

# Food for Art

By Jim Turner

Lasagna, when left in a dark place in your refrigerator, like behind the brown lettuce, will eventually transform itself into an interesting art form. With no help from your multitalented self, it will quietly morph into a conversational collage of stuff like pasta, ground beef and tomato sauce topped with something that resembles cheese, dotted with lovely white, fuzzy eruptions teased with blue specs. Really great color combinations. One is compelled to step back a pace or two, and while tilting the glass of Pinot something, caress the chin with the other hand and proclaim what the artist intends to convey. Eating it is just off the table, so to speak. Can you imagine eating a Picasso? The first words that came to mind upon witnessing the masterpiece in our very own kitchen were, “Does your chewing gum lose its flavor on the bedpost overnight?” Those were followed by “Hide this from Jami.”

Those who know the Turners recognize Jami as our wonderful daughter. Her main mission these days is to protect us from ourselves by performing routine inspections of our pantry, spice cabinet and the refrigerator. The minute she begins her purge fest, she becomes encircled by a radiant glow that grows more intense as she works and as the garbage liners fill up. Long ago we, her loving parents, declared that she was having refrigerator sex. We are careful not to say this in front of her grown-up kids. They would probably agree with us, but they are still her babies.

“Did you ever kill a pig?” The question was from a friend who knew a little of my history growing up on a Vance County farm. And it was a fair question, even if the timing was a bit unusual. We were at a pre-Christmas gathering and enjoying great food and fellowship—and these party celebrations have a way of moving off down roads less traveled. Add to the mix some 80 proof something or other and the road signs can blur. “Yes and no,” was my answer. No, I have never actually sent the poor beast on to glory with the executioner’s bullet or slit the throat after it was hung by its heels. I had some other very important jobs those cold mornings. For example, I was the inspector who checked the inside of Porky’s pink left ear to confirm the “best if killed by” date. Then I proceeded to get as wet and dirty as the other members of the crew. It is a particularly nasty job, slaughtering a farm animal, and it’s not something to be talked about later when the fresh tenderloin biscuits are steaming on the plate.

Memories of those cold mornings bring back some important lessons about frugality. For one thing, there was literally nothing wasted. Everything was used for human consumption, fed back as pig slop/food, or used as fertilizer. Strange as it might sound now, there were no FDA inspection stamps or food locker temperature guidelines. There were no signs directing us to wash our hands or wear a hairnet.

Ever tasted a pig knuckle or seasoned greens or beans with pork pieces? If you don’t already know where chitlins come from, that’s probably a good thing. All these goodies were salvaged with our filthy hands and some choice words. With our hogs, those pre-chitlin parts were often used as partial payment to a man who helped in the processing ceremony. He later used our water hose to flush away most of the debris—and the remains were carried home to feed his wife and babies.

The unremarkable truth is I am still alive to talk about these things. I participated, and I consumed and I washed up later and did not die because of it. And nobody worried about freshness or spoilage because such conditions were obvious if they ever occurred. Pork sausages and chops and such were used in a few days or, if you owned a freezer, stored for later. Shoulders and hams were salted, sometimes wrapped in bags and hung in a cool dark place. These “smoke houses” were early walk-in meat lockers with no electric meter spinning on the outside wall. Nothing was date stamped. Nobody had to tell us when it was time to eat something or toss it in the compost. I’m not saying we were immortal; we just used some common sense about what we ate and when we ate it.

Ever picked a blackberry from a roadside bush and popped it in your mouth without checking for freshness or absence of micro critters that could chew your tummy from the inside? At best, you might blow off residue from the plant. Man, those are good. But they didn’t and still don’t have colorful labels with sell-by or eat-by dates. I can tell if a blackberry is getting gray or mushy. I might be getting old, but really?

My longtime friend and guru, Albert Google, recently enlightened me on the meaning of those expiration and sell-by dates on food packages. The dates solely indicate freshness and are used by manufacturers to indicate when the product is at its peak. That means the food does not expire in the sense of becoming inedible. For foods that require no refrigeration, there may be no difference in taste or quality, and expired foods won’t necessarily make people sick. I focused on the manufacturer’s “use by” date. They want us to throw something out and buy more.

A recent CNN report noted that use-by dates are contributing to millions of pounds of wasted food each year. The Natural Resources Defense Council and Harvard Law School’s Food Law and Policy Clinic say Americans are prematurely throwing out food largely because of confusion over what expiration dates actually mean. Yet we grow sad-eyed when we read about families that suffer food deficiencies. Pictures of malnourished children bring tears. So how do we reconcile these truths with our propensity to discard the foods someone else needs? Remember that pig slaughtering helper who washed and saved the pig parts that many of us would toss away?

Christmas and New Year celebrations and gatherings are done, yet as I write this, I am still holding onto a few leftovers. In the total scheme of things, that’s not a long time ago. Our daughter/inspector general is planning to visit this coming weekend and that always makes us happy. The timing is perfect and gives us more artistic freedom. That’s plenty of time to grow a few extra touches on another interesting piece of art. I’ll send a picture for the next *Shoreline*.



**PKS YARD WASTE  
PICK-UP DATES  
February 8, 22**



**PKS RECYCLE DATES**

**"A" Week: February 14, 28  
"B" Week: February 7, 21**

*Please place recyclables and trash out  
on Sunday night to ensure pickup.*

Please clearly mark recycling containers to ensure that recycling is not picked up by the trash truck. Stickers for this purpose are available at town hall. Contact Charles Rocci at town hall at 247-4353, ext. 13, or [clerk@townofpks.com](mailto:clerk@townofpks.com) with questions.