

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1995

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CHEF LARRY JAMES

Warm someone's heart this holiday season

Scrooge learned a lesson about the joy of giving after his hideous night of Christmas past, present, and future. As a cook and writer I am particularly sensitive to the ceremonial and celebratory aspects of feasts. They are meant for sharing and giving.

In recent Christmas seasons, as my harried friends and I bemoaned the perils of shopping, the lack of time, and being on the brink of bankruptcy, I questioned not just the commercialization of all our holidays, but rather the loss of generosity and celebration.

We have friends whose mission it is during the month of December to find, at all costs, the biggest and best holiday gifts for everyone from the postman to the relatives. I suggest food or the thought of donating time and it's like getting the feeling that a Grinch has perched himself on my sullen brow.

Share your time

"What? No party?" is the standard response. Quietly I remember Sister Renella, my seventh grade Dominican Nun/teacher whose favorite line from December 8 through Three Kings Day was "Remember the reason for the season for the children pro encouraged to bring to school, we too can donate food or, better yet, cook at one of the numerous hospices, churches, soup kitchens and centers that provide for the elderly, the poor, the ill and outcasts.

Parents along with their children might consider making food for giving not only friends but, more importantly, also to those from whom we expect nothing in return, the needy and lonely. Teens can help with the planning, preparation, and serving of meals. Holidays are times to think about friends and acquaintances who may be on their own and ask them to share in our feasts. There used to be a time when no stranger in a church was allowed to leave without a family to join. Today, we may be leery of strangers, but we can ask friends or clergy for names of people who might benefit from an invitation.

But enough of the bandwagon, you undoubtedly catch my drift. In the Jesus Gange home, the preparation of food has established traditions and helped create a glow of satisfaction that lasts much longer than the momentary joys.

We'll pop corn and string it to festoon the front bushes for our feathered friends holiday treat. By the time my little ones could stand, they participated in making gingerbread families and houses.

The younger they were, the more stripped down to shorts and T-shirts, as kids are easier to wash than clothes. I can remember helping the kids move their shapes to the baking sheet while they helped themselves to raisins, nuts, sprinkles, M&M's and licorice. Sometimes a recognizable gingerbread man or house appeared; often the designs were wild and woolly fantasies. The wonderful spicy smell filled the air while sounds of Bing Crosby crooned "White Christmas" and sweet tastes were enjoyed while licking fingers covered with Royal Icing. Of course, as the kids get older, their dough figures and houses become neater, the rooms less messy, but the feelings remain the same. No time and talent in the gingerbread field of dreams, you say?

Christmas past

I can remember one Christmas growing up in Wyandotte when momma, on a blustery Sunday after church, brought down a bag of empty shoe boxes from the upstairs attic. We were instructed to wrap them in cheap colorful tissue while she baked, and baked, and baked. We licked the bowls, ate raw dough and inhaled powdered sugar. When the afternoon had ended, we jumped into the old Ford Fairlane and delivered the sweet treats to fire stations all around Wyandotte. It was just a mom and her kids saying thanks to people who provide a life-or-death service and who might be alone during the holidays.

Making, giving, welcoming, and sharing are all words that go well with food and with the holidays, harking back to Christmas past, when food was scarce in winter and feasts were celebrations. May your holiday table be as meaningful as those of Christmas past. Happy Holidays to all, and to all, a good night.

See Larry James' family-tested recipes inside. Chef Larry is a freelance writer for the Observer & Escanaba Newspapers. To leave a voice mail message for him dial (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1886.

LOOKING AHEAD

- What to watch for in Taste next week:
- New Year's Eve sparklers.
- Non-alcoholic sippers.

Crown your table with festive roast



NATIONAL LIFE STOCK AND MEAT BOARD

Royal feast: Crown your holiday table with classic beef roast with roasted root vegetables.

BY RENEE M. SKOGLUND
SPECIAL WRITER

Nothing is more stunning than crowning a festive Christmas table with a big succulent roast, browned to perfection. Guests will "oooh" and "ahhh" and raise their glasses in a toast to the cook's efforts.

Indeed, Christmas dinner can be a grand occasion, but its preparation should leave plenty of time for celebrating with family and friends. That's why the smart Christmas cook serves a roast.

Roasting is easy, even for beginning cooks. Perhaps the most classic choice is a beef rib roast. But there are other options as well.

"It's beautiful to look at. It's all together and the chops have these little chef hats on them. The meat just falls off the bone," said Shirley Broccardo of Livonia about her beautiful crown roast of lamb.

"I've made it for Christmas dinner and it's excellent. It's excellent because you marinate it the night before. You only have to bake it."

Broccardo, who owns Unique Accessories Boutique

in Plymouth, likes her dinner parties elegant but simple, especially for the busy holiday season. She carefully orchestrates her menu for taste and eye appeal.

"I serve the lamb with rice pilaf, a Caesar salad and broccoli or string beans. For an appetizer, I serve goat cheese and roasted garlic on hard Italian bread. It's so good," she said.

Broccardo always orders more meat than she needs. "If I'm having 10 people, I usually order meat for 12. For a larger Christmas dinner party, she'll serve roast turkey along with the lamb. However, she said the lamb always takes the spotlight.

The crown roast is special. It just looks like Christmas."

Laura Standhardt of Birmingham cannot imagine having Christmas dinner anywhere else but at her mother's. She knows her mother, Norma Marson of Livonia, will have prepared a baked ham, a stuffed capon and pasticciatta, an Italian-style beef

roast cooked with garlic, onions, tomato juice and wine. The roast is cooked the night before, then sliced and reheated in its own juices.

"When my mother brings out the pasticciatta on a buffet table, people go nuts. That's the first thing they want," said Standhardt.

Marson said pasticciatta has a long history in her family. In addition to making it for Christmas dinners and her grandchildren's graduation parties, she has made it for family bocci tournaments.

"My uncle would call and say they were having a bocci tournament, and people would say 'Is Norma bringing the pasticciatta?'"

Besides refilling 14 glasses with his own homemade wine, Marson's husband, Chet, contributes a special talent to the Christmas dinner: roasting the chestnuts.

He recalled the Christmas dinners of his boyhood in Sault Ste. Marie, Canada. "Of course, we always topped it off with roasted chestnuts"

about two and a half hours after dinner. The English would go into the handy room, and we Italians would stay in the kitchen with all the smells and have chestnuts."

I still remember the beef roast my Aunt Virginia used to make on Christmas day when I was a little girl. Her snug brick house on Camden Street in Detroit was our family's "dinner stop" before bringing the day to a close at my paternal grandparents'.

Her roasting pan must have been magic because it turned an ordinary pot roast into a fork-tender culinary masterpiece. To this day she claims she did nothing special.

This Christmas, let us all gather around the table and raise our glasses high in a toast to the cook who produced the roast. Let us bow our heads and give thanks for good food, good family and friends, and all of life's blessings.

• See recipes inside.

Wine is a perfect last-minute gift



Buying a Christmas gift of wine is easy. No crowded malls. You can even let your fingers do the shopping at the last minute without leaving home. Need a hostess gift? Buy a bottle of wine. Do you have someone on your gift list who likes off-beat, hard-to-find wines? A membership in the California Wine Club may be the perfect gift solution: It's a quality compact gift. The recipient of a gift will be sent two bottles of wine from a premium, small California winery. Generally, the wine is not available in our market. The brand may be, but the particular bottling is too small for national distribution and is best sold through a medium such as CWC. Current examples of wines in this category and available at discount to club members are two delightful sparklers from Anderson Valley: 1990 Handley Blanc de Blancs and 1990 Handley Brut.

The price for a direct-to-consumer gift from CWC is \$30 per month and you can send as many months as you choose. A connoisseur's series is also available and the price varies depending on the wines selected. Two-day service, volume discounts and deferred payments are offered. Call the 24-hour toll-free line (800) 777-4443 or Fax (800) 700-1599. Charges to Visa, Master Card or American Express are accepted.

Wine enthusiasts like to read. The best new wine book to cross our desk this year is "On Clark's Wine Atlas," (Little, Brown and Co., NY, \$60). Whether a person is planning a visit to one of the world's great wine regions or is only armchair traveling, the panoramic maps and photographic inclusions are breathtaking. Essentials of the various wine regions are covered in easy-flowing text.



Flavorful gift: Passion fruit juice and cognac blend Alize makes an unusual gift and a unique aperitif for a special dinner.

(Dutton, 1995, \$29.95). Ash is Fetzner Vineyards Culinary Director. This is not a coffee table book, but one that will get much use in the kitchen. The popularity of specialty fruit drinks combined with the appeal of cognac comes alive in the versatile chilled French aperitif Alize (Al-ee-say), about \$17. Alize is also a unique after-dinner sipper or it can double as a brunch cocktail. The cognac-based drink blended with passion fruit juices makes an unusual gift that pairs handsomely with Latin-American cuisine. Send a SASE to Alize Recipe Booklet, Kobrand Corporation, 124 East 40th Street, New York, NY

See WINE, inside

Wine Selections

From recently released bottlings, the following are our Christmas gift recommendations. Why? They last very good!

- 1994 Kenwood Reserve Sauvignon Blanc \$18
- 1994 Murphy-Goodie Reserve Fume \$10
- 1993 Bonafina Vineyard Carneros Reserve Chardonnay \$18
- 1994 Murphy-Goodie Reserve Chardonnay \$24
- 1993 Bonafina Vineyard Reserve Carneros Pinot Noir \$25
- 1994 Joseph Phelps Vineyard 1993 Pinot Noir \$27
- 1990 Cuvée de Cabannes Marval Chianti Classico \$19

The lush character of marjol makes the attractive. The price of this increasingly popular red wine is rising, but there are some very good values in this lot. Buy them as gifts or try them with grilled salmon, rosemary accented lamb chops, Christmas roast turkey or honey-baked ham.

- 1993 Louis Martini Merlot \$2.00
- 1994 Farnham Merlot \$10
- 1994 Cabernet Cuvée Merlot \$10
- 1994 Bonafina Vineyard Reserve Chardonnay \$18
- 1993 Bonafina Vineyard Reserve Carneros Pinot Noir \$25
- 1994 Joseph Phelps Vineyard 1993 Pinot Noir \$27
- 1990 Cuvée de Cabannes Marval Chianti Classico \$19