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#### HOLIDAY DINNER

## Heeding the ghosts of Thanksgivings past

An annual conflict takes place in my kitchen between the ghosts of Thanksgivings past and the famous chefs of Thanksgivings present. Recipes in my file box and in the 1950 Brockton Young Women's Hebrew Association cookbook represent my ghosts: Grandmother Mollie, Aunt Goldie and Mother.

The chefs make themselves known by picture spreads and recipes in Food and Wine, Gourmet and Bon Appetit magazines.

When I enter the kitchen at dawn on Thanksgiving, their words and voices will erupt around me as I fight my own battle between the tastes of childhood and trends of the moment.

Certain rules of the meal are inviolate. My mother's voice says: "There is nothing that can be done to make a tough turkey tender so you must start with a fresh, quality bird." When I was a child, there was a turkey farm near our home, and we were on the list of the privileged whose turkey was delivered by Judge Stone's chauffeur. It has never as easy since.

This year I have gone "heritage," ordering a turkey from the Slow Food organization. On Nov. 22, a Fed Ex truck should pull up with a fresh American Bronze turkey from one of the 50 producers that raise the birds of America's woods and fields the old-fashioned way.

After years of stuffing wars, when I tried sausage with fruit stuffing, oyster in cornbread stuffing and countless variations, I reverted to Grandmother's recipe. It is a cracker, corn-flake and egg stuffing, rich with sauted onions and mushrooms, made from New England common crackers. I'll improvise with shittake, oyster and porcini mushrooms, which will also enrich my Madeira-infused gravy.

Aunt Goldie will "walk" me through the preparation of the pies, following the family piecrust recipe that uses Crisco, flour and sour cream. There will be chocolate pecan, using an old Gourmet recipe; apple pie made from this season's Cortlands; and traditional pumpkin. Around 6 p.m on Thanksgiving the family will sit down at a table set with my grandmother's silver, the Wild Turkey promotion china that my in-laws collected, silver candlesticks that our children gave us for our 25th anniversary and ceramic turkey vases purchased 32 years ago for our first Thanksgiving in Miami.

Before I call them in, I will light the candles, probably with tears falling. Happy as I am about those who will soon grace our table, I briefly will envision the generations who have been with us before, and whose voices and spirits directed the preparation of our meal. May their ghosts always live in my kitchen.

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