

Turkey, Football, Snow

International students join one UNH family for
“Snowsgiving” 2014

Wednesday, December 3, 2014

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Gathering together: From left, Ron Potier, father of the hostess; UNH graduate students Xiaoyi Tang and Shivam Goyal; host Brent Bell, associate professor of kinesiology at UNH; Kathy Potier, mother of the hostess; Holden Bell (back turned), hosts' son.

Xiaoyi Tang and Shivam Goyal have no idea how lucky they are. The two UNH graduate students, from China and India, respectively, celebrated their first Thanksgiving dinner at one of the few local homes that didn't lose power. They joined me, my husband, associate professor of kinesiology Brent Bell, our son, and my parents in our Durham home for "Snowsgiving" as part of an effort coordinated by UNH's Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS).

As their hostess, I was relieved to welcome them to a warm table groaning with piping-hot Thanksgiving excess. After all, my family embraces some quirky food traditions (artisanal celery, anyone?) from my hometown of Lancaster, Penn.; sliced deli turkey and extra blankets against the chill might have scarred them from ever again celebrating what I've always considered our nation's finest holiday.

My worry was probably unnecessary. "I feel like I'm part of your family," said Goyal, a computer science student from Delhi, as he stretched out on the couch between dinner and dessert. My husband schooled our guests on watching football, and my globetrotting parents shared stories of their visits to India and China. Goyal and Tang told us about their cultures' parallel autumn celebrations (Diwali in India and the Chinese Moon Festival).

"It's so warm, so sweet that family can get together," said Tang, a Nanjing native and statistics student who also experienced her first major snowstorm that day. Both students expressed surprise that stereotypically far-flung American families make such an effort to be together for the holiday.

Admittedly, peppering our guests with hard-hitting interview questions ("Which pie was your favorite, apple or pumpkin?") after serving them a multi-course meal rather stacked the deck in our favor, but the students gave the day with our family top reviews. Butternut squash and stuffing were Goyal's favorite dishes; Tang loved another Pennsylvania Dutch peculiarity, Cope's baked corn.



Hosts Brent Bell, Holden Bell (with Blake the cat) and Beth Potier with guests Xiaoyi Tang and Shivam Goyal.

Ours was one of 35 local families, about half affiliated with UNH and half from the community, to host 65 international students for Thanksgiving this year, according to Zainab Qari, OISS programming and outreach coordinator. Now in its third year, the program is an overwhelming success, she said.

“The students were overwhelmed with the hospitality and the kindness, and they were so excited to try new foods,” Qari said. Cranberry sauce, she notes, is a particular favorite.

Qari, a native of Egypt who has worked at UNH for four years, was inspired by her own experience 20 years ago to launch the Thanksgiving dinner program. As an undergraduate at Suffolk University in Boston, she celebrated her first Thanksgiving as the guest of one of her professors.

“My experience was amazing,” Qari said. And lasting: She and her family traveled to the Boston area, as they do every year, to spend Thanksgiving with that teacher.

- WRITTEN BY:

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