

## Thanksgiving Receipt

Her first Thanksgiving back from college my daughter sprang out of the Town Car and started up our front walk. We circled her en route: hugs and kisses, some explanation of a not-so-faded Division I ding, and an afterthought—“Here.” She handed me the large, easy-to-read receipt—bright yellow testament to distance traveled—\$58 from the airport.

I turned to start back up the walk reminded of a freshman year over two decades earlier, when \$50 represented a social security payment—total monthly living allowance—the paltry receipt of a father’s choice not to pay into the system.

A surge of gratitude for blessings present melted into the mixed memory of Thanksgivings past: the motley gathering circling the tin folding table, turkey parts and Del Monte cans orbiting the steaming bowl of instant stuffing; and the drawn and self-contained high-school boy layered in hooded sweatshirts and neck towel, mid-section carefully wrapped in plastic begged from dry cleaners, curtly rejecting entreaties to eat—“I’m sucking weight.”

Out of the cramped apartment, on the empty streets of Thanksgiving night, the ritual would begin: jog to the corner, cross the deserted avenue, stretch and roll on the cold, hard safety mats beneath the playground’s swings, then begin pounding towards the bowels of Long Island City—industrial Queens.

At the 39th Street drop in Skillman Avenue, Midtown’s glittering skyline would suddenly expand—the cue to narrow focus to next week’s season-opening meet. I’d begin the internal drone—“Who’s the champ? Who’s the champ? I am. I am.” Past the giant factories and their empty truck bays, under els and over train bridges, along the perimeters of refuse-strewn lots, monotonously, interminably chanting, pounding, paying the price, praying the price.

Seeing my teenage daughter bound effortlessly, happily into our home her first Thanksgiving back from college playing fields, it occurred to me that I have no memory of returning from those long-ago, inner-gritty Thanksgiving runs—no homecoming memory in hand, but, thankfully, a bright receipt for a price paid.

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