

## **Croatian Foodways and St. Anthony's Day Celebration**

Domenica Tesvich Cibilich was born in 1955 in Port Sulphur, Louisiana to parents who were both born on the Dalmatian coast. In 1931, at the age of sixteen, her father, Ante Tesvich immigrated to Louisiana from Donja Vrucica. He became an oyster fisherman with his brother. On a return trip to Dalmatia in 1954, he met and married Tereza Jurevic, from nearby Sucuraj.

In 1967, when Domenica was in the seventh grade, the Tesvich family spent a year in Croatia. Although their Croatian house had no running water and they had to wash their clothes by hand, she says that she loved living there, because it was such a free life.

Her cousins in Kuzma taught them to catch and prepare birds and snails for food. Domenica is fluent in Croatian as well as English, and her four children can also speak Croatian. Her husband, Luke Cibilich, is a Croatian born oyster fisherman who has lived in Louisiana since 1969. Today her brother, John Tesvich, and her husband are partners in their oyster business.

Like many Croatian and Croatian American women, Domenica raises many of her own vegetables in her backyard garden. Her large yard also features a grape arbor and several of the fig trees traditional to Croatian gardens. Her mother always had gardens both at the camp and in Port Sulphur. Domenica also keeps a cow and three goats, and from her goats' milk, she makes a traditional pressed goat's milk cheese. Croatians usually make a hard goat's milk cheese which is aged for months and has a strong taste, but Domenica says that her cheese never gets that hard or strong tasting, because her family eats it before it can really age. She says the meals she prepares for her family are, "Just stuff that I learned from my mother's way of cooking, with a lot of fish, oysters, and collard greens." Collard greens were always raised in her garden.

Other staple foods include beans, cabbage, chicken soup, and beef soup. She describes a dried codfish meal, which the family traditionally served on church days when, "You had to fast and only eat one meal a day."

Domenica is an active member of Louisiana Citizens for a Free Croatia, a relief organization formed to aid children in Croatia. She helps to organize the St. Anthony's Day Celebration each year at the St. Patrick's Church in Port Sulphur. St. Anthony is the patron saint of her mother's village, Sucuraj.

Her mother and mother-in-law both do needlework, a traditional skill among Croatian women. Domenica is interested in textiles and has a collection not only of her mother's and mother-in-law's work, but also some older linens from Croatia.

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