



## Christmas at Hummingbird Hill Farm

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*By Karen Keb Acevedo*

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My mom was visiting us from California for the week, so we decided to cook up a real traditional Christmas Eve dinner—complete with all the dishes I remember from childhood.

I'm sure all you cooks out there know what an undertaking a holiday meal can be.

Even though it was only going to be me and my husband (Dennis), mom, and Dianne (HF's vet columnist) and Mike Hellwig, we wanted to go all out.

After all, isn't that what the holidays are all about?

Last year I experimented with a fancy beef bourginon recipe (after reading Julie & Julia) which tasted awful, so I decided Christmas is not the time to experiment--I wanted to go with the fail-safes.

On Tuesday, mom and I laid the groundwork by cooking some of the sides: cranberry jello salad (the recipe is in my cookbook *Cooking with Heirlooms*) made with Port wine, walnuts and whole cranberry sauce—so delicious!—and creamed corn made with heavy whipping cream and whole milk.

We cooked up the brine and put our 18-lb. turkey into the fridge overnight.

After dinner, back to the kitchen I went to make the pumpkin pie (this recipe is also in my book). I made the crust from scratch using Martha Stewart's "Pate Brisee" recipe, which is so easy it's a crime when it comes to pie crust.

My mom has always struggled with pie crust, so I gave her a few good tips to take home, like: chilling the cutting board freezing the dough between all the steps, and using a Pampered Chef miniature rolling pin to maneuver easily and get the crust's shape just right.

Christmas Eve, there was no resting.

After coffee and breakfast, we had the turkey to deal with. Out of the brine it came, and since mom volunteered to do all the cleaning and preparing, I let her at it.

After it rested for two hours, she washed it and loosened its skin, spreading a mixture of butter and salt and pepper underneath; we made stuffing and stuffed it gently before putting it into the oven to roast, along with a digital meat thermometer attached.

I put the potatoes on to boil and when they were ready, I ran them through a food mill for the smoothest, creamiest texture.

I did this because after looking at the \$30 potato ricer at Williams-Sonoma, I decided the food mill would provide the same results—and they did.

The best part? No peeling required!

I added heavy cream, and of course mounds of butter to them. The turkey came out at 170 degrees and sat for 30 minutes, its temperature gradually rising before Dennis carved it up.

When my guests arrived, I popped in a puff-pastry brie with honey and dried cherries (you can find the recipe in any holiday magazine or at Pepperidge Farms' website) and served it with sliced pears and apples and toasted bread rounds.



Let me tell you, that baked brie is a crowd pleaser!

We all delighted in the traditional, home-cooked favorite dishes that say "Christmas" in my family, and ended the evening with a game of Cranium, and finally, Midnight Mass at Pax Christi.

I hope you all had a joyful holiday season and are striving for the best in 2009.

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