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Plenty of beloved TV comedies have [great Thanksgiving episodes](https://www.vulture.com/2018/11/what-to-watch-stream-thanksgiving.html). The episode of Cheers that devolves into a food fight is an all-timer. Multiple [Thanksgiving episodes of Friends](https://www.vulture.com/article/best-friends-thanksgiving-episodes.html) are now considered holiday classics. The Simpsons’ “Bart vs. Thanksgiving” is as much of a must-watch every year, at least for me, as A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving. More recent sitcoms — like The Office, Bob’s Burgers, Veep, Black-ish, and Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt — have delivered great hat tips to Turkey Day, too.

But the most quintessential, uproarious Thanksgiving episode of a sitcom remains “Turkeys Away,” the WKRP in Cincinnati masterpiece of bird-dropping pandemonium that first aired in 1978. Four decades later, at least among those of a certain age or those possessing a certain amount of Thanksgiving pop-culture knowledge, it remains a touchstone. That’s partly because the jokes still hold up and partly because it ends with [a perfectly quotable mic drop of a last line](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LH0gcYgqOgM), spoken by the late Gordon Jump as clueless radio station manager Arthur Carlson: “As God is my witness, I thought turkeys could fly.”

For those who have not seen it, “Turkeys Away” — which is available to rent on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B000VL1GFQ/?ots=1&slotNum=0&imprToken=40bea43d-5691-49d0-e11&ascsubtag=%5b%5dvu%5bp%5dcjoq5fjgz0057q8y67iu2eaz9%5bi%5dundefined%5bu%5d1%5bt%5dw%5br%5dgoogle.com%5bd%5dD%5bz%5dm&tag=vulture-20) and [iTunes](https://itunes.apple.com/us/tv-season/turkeys-away/id266147896) — starts off with a straightforward plot that careens abruptly into dark comedy. Mr. Carlson, who runs the station owned by his wealthy, domineering mother, decides he needs to get more involved in day-to-day operations and comes up with an idea for a publicity stunt that will shine more attention on WKRP, which has recently changed formats from easy listening to rock. But he keeps the details of his plan a secret from his employees, with the exception of Herb Tarlek (Frank Bonner), the skeezy ad-sales guy who becomes his right-hand man in this Thanksgiving fiasco. As his taste in leisure suits attests, Herb’s judgment is no better than Carlson’s.

In the episode’s second act, as WKRP newsman Les Nessman (Richard Sanders) broadcasts live from the Pinedale Mall, what Mr. Carlson has done becomes clear, in real time, to Les, his colleagues back at the station, and everyone watching WKRP in Cincinnati: Mr. Carlson has chosen to drop 20 live turkeys from a helicopter with a “Happy Thanksgiving from WKRP” banner attached to it, above a busy shopping center parking lot. This … does not go well.

“The turkeys are hitting the ground like sacks of wet cement!” Les shouts while bystanders can be seen fleeing around him. When his feed cuts out during the mayhem, Johnny Fever (Howard Hesseman), the disc jockey running the boards back in the studio, segues back to the music with a wry, perfectly delivered, “Thanks for that on-the-spot report, Les. For those who just tuned in, the Pinedale Shopping Mall has just been bombed with live turkeys.”

There are a number of amazing things about this whole sequence, but I’ll start with this: It’s actually based on a true story. According to this [oral history of “Turkeys Away,”](https://classictvhistory.wordpress.com/2012/11/21/turkeys-away-an-oral-history/) not just one true story, but two. Hugh Wilson, the WKRP creator who [died last year](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/17/obituaries/hugh-wilson-who-created-wkrp-in-cincinnati-dies-at-74.html), said he based the plot on a similar promotion spearheaded by a station in Dallas, while staffers at the Atlanta station on which WKRP was based said they also once threw turkeys out of the back of a truck in a promotion that (shocker) went awry. The fact that two radio stations — and those are just the ones we know about!— actually executed some version of a live turkey drop lends this episode credibility. But what makes it funny is how incredible it is.