

## **Kholodetz (Pig's Feet)**

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### **They Used Everything but the Squeal**

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Story Inspired by Raisa Khrakovskaya

Raisa is a co-worker of our daughter Stacy and recently we e-mailed each other about the subject of making kholodetz. Raisa is from the Ukraine and came to America in 1994.

I think I must have heard it a thousand times as I was growing up in Logan County. It was said in reference to butchering pigs on the farm and how they used everything but the squeal. My ancestors knew how to use all of the pig. There were a lot of ways to use the less desirable pieces of pork and make it tasty. But it went way beyond that; using parts like the tail, feet, head and intestines reflected the hard times our ancestors went through and also showed how they felt about wasting anything. This is something like getting lemons, then making lemonade without whining about it.

I know that some of you turned up your nose when you read the words "pig's feet", but just hang on, there's more to this story than eating pig's feet and headcheese. For those of you who think headcheese is made from cow's milk, think again. It's made from the meat off the pig's head and made into a sausage that gets stuffed into the cleaned stomach of the pig.

My first cousin once removed, Roland Weispfenning, told me a couple of summers ago that he tells his children on a regular basis about how they butchered pigs and only threw the squeal away. He said it with pride in his voice, and I am sure he hoped his children would understand the hidden meaning, how his family, his parents made life work by not wasting a thing. How they survived the hard times and for the most part had a happy life.

Life has changed here on the Dakota prairie; we have reached a standard of living where we don't have to eat pig's feet; where forty hours a week sustains our family and there is even some free time for relaxing.

It shouldn't surprise us that our ancestors were able to take marginal cuts of meat and with spices make them into something that is still eaten and enjoyed today. It just might be an acquired taste, but if one has been eating something since they were kids, its easier to acquire a taste for it.

Recently I went looking for my mother's kholodetz recipe, the one her parents used on the farm near Napoleon, N.D. Kholodetz is a much more refined pig's feet dish than just pickled pig's feet. It's cooked, deboned, cut up into small cubes, then cooled until it jells and served on Sundays. Come on now, this stuff could be served to Sunday company even if they weren't German, especially after the white fat is scooped off with a spoon. Well OK, maybe if you went back a few years to the turn of the century this would apply better.

So I thought I would share this ancient German recipe from my mother's family, the Ivanovs. I also make it with pork hocks, which yields more meat than pig's feet.

## KHOLODETZ

Start with 6 pig's feet, wash and place in 8-quart kettle, cover with water, add 1 tsp. of salt for each quart of water, 2 bay leaves, ½ onion sliced, a few kernels of whole allspice, and 1 tbsp. of black pepper corns. Cook for 2 hours or until meat is tender. Take meat out and cool until you can handle it and cut meat off bone. Cube meat and skin and put into a 9" x 13" cake pan. Taste and sprinkle with pepper to taste. Strain liquid over meat until it's covered. Put in refrigerator until it's cooled and jelled. Invite all your favorite friends over and enjoy. If they don't come back you haven't lost a good friend.

Some recipes call for mixing half-and-half, vinegar and the liquid, then bringing it to a boil before covering the meat with this mixed liquid.

I also heard from a friend when I included him in a correspondence to Raisa about the pig's feet. He related this to me, "I recall the pigs feet served in the chill of the night after Midnight Mass at Strasburg, North Dakota growing up there".

Well, I promised you more than pig's feet; hope you enjoyed the words, hope you remembered your ancestors with fondness. Family traditions, preservation of our history and keeping our ancestor's memory alive, now that's what this pig's feet story is all about.

Here in Logan County where our ancestors on their farms raised pigs which sustained their lives. If the crops failed, if the price of cattle went below the production cost, they still figured out a way to feed their families. Where they often ended up with lemons and they knew how to turn it into lemon meringue pie. Life was good and people were happy here in Logan County during the hard times because of their attitudes, because of their willingness to try. They didn't expect a perfect life filled with riches, just a happy family and a pig or two for butchering.