

# Thanksgiving

by George Friedman - November 25, 2020

Thanksgiving is a family holiday. For our family it is truly a family holiday, for my wife, Meredith, is a descendent of William Bradford, who was the first governor of Plymouth Colony and one of the framers of the Mayflower Compact. Apparently one William Hunt married Bradford's granddaughter. We know this because Meredith's mother researched this all over the world, including in Utah at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which has a superb genealogical collection. And I trust it because she was old-school. On a visit to Australia years ago we were watching TV news about some unpleasantness and she said: "I don't know what has become of Australia. It used to be such a lovely, Christian country." She thought for a bit, turned to me and said, "Oh, I don't mean you, dear." Old-school and not given to falsification.

She got all this genealogy certified and joined, or planned to join, the Mayflower Society. I have urged my wife on many occasions to join herself, which she refuses to do, as it is too much trouble and what does it matter. What does it matter? The name Friedman would be enshrined on the rolls of a group founded by the most rigorous Protestants imaginable. And if somehow my wife could add her genealogy, we could perhaps add my own, including my great-grandfather Shmuel, who stole goats in the Carpathian Mountains. The last part I made up, but you get the picture. I really want a Friedman from Budapest on the Mayflower rolls. It would beat my Ph.D. hands down. I would immediately be able to speak softly and not laugh at my own jokes, and above all not embarrass my wife with my Bronx manners. I really want to join, but ...

In the course of begetting, a couple of generations later a James Irwin was born and served in our Revolutionary War. Unfortunately, he fought for the British and was a spy for Gen. William Howe, operating in Putnam County. Captured by the Yankees, he spent several years in a bad place. He escaped and apparently went back to his old business. He was accused of killing someone who apparently needed killing, from the British point of view. The British were careful with the niceties, and he was court-martialed. We found the record of his court-martial, where he was asked if he pleads guilty or not guilty. He said not guilty, and it seems the gavel came down in his favor. I hope the record was incomplete, but these were hard times and decisions had to be made quickly.

As you can see, my wife descends from the Mayflower but tragically cannot be a Daughter of the American Revolution. Uncle Jim screwed that up. He was given land in Nova Scotia, near Halifax,

and went into the shipbuilding industry. His son did the same and became captain of his own ship but apparently was lost at sea. The next generation of Irwins built a ship, the Active, and sailed for Australia, arriving in 1857. I assume he rolled the dice on the tail end of the Australian gold rush. If so, precious little made its way down the Irwin line, including to Meredith's grandmother. He may have gone for other reasons, like a desire to experience the incredible danger of the Strait of Magellan, though he settled in Armidale, a town remarkably quiet for a man who dared the oceans in a sailing craft. The Irwins were a restless group as a whole and adventurous. Meredith's mother's cousin left Australia to join the Royal Air Force and was shot down over the Ruhr Valley on a recon mission in World War II. Her grandfather surveyed the Birdsville track in Australia.

On Thanksgiving we give thanks for our children and grandchildren, though there will be no family gathering this year. For Meredith it is an opportunity to remember her restless and willful relatives, long gone but having left their mark. She continues that genetically based restlessness, following her first love eagerly to places she had never seen – first to Arkansas in the United States, then to Kano, Nigeria, for reasons hard to understand, and then to smuggle medicines in the Soviet Union for refusenik Jews. Perhaps her most extreme and incomprehensible adventure was marrying me. Our differences are profound. Her people adventured. My people fled.

Her life is quintessentially American, although she did not set foot here until she was 25. She is restless and brave, traveling the world as did her ancestors, and taking chances that no reasonable woman would. I can never figure out if she travels through courage or the illusion of invincibility. In that, she is a Bradford.

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