

Cookbook

Christmas - Italian style

By JOAN KINGSBURY
Staff Correspondent

Through the efforts of College Misericordia's A Window On The World program held last Saturday, I enjoyed a morning filled with the sights and legends of Christmas in Italy.

A Window On The World, funded by a Phaedrus Grant from the Pennsylvania Humanities Council and supported in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities, is a joint project sponsored by College Misericordia's Honors Students, Boy Scout Troop 232, Dallas and Girl Scout Troop 631, Shavertown. Lee Williams, Ph.D. is Project Director while Louis Maganzin, Ph.D. is session coordinator.

Christmas in Italy is very much a religious holiday. According to Dr. Maganzin, who is Italian by birth, the holiday begins with a Novena, nine days of prayer ending on Christmas Eve.

In the southern part of the country and in Sicily, puppet shows and acting out fairy tales is a special part of the Christmas tradition. On the feast day of Santa Lucia, Dec. 13, it is believed this saint brings gifts to the children. Dressed in a blue-star sprinkled coat and accompanied by a donkey, Santa Lucia places a gift in the child's shoes which have been placed on the window sill or doorway. The children leave a little straw in their shoes for the donkey.

Along the Adriatic, St. Nikolo, similar to our Santa Claus, brings children gifts on his feast day, Dec. 6. The children leave hay, carrots and water in their shoes which are placed before the fireside. St. Nikolo and his white horse bring each child a gift, leaving it in his or her shoe.

The Befana, an old woman dressed in black and carrying a broom, brings gifts to children in the areas of Rome and Florence on Little Christmas, Jan. 6, the feast of The Three Kings.

According to legend, the Befana was told of the birth of the Christ child by the three kings, Balthazar, Melchior and Casper, when they passed her home in search of Bethlehem. They explained that they were directed by the bright star, and that they were bringing gifts to the child. Although they invited her to journey with them, Befana delayed.

When she began her trip, Befana was unable to catch up to the Wise men, and she is forever destined to travel carrying a bag of gifts in search of the Christ child. She leaves a gift at the home of each child in case she may find the Christ child in that home.

Mrs. Florence Howanitz gave an outstanding performance as the Befana while Thomas Kotch, Jody Pallante and Andrew Yencha portrayed the three Kings.

Among the exhibits and demonstrations in Merrick Hall, the Foods of Italy display showed how to make homemade pasta and polenta. Depending on the area, these two food items are used as we would use potatoes. Since the preparation of homemade ravioli was demonstrated and since ravioli is a popular holiday dish for many Italian-Americans, I have included a recipe for ravioli in this column.

Use either a ravioli rolling pin or pasta machine to make your ravioli. To cook, drop freshly made or frozen ravioli into a large kettle of boiling salted water. When it returns to a boil cook gently, stirring occasionally until tender. Top with your favorite sauce.

FILLING FOR RAVIOLI

- 2/3 lb. pork chops, cut 1/2 inch thick
- 1/2 lb. boneless beef chuck, cut 1/2 inch thick
- 1 T. olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic
- 3 sprigs fresh parsley
- 1/4 t. ea. dry rosemary, thyme leaves and salt
- Dash pepper
- 1 lg. bunch fresh spinach (1 lb.) or 1 pkg. frozen, chopped spinach
- 2 T. butter or margarine
- 1 or 2 eggs
- 2 T. grated Romano or Parmesan cheese

To make filling, cut pork from bones, reserve bones for sauce. Trim off excess fat and any gristle from pork or beef. Cut meat into 2 inch squares. Heat oil in a wide frying pan over mediumhigh heat. Add meat and cook until browned on all sides. Add garlic, parsley, rosemary, thyme, salt and pepper. Reduce heat to low and cook, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until pork is not longer pink when slashed, about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile wash fresh spinach, drain, and discard stems and course leaves. Cook in a large pan with 1/2 inch boiling water for 5 minutes; drain. When cool enough to handle,

squeeze spinach with your hands to remove as much moisture as possible.

Melt butter in a frying pan over medium heat. Add spinach and cook, stirring, for 3 minutes. Using food processor or the finest blade of a meat grinder, very finely chop meat mixture. Finely chop spinach as well, but do not puree. In a bowl combine meat and spinach. At this point you may cover and refrigerate until next day if made ahead. Let mixture come to room temperature before continuing. Beat 1 egg and stir into meat mixture along with cheese. If mixture seems stiff, beat another egg and stir into mixture. Use to fill ravioli.

OLD FASHIONED RAVIOLI PASTA

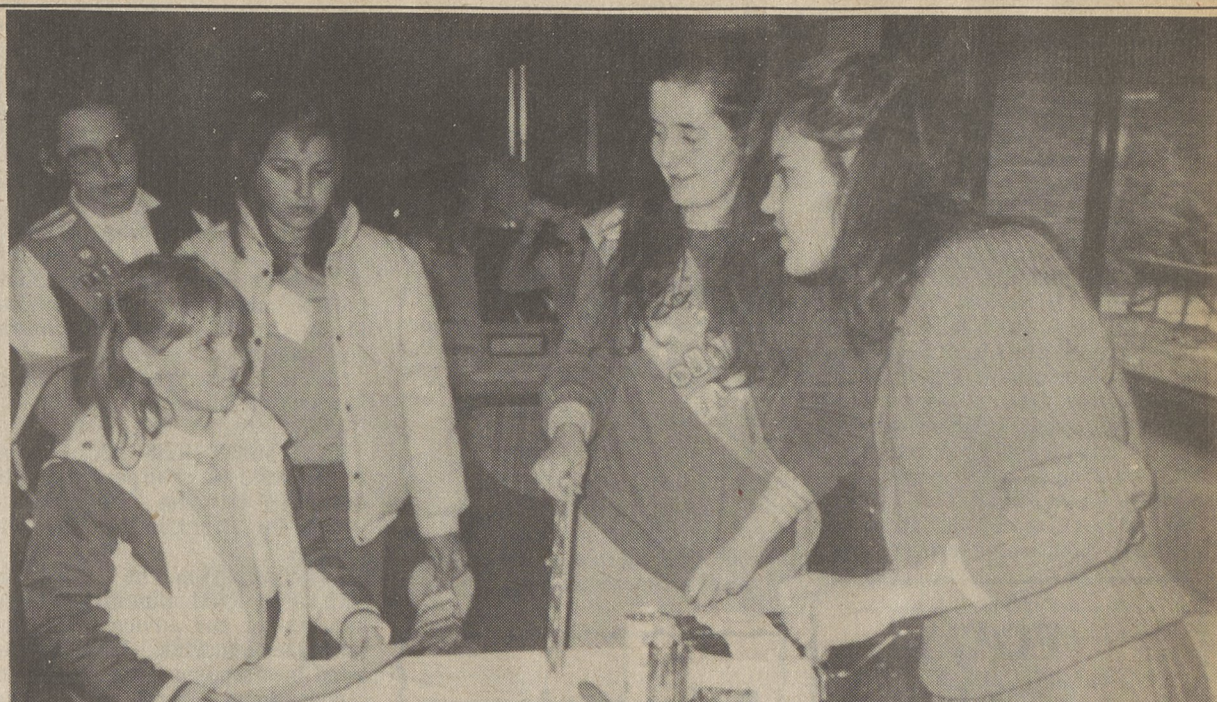
- 2 c. all-purpose flour
- 2 lg. eggs
- 3-6 T. water
- Additional flour for kneading, rolling and cutting

Mound flour on a work surface, or in a bowl make a deep well in center. Break eggs into well. With a fork, beat eggs lightly and stir in 2 tablespoons water. Using a circular motion, begin to draw flour from sides of well. Add one more tablespoon of water and continue mixing until flour is moistened. If necessary add more water a tablespoon at a time. When dough becomes stiff use your hands to finish mixing. Pat dough into a ball and knead a few times to help flour absorb liquid. Then clean and lightly flour the work surface.

If you plan to use a pasta machine first knead dough by hand, sprinkling with flour if needed, for 3 to 4 minutes or until dough is no longer sticky. Then proceed with pasta machine.

If you plan to use a rolling pin, knead dough by hand, sprinkling with flour if needed for 10 minutes or until dough is smooth and elastic. Cover and let rest for 20 minutes then proceed with rolling pin.

With pasta machine or rolling pin roll out a fourth of the dough at a time to desired thinness. Keep unrolled portion covered. When all dough is rolled, cut strips into desired shapes by machine or by hand. Machine-rolled dough makes about 4 cups cooked pasta when machine-cut into medium noodles or about 32 pieces lasagna. Yield of hand-rolled noodles may vary.



Dallas Post/Joan Kingsbury

Foods of Italy

Elizabeth Williams, left, and Vicki Yencha, right, show how to prepare homemade pasta at their Foods of Italy Exhibit in Merrick Hall at College Misericordia. The exhibit was part of "A Window on the World," a program sponsored by Misericordia. The Italian demonstration featured Italian Christmas traditions, music, language, legends, foods, art.



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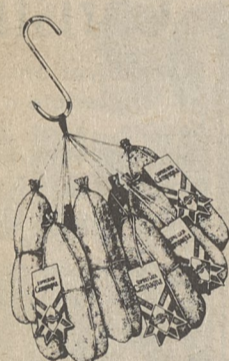
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- ★ Brie
- ★ Stracchino
- ★ Formaggio Parmesan
- ★ Cream Havarti

IMPORTED PASTA

— AND —

FRESH SAUCES

- ★ Sicilian Twist
- ★ French Stick
- ★ Vienna
- ★ Italian Cookies
- ★ Taralli

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