUE

By **Monica Bauer**

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Thanksgiving Morning: Doris Jean, a middle-aged Mom from Charlotte, North Carolina

Last year was The Best Thanksgiving Ever. I refer to it, with sweet nostalgia, as “The Thanksgiving of projectile vomiting.” I bet you never thought of the blessing of projectile vomiting, but that’s how I got the Best Thanksgiving Ever.

As a mother of five, I have become an expert on vomiting. Vomiting can be emergency-room worthy (*rare*), a simple case of eating too many Some Mores (*they should rename those vicious little stomach destroyer’s “Don’t eat no mores”*), or the opening bell for a full week of rapid and unintentional weight loss of the sort that, if it didn’t include splattering pre-digested food all over the couch, would be welcomed by Oprah. But rarely does vomiting save anybody’s Thanksgiving. That requires luck. Or, as I prefer to see it, Divine Intervention.

Now, not all vomiting is Divinely Inspired. Oh no. For example, if one our little Full House (*three boys and two girls*) had come down with “the wretch and whine,” it would *not* have been the Best Thanksgiving Ever. The Divine Intervention was in making the vomiting victim my husband, Chuck. Because that was pretty much the only excuse my mother-in-law would ever accept, for us to be missing a Delbow Family Thanksgiving.

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Don't you judge me! Not until you've walked a mile in my Nikes! Chuck is a good man, a fine man, but he has his faults, and one of them is he loves his mother.

Over the years, I had tried a wide variety of excuses to get out of a Delbow Family Thanksgiving; pregnancy, teething, pregnancy again, teething *and* toilet training, pregnancy again... even travelling with a van-load full of toddlers was no excuse for that woman. Know what goes on in the back seat of an SUV with five kids in it? Becomes a demolition derby back there. The children arrive at their Grandmother's house so bruised up, Chuck's relatives whisper about my parenting skills or lack thereof, and Aunt Charlene finds a moment to pass Chuck the phone number of Child Protective Services. Aunt Charlene is a Social Worker, which means her job is to run other people's lives, and I have rarely seen a human being who loves her job more than Charlene. Every Delbow Family Thanksgiving, she regales the entire house, including both the Grown-Ups and the Kid's Table, with stories from her job. Child abuse, substance abuse; even animal abuse!

You would expect a normal grandmother to protect her grandkids from people like that. But not my mother in law, not Chartreuse! She thinks every word that drops from the mouth of her daughter Charlene is a pearl of wisdom. Every time I try to shush up Charlene, Chartreuse gets all up in my business. What can you expect from a woman who insists on being called the name of a color? And not even a primary color, one of those colors you only find in the 64 crayon box! Of course, her given name is Carlotta, but when she was fifty-three she got hit by a two by four while baling

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hay, and came out of the coma insisting her name was "Chartreuse."

Just in case you think I'm exaggerating the crazy of my in-laws, the way people do on the Jerry Springer, and then they come out and they aren't nearly the deviants you were expecting, and the show gets surprisingly dull... Let me give you just a taste of Chartreuse crazy. Thanksgiving is a time of year when normal people eat turkey. Turkey, yummy, yummy stuffed turkey? But no, Chartreuse got it into her head as a child that Thanksgiving was a time when people should eat whatever farm animal had most recently died.

I have offered, on bended knee, to bring the turkey myself. Oh no, she says. "The Delbow family may not have much, Doris Jean, but we have our traditions! And I know the children look forward every year to finding out what fresh meat will be on the table!" Honest to God, when Chuck's father died three years back, in early November? That was the year I bribed the children to say we were all becoming vegetarians. Of course, you can't effectively bribe a toddler, so when little Chuck grabbed what looked like some sort of organ meat, started chewing on it, and then announced that it didn't taste at all like Grandpa, well... that was a long ride home.

So, now you can fully imagine my excitement when Chuck started to lose it all over the front seat of the Explorer, half-way between Winston-Salem and Raleigh!

I turned the car around, and headed for home, where I got Chuck settled in the bedroom with one of Little Chuck's

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big plastic buckets, the kind kids use at the beach to make sandcastles. I put my oldest in charge of the youngest, because he is not afraid to stop a homicide in progress. Then I high-tailed it to the Food Mart, just praying it would be open, and I found me an honest to God turkey, and stuffing, and frozen corn. We could finally eat in peace, without having to guess how recently the meat on the table had been romping in the back meadow. Or dying of some horrible disease in the barn. I'm telling you, just knowing exactly what you're going to eat, well, we take that for granted way too much.

Unfortunately, when Chuck smelled that turkey cooking, he decided he wasn't too sick to join us for a late Thanksgiving. But he wasn't quite up to the occasion. It would have been more festive if Chuck had been the kind of man to vomit with dignity, but he's always been a big man in all respects, so... oh heck, I just turned up the TV, and enjoyed the Best Thanksgiving Ever, giving thanks to the Good Lord for his Divine Intervention.

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