

## FISH CHRISTMAS

It was another Christmas Eve at my grandmother's house. The house was large and housed my Uncle John and Aunt Minnie and my 3 cousins, Pete, Jerry and John. Jerry and I were the same age. There was a great competition between us; on every level, sports, academic, and even looks. Well, it was Christmas Eve and all animosity was put away. It was the feast of the seven fishes. It seemed to me that there was more than 7 different fishes; fried, baked, boiled and some with sauce. All of the uncles had their favorite fish. Uncle John, Uncle Jerry and Aunt Lizzie and Aunt Minnie, Aunt Concetta, Uncle Toto, my dad, Willie and my mother, also a Lizzie, were there. Along with my brother, there were also 7 cousins at this feast, a total of 17 of us.

The cooking was going on all day long. Hot pots of water constantly on the white porcelain stove. I'm sure it was a Sears brand because my extended family bought everything from Sears in East Liberty, even though we were all located in Verona, nothing to do with Verona, Italy even though my family always stated that the town was named for Verona, Italy. The town was really named for a pioneer merchant in the area. There was no way to convince any of the elders.

Now it came time to do the final step of cooking. The eel was in a bucket on the back porch. My Uncle John brought the bucket with the eel into the kitchen. The water had been boiling for a long time, it seemed like hours. The ceiling of the kitchen was even dripping water because of the steam. The floors were also damp. My grandmother had the best floral linoleum floor in town. All the cousins were anticipating the meal, not in particular the fish, but all the other great ethnic foods. Uncle John lifted the bucket and dropped the eel in the boiling water. All of a sudden, the eel straightened itself out and flew out of the pot, like a spear. Everyone was screaming, men and women alike. That eel slid across the floral floor. Most were running away, but some were trying to corral the non-cooperative ugly fish. Finally Uncle Toto put a foot on it and grabbed it with a towel; back in the pot. We did not miss a beat that Christmas Eve.

Frank W. Santucci, September, 2014