

# Tradition means family recipes

**Kathy Hedberg/Lewiston Tribune**

Long after parents and grandparents have gone to their heavenly reward, they still live on in the holiday dishes we prepare in their honor.

Sometimes this is a good thing; other times, not so much. I know of a family who eats their turkey dry as straw every year and have to gag it down with lots of beer. It's not that the family likes turkey this way, nor are they so dumb they can't they figure out another way to cook it.

It's just that dry-as-dust turkey is the way grandma used to make it and so every time they eat it, it brings back happy memories.

In my family one of the weirdest traditions was tomato aspic, a cold gelled salad filled with vegetables and shrimp and served in some kind of fancy mold, usually a fish.

I'm not sure where tomato aspic got its start in our family. Most likely it was one of those dishes mom or grandma found in a women's magazine. Both of them were famous for going to the doctor's office for an appointment, sitting in the waiting room and ripping recipes out of the doctor's magazines while waiting for the doctor.

Tomato aspic sounded exotic and certainly different from the usual cabbage and beet salads we were used to.

I can't remember a holiday without tomato aspic, but the funny thing was that nobody, except maybe mom and grandma, liked it. In fact, it was kind of a controversial dish.

My mother made tomato aspic the way the recipe said - with tomato juice, unflavored gelatin, chopped green onions and celery, sliced olives and salad shrimp.

My grandmother made a variation using lemon Jell-O, V-8 juice and canned vegetables. My mother told me grandma made it this way because she was "hoity-toity," which, I thought, meant she was a Democrat.

My great-aunt, the one who guarded the family traditions, believed it was sacrilegious to deviate from the traditional cabbage and beet salad.

"Tastes like something a goat would eat," she snarled, and put down her spoon, never to taste tomato aspic again.

I can't say I was ever crazy about tomato aspic, either, although I thought it was pretty and I enjoyed chopping up the vegetables (or opening up the cans, if I was helping grandma) to help make it.

And yet, when I got older and had a family of my own tomato aspic was on the menu every holiday. Even though the dog usually had to clean it up, it just didn't seem right having a holiday meal without tomato aspic.

Then one year my sister and I looked at the big lump of tomato aspic leftover from our holiday meal that only she and I had eaten and we asked ourselves: "Why are we doing this? Our families hate it, even the dog is beginning to revolt. Mom and grandma are no longer around, so what's the point?"

Neither she nor I have made it again. In one way it feels liberating to have changed a family tradition that was no longer working.

But in some ways the holiday seems a little less sparkly without tomato aspic on the table.

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