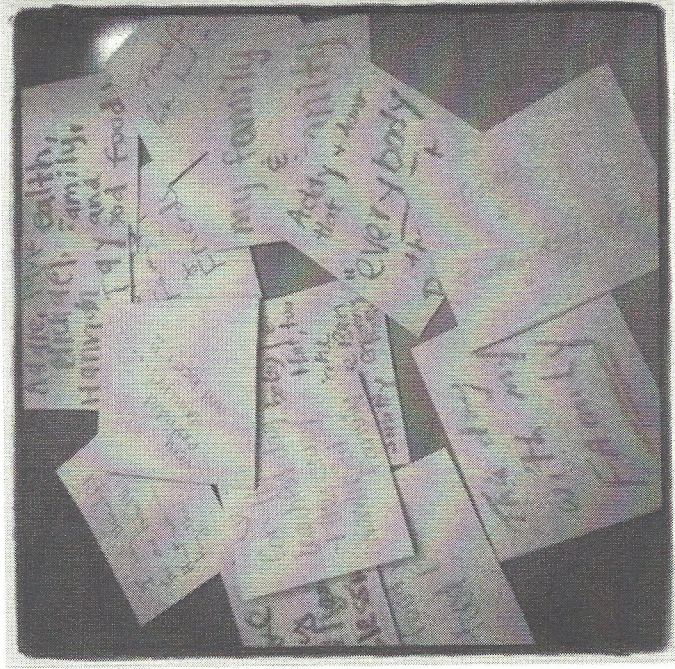


## Bowl O'Gratitude

Harriet Riley



The salt air was wet on our faces. We took turns holding the soft babies in the cool air with the waves bouncing the boat like a seesaw. Deep sadness was just below the surface. But we choose laughter as we gathered on this coastal island.

It was Thanksgiving morning and months before we had sprinkled the ashes of a loved one in these very waters. We were healing in the sunshine, the salt and the people gathered together. Among other family members, I was with my second husband and his daughter by his first wife, his son by his second, and my two daughters by my first husband, now deceased. Not the traditional family, we were in the process of creating our own community to share the time-honored American tradition. What brought us all together was not turkey and salt water, but a sense of shared family.

When we had first arrived at the island house the day before, I had set out a bowl and asked everyone to place in it what they were thankful for this year. These notes made us all think about the good things in our life rather than the losses that were always on our minds. Little Addie, age 3, who had lost both her parents in a plane crash, had me list 12 people and a horse she was thankful for. Her blessings overflowed. One person listed, "Extended families...and beer!" Another wrote, "For this beautiful day and this crazy, wonderful family!"

Surrounded by love and filled with gratitude, it was Thanksgiving at last.