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## Global Polish Christmas

Millions of Polish immigrants left the motherland to escape poverty, wars and communist oppression and to search for fortune and glory. At one time Poland was repartitioned between Austria, Germany and Russia and did not exist as a country for 150 years. In recent history, both Germans during WWII, and later on Russians during 45 years of their domination, did their earnest to dampen our spirits and to eradicate our culture and customs. One Polish custom that has survived is that of our glorious Polish Christmas food.

No matter which country we live in and which language we choose to speak at Christmas time, anyone can recognize we are Polish by the type of food we prepare and eat. In my travels around the world I found that people of other countries are also curious about Polish food and enjoy what we eat. During the last 30 years of living abroad I have painstakingly re-created many traditional dishes, which I remembered only by taste from my home in Poland. For during times of historical uprooting and occupations Polish culture survived at our homes, carefully preserved by our families.

My favorite festive Christmas dish is a small pig stuffed with buckwheat and roasted in the oven. If you like pork, this is the best way to serve it. Two years ago I was spending Christmas in Peru and when I arrived a large pig of 120 pounds was waiting for me as soon as I got off the plane. Normally I prefer a small 26-pound baby pig, which has moist succulent meat. But since 85 people were invited for Christmas dinner my Peruvians obtained a larger animal. Fortunately I had brought enough Polish buckwheat with me in my suitcase from Canada. The night before Christmas the pig was washed inside and outside and painted inside out with vegetable oil and salt and pepper. While doing that, now was a good time to serve well chilled Polish vodka with one shot served to the pig to tenderize the meat. After one night in a cooler (needed in tropics), baking space was contracted next morning at a local bakery in their bread oven. Good thing we brought the pig early in large rectangular steel pan, which was large enough to catch the fat. Our pig had to compete for cooking space with lots of turkeys, which are traditionally served in Peru for Christmas dinner. After nine hours in the bread oven the pig was ready and transported to our banquet hall. What a joy and pride it was to serve a Polish style pig stuffed with buckwheat for Christmas dinner. Peruvians who would normally eat turkey and rice had the opportunity to taste a succulent pig with buckwheat and sweet minced red beets and sauerkraut dishes. The second day of Christmas I invited some local Polish friends for a "bigos" made of sauerkraut, remains of the pig, polish garlic sausage vacuum packed by Czechowski Meats of Toronto and some Polish vodka of course. Old immigrants who left Poland 45 years ago cried with real tears streaming down their cheeks while remembering taste of home.

This year I will spend Christmas in China where I am going on business and to see my Chinese and Polish friends. So my suitcase is already full of Polish buckwheat, dry

parsley, marjoram, dry wild mushrooms, poppy seeds for “makowiec” cake and two bottles of “Luksusowa”, which is the best Polish potato vodka I know. Chinese are probably tired of the Peking duck so they just might appreciate the taste of my Polish style pig. So I will serve them some glorious Polish food and I am happy to do so as good food is always remembered well and is certainly ranks above business and politics.

If you want to roast a small (max. 26 lbs) pig for your family and friends this Christmas, obtain a large aluminum turkey pan to roast the pig in your home oven heated up to 350 F. Makes sure it has the small body parts such as tail, feet, mouth and ears well covered with aluminum foil in such a way that dripping fat falls in to the pan. Roast for about 6 hours and serve buffet style to a line up of guest. The pig looks much better when it is decorated with a pair of earrings from a “One Dollar” store and with a small fresh red apple in its mouth.

Despite the inherent cultural differences of us Poles living in different countries, success is attainable. While yesterday’s immigrants hid their food at home, the today’s world appreciates originality, variety and unique taste. We can be proud of the food culture that always survived in our Polish homes. Now is the time to bring it out in the open and share it with others. Enjoy your successes and have a prosperous New Year.

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