



CIE's own Darren Boulet talks about what Thanksgiving means to him.

*photo by Mohammad Saeed*

# Giving Thanks at CIE.

## Darren Boulet speaks at CIE and Hart House Thanksgiving Dinner

Hello everyone, my name is Darren Robert Boulet; I'm a third year student at the University of Toronto, studying towards a specialist in chemistry, and I am a student assistant at the Centre for International Experience. I welcome you all to the Centre for International Experience's Thanksgiving dinner. Is everyone excited for all the food you're about to eat?

I'm sure that Thanksgiving is a concept that is new to some of you and might even be the first Thanksgiving you've ever had. Well, that makes me even more honoured to introduce and share this tradition that is so dear to me and part of our Canadian culture with all of you.

Thanksgiving has been said to have many different origin stories, but they all started here in North America in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. For the British, the first Thanksgiving happened while the explorer Martin Frobisher was trying to find a northern passage to the Pacific Ocean. Frobisher held a big feast in thanks for surviv-

ing the long journey from England through the perils of storms and icebergs to Canada. However, the most notable origin and version of Thanksgiving happened thanks to the French settlers who came to Canada with the famous explorer Samuel de Champlain.

The settlers would always celebrate a successful harvest season by having a massive feast with all the spoils of their labours. Except their Thanksgiving wasn't just a night or a weekend. They would celebrate Thanksgiving all throughout winter, even sharing their food with the indigenous First Nations people in the area. Years later we still keep the tradition of feasting at the end of the harvest season and giving thanks for a successful year alive to honour our heritage and the first settlers who came before us.

You might be thinking though, "Why is this weird U of T student standing here telling us about Thanksgiving?"

Well, I'm glad you asked. I have the wonderful honour of being an 11<sup>th</sup> generation French Canadian

and the descendant of one of the original French settlers to come to Canada. My ancestor, Robert Boulet, arrived in Canada, on a small island off the coast of Quebec City known as Île d'Orleans, or the Island of Orleans, with his wife, Françoise Garnier and their daughter Jaqueline in 1662. That makes this year the 350<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of my family's settlement in Canada. Robert Boulet gave up his life in the little town of Saint-Germain de Loisé in France to become a farmer in Canada under the orders of King Louis XIV. The road to Canada wasn't easy.

Of the 100 men that traveled with him by boat from France to Canada, 33 of them died of hunger and thirst, but Robert and his family made it to the Island of Orleans, where I'm sure he celebrated many Thanksgivings. He lived on that island until he died on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1707. His remains are still buried in the local cemetery there. I am very thankful for my ancestor because if it weren't for his bravery in coming to the New World I would not have the wonderful life I have today.

Nowadays Thanksgiving isn't just about celebrating a good harvest. It's been adapted to be a day where we give thanks for all the many blessings we've received throughout the year. A lot of people

like to travel somewhere, or hold a massive feast with gigantic tables and all of their extended family, but no matter what you do it's always to join together with your family.

Me personally, I love the way my family celebrates Thanksgiving. I go to my grandmother's house, which isn't far from where I live, I get together with just a handful of members of my immediate family, and we sit around a small table and we just laugh. We tell tons of bad jokes, we tease each other, and we enjoy each other's company. It's very intimate and I love it. I love everything about my crazy family. That's the thing. Thanksgiving is exactly what it sounds like: Thanks and giving. It's a time to love everything and everyone that has made you who you are today. It's a time to be thankful and give back to those you love.

So to lead by example let me leave you with some things that I am thankful for. I am thankful for living, I am thankful for videogames. I am thankful for my wonderful family that loves me and cares for me. I am thankful for delicious food. I am thankful for my friends. I am thankful that I am not failing chemistry right now. But most importantly, I am thankful that I get to share this tradition of love and thanks with all of you. Thank you very much.

*photo by Mohammad Saeed*

