

THANKSGIVING MEMORIES

It's hard to think about Thanksgiving without thinking about my nana. My memories go back more than fifty years, but I can still see her wearing her slightly stained white full-bodied apron with blue embroidered edges over her holiday best. All day she would be busy prepping the one, good old-fashioned, made-almost-from-scratch, meal of the year—Thanksgiving.

Nana always bought at least an 18-pound bird because she was feeding her own little army. Savory and sweet aromas perfumed the room as the stuffing's pungent onions and chicken livers collided with sugary baked sweet potatoes and browning small marshmallows. On the counter, an empty can of Campbell's Mushroom Soup sat next to the string bean casserole. The cranberry jelly mold was already jiggling on a beautiful hand-painted green and yellow floral ceramic plate she brought back from a trip she took to Spain with her sister, Helen. There was no better place to be at that moment than in Nana's kitchen. It was the warmest room in the house, as her love was baked into every bite our lucky bellies were about to enjoy.

Nana and Granddad lived just 20 minutes away from our house in Bethpage, not far off the Long Island Expressway in New Hyde Park. Their house was a two-bedroom ranch on a quiet street with manicured lawns and newly planted birch trees lining the road. They moved out to Long Island from East 34th Street in Brooklyn because *everyone* was moving out to Long Island from Brooklyn. On a normal day, it had the familiar scents of Old Bond Medicated Foot Powder and Borax emanating from the bathroom at the end of the hall. Outside on cold nights, the smell of freshly baked bread from the local bakery froze me in my tracks.

"How would you like to help me finish the pie?" she asked, smiling.

She tied a matching little white apron around me and pushed over a small wooden stool so I could reach the yellow and white speckled Formica counter. She handed me a big wooden spoon and I slowly tried to spoon out all the apples without having any fall on the counter. I missed a few, but Nana never minded if you messed things up, not like Mom.

Next, she put her brown spotted hands over mine as we held the rolling pin to place the top crust over the apples. She took a knife and trimmed the edges so that the crust looked nice and round and even.

“I know what to do next!” I squealed.

I took a fork and pressed the two crusts together going all the way around the frame of the pie and then I poked an ‘N’ for Nana into the top so the pie could breathe.

Dad walked in, inhaling the feast to come, and put his arm around Nana.

“Mom, you are the Queen of Thanksgiving, all hail.”

And she was. She deserved her own crown made with as much love as she stuffed into every turkey carcass and baked into every pie. Her noodle pudding alone, with its sweet melted raisins and apples wrapped in perfectly cooked egg noodles, could silence any argument. She managed to keep us all together with every slice of turkey, schmear of cranberry sauce, and bite of stuffing we gladly devoured.

If it weren't for Nana, I may never have had any early appreciation for food or how it could make someone feel loved. Thankfully, I stored that somewhere deep within my psyche, not knowing how much I would come to treasure that in the years to come.