

## A “Foodie” Tribute - Thinking of and Thankful for the Memories

In my life history there are many wonderful food memories so resonant that my mouth waters just thinking about them. Something as simple as the cooking from my childhood - where should I start? Sigh.....

When I was little my mom’s parents lived in New York City. We visited them frequently, and there were certain food things that we always had when at their apartment. The best were the homemade items, though there were one or two bought things that made me do the happy dance too. But the best were these little crackers my grandmother always kept in a silver metal bowl on top of her fridge. They were called “plashniglach” and I’m hoping that spelling is correct. Wasn’t much to them - flour, water, salt, oil, roll them out, cut them and bake in the oven until they were crispy. My brother could finish off a bowl of these in one sitting by himself. My mother says she’s taking the recipe to the grave. Not sure why, but have you ever met anyone’s mother whose behavior you could explain? Yeah, me neither.

Speaking of my mom though, she’s my touchstone as an early influence on my cooking style. I didn’t like everything she made, but everything she made that I did like was nutritious and delicious. My mom was about a well balanced meal - always a protein, starch and vegetables or a salad daily. I can remember how my parents’ house smelled on Thanksgiving every year. The menu never varied, and again it was simple and absolutely delicious. Turkey, of course, onion gravy, homemade cranberry sauce, homemade coleslaw, and her special stuffing balls. Can you just imagine how those items perfumed the air? Again, nothing fancy or fussy or labor-intensive, just simple flavors but oh so good. She made the best cookies - her chocolate chip or homemade slice and bakes were always so yummy.

As a family we were home for most meals, and though I got bored with eating her food at times, which I think happens for everyone, I am grateful to her now for those wholesome and delicious meals we totally took for granted growing up. There was the occasional pizza night (with a big fresh salad of course), and trips to local restaurants here and there which we enjoyed. But as I look back now what really has stayed with me are the flavors of my mom’s food. Her barbecued chicken was off the chain. She did breaded veal chops to die for. Her hamburgers were mouth watering - I have yet to figure out what she did to make them taste so good. Who cares , just hand me another one! And always the balance - a protein, a starch, a vegetable. Always fresh fruit for snacks in the fridge. Very limited intake of candy, junk food, and soda. Water with meals. The best homemade chicken soup. The most flavorful chopped liver I’ve ever tasted. Cabbage soup. Beef stew. And there were other flavors specific to my childhood experience, things that will always go together in my head. Pretzels and ice cream. Hot dogs with ketchup, not mustard. Tomato juice and sauerkraut. Certain side dishes went with certain main courses. It made sense to me then and still does.

I took many of those elements into my adult life. In my junior year of college I lived in a house with several other people and that year we decided to do our own ‘meal plan.’ For \$15 a week, we had five dinners Sundays through Thursdays and we all took turns cooking. We all

submitted our ingredients to the two guys who did the shopping and we adhered to lists of things people didn't like and wouldn't eat . Nothing was left to chance, everything planned and organized. I took flavors from my childhood meals and introduced them when it was my turn to cook dinner. Everyone in the house did that. We had a guy who grew up in an Italian family, and his family recipes were amazing. We had another fellow who was into exotic and different kinds of cuisines - he was always experimenting with curry and other ingredients I never had growing up but was willing to try. There was one woman whose cooking skills were severely limited compared to everyone else. I can't remember what night of the week she cooked, or anything she cooked for that matter. In any group setting there may be a weak link - can't be helped sometimes.

Later on in my adult life I was part of a dinner/cooking group that met monthly. I was a member of this group for twelve years. We took turns meeting at different houses and bringing different parts of the meal to which we had been assigned. The only rule was we had to try to make something we had never made before. Everyone in the group pushed themselves to be adventurous and we had so many wonderful meals together . We never had organized themes, but somehow the meals always managed to hang together and have great balance.

To this day I strive for that same balance in my meals which has carried over from my childhood. I'm a great deal more adventurous than my mom when it comes to the way I cook. Her two favorite seasonings were salt and vegetable oil. She discovered garlic eventually but was never into lots of different spices and was not at all about pepper. I still turn to some of her old standbys and tweak them a bit to make them my own. My mom paid me the ultimate compliment a few years back when she said my chicken soup was as good as hers. High praise indeed. I share recipes with her that I've found and enjoyed and she'll send me an email sometimes about how she took the recipe and tweaked it herself to her liking. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, does it?

The memories are always with me, and I'm happy to share them. I can still see, smell and taste those foods of my childhood and think of them as the foundation or birth of my foodie adventures. More to come, stay tuned.