

GOOD OLD DAYS®

The Magazine That Remembers the Best • November/December 2025

UNWRAPPING THE PAST

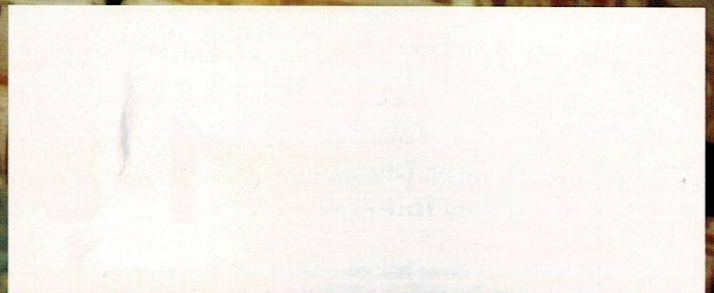
Tinsel, Toys and Timeless Traditions

Special Surprises

Gifts We'll Always Remember

Away From Home

How Enlisted Personnel
Celebrated the Holidays



GOOD·OLD·DAYS®

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JOIN IN ON
THE Fun!



Find the gift hidden in this issue and then let us know you found it! Post on Facebook (but don't list the page number) at <https://www.facebook.com/GoodOldDaysMag/>.

We will announce the hidden location in next month's Welcome. Be sure to play along!

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And to All a Good Night

Family, traditions and the Feast of the Seven Fishes made the season memorable.

By Joe “Kirsch” Curcio

Here I am once again on a cold winter’s day, snuggled up with a small glass of brandy, preparing to follow in the footsteps of my uncles before me as a holiday traveler on the night before Christmas. Fortunately, the journey will take me all but a mile away to the home where I grew up in my small town of Greenpoint, Brooklyn, N.Y., to Mama and Papa’s house.

In spirit, I’m still that young Brooklyn Italian kid, born in 1960, who, for as long as I can remember, cherished everything about this night—Christmas Eve—especially the scent of the seven fishes and garlic frying in Mama’s Italian kitchen.

I’m the youngest of three siblings who often heard their Italian father say that you couldn’t give him a million bucks for one bite of meat on Christmas Eve. I still believe if anyone had ever approached him with a suitcase filled with money and a dish of Brooklyn’s famous Peter Luger steak, my father, in his own kind Italian way, would have said “No thank you” on Christmas Eve.

Confusion and commotion were as much a part of my family’s Christmas Eve as the salted-cod *baccalà* salad chilling in the refrigerator. The snipped edges of Christmas wrappings and papery sheaths of garlic cloves mingled together in a colorful scene of merry debris on our

kitchen table as Mama and Papa prepared for our traditional Christmas Eve dinner.

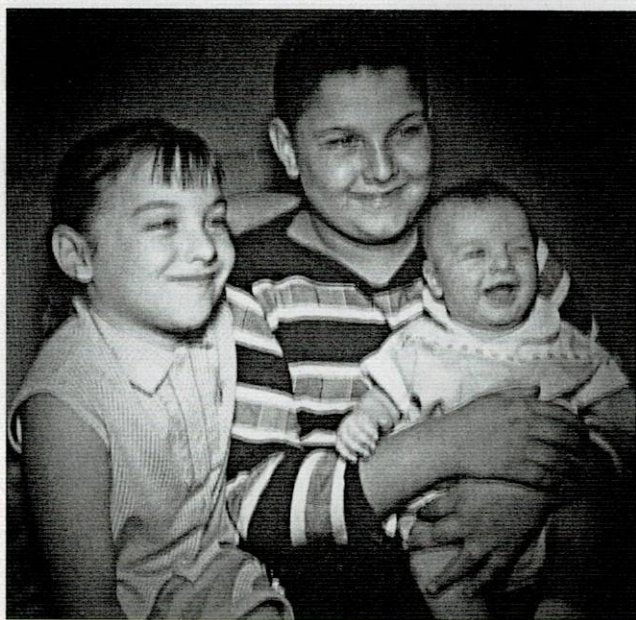
My sister would sit in the parlor, tying the final bows on her gifts, and making change for her money envelopes. Glancing nervously at the Christmas tree, she would admonish us to not turn the television on: “It’s too close to the tree.” Although the artificial tree was

completely fireproof and was probably tested with a blow torch by Underwriters Laboratory, Sis still worried that the broadcast of the Yule log just might set it ablaze.

Then my aunt would arrive huffing and puffing from her long trip down the stairs from the second floor of our two-family house. In 1967, families still lived together or at least nearby. Italians were



Joe’s always-smiling Papa.



Joe as a baby with his sister, Tina, and brother, John.

no different, but it did pose somewhat more of a challenge trying to figure out which Michael or Anthony was being called in for dinner from the top-floor window.

Like clockwork, no sooner had my aunt arrived when the annual debate would begin between her and my mother as to the precise date when Aunt Concetta had passed away. This was followed by the quibble over whether or not the seafood sauce was too spicy for her diverticulitis. All of this always ended with my father pointing out that there was plenty of Brioschi (a lemon-flavored, effervescent digestive aid) in the medicine cabinet, and a reminder that in this house it's "gravy," not "sauce"!

Each year was a wonderful encore of food, family, festivities and light quarrels—but it always ended with a delightful reprise of heartfelt family tradition.

As we approach Mama and Papa's house in my memory, I already smell the garlic frying from outside! I move through the front doors and into the kitchen where more preparations for the great Christmas Eve feast continue. I see Mama shelling the shrimp, cleaning the calamari, breading the fillet, and praising the size of the scallops. The rest of the world may have called these delicacies crustaceans, but on this special night the scallops, shrimp, calamari and clams are magically transposed into the sumptuous participants in the Feast of the Seven Fishes, a traditional Italian Christmas Eve meal. It's one of the smaller miracles that occurred on this night.



The Curcio and Carlo family, circa 1968.

My mind pictures Papa opening the anchovies and prepping the *Spaghetti Aglio e Olio*, frying garlic slices in olive oil to a perfect golden brown. He would grind hot peppers that had been stitched on string and hung in the kitchen to dry since Thanksgiving, saving them to make the crushed, spicy pepper flakes of his special version of *peperoncino* to sprinkle across the *al dente* pasta.

He softened the hard *friselle* bread biscuits in water—they were soon to be covered with his seafood sauce and served alongside the shrimp and calamari. Papa's white gravy-stained T-shirt displayed the labor of his day. Soon it would



The Curcio's Feast of the Seven Fishes on Christmas Eve.

be time to drain the macaroni in what most might call a colander but was forever known in my family's house as a *scolapasta* (pasta strainer). Finally, the table would be set as always, with one accidentally placed dish too many. Mama would say, "Leave it there for the souls."

When the feast was over, and the table cleared, Papa would offer coffee by asking, "Who's having black, and who's having brown?" The difference being a choice between black espresso coffee made in a "mog-uh-nett"—a steam-pressure moka pot (*macchinetta*)—with a little drop of anisette and a twisted lemon peel, or brown American coffee brewed in an old-fashioned stovetop percolator.

After the gifts and the great Christmas Eve feast, families strolled through the streets of Greenpoint, greeting all the familiar names and faces—"Merry Christmas, Sal. Merry Christmas, Lina. Merry Christmas, Sam."—as they made their way to the church for midnight Mass.

Midnight Mass at St. Cecilia's was a solemn gathering, yet it was as festive as

old Fezziwig's ball in *A Christmas Carol*. It was a place to see and to be seen, sporting your new Christmas coat and hat. School carolers—the heavenly voices of a full Christmas choir—made their intentions clear: It was Christmas Eve in Greenpoint!

Now I set down my empty brandy glass and smile at the memories, noticing that some things have changed as many things do. But I do believe that one thing remains the same: "I have always thought of Christmas time ... as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys." —Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

"Merry Christmas. Sal. Merry Christmas, Lina." And merry Christmas to you one and all from our little town of Greenpoint, Brooklyn, N.Y. ♦