

## A Prosciutto Story

By George Kun



The "Healthy Life Style Police" is telling us that cold cuts, particularly with tons of salt, nitrates and other deadly stuff are bad for you. They mean they are really, really bad. Unfortunately, they are right.

The reality of life, for the ones who like to live it and enjoy it, is that many bad, bad, things find their way into our diet. Mostly, of course, with our help. Many educated, well-informed and intelligent people, who also want to live long and healthy lives are wondering what can be done? A possible answer is to become creative and do many questionable and bad things in "**moderation**". This approach is often effective in eliminating feelings of guilt, reducing criticism from the caring and friendly watch dogs, and giving all in all a comforting sense of balance.

As far as what constitutes "moderation", it is a whole new topic that usually ruins the fun, so we'll skip it this time.

I felt the other day like having some prosciutto, so I went to my favorite Italian store called "Grande Cheese", which unlike the name suggests, sells all kinds of non cheese Italian goodies as well, prosciutto included. I headed straight to the huge deli department counter where I was greeted by the department supervisor, a tiny elderly lady with a fresh hairdo full of decorative shiny little combs, and old fashioned glasses resting on the tip of her nose.

I asked her to recommend her favorite brand of prosciutto and she kindly obliged with a short grin, apparently pleased that her opinion was important. She lifted a huge chunk of prosciutto from the hook and proudly turned it to show the slicing area. It looked very nice in color and texture, except for a large island of fat in the middle. I asked her if she would be kind enough to

cut the fat and she said: "No problem, sir". Then she immediately handed the big chunk over to a young man, a butcher helper that just emerged from the back door of the department. The lady asked me how many slices I wanted, and I said: "Five". Then she instructed the young man to cut the fat and moved away to talk to another customer.

The butcher trainee appeared to be happy to prove his skills in what he thought was going to be an elaborate exercise. He took the big chunk of ham aside, and started cutting the outer fat with short precise motions, following the curvature of the meat, as to cut the outer fat only. He managed to expose about two inches of meat, then he grabbed the heavy chunk, placed it vertically face down on the electrical slicer, and cut exactly five slices, as I asked.

Something totally unexpected happened after that. The young man took the first slice of prosciutto, placed it on a plastic board, took a small sharp knife and proceeded to carving out the island of fat from the middle of the slice. I was watching the scene with a mix of great pleasure for such good service and horror, in anticipation of retaliation from the "boss" for this crime against the store's profit. I have not even finished my thoughts when the supervisor lady noticed what was going on, and with total disregard to other customers, started yelling hysterically to the young man: "What are you doing, are you out of your mind?"

The young man replied with an embarrassed look: "You told me to cut the fat".

In an attempt to prevent further verbal abuse, and divert the attention to the discrepancy between honest good service and greedy commercial practices, I said to the woman: "Please let him do what you asked him to do".

The woman turned a really mean look at me and continued, still in a shrill voice: "He cannot do that!" I said: "Of course he can, I was watching him, he is really good at it!"

"Sir, I'm telling you, he cannot do this!" continued the woman. I went on with: "And I'm telling you he can, please give him a chance, I know it's really not difficult, I'm doing it often myself".

Something that looked like growing foam around the lady's mouth made me realize it was time for me to switch from playing stupid to questioning the practice. Anyway, the lady did not seem to want to distinguish between ability and permission, so she just ordered him to stop immediately. Then I asked: "Are you selling me prosciutto, or fat?"

She replied: "This is how they come!"

I said: "I know many people that come like that, but some go for liposuction."

The woman was even more furious and did not seem to get my point or want to let me get away with trying to be "funny", so she said: "My helper is new, he does not know how to do it right!"

I said: "That what happens to new people. They stay honest until they learn the tricks of the trade, as the real meaning of "cutting the fat".

The other waiting customers did not show impatience because they were laughing, but the woman moved furiously to the cheese department and switched places with the cheese girl, who showed me another piece of unbelievably nice and almost no inner fat prosciutto and even let me taste it. I did, it was very good and I bought ten slices.

I left the store realizing that I should have asked the lady about her favorite prosciutto to eat, not the one to sell. Oh well, just a case of miscommunication.