



ALLYCE'S ATTIC

"Food 'n Family"

by MARY ALLYCE

We all know "foodies". They're the folks who love to post pictures of breakfast, lunch and dinner and endless recipes to tempt the rest of us to the dark side. It works. I have pictures and recipes from cakes to casseroles most of which I will never make because they violate every dietary rule. This time of year, however, dietary rules go out the window and we all turn into foodies. Admit it. You left the Thanksgiving table as overstuffed as the turkey. Can Christmas cookies be far behind?

The thing about food and holidays is they speak of family, not just food, and they cross all ethnicities and cultures. I grew up in a German Lutheran family in Wisconsin. It was oyster stew on Christmas Eve, stollen on Christmas morning, gingerbread and pfeffernusse and pickled herring. Lots of pickled herring. I have vivid memories of my grandfather (the one whose attic inspired the name of this column) delicately spearing a chunk of herring with some of the pickled onion that went with it, putting it on a cracker and eating it with great gusto. It's an acquired taste I still haven't quite mastered.

We barely get through Christmas and New Year's Eve and New Year's Day are upon us with more turkey or ham or roast beef, more libations, and a final run at the cookie plate and the fruitcake. Did I mention eggnog? Spiked or not, eggnog is a spectacular addition to the season. There was one New Year's Eve party years ago where the hostess served homemade eggnog and my husband insisted he spent the night "sifting egg whites" through his teeth, but I've never met an eggnog I didn't like.

In an effort to create my own family traditions, I started making a hearty pea soup with homemade bread on Christmas Eve when my sons were young. I thought it was going over pretty well until the year

one of the boys eyed the bowl in front of him with suspicion and asked, "Do I like this?" I assured him he did. He took a wee sip and announced, "I was right. I don't like this." His younger brother heartily agreed with him and their father added, "It's not my favorite either." After a couple of hits and misses we settled on spaghetti carbonara. It was fine until the year I mistakenly grabbed maple flavored bacon, creating an extremely odd flavor mix with the parmesan cheese. Imagine (if you want to) maple syrup on your pasta, ala the lead character in the movie *Elf* who puts maple syrup on everything. We still have a good laugh over it and that's the point.

It's impossible to think of this time of year without remembering family and friends through foods of the season. It's said scent is the most powerful provoker of sense memory. It's no wonder the aroma of roasting turkey, sage and cinnamon, vanilla and ginger take us back to the happiest, funniest, most memorable times of our life and many of those memories take us to the dinner table.

In some families it's tamales or lasagna, black eyed peas or menudo or challah. No matter. It's the gathering that's important. Whether it's with family or friends, a large communal potluck meal or a few near and dear, it's the importance of coming together, sharing traditions and eating that glorious food.

But start your diet on January 2nd, because before you know it- here comes Cowboy Mardi Gras in Bandera! Ah-eeee - crawfish, etouffee, gumbo, King's Cake. Whew. Better dance away the calories!

So as we enter the winter months – Merry Christmas, Feliz Navidad, Happy Hannukah, Happy New Year. Laissez les bon temps rouler! Enjoy every bit, every bite of it. Enjoy each other and don't forget to share and give thanks!