

11/15/20

## A Christmas Tradition that has Faded Away

by Pam Jundt

I don't love to cook. In fact most days I don't even like to cook. Before way too many meals I ask myself "how can I go from being hungry to not hungry with as little effort as possible?" I had a friendlier relationship with the kitchen when my two sons were young, but I've never been one who finds cooking relaxing or a good creative outlet. My goal was to get dinner on the table without much stress or time involved and without relying too heavily on processed or fast food. I dubbed myself the Queen of the 20 Minute Meal.

Like most women my age the burden of holiday meals, the shopping, cooking and clean up, fell on me. My husband and kids were great about helping, but still most of the meal prep was my job. Given my relax attitude towards the culinary arts it's no surprise that in our family spiral cut ham for dinner became a Christmas tradition. Not only is spiral cut ham tasty, it's easy. Just reheat and eat. Add a casserole of cheesy potatoes, some steamed asparagus, a batch of Rhodes rolls and, bam, Christmas dinner is done. So every year I picked up a ham, on sale, at the grocery store or, if we felt like splurging, I'd wait in line, coupon in hand, at the Honey Baked Ham store. There was something comforting about always knowing what we were having for Christmas dinner.

This tradition carried on even as my sons grew to be adults. As they grew up though, the weirdest thing happened. Both my sons became excellent cooks. (If they both didn't look a lot like me I'd think they were switched at birth). They took on more and more of the responsibility of cooking Christmas dinner. Ham was still the staple but the side dishes got more varied and interesting. After my one son met his wife, who doesn't care for ham, we added more meats to the meal.

Last year my son, who lives in Atlanta, and his girlfriend flew to Denver. Both my sons and their partners told me they were going to cook Christmas dinner. Yay, I was off the hook. The first thing they did was to boot ham off the menu. It was decided that porchetta would be the main course. Most anyone who is of Italian descent or those more adventurous eaters knows what porchetta is, but, I, with my white bread northern European background had never heard of it. I soon learned it's roasted stuffed and rolled pork belly.

It needs to be started a couple days in advanced. The pork belly has to rest in the refrigerator for at least a day, preferably two before roasting. After resting the meat is stuffed with herbs and vegetables, rolled and tied then roasted for hours, changing the oven temperature halfway through. Personally I'd rather be stabbed with a fondue fork than toil over such a convoluted recipe but, hey, I wasn't cooking so what did I care?

Christmas dinner was delicious. Succulent meat, wonderfully creamy mashed potatoes and piles of perfectly roasted vegetables. I didn't miss the ham at all. Last year was my first year in my condo, so a good time to start new traditions. Sometimes we just have let go of what we've always done and embrace the new. The only tradition I will always, always hang on to is my family coming together in laughter and in love, either in person or by Zoom.