

Pot Roast

April 11, 2022



Somehow just the thought of the smell of pot roast takes me back to the kitchen of my childhood on Fellows Avenue in Syracuse, NY. My grandfather cooked it in an old cast iron Dutch oven. He'd start by sautéing the onions which already sent a wonderful smell of its own and then add the roast and sear it. By that time the aroma was already wafting through the house. I haven't been able to eat beef for almost 40 years, but that smell is still strong in my memory.

This was always a Sunday. Sundays, in those days, were all about the funnies papers in the Syracuse Post Standard newspaper, church with the usual begging my mother to hurry up as she fussed with her hat, and Sunday dinner. It was always a quiet, low key day as nothing was ever open on Sundays, not like now.

We were 'unchurched' when I was little. My mother attended a Methodist Sunday school as a teenager with

some friends, but when it came time to join, her father advised her against it. He said she should wait until she was an adult to make that kind of decision. (I think he was a closet atheist. Maybe that came from being raised in a household full of very devout adults who were Methodists. When my grandfather was born they named him John Wesley Smith. (No wonder the man was an atheist!) At any rate, the adults didn't do anything on Sunday morning except read the paper and prepare for the big mid-day meal.

One of my two best friends, Linda Schug, lived across the street. When we were about four years old, Mrs. Schug asked my mother if she could take me to Sunday School with Linda. They went to Betts Memorial Universalist Church, an old church situated downtown across from Central High School. I went and never looked back.

After that, the Sunday arrangement included alternating where the two of us ate Sunday dinner, one week at her house and the next at my house. Of course we were always starving. The advantage of eating at my house was that dinner was on the table shortly after we got home. At her house we had to wait for what seemed like

hours because they were only starting the preparations when everyone got home from church.

We truly enjoyed those easy going Sundays, but ultimately the Schug's had to move away. Her father was called up from the reserves into the military and the family started moving around. They even spent time living in Vietnam before the war heated up.

After they left, I insisted on continuing in the Universalist Sunday School. I can't remember how old I was, but for sure I was still in elementary school. My mother agreed to take me to church. She ultimately joined and was president of the Women's Group for years. I asked her once why she started attending. She said "What was I supposed to do while you were in Sunday School? Sit in the car in the parking lot." At any rate, she found a home there and was an active member for the rest of her life.

My grandfather continued his routine of preparing Sunday dinner so it was always ready when we got home. Oh, the smell if that was a Pot roast day!