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Christmas Eve Dinner Menu

1. Zeppoli – with and without anchovies
2. Appetizer –
 - a. Shrimp cocktail
 - b. Fried smelts
 - c. Seafood salad
3. Dinner part one
 - a. Spaghetti with crab sauce
4. Dinner part two
 - a. Broiled lobster tails
 - b. Baked flounder
 - c. Broccoli salad (I know)
5. Dessert
 - a. Italian pastry
 - b. Struffoli

Christmas Eve Italian Style

(I hope you like seafood)

It's not called the Feast of the Seven Fishes for nothing.

Introduction:

Christmas Eve has always been my favorite food day of the year. During high school and college, my friends (all food lovers) and I would get together during that afternoon for a couple of drinks, a few appetizers, and many laughs. We would always discuss the coming dinner, and prepare for it. It was like the opening scene from *The Hangover*.

What is the Feast of the Seven Fishes? According to Mario Batali, "It's what Italians do when they say they're fasting." More precisely, the Feast is a meal served in Italian households on *La Vigilia* (Christmas Eve). In many parts of Italy, the night is traditionally a partial fast, during which no meat should be served.

But in true Italian (and American) style, this proscription has morphed into something very UN-fast like, indeed:

Course after course of luxurious seafood dishes, often as many as 7, 10, or even 13. "No one's quite sure of the significance of the number," says Batali. "Some families do seven for the sacraments. Some do ten for the stations of the cross. And some even do 13 for the 12 apostles plus Jesus."

Regardless of the religious symbolism, for most people the main point of the meal is to gather family and friends and enjoy delicious food.

Some of the above was borrowed from:

<http://www.epicurious.com/articlesguides/holidays/christmas/batalisevenfishes>

I was never allowed or even wanted to help in the preparation of the meal. My mother was the genius; I received everything from her. What I did learn was, most of this meal is better when it is a few hours or even a day old. It is what it is.

So, most of the meal should be prepared in advance and reheated. That will save the person or people preparing the dishes quite a bit of time and aggravation.

Believe me, and I have history to back me up, this is the best for everyone involved. **All it takes is a little strategy with your time.**

Throughout this book I will tell you exactly what you need, how to prepare it, and when. This is all about everyone enjoying each other and the food.

Chapter 1

The Arrival – Zeppoli

Zeppoli as an excellent, simple way to get the ball rolling. **Have these ready or in process when people arrive.** Make them both plain and with anchovies on the inside. Both are incredible. Just don't eat too many.

Ingredients:

2 packages instant yeast (4 ½ teaspoons)
1/2 cup warm water
2 cups flour, plus up to 2 additional cups to make batter thick
1 teaspoon salt
Vegetable oil for frying
1 can of anchovies

Directions:

- In a medium bowl, whisk the yeast and very warm water together.
- Add the 2 cups flour and salt.
- Whisk well until the mixture resembles a batter.
- Add more flour up to 2 cups just until it becomes a very thick batter. It should not form a ball.
- Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and allow the dough to rise for 1 hour.
- Preheat the oil to 360 degrees F. Using a spoon, drop the batter into the hot oil.
- Fry until golden brown, about 3 to 4 minutes. Remove and drain on paper towel
- Lightly sprinkle with salt

Reserve –

- Reserve –(¾ of the dough for plain)

After frying the “plain” zeppolis, use the final portion of the batter and place 4 anchovies in the center of each one. Seal inside the dough and fry.

Chapter 2

The Appetizer Course

(1) Shrimp Cocktail (make this Christmas Eve afternoon)

Ingredients:

32 shell-on (21 to 25 count) tiger shrimp

For the cocktail sauce:

1 (14 1/2-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained

1/2 cup prepared chili sauce

4 tablespoons prepared horseradish

1 teaspoon sugar

Few grinds fresh black pepper

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

1 tablespoon olive oil

Sprinkle Old Bay seasoning

Directions:

Using a pair of scissors or a serrated knife, make an incision down the backside of the shrimp, following the intestinal track. Eviscerate shrimp and rinse under cool water leaving shells intact.

Place cleaned shrimp into a pot. Cover over with 3 inches of water. Refrigerate.

Place tomatoes, chili sauce, horseradish, sugar, pepper, and salt in food processor and blend until smooth. Refrigerate cocktail sauce until ready to serve.

Place a pot of shrimp on the stove on high heat.

When the water boils, the shrimp are done.

Place the shrimp into an ice bath to stop the cooking.

Once shrimp have chilled, refrigerate and arrange with cocktail sauce in a martini glass or as desired.

(b) Calamari and Scungilli Salad (Christmas Eve Morning)

One of my favorite dishes is squid and scungilli salad, or the calamari all'insalata. Follow this simple recipe and method with total passion to make this wonderful dish.

You can and will enjoy this appetizer, utilize the dressing to dunk the fresh and delicious crusty Italian bread. The calamari salad is best prepared and seasoned a day ahead, to let the ingredients blend, to acquire the taste of our celebrated seafood salad.

The ingredients used are few. This is the sapore di mare, the "taste of the ocean salad."

Serves 4– so, scale the ingredients to your body.

Ingredients:

- 4 lb. clean squid, tentacles and the bodies separated
- 2 medium size fresh, frozen or precooked conch, scungilli.
- 5 lemons
- 3 bay leaves
- salt and pepper
- peperoncino, hot red pepper flakes (optional)
- ½ cup olive oil
- ½ cup of chopped parsley
- 2 cloves of garlic sliced very thin

Preparation:

How to Boil Calamari

Squid must be cooked either a very short time or a very long time. Anything in between turns it into rubber. Two minutes over high heat is plenty. Beyond that will require at least 30 minutes to an hour to re-tenderize it.

The Salad

In a large bowl, whisk together the juice of the remaining lemons, the olive oil, a few pinches of black pepper, peperoncino flakes (optional) and half of the parsley.

Combine with the dressing the sliced scungilli and calamari, rings and tentacles.

Barely cover with the reserved scungilli's water and add any salt and pepper to taste.

Serve the salad the next day.

When ready to serve, add freshly sliced garlic and garnish with remaining parsley.

I like to serve the calamari salad on bed of lettuce dressed with olive oil and a few drops of lemon juice.

If the scungilli is not fresh – go without it!

(c) **Fried Smelts (make this right before serving)**

A classic way to cook smelts is to fry them. Lots of people use batter, and I really like them in the light tempura batter I use with halibut sometimes. But you can go even lighter by just dredging them in seasoned flour and sautéing them in olive oil. I include the chard and garlic because they work well with the smelt; you could also use spinach or kale. Figure on 6-8 smelt per person for an appetizer; double that for a main course. I serve this with heads on -- these fish are so small, everything is edible -- but feel free to behead them if you'd like. Fresh anchovies are also excellent cooked this way.

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 15 minutes

Total Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

- 3-6 dozen fresh or thawed smelt, depending on your appetite
- Kosher salt
- Olive oil for frying, about 1/4 cup
- 1 cup whole wheat flour (you can substitute all-purpose)
- 1 T. kosher salt
- 1 t. garlic powder
- 1 t. cayenne (or more to taste)
- 1 t. mustard powder
- 1 t. fresh ground black pepper

Preparation:

Make the seasoned flour by mixing all the ingredients. It should not taste overpowering -- the seasonings are there to accent the fish, not hide it.

Lay your smelts out on a platter and salt them well.

Heat a large frying pan over high heat for a minute or two. Turn the heat down to medium-high and add enough olive oil to coat the bottom of the pan by about 1/8 inch. You do not want the smelt swimming in oil. Let this oil heat up for 2-3 minutes, or until you see it begin to ripple on the surface.

While the oil is heating, dredge your smelt in the flour and set aside on a dry spot. Lay out some paper towels to drain them later.

When the oil is hot, arrange your smelt in one layer with room between each one and fry over medium-high heat for 2 minutes. Turn and fry for an additional minute, maybe two.

The trick here is to do most of the cooking on one side, giving you that pretty golden crust. You give the other side less time because you don't want overcooked fish inside that pretty golden crust.

Serve with lemon wedges

Chapter 3

Dinner – Course 1

Spaghetti with Blue Crab Sauce

(make the sauce the day before and the Spaghetti just before dinner)

This is the ultimate Christmas Eve Dish. In my opinion, this is the most awesome tasting tomato sauce ever created. The crab provides a level of sweetness which completely bypasses the acidity of the tomato sauce. Make this sauce the day before on the morning of Christmas Eve. It will be that much better.

Ingredients:

8 blue crabs (fresh or frozen)
3 – 28 ounce cans of san marzano plum tomatoes. whole or crushed
6 to 10 cloves of garlic, coarsely chopped
4 tablespoons italian parsley, fresh and coarsely chopped
1-2 pounds of dry spaghetti, linguini, or angel hair pasta
Olive oil
Salt and pepper

Dealing with the Crabs

You can purchase them frozen and cleaned. Or, you can buy them fresh and already dead. Or, you can buy them living. Actually, if you look at the three ways to purchase crabs that I just mentioned, living becomes killed becomes killed and claimed. We will start from the beginning. You can pick up from whatever stage you have purchased them.

1. Bring a large pot filled halfway with water to a boil.
2. Place the crabs in the pot, bottom up.
3. Cook for 4 min. and then place the crabs in a cold water bath or simply, run cold water on them until they are at room temperature or below to stop the cooking.

On the underside of the crab is an apron. If the apron is narrow, the crab was a male. If the apron is wide, the crab was a female. With your finger on the tip of a knife, open the apron and remove the top shell

With your fingers, remove the lungs, also known as Dead Men or Devil's Fingers. Clean anything that is colored from the crab with a brush and running water. Clean the claws with that same scrubbing brush and running water. After all, crabs are bottom dwellers and get very sandy. You would not want sand in your sauce.

Fill a large pot with ¼ inches of olive oil, the garlic and a couple of shakes of red movable online pepper. Place on medium/high. When the garlic is brown, NOT BLACK, remove it from the oil. You have just seasoned the oil

Now, place the crabs in the pot based on the size of your pot. The goal here is to get some color on the shells and to further season the oil. After 3 min. of sautéing, remove the crabs to a bowl. We will get back to the crabs after we make the sauce.

Tomato Sauce

Do not be intimidated by this. It is truly simple.

Page down, page down. Remember that pot that we cooked the garlic, red pepper and sautéed the crabs in? Well, it has been thoroughly seasoned for this pot of sauce. There should be some oil still in the pot. Don't do anything yet.

I have only listed the ingredients above. The hard part is over.

In the cooled off pot, add the 3 cans of tomatoes, they couple of shakes of dried oregano, 1 teaspoon of fresh chopped parsley, a pinch of salt and a couple of grinds of black pepper.

Turn on the heat to HIGH until the pot of tomatoes begins to **boil**.

Reduce the heat to medium/low and cover slightly.

Simmer for 45 min.

Add the crabs and simmer for another 20 min.

You can do that the day before, morning of or just before dinnertime. Personally, I think this sauce is that much better after reheating so, make this sauce the day before. You will look like that much more of a professional time manager and chef.

Bring a large pot, $\frac{3}{4}$ full of water to a rolling boil. Toss in 3-4 tablespoons salt to the water. When the water reaches a second rolling boil, add the pasta and cook until al dente (slightly hard).

Place the cooked pasta in a large serving bowl. Top with 3-4 ladles of sauce and mix that all together. Place extra sauce on the table should people want more. You can serve the pasta with grated cheese on the side. But, that is unheard of. Just kidding. Anyone can do whatever they like.

The crabs are served after the pasta. Crack, pick, suck, and get messy!

It is worth it.

Wait a minute there is still another three-part course plus dessert.

Chapter 4

Dinner Course, Part 2, a, b and c

a. Broiled Lobster Tails (prepare right after the Spaghetti)

Ingredients:

6 – 6 ounce lobster tails
Butter
Seasoning of your choice –Old Bay, etc.

Instructions:

Turn on your broiler. Allow the oven to get EXTREMELY HOT.

With a sharp scissors, cut through the center of the top shell. All the way, but not including the tailfin.

Squeeze the lobster tail together until the bottom shell cracks.

From the tailfin area of the top shall, rub your finger from tailfin to the front of the lobster tail, separating the meat from the shelf.

Flip over the lobster tail meat. Lay it on the top shell.

Top the meat with a little butter and seasoning.

Broil for 6 min. – 1 min. per ounce.

Serve while hot. Sweet and succulent. Yes, it is that easy.

Below is a video that will show you everything.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnQ6QEHsFOM&feature=related>

b. Baked Sole (prepare right after the Spaghetti)

Ingredients:

1-2 pounds of filet of sole
3 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
3 tablespoons of fresh Italian parsley, finely chopped
½ lemon juice
1 tablespoon olive oil

Preparation:

Set your oven temperature to 400°

Place the fish on a foil-covered cookie sheet

Brush Olive Oil on the fish

Top with Garlic, Parsley and Lemon Juice

Bake for 12-15 min.

Simple wins every time.

c. Broccoli Salad (prepare Christmas Eve afternoon)

Ingredients:

1 head of broccoli separated into fairly large pieces
¼ lemon juice

Olive oil
Salt, pepper and red pepper

Preparation:

Steam the broccoli until it is just barely cooked through.

Immediately dress with olive oil, salt, pepper and a few shakes of red pepper.

Add the lemon juice.

Toss thoroughly.

Cover and place aside. This is better once it sits for an hour or two.

Well, you are probably busting at the seams right now. You should be.

Finish your wine and help your host to clean up. If you are the host, you should request strongly that everyone clean up for you.

Comment [MSOffice1]:

Let's eat something sweet.

Chapter 5

Dessert (**Finally**)

a. Italian Pastry (should be purchased Christmas Eve afternoon)

Directions:

Ask one of your invited guests to bring a box of assorted, mini-Italian pastries from a local Italian Bakery.

b. Struffoli (should be prepared Christmas Eve morning)

Make this in the morning. It gets better throughout the day.

Ingredients:

3 1/2 cups flour
6 eggs, plus 1 egg yolk
1/2 teaspoon salt
4 cups canola or peanut oil, for frying
2 cups honey
Powdered sugar, for dusting

Directions

In a mixing bowl, place flour, eggs, yolk, and mix well to form a firm dough, 8 to 10 minutes. Place in the refrigerator and allow to rest 30 minutes.

Remove from the refrigerator and cut ball-sized pieces of dough from the main batch. Roll each ball into a 1/2-inch thick dowel (rope) and cut each dowel into 1/2-inch pieces. Roll each piece into a ball and continue until finished with all dough.

In a 12 to 14-inch skillet with at least 3-inch sides, heat the oil to 375 degrees F. Drop enough balls in to cover about half of the surface of frying oil and cook until dark golden brown. Use a slotted spoon to turn them regularly, and expect them to puff up while cooking. As they finish, remove them to a tray covered with paper towels, and drain well. This should take at least 5 batches.

When all of the struffoli are cooked, heat the honey, in a wide 6 to 8 quart saucepan until quite warm, about 150 degrees F, and substantially thinner. Add struffoli to honey and stir carefully until well coated. Remove from heat and allow to cool 5 minutes in the pan, stirring regularly. Pour into a large serving

tray in the form of either a pyramid or a ring mold. Sprinkle with powdered sugar and serve.

Someone needs to make the coffee.

Enjoy your dessert and let the digestion begin.

That was my favorite holiday meal that I will always remember. Maybe, some variation of it will be yours. I hope so. It is worth it.

Are you tired yet? You should be.

Get ready because your Christmas Day feast is tomorrow!

Merry Christmas

[Now, it's time for your bonus. See below](#)

BIG ITALIAN,

TIGHT BUDGET

Enjoy Great Italian Food!

If all you have is a limited budget and some desire, you can make amazing meals all year long. In the following pages, you will learn how to eat well even when operating on a **shoe string**



Dedication

This book is dedicated to both my mother and my wife for different reasons.

My mother loved to cook when she had the time. She rarely did, but managed to put outstanding food on the table every night. She was sweet and gentle and always found a way to make me feel good about life even though there was usually a storm going on in hers.

My wife, Lesley, does not like to cook, but she tries very hard. Like my mother, Lesley has very little time. She manages to put healthy meals on the table almost every night. Sometimes, her job keeps her away at night for meetings, so I get take out (even healthy take out).

If you are thinking to yourself, "why doesn't he just cook?" The answer is, "I would love to, but I can't". I have MS, and I am paralyzed. I think about food a lot. Lesley married me because I could cook. Hopefully, I will cook again soon, but enough about that.

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Introduction

This book was lovingly inspired by my mother, an amazing woman both in and out of the kitchen. She managed our family budget to the penny, cooked incredible meals and managed to do it all without any help. I never noticed this as a child, but as I got older it all started to become clear. My father was without a job more often than he had one and my mother had to earn a paycheck to keep food on our plates. She worked tirelessly to provide for us and her story is so similar to the stories of many people out there today. It's a story of dedication, love, spirit and quiet tenacity. My mother's dedication to feeding our family has driven me to write this book, in hopes of teaching you how you can fill your family's stomachs with wholesome food that won't break the bank.

My mother was a bookkeeper and her organizational skills carried over into our home life. Her weekly grocery shopping trips were like a military operation, with a careful plan of attack mapped out between major sales and specials at multiple stores. She was armed to the teeth with coupons, lists and weekly circular advertisements from the newspaper. She would stock up on dried goods and canned items for storage in our basement. I used to ask her why we didn't live in a bomb shelter, since it was apparent that she was preparing for a nuclear attack. My mother passed away, leaving behind the giant metal cabinet and freezer that we would jokingly call, the 'war chest'. There had to be 50 boxes of macaroni and 50 cans of crushed tomatoes as well as various other boxed and canned items, like tuna. She was most fond of the Shop-Rite 'Can Can' Sale, which she frequented on a regular basis. We would eat macaroni a lot when I was a kid, but it was

always different and always wonderful. I have to admit, I didn't always love what she would put on my dinner plate. What kid actually likes eating broccoli di rabi? When you're a child, you have a pension for being finicky. As I grew older, I found myself requesting the things I used to dislike.

My mother's freezer was always loaded with various cuts of meat, fish and poultry. When items were on sale, she would buy in bulk and stock the freezer to the brim. With my father laid off from work so often, my mother was preparing for the bottom to drop out at any moment – which it did, more times than I can remember.

Luckily, my mother learned how to stretch a dollar in the kitchen, without sacrificing quality and taste, from both of my grandmothers. In fact, she perfected their life-long practice and made it better. My grandmothers had grown up poor, but my mother played the hand that she was dealt and always put her family first. She focused her efforts on learning more ways to help our family cut costs in the best way she knew how, in the kitchen.

In this book, you'll find a slew of my mother's best recipes and useful tips and tricks on how to stretch your food budget to keep your family fed and happy. I have also included some irresistible recipes passed along from the mother's of my friends, who all grew up in the same boat that I did. One of the greatest things about Italian food is that there are so many ways to prepare the same dish, which I'll teach you about in this book as well.

Now, let's get to it!

Chapter 1:

Antipasti

While I hesitate to begin this book with a holiday dish, like this one, it is a first course item. Naturally, it's logical to begin a cooking book with the first course. I love sitting down with this dish, some Italian bread and a glass of wine; it could be an entire meal. Like many other Italian families, family gatherings were focused around food. The holidays, like Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Day and Easter, were eating marathons!

This recipe is more of an assembly process and doesn't require any cooking unless you make some of the ingredients at home. While this is not the same dish that you typically see in restaurants, but in my opinion it blows them all away.

Ingredients

By using varied quantities of these ingredients, you can control the size of the dish to accommodate small or large groups.

- Marinated mushrooms
- Pickled, stuffed cherry peppers
- Anchovies, 1 can, separated into individual filets
- ½ pound 25-32 shrimp or more to your liking (when prepare the shrimp, place them in a pot of tap water and bring to a boil. Immediately remove from the heat and drop the shrimp in an ice bath to stop the cooking and cool – it's that easy)
- Pickled eggplant (I prefer using homemade, the store brands don't have enough flavor)
- Tuna, packed in oil (I choose a good Italian brand tuna)
- Celery, coarsely diced
- Roasted peppers, cut into ½ inch thick strips (see below)
- Provolone cheese (dry, hard and sharp. Cut into chunks)
- Kalamata olives
- Prosciutto (rolled and cut into 1 inch thick chunks)
- Fresh mozzarella (packed in liquid), cut into somewhat bite-sized round pieces
- Sun-Dried Tomatoes (oil packed if store bought, otherwise use the recipe below)

Using the collected ingredients and ingredients that were prepared from the recipes below, assemble a simple platter. Arrange them in complementary groupings or mix them all together, whichever way you like best!

Roasted Peppers:

You can buy roasted peppers at the grocery store or supermarket and they're usually pretty good. If you want to attempt to make them homemade, they're relatively easy to make. Just rub a little bit of olive oil on a few peppers and place them on the grill, on a stovetop or under the broiler until the pepper is charred. Put them in a bowl and cover with plastic wrap. After approximately 20 minutes, the peppers will be thoroughly steamed. You can now remove the skin and the seeds from the peppers. Don't ever place your peppers under running water; you'll wash the flavor right down the drain. Cut the peppers and place them in a bowl with a little chopped garlic. Use them when you are ready.

Sun-Dried Tomatoes:

These sun-dried tomatoes are easy to prepare and store, and are a huge money-saver (compared to store bought).

- Plum tomatoes
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- Garlic; finely chopped

Preheat the oven to 200-225 degrees.

Lightly oil the tomatoes and cut them half, lengthwise. Place them on a cookie sheet, skin side down.

Lightly sprinkle them with salt and pepper and a little bit of garlic

Drizzle them lightly with some olive oil.

Place them in the oven for 4-5 hours.

Take them out of the oven and let them cool.

Put them in a jar, cover them with olive oil and seal them tightly.

Enjoy!

Chapter 2

Sunday Tomato Sauce (Don't be scared!)

Most people won't even attempt making a homemade tomato sauce because they think it's too difficult. I would like to teach you the secrets of my mother's proverbial 'Sunday Sauce'. It is the meat sauce that I grew up on, and it can match any rival sauce. It is a simple recipe but, I have to say, it is awesome. Regarding the meats included in this recipe, it's great if you use it all but if you can't, or if you substitute, that is okay.

To make Sunday Sauce, you'll need the following:

- 2 – 28 ounce cans crushed tomatoes (San Marzano is the best.)
- 2 – small cans tomato paste
- 6-10 fresh garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 – 12 meatballs (recipe below)
- Italian sausage
- 3-4 spareribs (intact)
- 3-4 braccioni (pronounced 'bra-jole'; recipe below)
- 1 handful flat leaf parsley
- 1 -6 basil leaves
- Salt, pepper, dried oregano, olive oil and red wine (optional)

Add a small amount of olive oil to a pot on medium-high heat. Add the spareribs, sausage and braccioni and brown them individually. Do not crowd the pot or the meats will steam and not brown. Remove the meats from the pot and place them in a bowl. Add more olive oil to the pot that you used to brown the meat. Chop the garlic and sauté it in the olive oil until golden brown. Remove it from the pot. Guess what? You just seasoned your olive oil. Add ½ of the parsley and basil at medium-high and pour in a cup of red wine. Scrape the bits off of the bottom of the pot.

When the wine is almost completely evaporated, turn off the heat. Put the garlic, tomatoes and tomato paste into the pot. Very important step to remember – place 2 tomato and tomato paste cans filled with water into the pot. Turn the heat back on to high. When it all comes to a boil, reduce the heat to a simmer and add a pinch or two of salt and pepper and a sprinkle of dried oregano. Partially cover the pot and simmer it on medium heat for 25 minutes. When the time has passed, add the meat and simmer for

another 35-60 minutes. If the sauce gets too thick, you can add a little bit of water. The sauce is done after 1-1 1/2 hours. Add the remaining parsley and basil. To make more, just double or triple the ingredients

That is pretty much it. You can vary this recipe but make sure you dunk a piece of Italian bread into the pot to taste the sauce as it cooks. It is the Italian way! This is not a sauce to be rushed, take your time because it gets better and better.

To showcase the sauce in a tasty meal, start a pot of water boiling with a dash of salt. When the water comes to a rolling boil, add some dried macaroni pasta. While that boils, you're free to set the table. With a sauce like this, I prefer ziti with lines or mostaccioli with lines. Why lines? Lines are what allow the macaroni to hold onto the sauce. Why would you want the sauce sliding off?

After about 8-10 minutes, taste a piece of macaroni. In my opinion, you would want it to be al dente which means "to the tooth," or a little bit hard. Ultimately, you are the judge of how you like your macaroni cooked.

Strain the macaroni and place it in a bowl. Top the macaroni with enough sauce to lightly coat it. Bring extra sauce to the table, as well as the meats. Also, make sure there is grated parmesan cheese, Italian bread, a beautifully simple salad and the beverage of your choice on the table.

I will get into seafood sauce later in this book; they are much easier and faster than this sauce.

Meatballs (old-school vs. present method)

Ingredients

1 pound ground beef (old school) OR 1/3 pound each of ground beef, veal and pork (newer way) delicious. Bake them if you must, but that loud noise you'll hear is my mother yelling, screaming (not swearing) and throwing things around in heaven.

When I was a kid, my friends would come over on Sunday morning, when my mother would be frying meatballs. She would stick a fork in a meatball and pass one out to each of my friends. She did it mostly to shut them all up. They would call them 'Italian Lollipops'

.

Braccioni

Ingredients

- Flank steak, cut into approximately 3 x 4 inch rectangles and pounded thin
- 3 cloves of garlic, chopped
- 1 handful parsley, finely chopped
- Toothpicks, 2 per piece

Place some garlic and parsley on a piece of flank steak. Roll the piece up with the garlic and parsley on the inside and secure it with a toothpick on each side. Brown it on both sides.

My mother would include pine nuts and/or raisins along with the garlic and parsley. You might like it, but that is where I drew the line.

Nowadays, many supermarkets and butcher shops sell this item already assembled so, you have choices. When it's in the sauce, nobody will know, just you.

In the next chapter, I will talk about a wonderful way to deal with and really stretch the leftovers into one or more meals. Until then, Enjoy!

Chapter 3

Leftover Sunday Dinner

When I was very small, we lived in a two family house with my grandmother on the first floor. It seemed like my Aunt, Uncle and their 5 kids were always there, expecting to be fed. Also, there were always stragglers or whatever you want to call them. My mother was always the one left to figure out how to feed all of them. To this day, I can still taste this very simple meal.

Leftover macaroni always taste better. The sauce has a day or so to soak in. But how do you stretch it out to feed this Army?

Ingredients:

- Leftover macaroni from Sunday dinner, already sauced
- Leftover meat from the Sunday Sauce.
- Leftover Sunday Sauce
- ½ box of ziti, or any other kind of macaroni, if needed
- 3-4 eggs

- Corn, vegetable or olive oil

Place a large cast-iron (or whatever you have) frying pan over medium-high heat. Put some oil in the pan; not too much, not too little.

Put the macaroni and some, or all, of the meat (cut up into pieces) in the pan. Allow it to get hot and start to sizzle.

In a bowl, scramble the eggs. When the macaroni is hot and some of the pieces are browned, add the eggs and stir until the eggs are cooked.

You just stretched out your leftovers and made them awesome. I absolutely love when the macaroni gets a little bit crispy and strongly suggest that you give it a try.

Boil and salt a pot of water and cook whenever macaroni you have. When done, strain.

Add some left over sauce and you can now feed more people. Use this method of stretching only if needed, but it probably will be.

Chapter 4

Simple, Simple, Simple, yet Awesome Macaroni Dishes

1. Pasta y Fagioli (pronounced Pasta Fazool) – Macaroni and Beans

Simple, Inexpensive and Quick

Ingredients:

- ½ box of ditalini (meaning: short tubes)
- 1 large can of cannellini beans (White Kidney) – drained and rinsed
OR 1/2 bag of dried cannellini beans
Place dried beans in a pot covered by 2 inches of water. Cover the pot, place in refrigerator and soak overnight.
Drain the liquid; cover the beans with 2 inches of fresh water. Place over medium-high heat, bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer and cook until the beans are al dente, not mushy.
Strain the beans and set aside
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- ¼ inch thick piece of pancetta, diced
- Olive oil, salt, pepper, red pepper

Fill a large pot $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way full with water, add a generous sprinkle of salt and place over high heat. When the water boils, put in the macaroni and cook until it is al dente. Set 2 cups of the pasta water aside and strain the macaroni.

Place a medium pot over medium-high heat and add some olive oil and red pepper. Sauté for 2 minutes to season the oil before adding the pancetta and sautéing until browned. Remove it from the pan and place on paper towel

Add a little more olive oil if necessary and add garlic, sauté until golden brown. Add the reserved macaroni water, beans, salt/pepper and bring to a rapid simmer. When everything is combined and simmering, add the cooked macaroni and stir. After simmering for 2 minutes, add the pancetta.

Serve in bowls and top it with grated parmesan cheese. Add a salad and some Italian bread for a filling meal. To keep costs down, exclude the pancetta.

Ask yourself – who is better than you?

2. Pasta e Piselli (pronounced Pasta Pazeel) – Macaroni and Peas

This recipe is so simple, but is such an eye opener. It will leave you thinking, "why didn't I think of that?"

Ingredients:

- $\frac{1}{2}$ box of elbow macaroni
- 1 small/medium onion, white or yellow, sliced or chopped
- 2 cups frozen peas or 1 can of peas, drained
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- Olive oil, salt, pepper, red pepper

Bring a pot of liberally salted water to a boil. Cook the macaroni until al dente. Reserve 2 cups of the pasta water and strain the macaroni.

In a pot, over medium-high heat, put in some olive oil and a couple of shakes of red pepper and cook for 1 minute. Add the onions and cook until softened. When the onions are fully cooked, add the garlic, some salt and pepper. Stir the mixture to blend evenly

throughout the pan. Put the peas and the 2 cups of macaroni water into pot and bring it all to a simmer. Add the macaroni and let it all simmer for 3 or 4 minutes.

Serve in bowls with a piece of provolone cheese, grated parmesan cheese, a green salad, Italian bread and a glass of wine. Nobody is better than you!

3. Pasta e Ceci (pronounced Pasta Cheech) – Macaroni with Chickpeas

Unlike my previous pasta dishes in this section, this one uses a red sauce. Why? Because that's what my mother did.

Ingredients:

- 1 – 14 ounce can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
OR – 1/2 bag of dry chickpeas
Place the dried chickpeas in a pot and cover by 2 inches with water.
Cover and refrigerate overnight.
Drain the water and refill with 2 inches of fresh, new water.
Place it all on the stovetop, over medium-high heat.
Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer and cook until al dente.
Remove it from the heat, drain and rinse.
- 1 large can of crushed tomatoes
- 3 cloves of garlic, chopped
- ½ box of wide noodles type pasta, wider than linguine
- Dried oregano, red pepper, salt, pepper and olive oil

Fill a large pot $\frac{3}{4}$ full with water. Liberally salt and bring to a rolling boil. Cook the macaroni until it is al dente.

In a medium pot, over medium-high heat, pour some olive oil and sprinkle some red pepper and allow it to sizzle for one minute. This will season the oil. Add the garlic and cook until golden brown. Remove the pot from the heat, add the can of tomatoes and return it to the stovetop. Mix in a touch of salt, pepper and oregano and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the chickpeas and cook for 5 more minutes before pouring the macaroni in the sauce pot and cook together for 2 more minutes.

Serve in bowls with grated parmesan cheese, Italian bread, a green salad and a glass of wine.

Do you notice how similar all of these macaroni dishes are? That means that you can be creative and think of many more on your own. They're simple and quick, too!

Chapter 5

Soups

1. Beef Soup with a Warm Beef Salad.

This soup is fairly thin because the beef is removed, but the flavor is still there. The warm beef salad that accompanies it is truly amazing. I miss this dish; nobody could make it like my mother and I have never seen it on a restaurant menu.

- 1 pound chuck roast, cut into chunks
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 celery ribs, chopped
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ box of orzo pasta, cooked
- Olive oil, salt and pepper

In a soup pot on medium-high heat, pour a drizzle or two of olive oil. While the oil warms, season the meat with salt and pepper and lightly brown the beef chunks in the pot. When they have browned nicely on the outside, remove them and set them aside.

Sauté the onions, celery, carrots and garlic for 2 minutes and add salt and pepper to taste. Add the beef and cover it all with 2 inches of water. Bring to a boil and simmer for 30 minutes.

Remove the beef and add the orzo pasta. Simmer for five more minutes. Soup's done!

Warm Beef Salad

- Warm beef chunks, from recipe above
- ½ red onion, diced
- 1 medium tomato, diced
- ½ head iceberg lettuce, cut into chunks

Toss the vegetables and place them in the bottom of a platter. Arrange the warm beef chunks on the bed of vegetables.

Dress the platter with olive oil and a couple of dashes of red wine vinegar.

That's it! You've never had a salad like this before, I guarantee!

Once again, serve with grated parmesan Cheese, Italian bread and a glass of wine. Enjoy!

2. Wedding Soup

You don't need to be at a wedding to enjoy this delicious soup. It's another extremely simple, ingredient-stretching recipe.

Ingredients

- ½ gallon chicken broth. (you could also use a quart of broth with a quart of water)
- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 pound spinach leaves
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 celery ribs, chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic, chopped
- 2 large eggs
- 1 handful Italian parsley, chopped
- Grated parmesan cheese
- Stale bread (Softened) or breadcrumbs.
- Olive oil, salt and pepper

In a large pot over medium-high heat, cover the bottom with olive oil and sauté the onions for 2 minutes. Add the carrots, celery and garlic and season with salt and pepper. Add all of the liquids and bring everything to a boil, then reduce to a low simmer for 30 minutes.

In a large bowl add the ground beef, eggs, softened bread, grated parmesan cheese, parsley, salt and pepper. Mix everything together thoroughly with your (clean) hands.

With a melon scoop, spoon small meatballs out of the bowl and drop them into the soup where they will poach.

Add the spinach to the soup and let the entire package cook for 15 to 30 more minutes.

Serve with Italian bread, grated parmesan cheese and a glass of wine.

Chapter 6

Salad

1. Calamari Salad

This is a great, tasty and nutritious salad that I love very much. Don't let the calamari scare you, it's harmless and not as weird as you anticipate it would be.

Ingredients:

- 1 pound calamari; cleaned and cut into ¼ inch rings with the tentacles in half.
- 1 rib of celery, sliced in half lengthwise, then chopped
- ¼ Bunch of Italian (Flat Leaf) Parsley, coarsely chopped
- ½ red onion, coarsely diced
- ½ lemon, juiced
- Olives, any kind (optional)
- Lettuce, any kind, to act as a bed and decoration for the salad (optional)

- Olive oil, red pepper, salt and pepper (if needed).

Bring a large pot of water to a boil, and cook the calamari for about one minute. Remove them and strain out any residual water. Place in a bowl, toss in the celery, onion, parsley and approximately ¼ cup of olive oil and the lemon juice.

Taste the salad and add more ingredients to taste. All of the flavors should blend well together and nothing should be overwhelming. Make sure that you do all of this when the Calamari is warm/hot, this way nothing will "stick" to it.

Eat this salad with Italian bread (it will soak up the acid from the lemon juice and make things even more pleasurable) and a glass of wine. Yes, it is that simple!

*You can improvise and add some quickly boiled shrimp, quickly steamed clams, cooked scungilli (my mother always purchased this because it grossed her out), quickly steamed mussels, etc. Now that is an amazing seafood salad; not cheap, but amazing!

Chapter 7

Summertime

Fried Zucchini Flowers

Often referred to as 'shoodeals' (at least that's what it sounds like), these fried zucchini flowers are delicious no matter what you call them. Nobody I know, that is fluent in Italian or right off the boat, has ever heard anything close to this recipe or name. So, I chalk this all up to a unique family food.

This is an absolutely delicious summer treat, crispy, tasty and totally unique!

Ingredients

- 24 male zucchini flowers (with stems)
- 4 cups cold-pressed peanut or grape seed oil
- 2 cups flour seasoned with salt and pepper
- Salt

Gently remove the pistil from each flower and cut the stems to about 1 inch. Make sure the blossoms are dry before proceeding any further.

Blend water and flour into a pasty consistency that will coat the blossoms. After dipping the blossoms in the flour batter, allow them to drip excess before frying.

In a 12 inch sauté pan, heat one inch of oil until it is hot, but not smoking. It should be about 365 degrees on a candy thermometer. Fry a few minutes until crisp and golden brown on both sides. Drain on paper towels, season with salt and serve hot.

I can still taste these, but I don't know anyone who knows how to make them. By the way, when I was a little kid, these flowers were given away by vegetable stands in the summertime. Things certainly have changed.

My mother passed away before I could get her recipe, but I have found one that looks identical. Below is the website address. Please give her some respect.

Nonna's Panfried Zucchini Flowers:

http://splendidtable.publicradio.org/recipes/vegetable_flowers.html

Nowadays, the flowers are sometimes stuffed with goat cheese or some other type of cheese prior to batter dipping and frying. I saw that on the Mario Batali cooking show, Molto Mario, on the Food Network. Sounds great, but where is the austerity?

Chapter 8

Clams (Not Rich Man's), Greens and More Stale Bread

More Ways to Stretch a Dollar: Old School Austerity and Taste

1. Stuffed Clams

Based on another peasant Italian dish, this dish has never been matched by any restaurant I've ever been to.

Ingredients:

- 6-8 quahog sized clams.
- 4-6 cloves of garlic, chopped
- Italian parsley, fresh and chopped (try to eliminate the stems)
- Stale Italian bread, really hard
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 1 small bottle of clam juice, just in case

Place the clams in a pot with approximately 1 inch of water at the bottom. Bring the water to a boil and when the clams open up, turn off the heat and let the clams cool off in a bowl (shells still on).

Place the Italian bread in a large bowl and cover with water until soft. When soft, pour out the water and squeeze the bread until the water is removed. Set this aside.

Chop the clams into chunks, make sure that you recover as much of the liquid as possible. Place the clams, a proper amount of bread (you be the judge), parsley, garlic, salt, pepper and enough olive oil/clam juice to bind and flavor everything. Mix everything in the bowl up until evenly distributed. Place a mixture into the individual clam shells and drizzle olive oil on top. Bake at 400F until everything is firm and the tops become golden brown, about 30 to 40 minutes.

Remember, most of these recipes are very general, because they're meant to be adjusted to your taste. You need to eyeball things. The old-timers never used cook books; they did it because they had to. This is an absolutely awesome dish. In fact, I am getting hungry just thinking about it. Take your time and you will do well. Good luck!

2. Escarole, Beans and Stale Bread Pannacotta

Escarole, another peasant dish that will leave you begging for more! My grandmother passed down this incredible dish that is very popular in Italian restaurants. It can be a great success, but some that have been altered have been complete failures. The dish is called pannacotta (pronounced panna-gawt) and shouldn't be confused with the dessert, panna cotta. It's nothing more than left over escarole and beans, stretched out with stale bread.

Ingredients:

- 1 head of escarole, coarsely chopped and soaked in water

- 1 can of cannellini beans (14 ounce), drained and rinsed
- 5-6 cloves of garlic
- Salt, black pepper and red pepper
- Olive oil or corn oil, whatever you have

Heat a small pot over medium/ high heat and add some oil. Shake in some red pepper to flavor the oil. Add garlic and sauté that until it is golden brown. Throw in the Escarole, add salt and pepper to taste and toss in the pan. Add a couple of cups water or broth and bring it to a boil and simmer. When the escarole is softened, throw in the beans and simmer 15 minutes. Refrigerate 1-2 days and then it's magic time!

Cube some stale, day old or fresh Italian bread. Heat up some oil and sautéed garlic/red pepper. Throw in the cubes of bread and sauté until lightly toasted and firm. Take out and place on the side. Place the leftover escarole and beans in the pot and heat up. Once hot, throw in the cubes of bread and toss. Take it off of the heat after five minutes and have an incredible meal. Bread cubes are soft, crispy and chewy...and garlic-y too!

I am an Italian-American, this type of recipe can apply to any ethnic group that has struggled to put food in the mouths of their families during tough times.

3. Stale Bread (???)

When I was growing up, we ate macaroni 3 or 4 times per week, but the sauce was always amazing. Why the title of this recipe? Well, I'll tell you. If you take rock hard, Italian bread (useless in most kitchens and usually discarded) and soak it in a pot of water at room temperature for approximately 30 minutes, you have nothing but a bunch of wet bread. However, if you squeeze it and get rid of all the water, that is the basis for stuffing, meatballs, meatloaf, stuffed artichokes or even stuffed clams. Below is a poor man's secret:

Soak the Italian bread, squeeze the water out and add parsley, garlic, olive oil (or any oil) and parmesan cheese, if you have any.

My mother stretched her budget and we never felt like we were missing out on anything. Today, most of the items at vegetable stands which were given away during my childhood (squash flowers), are now delicacies at expensive restaurants. Stretching is even harder these days.

By taking the ingredients that we have and stretching them to make them last longer, we can begin to tackle our high grocery bills. My mother was great at it and was able to use this technique to make fantastic meatballs and stuffing.

4. Cauliflower or Broccoli and Ziti or Linguine.

This dish is super simple, but tasty and filling. It's also quick and easy to make, so it's great for the weeknights. While it calls for the florets of the broccoli or cauliflower, you could also use the stalks. Just remember to peel off the hard outer layer.

Ingredients:

- 1 head of cauliflower or broccoli, cut into florets
- 6 garlic cloves (more or less if you like), grated
- 1 pound box of ziti or linguine, prepared al dente and set aside
- Parmesan cheese, salt, pepper, red pepper flakes, olive oil

In a large pot, bring salted water to a boil and add the cauliflower or broccoli. Place the vegetable in a strainer, but do not throw out the water! Bring that same water to another boil. Taste the water to see how salty it is, and salt one more time if necessary. Cook the pasta in that water until it is al dente (a little hard). The macaroni will absorb the salt and the flavor of the vegetables.

In a large frying pan, heat up 3 tablespoons of olive oil on medium-high. Add the red pepper flake and garlic and sauté it until it is golden brown. Throw in the vegetable and sauté for two minutes. Add the precooked macaroni along with 2-3 ladles of the macaroni water in the pan and boil everything together for two minutes. Take off the stove top and serve with grated Parmesan cheese.

When you need to feed a family on a very limited budget, shortcuts are the only way. My mother was able to feed a family of five with her skill in the kitchen and her wits. She used coupons and grocery store specials to her full advantage. By the time she passed away, she left a storage closet that was busting at the seams with food that she got at a bargain.

Chapter 9

Hot Dogs

Growing up, I felt like a millionaire because I ate like a king. We ate hot dogs fairly often, cooked in many different ways. I am not going to get into the health aspect, but hot dogs were good to go to in a pinch. Whether it was time, money or both, hot dogs fill the gap very well.

I am going to provide a couple of recipes that, if you try them, I guarantee that you will be amazed. Every one of them is simple.

1. Hotdogs and Beans

- 5 hot dogs, cut into 6 pieces each
- 1 can baked beans (I prefer Bush's, but use any brand you like)

Place the baked beans in a pot. Bring to a simmer and add the hot dogs. Simmer for 10 minutes. Serve with cornbread, Italian bread or anything else that will make your family happy and full.

2. Hotdogs and Eggs

- 5 hot dogs, cut into 6 pieces each
- 6 eggs
- ½ cups of milk
- Olive oil, grated cheese

Crack the eggs into a bowl and whisk. Add a ½ cup of milk and scramble a little bit more. Get a frying pan hot and add a small amount of oil. Sauté the hot dogs until the skin is somewhat browned, then add the eggs to the pan and continually move them until they are cooked. Serve with cornbread or Italian bread.

3. Hotdogs with Peppers and Potatoes (you'll love this one!)

- 5 hot dogs, cut into 6 pieces each
- 2 green or red bell peppers (or both), cut into strips ½ inch wide
- 3 medium white or gold potatoes cut into strips ½ inch wide, ¼ inch thick
- Corn, vegetable or canola oil
- Salt and pepper

When cutting the potatoes, think of steak fries as a dimensional guideline. No need for perfection, sometimes you just need to get food on the table.

Sauté the hot dogs until the skin is somewhat browned. Remove and place on a piece of paper towel. Add a little bit more oil to the pan and add the peppers. Sprinkle in some salt and pepper and sauté until softened, but not mushy. Set the peppers aside.

You can either fry the potatoes in that same frying pan or oven fry. Just get them crispy but not burned. Now that every part is cooked, add them all together in the frying pan and sauté for a few minutes until the flavors combine and everything is hot.

This was my favorite hotdog meal from my mother. It took a little bit longer, but was absolutely awesome. I see this offered in some delis, well...the good delis.

4. Hotdogs and Sauerkraut (just like from a hot dog cart or baseball game)

- 5 hotdogs, whole
- 1 can sauerkraut
- 1 package hotdog rolls

Place 1 inch of water into a pot and bring to a simmer. Add the hot dogs and simmer for 5 minutes. Add the sauerkraut and simmer for five more minutes. Serve with mustard.

These were some of the hotdog meals I ate as a kid and they're all simple, fast and inexpensive. My mother passed away in 2006 and I will remember her meals forever. I can still taste them.

Chapter 10

Totally Down-on-Your-Luck Dining

Beans over Stale Bread

When I was a kid, I ate so well that I thought this dish was totally beneath me, if you can believe that. Try this as soon as you can, you will not be let down.

Ingredients

- ½ bag of dried cannellini beans, not canned beans.
- Stale or fresh bread, cut into cubes
- 3 cloves of garlic, chopped
- ½ onion, red, yellow or white, finely diced
- Olive oil, red pepper, salt and pepper

Soak the beans in water overnight, or power soak them. To power soak your beans, place them in a pot covered by 2 inches of water. Bring them to a boil and turn off the heat. Cover the pot and allow it to sit for one hour. After one hour, discard the liquid.

Place the beans in a pot covered by 2 inches of water and bring it to a boil and then a simmer. Cook the beans until al dente. Take off the heat. Do not discard the liquid, it will soften the bread and add flavor to it.

In a frying pan over medium/high heat, heat up some olive oil and sauté the red pepper for approximately 1 minute. Add the garlic and sauté until golden brown. Put the bread in the pan and sauté until toasted.

To serve, place the bread cubes in a bowl and top with beans and diced onion. Serve with grated cheese, green salad and a glass of wine, if you've got one. You could also substitute the bread for rice. Either way, it tastes great!

Chapter 11

Linguine with Shrimp

I told you that I would include this earlier and know that you'll be amazing with how simple this recipe is.

Ingredients:

- ½ box of linguine
- 28 ounce can of crushed tomatoes
- ½ pound 25-32 shrimp, cleaned and deveined
- 3 cloves of garlic, chopped
- Olive oil, red pepper, salt and pepper

Heat 3 tablespoons of olive oil in a large frying pan on medium-high heat. Add red pepper and garlic and sauté until golden brown. Remove the garlic and let it drain on a paper towel. Quickly and lightly, sauté the shrimp for about 1 minute per side and place the cooked shrimp in a bowl off to the side. Remove the frying pan from the heat and add the can of crushed tomato and salt and pepper to season.

Put the pan back on the heat and bring to a boil. Add the garlic back to the pan, reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes

Bring a pot that is 3/4 full with water to a boil and add a copious amount of salt. When the pot is at a rolling boil, cook the linguine until al dente

Add the shrimp and strained linguini to the frying pan, along with the sauce, and toss it all together. Allow everything to cook and mingle together for 3 to 4 minutes.

Dinner is ready! Serve with a green salad, Italian bread and a glass of wine. I do not use grated Parmesan cheese with a seafood sauce, but you can if you'd like.

Chapter 12

3 Simple, Tasty Chicken Dishes

I love chicken and I've always loved these dishes. I label the ingredients that go in each dish separately as (a), (b) or (c).

(a) Chicken with Stewed Tomatoes and Potatoes

(b) Chicken with Peas and Potatoes

(c) Lemon Chicken and Potatoes

(Not very exciting names, but they get the job done)

Ingredients

- 1 package of chicken thighs, legs, breasts or any combination

- 3 large white potatoes, cut into chunks or wedges
- 1 white or yellow onion, sliced ¼ inch thick slices and separated
- 3 cloves of garlic, quartered
- 1 small can stewed tomatoes (a)
- 1 cup frozen peas (b)
- ¼ cup Lemon Juice (c)
- Salt, pepper, olive oil

Wash and pat the chicken dry and set aside. Place potatoes, onions and garlic in a bowl and add salt and pepper. Add 2 tablespoons olive oil and toss until coated. Empty everything into a large baking dish. Rub the chicken pieces with olive oil and place them on top of the vegetables in the dish. Cover the baking dish with foil and cook at 350° for 30 minutes. Remove the foil and toss the vegetables and chicken to more evenly cook. After 15 minutes of cooking, add the stewed tomatoes (a), peas (b) or lemon juice (c). Cook it all for another 15 minutes, for a total of one hour, and you have 3 awesome, yet simple chicken dishes that don't cost much to make. Serve them all with a green salad, Italian bread and a glass of wine.

These are 3 simple dishes, but there are hundreds of thousands of variations on a simple chicken dinner that will please your whole family.

Chapter 13

Icebox Cake

We always had a dessert available, but rarely was it homemade. The one homemade dessert I can remember is the Icebox Cake. This is more of an assembly dish, but I just love it. Lately, I've even seen these offered in restaurants.

Ingredients

- 2 cups vanilla pudding, anything but the fat free version
- 2 cups chocolate pudding, again stay away from fat free
- Graham crackers, broken into segments
- Canned peaches, or fresh, in wedges

- 2 bananas, cut into round pieces about ¼ inch thick
- Whipped cream

Line the bottom of the baking dish with graham crackers and liberally coat the layer with vanilla pudding. Arrange a layer of peaches on top of the vanilla pudding and top them with a layer of whipped cream.

Add another layer of graham crackers to the dish and top with chocolate pudding this time. Arrange a layer of bananas on top and another layer of whipped cream. Top the entire dish with crumbled graham crackers.

*Be creative in the assembly, there is no right or wrong way. Once this dishes assembled, place in the refrigerator for at least two hours, preferably overnight. The flavors need to mingle and the graham crackers need to soften a bit.

There you have it. Not a gourmet dish, but excellent just the same.

Chapter 14

Conclusions

You do not need to be wealthy to eat well and I hope that I've shown you that. It takes a combination of smarts, cunning, love and creativity. My mother possessed them all. The proportions of the ingredients were always changing based on our situation, but the dishes were always filling and delicious.

I hope you'll try some of the recipes that I've included in this book. They are all extremely easy to prepare and each of them will save you time. They will not disappoint you, I promise. Everyone has battles of their own and you've got enough to deal with, food should be something you have to worry about.

I plan on starting a membership site because this book barely scratches the surface of my mother's cooking creativity.

For example:

Question:

Do you know what a Frittata is?

I do, my mother was a master at making them. It is part omelet, part quiche and part pie. Sounds tough, but it really is not. There are lots of recipes for different types of frittatas available on the Internet, but my mother never used an oven or broiler when making hers. By the way, in my family and in the world of Italian food, frittata is pronounced, “free-todd.”

An interesting fact about my mother – she actually had her dishwasher removed because, in her opinion, she could wash dishes better, the utility cost was too high and she needed the space. It came with our house and she was never comfortable with it. There are not many people like that left in this world.

I hope you learned a lot about my mother and her food. I look forward to speaking with you again soon.

Enjoy the kitchen, be creative, save money, and make yourself and everyone around you happy!

Best Regards,

Rich Ursini

P.S.

Feel free to contact me by e-mail with any cooking questions you might have. I will respond as soon as possible. If I don't know something, I will tell you. Also, I will be starting a blog soon to help you make the information available more easily.

Personal E-Mail Address: richu@SNET.NET

Bonus Recipes Are Waiting For You Below!



Bonus Recipes & Discussion:

The recipes I am about to give you will either complement some of the recipes that I already have provided or they will be completely new. You will know what I mean when I begin. Cooking does not need to be difficult to be great. Pay attention to what you're doing then things will be fine. Now for some amazing new recipes for you.

1. The simplest Broccoli Salad that you will ever make. This recipe was made for me when I was in college by my roommate Mike. I still think about this one.

Ingredients:

½ Or Whole Head of Broccoli cut into florettes

½ Or Whole Lemon

2-4 Tablespoons Olive Oil (your preference, depending on how much).

2-4 Shakes of Red Pepper

Salt and Pepper to taste

- Steam or Boil the Broccoli (I prefer steaming) until it is cooked and slightly from, but not mushy. Drain thoroughly
- Dress Broccoli while very warm with Olive Oil, Lemon Juice, Red Pepper, Salt Said Pepper.
- Allow Broccoli Salad to come to room temperature on the counter or allow it to get cool in the refrigerator.
- Start eating. Make sure there is some Italian Bread on the table.

Yes, it's that easy.

2. Chicken, Veal or Shrimp Parmesan

This is a very simple dish, if you are organized. It's not hard. Before we can make this dish, we need to make some Marinara Sauce so, let's begin here.

Marinara Sauce

Ingredients:

- 1 – 28 ounce can of crushed tomatoes. (I prefer the San Marzano type)
- 1 – see small can of Tomato Paste
- 4 Garlic Cloves, chopped
- 3 Teaspoons Olive Oil
- ¼ Bunch Fresh Parsley, chopped
- 1 Teaspoon Dried Oregano
- 3 Tablespoons Olive Oil
- Red Pepper, Salt and Pepper – All to Taste

Heat a large pot over Medium/High

Add Olive Oil

Add Garlic and cook until Golden Brown

Remove the pot from the heat

Add Crushed Tomatoes, Tomato Paste, Each of Their Cans of Water, Parsley, Oregano And Salt/Pepper(1/4 Teaspoon each)

Place back on High Heat. Bring to a boil and reduce to a simmer for approximately 45 min.

You could have added finely diced carrot or a pinch of sugar if you think that the tomato bite too much

Sauce is done.

Moving Right along...

Ingredients:

- 1 pound of Chicken or Veal Cutlets or 16-25 Shrimp
- 1 Cup White Flour
- 2 Cups Italian Seasoned Bread Crumbs
- 4 Large Eggs – Raw and Scrambled
- Olive, Vegetable, Corn or Canola Oil

- Place the Flour, Bread Crumbs and Scrambled Eggs into Separate Large Bowls
- Season the flour and eggs with salt and pepper. Thoroughly mix
- Dredge a piece of Chicken, Veal or Shrimp through the Flour. Shake off the excess
- Place into the egg wash. Make sure that the excess slides off
- Dredge through the breadcrumbs. Coat thoroughly. Shake off the excess
- Place on waxed paper and allow to rest for 30 min.
- Place a quarter of an inch of oil in a frying pan and heat over Medium/High
- Fry the Chicken, Veal or Shrimp until golden brown and place on a paper towel
- Ladle a small amount of sauce into the bottom of a baking dish
- Place a layer of Chicken, Veal or Shrimp on the Sauce. Ladle Some Sauce on Top
- Top with Parmesan cheese.
- Place another layer of Chicken, Veal or Shrimp. Ladle on some sauce and top with Parmesan Cheese.
- If you are done, top with fresh mozzarella cheese

Or

Make another layer and follow the above instructions

- Cover with and while and bake at 350° for 30 min. Remove the file and bake for 20 more minutes.

You are done!

*I worked in a restaurant once where they took previously fried chicken cutlets out of the freezer and fried them again, topped them with sauce from a can, put cheese on top and placed the dish in the microwave oven. That restaurant failed soon after.

I was horrified

3. Eggplant Parmesan

This dish is the same as the above recipes, there is a slight difference that I will let you know about here.

Ingredients:

2-3 Medium, as Firm Eggplants –

Top and Bottom stem and base removed. Skinned and sliced into ¼ inch thick discs.

Instead of using Breadcrumbs, use seasoned flour twice.

Flour – Egg – Flour

Eggplant will absorb a lot of oil when you are frying so, make sure that the oil is hot before you begin to fry.

So,

Flour – Egg – Flour

Fry

Sauce the bottom of the casserole dish

Place a layer of eggplant on the sauce

Lightly sauce the top of the eggplant and add some Parmesan cheese

Make another 2 to 3 layers of eggplant

Along with Parmesan Cheese on the top layer, include some Mozzarella

Cover the casserole dish with foil and bake for 30 min. at 350°

Remove the foil and bake for another 30 min.

Another simple recipe that you can make.

4. Steak Pizzaiola (pronounced Petes-eye-ole)

I am going to give you 2 methods. The first is my mother's extremely austere method and the second is the way that restaurants do it. Personally, I think that restaurants win, but my mother's method is much less costly.

Ingredients:

My Mother

Chuck Steak

Restaurants

NY Strip Steak

1 Pot of Marinara Sauce (recipe provided above)

My Mother

Place chuck steaks into

A pot of boiling Marinara Sauce. Deglaze With Red Wine

Simmer for 40 min.

Restaurants

In a Cast and Pan, Brown the Steak

Add 3 cups Marinara Sauce

Simmer 15 min until steak is cooked

Serve on a bed of pasta

5. Summertime Cocktail

I will leave the naming of this to you

Ingredients:

1 Bottle of Fairly Dry Red Wine.

6 Peaches – skinned then cut into wedges– The Best Way

– OR –

1 Large Can of Peaches–Wedges In Natural Juice

In large goblets, place a liberal amount of peaches then fill with wine.

Allow the flavors to mingle for 4 hours, preferably in the refrigerator.

This is a summer cocktail and needs to be cool.

You are going to love this

Now, let's do a little more cooking.

More Hot Dogs

Hotdogs and Peppers in Sauce

Ingredients

6 Hot Dogs, cut into bite-size chunks

3 Green/Red or Both, cut into ¼ inch wide strips

½ Medium Onion, chopped

3 Cloves of Garlic, chopped short

- Make a pot of Marinara Sauce (recipe provided previously)
- Brown the hot dogs and a little olive oil. Set aside
- Lightly brown peppers/onion and garlic. Set aside
- Add the hot dogs,peppers, onions/garlic to a simmering pot of Marinara Sauce.
- Simmer for 30 min.
- Believe it or not, this is a great meal, especially in a time or money pitch

8. Stuffed Peppers

Ingredients:

1 pound ground beef
½ loaf Stale Italian Bread
¼ bunch of Flat Italian Parsley, coarsely chopped
3 Cloves of Garlic, chopped
2 Large Eggs, scrambled in a bowl
3 Green Peppers
3 Red Peppers
Grated Parmesan Cheese
Olive Oil
Salt and Pepperis

- Soak the bread in water or milk for one hour. Squeeze out all of the water. Place in a large bowl
- Place the ground between the bold
- Add the eggs, parsley, garlic, some salt/pepper and ¼ cup of grated Parmesan cheese
- Cut a circle around the pepper stems and remove all of the seeds and ribs
- Stuff the peppers with the ground beef mixture
- Rub some oil lightly on the outside of the peppers
- Place the stuffed peppers in a baking dish standing up and drizzle a little bit of olive oil on top and lightly sprinkle some grated cheese on top
- Bake for one hgo to top of that.our at 350°

If you do not have stale bread, you can substitute it with cooked white rice.

Thank you very much for buying my cookbook. Contact me anytime if you ever have questions.