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The wrong way to cook a Turkey.

My older sister and I huddled in her kitchen the night before Thanksgiving, like a coach before a big game. “Which cheese are you going to put in the macaroni?” she asked with a steady eye. Carefully, I selected Cheddar and Mozzarella. “Good, and how much salt are you to put in the Collard Greens?” Unsure, I said, “About a quarter cup?”. She smiled and said, “Good. Okay, you’re ready”. This was it; I passed her test. This was a moment that we’ve always fantasized about as children. We were both grown adults, leading a Thanksgiving dinner together. Thanksgiving is an American holiday where families come together to enjoy a great dinner and celebrate thankfulness. It’s led by the leaders of our families, and they’re the ones who dictate the rules. For years my sister and I were forced laborers to our grandmother, mother, and aunts. Now, we stand together as adults in our respective apartments. Although my general knowledge was the test, it was only a prerequisite to see if I was capable of the bigger responsibility. This year I was tasked with the most important dish of all, to cook the Turkey and present it to our family.

The tradition of presenting a Thanksgiving turkey in America dates to 1621. The Puritans migrated from England and became permanent settlers in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Gratitude and thankfulness are the foundation of the dinner. Members aboard the Mayflower ship gathered to celebrate adapting successfully to the “new world” after much misfortune during

their cross-Atlantic voyage. This Tradition became engraved in American Culture. When the Holiday was signed into proclamation in 1863 by President Lincoln, it was considered a rite of passage for immigrants. Undoubtedly, it became a North American ritual of which its participants were to be considered “real Americans” (Kirkpatrick, M 2021). Turkeys are native to North America, and they became the main poultry of choice and a symbol of gratitude. These massive birds are to be enjoyed with those you are thankful for (Greninger, E 1979). I had entered the Olympics of cooking all too eager. Lack of attention, not following instructions, and lack of experience contributed to the ultimate failure that resulted in my first Turkey. To help others avoid those same mistakes, I will outline an absolutely WRONG way to make a turkey.

With most things, you never want to be too overzealous. Therefore, the first step in making a turkey is to Humble yourself. Turkeys are very big and if you’ve never cooked one, you might want to practice before making one for your entire family. The proper way to prepare your turkey is to take it out of the packaging. Next, remove the innards bag, and removed all the plastic. Lastly, clean the massive bird before seasoning. I did not do that. I stood over my first bird at 3 am on Thanksgiving morning. Tired, I daydreamed about how my family would be so proud of me. I removed the Turkey from the outer plastic and immediately went to season, which was not following the instructions my sister gave me at all.

The second step to making your turkey is follow instructions your family gave you. I wouldn’t recommend forgetting what your family suggested. If it does not taste like your mother’s turkey, it may be less likely she will trust you to make one again. Make sure you have

the correct seasonings and tools to make your Turkey a success. My sister gave me an array of seasonings to use which included salt, pepper, Ms. Dash seasoning and real onions. She instructed me to marinate the turkey for at least 6 hours minimum before baking. My sister also explained that I needed to pre heat the oven at least 20 minutes before my baking time. I completely ignored that. I cut onions, put some salt on the turkey and plopped it into a cold oven, and grinned with satisfaction. "I did it." I thought to myself and trailed off to bed while it cooked.

The size of Turkey is to be always considered. Aside from assuring it is well-seasoned, you must make sure that it's thoroughly cooked. Most Poultry can take up to 13 hours to cook to perfection. In my family, we cook the Turkey overnight so that it can be ready to be served on time. It's important to poke holes in the chest of your turkey with a knife. It's also important to keep the meat moist through a process called basting. Basting is to take the juices that are expelled while cooking and reintroduce them, so the meat won't be dry. This process is imperative because there is no way to know the turkey is dry until it's ready to eat. As it can be imagined, I, once again, did not do that. The following morning, I pulled my turkey out of the oven. I was satisfied that the turkey was complete. The color looked right, which is a common deception and it smelled great. I wrapped it in foil and started my voyage towards my sister's house.

Finally, I had arrived, and it was my time to shine. This time, I was joined by my entire family at my sister's house. I was greeted by excitement and laughs from family I don't see quite often. It made me remember a Thanksgiving when I was 9. My sister and I saw a Barbie

commercial appear on the TV with her new “Thanksgiving’s edition” multi-play set! I always liked Thanksgiving, but Barbie cosigned this holiday herself, and now I love it. This was the day I developed a terrible need for self-gratification. I walked up to my mother and demanded she buy me this Barbie Doll. Unmoved by conviction, my mother responded, “Thanksgiving is not a time for gifts, it’s a time to be thankful.” I was stunned to be defeated by something so simple, that my jaw dropped. My sister laughed at me first, and my mother broke her serious reply and laughed at me too. From that day forward “it’s a time to be thankful” became our idiom.

We waited until the evening to start dinner. My mother looked at me skeptically as I put the turkey down. I looked at her with a smirk on my face. “Oh, it’s a time to be thankful” I said sarcastically. My sister laughed in the distance. We understood that we needed to have a perfect execution of this dinner or else we wouldn’t hear the end of it. It was no doubt in my mind that the torch will be passed down. I unwrapped the turkey and it looked amazing. The whole family gathered and started our dinner with a prayer. After the prayer, everyone started to dig in. I waited to bask in the many compliments I was sure to come. However, this wasn’t the self-gratification I was hoping for. “EW, who made this damn dry ass turkey!?” my uncle Ray yelled as he spit it out into his hand. My eyes grew wide. “Yeah, I’m not going to lie, this turkey is salty and Dry” my aunt Jackie piggybacked “And is that the innards bag still in the turkey?”. My mother sat across from me with a smile on her face as if she knew this would happen. The room grew loud with critics. I became hot behind my ears. I was embarrassed. *‘How could this happen?’* I asked myself as I imploded.

My sister laughed hard, and she gathered my turkey from the table. “Alright guy’s, that’s enough teasing.” She turned her attention to me “I knew you wouldn’t listen to me, so I made a backup turkey.” *‘She betrayed me!’* I thought. Was the whole family in on the joke? My sister had been securing her torch at my demise. After I gave it more thought, I decided it was rightly deserved. She knew I wouldn’t listen anyway, and she was right. She brought another turkey out the oven which was perfect. In hindsight, I understood that the right person was in charge to lead the next generation of Thanksgiving dinners. However, in the moment, I was mixed with amusement and betrayal. Most of those feelings vanished by the time I was done with my plate.

My sister and my mother knew that I wouldn’t cook a perfect turkey just yet. The way they tested me and taught me the process of “what not to do” is exactly why they should be celebrated. My Lack of attention, not following instructions, and lack of experience contributed to my demise; however, my family's love and unique process of teaching me something contributed to my future success. That’s something to be grateful for, a tailor-made life lesson from those who love you best. That is the real cause for celebration. I still wouldn’t recommend making a Turkey unless you practice and pay attention to the instructions laid out by your family. After all, what are the odds you might have a backup turkey?

Works Cited

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