

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

307

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will involve American history. As you know, after 66 days at sea the pilgrims arrived off the coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts on Nov. 9, 1620. Two days later, while still at anchor, 41 pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact. This document reveals the purpose of their journey: "*Having undertaken for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the first Colony in the northern Parts of Virginia . . .*" The following information about how the pilgrims survived in this new world has been taken from the book *The Light and the Glory* by Peter Marshall and David Manuel.

The following facts seem to confirm the blessing of God upon these devout pilgrims who sought to glorify God and advance the Christian faith. First, the area where the pilgrims were to disembark was once inhabited by Patuxet Indians. This was a large hostile tribe determined to kill every white man with whom they came in contact. Why did these Indians not kill the pilgrims? This, as Paul Harvey would say, is the "rest of the story".

Let us go back 15 years to 1605. This was the year that five Patuxet Indians were taken captive by Capt. George Weymouth. One of these captives was named Squanto. These poor souls were taken as slaves to England where Squanto became fluent in English. Nine years later, in 1614, Squanto was permitted to return to America with Capt. John Smith. Shortly thereafter, he was again captured and enslaved. This time by Englishman Capt. Thomas Hunt. Sadly, he was again forced to return to England. This time he was rescued from slavery by local friars who introduced him to the Christian faith. Much too enterprising to be cooped up in a monastery, Squanto attached himself to an Englishman bound for London. In the year 1619 he somehow made arrangements to sail back to America with Capt. Dermer.

When Squanto stepped ashore, just six months before the pilgrims arrived, he received the shock of his life. A terrible plague had taken the lives of every man, woman, and child in his entire tribe. Nothing remained of his people but skeletons and abandoned relics of a previous civilization. The plague was so devastating that other tribes shunned the area fearing it was inhabited by evil spirits. Squanto wandered aimlessly through the land where he had grown up as a child. It was here he had learned to hunt and fish and dreamed of someday raising a family. He was overcome with sadness.

The destruction of the violent Patuxet tribe explains why the pilgrims were not killed when they came ashore. They would most certainly not have survived if they had arrived only a few years earlier. In 1620, however, they were greeted by a friendly Indian who spoke perfect English and was educated in the Christian faith. It is hard to believe the pilgrims considered this as an "accident".

Helping these friendly white people gave Squanto a reason for living. He saw them as little children totally unprepared to survive in the hostile wilderness. First, he taught them how to catch eels which were plentiful, fat, and sweet. Then he taught them how to stalk deer, hunt, and fish. Of critical importance for their survival was the ability to grow corn. Europeans, as you probably know, did not know about corn until Columbus discovered America. At any rate, Squanto taught them how to plant corn and fertilize it with fish. He taught them to protect their fields from wolves for two weeks until the fish had decomposed. He also taught them to plant pumpkins in between the rows of corn. The first year they harvested a bountiful crop from a full 20 acres of luscious corn and delicious pumpkins.

Equally important for their survival was the ability to harvest and sell beaver pelts. The corn sustained them physically, and the beaver pelts sustained them economically. Squanto was said to have helped the pilgrims in a thousand different ways. He showed them how to refine maple syrup, to make medicines of herbs, and which berries were the most healthy, Etc.

On Apr. 21 the Mayflower set sail for the return trip to England. 47 pilgrims and half of the crew had perished during that first hard winter. The summer of 1621, however, was beautiful and productive. With Squanto as leader and interpreter, friendly contacts were made with neighboring tribes. In October, Governor Bradford declared a day of Thanksgiving. Massasoit, chief of a neighboring tribe, brought 90 Indians with him to join in the celebration. The pilgrims were concerned that such a large crowd would deplete their store of food they had saved for the winter. They didn't need to worry. The Indians brought with them plenty of food including 5 dressed deer and a dozen wild turkeys. The Indian women showed the pilgrims how to prepare tasty dishes like hoe cakes and pudding made out of corn meal and sweetened with maple syrup. This was also the first time the pilgrims had ever seen or eaten popcorn.

The pilgrims in turn provided many vegetables such as carrots, onions, turnips, parsnips, cucumber, radishes, beets, and cabbage. They also introduced their Indian friends to blueberry, apple, and cherry pie. There were also friendly contests in shooting, wrestling, and running. The occasion was so happy that the Indians decided to stay for three more days.

What lessons can we learn from this? Perhaps one lesson is this, if we risk our lives for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith, God may decide to send someone like Squanto to help us succeed.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce