

LINK BY LINK

For years I've been passing by the local Polish butcher shop in my neighborhood. Through the window I could see long links of sausages dangling above the counter waiting for a chance to enhance a soup or stew. I could hear the Polish-speaking customers ordering oddly named meats as the men behind the counter wrapped up links and slices.

One day I finally got up the nerve to go inside where I was welcomed with a small smile and a stare. The sausages were lined up one after the other – some thick, some thin, some light, and some dark.

"I'd like a link of *kielbasa*, please," I ordered, not knowing which sausage I'd get.

"Which one?" asked the owner.

It turns out that *kielbasa* is the generic name for all Polish sausages, which I didn't know at that moment.

"I'd like a smoky one."

"They're all smoky," he said impatiently.

Clearly, in his mind, I'm an idiot. I pointed to a few that looked good and then paid as quickly as I could, fleeing the store mortified.

When I got home and tasted them, they were so much better than the traditional half-circle tasteless *kielbasa* you find in the supermarket. They were lean and smoky, each with a unique and delicious flavor profile well worth the humiliation I had just experienced.

Determined to find out more about Polish sausages, I started my research. *Wiejska* is Polish for rural or country, so *Kielbasa Wiejska* is known as "Farmer's Sausage," the most

traditional of all sausages. It's a lightly smoked, garlicky sausage that can be eaten raw.

Kabanos sausages are long, thin sticks that have the flavor of allspice and smoke.

One that I love to use in cassoulet is *Kielbasa Myśliwska*, otherwise known as "Hunters Sausage." It's about an inch thick and is usually a short link that's very dark and smoky.

I could keep going, but you get the idea. *Kiełbasa Starowiejska*, *Jałowcowa*, and *Żywiecka* are a few more varieties, but they're way too hard for me to pronounce.

A few weeks later, I decide to go back to the butcher shop. This time I throw around a couple of names and the stern look from the owner seems to soften. For those that I can't pronounce, I resort to pointing. All in all, I leave the store with 4 pounds of a variety of sausages and a loaf of *Chleb Ziemniaczany*, (Polish Potato bread). Now I just need some mustard, a few bottles of *Zywiec* Beer, and a bunch of friends for a taste test. Wanna come?