



A Kind of Non-sectarian Christmas

Peter Sagal, Host NPR's *Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me!*

Like a lot of Jewish families, Thanksgiving became for us a kind of non-sectarian Christmas. (We never bought into the whole Hanukkah scam... a minor, non-liturgical holiday blown out of proportion so that suburban Jewish kids like me wouldn't feel bad when our Christian friends got all that loot.) For as long as I can remember, my entire family has gathered, from as far away as circumstances have flung us, to celebrate a holiday begun – traditionally at least – by a group of Christian Pilgrims for whom a real live Jew would have been far more exotic, and possibly more sinister, than the American Indians they were breaking bread with. But this is America, in which anybody and everybody gets to come here, turn on football on the TV in the other room, and stun themselves into incoherence with L-tryptophan. Among the hallmarks of the classic Sagal family Thanksgiving: overcooked turkey – it's possible my mother was scared by a large flightless bird in her youth, and has been extracting revenge ever since – and a strange sweet-salty noodle, cheese, and raisin concoction called *kugel*, which we marveled at but never ate. Plus, of course, canned cranberry sauce, presented in a perfect cylinder on a plate, with the stripe-like indents from the steel can still visible on its translucent sides. This year, I'll be bringing my wife and three children to celebrate the occasion at my parents' home, because in addition to Thanksgiving, it's my father's 70th birthday. I'm going to insist on cooking the turkey... although I will encourage my mother to prepare *kugel* again, so I can share the experience of not eating it with my kids.