



STEFANI BOOROOJIAN

As Holidays go, Thanksgiving is it for Stefani. "It's always been my favorite Holiday." Each year, the gathering may have as many as 30 guests, and takes several days of preparation.

But the entire family pulls together to make the event work. "We're all part of putting it together," Stefani says. Her children collect leaves to scatter on the table as decorations, while Stefani and her husband handle the cooking duties. The meal always includes Dolmas (grape leaves Pilaf and an Armenian dessert.)

Even the out-of-town guests chip in, she says — her mother always brings the pumpkin pie.

Cranberry Sauce with Dried Cherries and Cloves

Ingredients:

2 1/2 cups cherry cider or black cherry cider or cranberry juice cocktail

1 8-ounce package dried tart cherries (about 2 cups)

1 cup sugar

1 12-ounce package cranberries

1/4 teaspoon (generous) ground cloves

Preparation

Bring cider to simmer in heavy, large saucepan. Remove from heat. Add cherries and let stand 8 minutes. Mix in sugar, then cranberries and cloves. Cook over medium-high heat until cranberries burst, stirring occasionally, about 9 minutes. Refrigerate until cold, about 4 hours (sauce will thicken as it cools). (Can be prepared 4 days ahead. Cover and keep refrigerated.)



JIM GUY

When Jim Guy was about 10 years old, all he wanted for Christmas was a guitar.

"I was really into music, and I wanted to learn to play guitar," he says.

When he woke up Christmas morning, there was no large box under the Christmas tree. When he had finished opening up all his gifts, his parents asked if he was happy with what he got. Trying to be grateful, he did like all his other gifts, he said yes, though he had no guitar.

His parents saw something behind the curtains in the living room and asked him to check what it was.

When Guy went and checked, there was his guitar.

"It was a great Christmas," he says.

Waldorf Red Velvet Cake

1/2 c Shortening

2 Eggs

1 ts Vanilla

1 ts Salt

2 1/2 c Flour, all purpose; sifted

1 ts Baking soda

1 1/2 c Sugar

1/4 c Food coloring, red

2 tb Cocoa

1 c Buttermilk

1 tb Vinegar

Frosting

1 c Milk

5 ts Flour, all purpose

1 c Butter

1 c Sugar, powdered; sifted

1 ts Vanilla

Cake batter:

Cream shortening and sugar till fluffy. Add eggs and beat 1 minute.

Add salt, beat. Add vanilla and coloring to buttermilk. Alternate adding flour and milk mixtures to batter. Combine soda and vinegar in cup and add to cake batter. Bake in (2) 9" cake pans at 350F for 25 to 30 minutes. Cool on cake racks.

Frosting:

Cook milk and flour until thick; cool in fridge. Beat butter, sugar and vanilla with mixer.

Add flour and milk mixture a little at a time (make ahead of cake so that it has plenty of time to cool). Beat well. Yield: 12 servings



FAITH SIDLOW

Faith Sidlow with her two brothers, sister, mother and extended family all get together for Thanksgiving. Where they get together rotates each year. Every five years, Sidlow hosts Thanksgiving in Fresno.

"We have the same dishes we had when we were kids, with a twist," Sidlow says about the Thanksgiving menu. Some of those dishes include green bean casserole, sweet potatoes with marshmallows, and pumpkin cheesecake. But Sidlow, her husband and kids also add a few new dishes to the menu.

"My father passed away three years ago a week before Thanksgiving," she says. "Thanksgiving now has even more meaning for us."

Sidlow says that Thanksgiving is a time to reconnect with family and friends.

"It is a wonderful time of celebration," she says. "It is a great time for being together."

When growing up her family of six circled the Thanksgiving table. Now, it's a family of 14. "It definitely makes it a lot of fun," Sidlow says.

Pumpkin Cheesecake

Crust:

1 1/2 cups graham cracker crumbs

1/4 cup sugar

1/3 cup butter, melted

1/2 tsp ground ginger

1/2 tsp ground cinnamon

1/4 tsp ground cloves

Filling

1 cup granulated sugar

1/4 cup light brown sugar

2 large eggs

1 tsp ground cinnamon

1/2 tsp ground ginger

1/4 tsp ground nutmeg

1/4 tsp ground cloves

1/4 tsp ground allspice

1 can (15 ounces) pumpkin

1 1/2 pounds cream cheese, cut into 1 inch chunks (at room temperature)

2/3 cup evaporated milk

2 T cornstarch

1 T vanilla extract

1 16 oz container sour cream

1/3 cup granulated sugar

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a food processor, finely grind graham crackers, sugar and spices. Place crumbs in a bowl, drizzle melted butter over and mix until evenly moistened. Press crumbs into an even layer on the bottom of an ungreased spring form pan and 1 inch up the side. Bake 6 to 8 minutes (do not allow to brown). Cool on a wire rack for 10 minutes.

Beat cream cheese, granulated sugar and brown sugar in large mixer bowl until fluffy. Beat in eggs, pumpkin and evaporated milk. Add cornstarch and spices. Beat well. Pour into crust.

Bake for 55 to 60 minutes or until edge is set but center still moves slightly. Combine sour cream, granulated sugar and vanilla extract in a small bowl and mix well. Spread over surface of warm cheesecake. Bake for 5 minutes. Cool on wire rack. Refrigerate overnight. Remove side of spring form pan and serve. Serves 16.



RICH RODRIGUEZ

Christmas is a busy day for Rich Rodriguez. Every year starts off with a morning celebration at home with his two sons, 6-year-old Rhetta and 4-year-old Roman. Then the family travels to his mother's house near Exeter. "That's the big meeting place," Rich says.

Including kids, grand-kids, aunts, uncles and cousins, there may be 40 to 50 people at the house. His mom still does most of the cooking.

Then it's off to his in-laws for a big Italian feast, with lots of pasta and breads. "You have to pace yourself," he says. The following day, the "big kids"—now grown and moved out—come into town and meet at their grandmother's house for another meal.

Sausage Stuffing

(from last year)

Ingredients:

2 pounds breakfast

sausage

1 1/2 cups finely diced

onion

3 cups chopped celery

1 1/2 cups melted

margarine

16 cups soft bread cubes

6 teaspoons poultry

seasoning

1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Place sausage in a large deep skillet. Cook over medium high heat until evenly brown. Remove sausage from skillet and let drain on paper towels. Combine melted margarine with sausage drippings until there is 1 cup combined.

Saute onions and celery in the margarine/dripping mixture until onion is tender, but not browned. Stir in about 2/3 of bread cubes. Pour onion mixture into a large bowl and stir in remaining bread cubes, poultry seasoning and pepper. Watch your hands, it's hot. Mix well. The stuffing is ready for baking.



ALEX DELGADO

While growing up, Alex Delgado's family went all out for Christmas. Her mother would hurry all the children down their Chicago basement and wait for the sound of Santa's footsteps on the rooftop every Christmas Eve. Santa would come in and all the children would sit on his lap.

"One year my dad was Santa," Delgado says. "I noticed a mole on his face and almost ruined it by saying, 'It's dad, it's dad.'"

Delgado's Chicago holiday memories where always filled with snow, eating, dancing and fun.

Buñuelos

Fry thin flour tortillas in oil. Mix cinnamon powder and sugar on a plate. Place the tortilla from the fry pan to the plate. Make sure it's all covered with sugar and cinnamon. Delgado says it goes great with ice cream.