

Preserving Our Rich Heritage



Reading Michael and Carrie Nobel Kline's report, *Come to the Old Country, A Handbook for Preserving and Sharing Schuylkill County's Cultural Heritage*, I realize how lucky I was to grow up here. We have such a rich diversity of cultures that it's all too easy to overlook just how unique the area is—our traditions, stories and recipes are “just the way we do things here.” These things that make us special and that outsiders find so interesting, all too often native Schuylkill Countians don't even notice.

I am not into genealogy as others in my family are, but from their research I know I am part Lithuanian and part German, and at least a little Pennsylvania Dutch and English. I was raised in St. Clair, a small town with over a dozen different churches of varying ethnic groups. I grew up thinking it was normal to celebrate holidays twice. We had the “normal” Christmas and Easter, and then celebrated in the Orthodox way with our neighbors, according to their calendar.

The traditions, languages and foods of my childhood are ingrained in my memories. My Lithuanian grandmother spent countless hours in the kitchen and seemed to equate food with love. Several times a week I'd eat at her house, and I didn't realize how much I'd miss her cooking until I went off to school in New Mexico when I was 17.

During one bout of homesickness my first year away, I set out to make breenies. I had watched my grandmother make potato pancakes countless times, but I couldn't get it right. I just succeeded in filling the dorm's common room with lots of greasy smoke. I called her that afternoon, and she couldn't tell me how to do it over the phone. Her “add flour till it looks right” didn't cut it. It was second nature to her. She didn't even have written recipes for many of my favorite foods.

A few years ago, I bought a cookbook that was put together by the Knights of Lithuania. It doesn't have a breenie recipe in its pages, either, although it has lots of other great recipes and information about traditional foods.

The Klines note in their report that with every passing generation, we lose a little of that heritage. Languages are spoken less, recipes don't get passed down, and stories are forgotten. It's my hope that *Schuylkill Living* helps preserve a little of that history and heritage, so all is not lost.

Erica Ramus
Editor/Publisher & Owner

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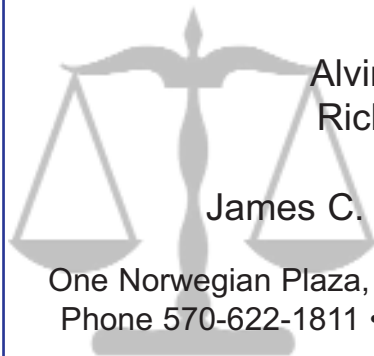
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