The Joy Of Growing Up Italian

Part 2

When it came to food, it always amazed me that my American friends or classmates only ate turkey on Thanksgiving or Christmas. Or rather, that they only ate turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce. Now we Italians – we also had turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce - but only after we had finished the antipasto, soup, lasagna, meatballs, salad and whatever else Mama thought might be appropriate for that particular holiday. This turkey was usually accompanied by a roast of some kind (just in case somebody walked in who didn't like turkey) and was followed by an assortment of fruits, nuts, pastries, cakes and, of course, homemade cookies. No holiday was complete without some home baking; none of that store-bought stuff for us. This is where you learned to eat a seven-course meal between noon and 4:00PM, how to handle hot chestnuts and put peach wedges in red wine. I truly believe Italians live a romance with food.

Speaking of food – Sunday was truly the big day of the week. That was the day you'd wake up to the smell of garlic and onions frying in olive oil. As you lay in bed, you could hear the hiss as tomatoes were dropped into the pan. Sunday we always had gravy (the "MED-E-GONES" called it "sauce") and macaroni (they called it "pasta"). Sunday would not be Sunday without going to Mass. Of course, you couldn't eat before Mass because you had to fast before receiving Communion. But, the good part was we knew that when we got home, we'd find hot meatballs frying, and nothing tastes better than newly-fried meatballs and crisp bread dipped in a pot of gravy.