

Thanksgiving advice for new boyfriends

Thanksgiving comes but once a year, but every day is Dad's day

Daniel Akst



Congratulations! You've been invited to **Thanksgiving** with Dad. Since you're new to the role of my boyfriend, please take a moment to review some of the special considerations that can make your time with this important American writer more rewarding for everyone.

As soon as you receive this memo, begin **following Dad on Twitter**. Then complete and return the attached six-page release. It's just a formality, giving him unlimited rights to use any and all of your stories, mannerisms, disabilities and family secrets in all media anywhere in the known universe. You also pledge to indemnify and hold him harmless in the event of a lawsuit, however frivolous, by anyone in connection with this material, including you. A notary can typically be found at your local bank, but if necessary we can refer you to Colette in the offices of Dad's lawyers. Sometimes she doesn't even charge.

Once you've completed the paperwork, there are a few things to keep in mind when you sit down for the rare privilege of a turkey dinner with Dad.

Ogling: Dad considers himself a magnet for troubled young women, but it's important not to stare at the cleavage of his latest unseemly paramour. Although Dad will want some acknowledgement from you that she's a hot number, he's indicated in the past that overt flirtation, slobbering or comments like 'Smokin'!' are unwelcome. If you must, offer manly praise in private.

Sucking up: Speaking of praise, Dad has an ego as big as the biography that he believes will someday be written about him, so don't stint on the compliments. As soon as you're introduced, comment on the firmness of his handshake. He'll expect you to have read all of his significant works — this won't take long, ha! — and to violently disagree with the envious critics who've pilloried him all these years. Generally, it's best not to bring up reviews until he's had so much to drink that he's shamelessly wallowing in self-pity, which is sometimes not until mid-morning. At that point commiseration is probably the best strategy. In addition to praising his novels, you'll get extra credit for noticing his gimlet-eyed journalism, particularly his transcendent recent essays in *Tax Preparer's Journal* and *Laundry Digest*.

Off limits: To preserve warm relations and forestall bloodshed, several topics are best left off the table. Any mention of literary prizes, publishers, agents or tenure could trigger a violent outburst. Although I love my mother, and Dad's wives are favorite fodder for his notoriously good-humored barbs, it's best not to mention any of these women until he does. His hard-earned antipathy toward matrimony may not yet be known to his latest paramour. She may also be ignorant of his straitened circumstances, so when you unhesitatingly pick up the check for the four of us, do so under cover of effusive admiration. In no event should you allude to his third wife in particular. I remind you that the inquest was inconclusive and Dad was never charged. He remains traumatized by the episode, which cast a pall over all four of his subsequent marriages.

Logistics: As you know, our Thanksgiving meal will occur at Dad's favorite restaurant, where we have a surety bond on file against the damages that have been all too frequent over the years, and where the experienced staff expertly water his drinks. Any food allergies you may think you have should be discussed with the maître d' in advance; Dad's inevitable lateness should allow ample opportunity for this important consultation. Under no circumstances should you allow yourself to mention 'gluten,' 'carbs' or 'vegan options' within his admittedly quite limited hearing.

Politics: All writers flirt with extremism. Dad calls it a byproduct of youthful genius. He always enjoys reminiscing about his time with Ezra Pound after the war, when they had those magical rambling conversations which are now so tragically lost to literary history. On the other hand, if he admires your wrist watch, it would be best not to mention its provenance. It's a nice bar mitzvah present, but Dad's old-fashioned about those things.

A final caution: Dad's never been good with names, so please just answer to whatever he calls you. I should think that would be a relief for both of you.

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