

The Story Of Leo's Ham

My dad used to tell me stories of what life was like as a kid back in the day. Some stories involved food, one in particular I remember was about pork. Sometimes, dad would say, when times were tough back in the 30's having a protein on your table nightly was a luxury. He told me often in those instances his family would use pork fat back, or "stoninia" in Polish, in lieu of ham or other more expensive cuts of pork. Fat back cannot be eaten whole, but he said they would pan sear it and squeeze the juices on bread, sometimes along with peppers and onions, bringing a semblance of roasted pork flavor to the table. Sometimes one wedge of fat back was used on multiple nights. On special holidays or occasions however, the fat back was replaced with a roasted smoked ham. You can maybe see why that holiday ham was so special to my dad.

Growing up under my mom and dad's roof, my siblings and I didn't quite have to face the struggles or sometimes the hunger as they did when they were children. My parents wanted better things and a better life for their kids, as do we all. Growing up, the ham was our Polish turkey if you will and as my dad would call it, the centerpiece of all our holiday family dinners. Years ago, I remember being a young chef, I was pretty handy with the knife, so my father gave me the honor of carving the ham. That privilege came with one condition though, that he got to stand next to me and steal the first slices I cut before I brought the carved ham to the table. It was like he was a kid again, I could see it in his face, and I miss that.

I mentioned the ham was the centerpiece of our holiday table, but that's not quite true. What was the centerpiece and truly paramount was family, friends, loved ones being together, sharing the holiday and breaking bread together.

Thank you for allowing me to share memories of my dad with you, and thanks for allowing CityRange to be part of your family's holiday dinners.

Cory Wilk Co-Owner