

= Thanksgiving Orphans =

" Thanksgiving Orphans " is the ninth episode of the fifth season of the American television sitcom , Cheers , co @-@ written by Cheri Eichen and Bill Steinkeller and directed by James Burrows . It originally aired on November 27 , 1986 , on NBC . The characters do not have families or friends to spend time with , and some of their plans backfire . They gather for a Thanksgiving feast , which degenerates into a food fight . Burrows filmed the food @-@ fight scene (which was only partially choreographed) twice .

= = Plot = =

On Thanksgiving , Sam (Ted Danson) is with his fiancée Wendy . Frasier (Kelsey Grammer) is lonely , and wants some company . Cliff 's mother volunteers to feed the homeless , but Cliff (John Ratzenberger) ? who has done that during the past year ? is unwilling . Norm (George Wendt) does not want to go to his mother @-@ in @-@ law 's overheated house , which lacks beer and a television . Woody (Woody Harrelson) is still in Indiana , away from his family . Carla 's children are with Nick , her ex @-@ husband . At Diane 's insistence , Carla (Rhea Perlman) invites the gang for a Thanksgiving potluck . However , Diane (Shelley Long) has been invited to her American literature professor 's annual Thanksgiving party where she hopes to meet William Styron .

The scene in Carla 's new house (first seen in the 1986 episode , " House of Horrors with Formal Dining and Used Brick ") begins with Woody , Cliff , and Frasier watching television . Norm arrives with an uncooked turkey and puts it in Carla 's oven while he explains that Vera went to her mother 's house . Sam arrives with dessert , but without Wendy ; she and her sister , who arrived from out of town , did not want to go to Carla 's . Diane then arrives , dressed as a pilgrim . At the professor 's party she discovered that she had been invited to be domestic help , and left in tears . The gang , including a reluctant Carla , decides to allow her to stay for dinner .

They continue watching television for a while until Diane turns it off and forces them to have dinner . In the dining room , when they are eager to eat , Diane tells them to suspend their eating until the turkey is ready . As suppertime comes and goes , the turkey is still very undercooked and the trimmings have gone cold . Carla and Norm start blaming each other for the turkey 's slow cooking . Norm throws some of Carla 's peas at her and then she throws carrots back at him . Cliff throws mashed yams at Frasier , who throws gravy skin back at Cliff but misses and accidentally hits Woody . The whole gang are poised to start a food fight until Diane stands up and loudly tells them to stop . When she is close to scolding them , Sam throws cranberry sauce at her , so the food fight resumes . By the time the food fight ends , the turkey is finally cooked . The gang calms down and decides to eat what they can . Diane comes out of the kitchen and throws a pumpkin pie to spite Sam for throwing the cranberry sauce at her . The pie misses Sam but accidentally hits Vera as she enters . Vera tells Norm to fetch Norm 's own coat , i.e. take her home , and Norm remorsefully agrees .

= = Production = =

Cheri Eichen and Bill Steinkellner wrote the episode and it was directed by James Burrows . Burrows shot the food fight scene twice , with the scene unchoreographed after the point where the character Sam Malone throws cranberry sauce at Diane Chambers ' face . The extended takes resulted in a strong food odor around the set . In one of the food fight takes , the floor was covered with a " plastic tarp " in order to prevent vital materials from being broken while the cast was slipping on the floor during the scene . However , the attempt was ineffective . After the episode aired , the production crew received a few angry letters disapproving of the food fight scene " at a time when world hunger was a political cause du jour . " According to Burrows , the food not used for the scene was donated to charity .

Bernadette Birkett , whose husband George Wendt portrays Norm Peterson , appears in the episode as Norm 's wife Vera , though Birkett is not credited for the role and Vera 's face is never

visible to the audience because she is struck by a pumpkin pie thrown by Diane . Birkett had previously appeared in a 1984 episode , " Fairy Tales Can Come True " , as Sharon O 'Hare , who dressed as Tinker Bell on Halloween .

= = Reception = =

The episode aired on NBC on Thanksgiving Day , November 27 , 1986 . For the week ending November 30 , it had the sixth highest Nielsen rating at 21 @. @ 7 , with a 38 share . Leigh Weingus of The Huffington Post included the food fight sequence in a list of the 10 Most Awkward Thanksgiving Scenes of All Time from movies and television . TV Guide ranked it number seven on its 100 Greatest Episodes of All Time list . IGN called it the fourth best Cheers episode , highlighting the witty dialogue and the bonding between characters .

An A.V. Club retrospective group review praised the episode , especially for the food fight . The reviewers also highlighted the effective short reference by the characters to a past colleague , the late Coach Ernie Pantusso , and the setting of much of the episode at Carla 's house rather than the bar . Molly Eichel , one of the reviewers , was especially interested in moments other than the food fight , such as the " childishness " (also described as " devolution ") of the characters , Diane 's motherliness toward the gang , and Eichel 's " favorite part " , Vera 's long @-@ awaited appearance , even though her face was covered with pumpkin pie .