

Hispanic Heritage Month | Kristie Commins

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Meet MGC Greenville attorney [Kristie Commins](#) as we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month!

My dad is from Puerta de Tierra, Puerto Rico, which, at the time, was a very poor and hard part of San Juan. He married his high school sweetheart at 18 and they had three children. After about 20 years, they divorced and my dad married my mom—a Sicilian Gambino from New York. My parents had me and all I have to say is God bless my husband for loving the “hot” blood that runs through my veins!

Unfortunately, once my dad married my mom, he tried to get away from his Puerto Rican roots. As sad as it is, I think he felt life was easier for him when he was not seen as a Hispanic man. He always tried to stay out of the sun so his skin would not get too dark and he never taught me Spanish growing up. Although he tried to stay away from it, I have always been incredibly proud of my heritage and over the years he slowly began to embrace it again.

Puerto Ricans love music, food and Christmas! Growing up, we always had music playing in the house, whether it was Latin, 1950s or current hits on the radio. My dad never hesitated to grab any of the many women in my family for impromptu dancing in the kitchen when something was playing. Music is still so important to me and one of my all-time favorite artists is Selena Quintanilla. She was Mexican-American and paved such a way for recognition of Hispanics and Tejano music throughout the United States.

When it comes to Christmas, the island celebrates for most of December, and well into January for Three Kings Day. You will find food, music and gatherings constantly! Both as a kid and even now, my house is always decorated immediately after Thanksgiving and never taken down before Three Kings Day. My brother also married a Cuban woman and they have five children (some more “hot” blood!), so get-togethers during Christmas time with my immediate family are big, loud, full of good food and never a dull moment! One of my favorite dishes, not only at Christmas but year round, is arroz con gandules which is Puerto Rican rice. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do!

Arroz con Gandules (Puerto Rican Rice)

Ingredients:

- Rice:
 - 1.5 cups white rice
 - 1 small onion—diced
 - 1 teaspoon minced garlic
 - ¼ jar of either Recaito or sofrito (but also be liberal)
 - 1 8 ounce can of tomato sauce
 - 1.5 cups or either dry white wine, white cooking wine, or Goya golden cooking wine (but also be liberal)

- 1 package of Sazon
- 1 can of gandules (aka green pigeon peas)
- Chicken broth (to cover rice plus ½ inch above)
- Pork
 - Pork tenderloin
 - Adobo
 - Lime or Lemon juice
 - Olive oil

Steps:

1. Marinate pork in adobo and lime/lemon juice for at very minimum 1 hour, but overnight is best.
2. Cut pork into chunks.
3. Sauté pork chunks in olive oil on low to medium heat in a covered pan. Cook only halfway through.
4. In a separate large pot, sauté diced onion, minced garlic, and Recaito/sofrito.
5. After 2-4 minutes, add tomato sauce, uncooked rice, pork chunks, white wine, Sazon, gandules, and chicken broth.
6. Stir and bring to boil.
7. Once at a boil, reduce to low and cover.
8. Cook 20 minutes or until there is no remaining broth.
9. If you want pegao, stir only once. Pegao is a crispy layer of rice that will form around the bottom of the pot and is treasured by Puerto Ricans! If you do not want pegao, stir regularly.
10. Turn off heat and let sit for 10 minutes before serving.