



LINDA CARDILLO

Come Sit at My Table

Recipes
from

Across the Table

Dancing on Sunday Afternoons

and

Family Traditions

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ISBN-13: 978-0-615-40644-2
ISBN-10: 0-615-40644-0

COME SIT AT MY TABLE

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In loving memory of Lena Vetrano Cardillo,
my mother and my mentor in the kitchen

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Soups

Escarole Soup

The meal served at Rose and Al Dante's wedding reception in *Across the Table* begins with a *minestre*, a light soup. As children, we called this "meatball soup" because of the miniature meatballs bobbing in the midst of the greens, and we definitely preferred to have more of them in our bowls than escarole. As an adult, I was struck by how iconic this soup is when I made it one evening for a visiting friend whose family comes from the same region of Italy. Like Proust's madeleine, the aroma and flavor as he tasted it brought him back to the table of his childhood.

Chicken broth (see below)

Turkey meatballs (see below)

1 head escarole, rinsed and cut or torn into bite-size pieces

Optional: 2 eggs beaten with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Parmigiano

Chicken Broth

3-lb whole chicken

3 quarts water

3 stalks celery, cut into large chunks

3 large carrots, peeled and cut into large chunks

2 large onions, peeled and quartered

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup parsley, coarsely chopped

2 large bay leaves

Salt and pepper to taste

Place chicken in cold water and bring gradually to a boil, skimming the scum. Add celery, carrots, onions, parsley and bay leaves and simmer for 2-3 hours.

Remove the chicken and allow to cool. When cool, discard the skin, pull the meat from the bones and set aside for another purpose.

Strain the broth through a sieve, pressing the vegetables to extract juices.

Turkey Meatballs

1 lb ground turkey

2 eggs

1 cup stale Italian bread soaked in water and squeezed dry

½ cup grated Parmigiano cheese

½ cup chopped parsley

2 cloves garlic, minced

Salt and pepper to taste

Mix all ingredients together by hand until well blended.

Shape into small meatballs about 1 inch in diameter.

Composing the Soup

Bring the strained broth to a boil.

Add escarole and meatballs and return to a boil.

Reduce heat and simmer for about 10 minutes.

Add optional egg-and-Parmigiano mixture, stirring quickly in a circular motion to form threads, and cook for another minute.

Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Lentil Soup

When the temperatures in western New England turn chilly and the prediction is snow, I start to think about soups and stews. One of the staples of my childhood and a favorite among my own children is my mother's recipe for lentils. It's aromatic, flavorful and quick!

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 medium diced onion (1/4 inch)

2 cloves garlic, chopped finely

½ cup diced carrot (1/4 inch)

1 teaspoon dried thyme

2 cups dried lentils (rinsed and checked for debris)

2 cubes Knorr vegetable broth, dissolved in 4 cups water

Saute onion, garlic, and carrot in olive oil over medium heat until soft (about five minutes). Stir constantly.

Add lentils and dried thyme, stirring to blend.

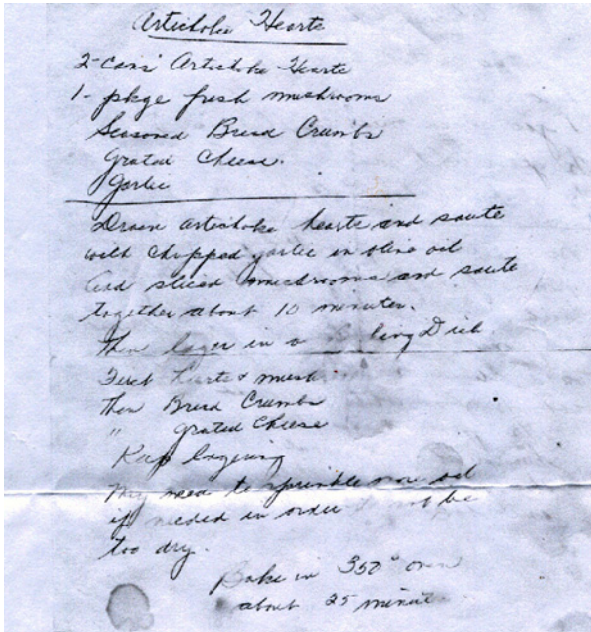
Add vegetable broth and heat to boiling.

Lower heat and cover, cooking for 20-30 minutes until lentils are tender. If too much liquid remains in the pot, uncover the pot and raise the heat to evaporate excess liquid.

Serve with rice.

Vegetables

Artichoke Hearts



The water-stained and folded scrap of paper above is an example of my mother's cooking style—not too many specific measurements but clear instruction on what to do with them! My cousin Joan shared this with me, a fragment of my mother's repertoire in her beautiful handwriting. My attempt at formalizing the recipe follows.

Two 15-ounce cans artichoke hearts
1 lb. fresh mushrooms
3 tablespoons olive oil
3 cloves chopped garlic
2 cups Italian seasoned breadcrumbs
1 cup grated Parmigiano

Drain and slice artichoke hearts into quarters.

Wash and slice mushrooms.

Sauté artichoke hearts in olive oil with chopped garlic.

Add mushrooms and sauté for about 10 minutes.

Layer artichoke heart-mushroom mixture in a baking dish with a layer of breadcrumbs followed by a layer of cheese until all have been arranged.

Drizzle with olive oil.

Bake at 350° for about 25 minutes.

Artichoke Pie

My Aunt Mella made this artichoke pie one night when a group of us cousins from out of town were staying together at her daughter's house and had gathered around the kitchen table for a late-night snack.

Pie crust (Use your favorite recipe)

Filling

2 tablespoons olive oil

One 15-ounce can of artichoke hearts

3 cloves garlic, minced

3 eggs, lightly beaten

1 lb. shredded mozzarella

½ cup grated Parmigiano

Salt and pepper to taste

Drain artichoke hearts, slice into quarters and sauté in olive oil until lightly browned.

Add garlic and continue cooking until golden.

Transfer artichoke hearts and garlic to large mixing bowl.

Add eggs, mozzarella and Parmigiano and blend well.

Preheat oven to 350°.

Place bottom of pie dough in 9-inch pie plate.

Add filling.

Cover with top of pie dough and crimp to seal.

Brush crust with beaten egg yolk.

Bake at 350° for 25 minutes.

Stuffed Artichokes

When Rose Dante gives birth to her son in 1942, her husband is on a destroyer somewhere in the South Pacific. To comfort her, her mother brings Thanksgiving dinner to the hospital. Included in the bounty she spreads out for her daughter is a dish that graced the table at every holiday meal when I was growing up—stuffed artichokes.

4 large artichokes, with stems

2 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped fine

2 tablespoons chopped parsley

1 cup bread crumbs

½ cup grated Parmigiano cheese

Olive oil

With kitchen shears, trim the tip of each artichoke leaf straight across.

Slice off the stems of the artichokes close to the base so that artichokes stand upright.

Peel the stems and chop into 1/8" dice.

Mix the chopped stems with the bread crumbs, parsley, garlic and cheese.

Add olive oil to hold the mixture together.

Spread open the top of the artichoke, forming a cavity, and stuff with the bread crumb mixture. Add more stuffing between the leaves.

Arrange stuffed artichokes in a heavy pan. Drizzle with olive oil.

Fill the pan with about one inch of water

Cover the pan and bring water to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer and cook for about 45 minutes, checking to make sure that water has not evaporated (add more if necessary).

Artichokes are done when a leaf can be pulled off easily.

Eat by pulling off one leaf at a time and scraping teeth along the inside of the leaf.

Broccoli Rabe

One of my favorite comfort foods is broccoli rabe. Like dandelion greens and arugula, it's an acquired taste (as my husband will attest). But I grew up with these dark and distinctly flavored greens and I love them.

When my mother was first diagnosed with ovarian cancer and I had flown to Florida on a few hours' notice to be with her, I returned from the ICU on that first day to her home in Palm Beach Gardens, exhausted, overwhelmed and hungry. Waiting for me was my mother's sister, Aunt Kay, standing at the stove with wooden spoon in hand. She had cooked up a pot of broccoli rabe—we called them "robbies"—and served them with a loaf of crusty bread. It was exactly what I needed.

Here is how I prepare them.

1 bunch of broccoli rabe
2 large peeled cloves of garlic
Olive oil
1/2 cube of vegetable broth
1 cup water

Rinse the broccoli rabe, trim off the stems and chop the leaves and florets into 2-inch pieces.

Slice the garlic thinly.

Film a heavy saucepan with olive oil and heat on medium high.

Add the broccoli rabe and stir, coating the greens with the oil.

When the greens are slightly wilted, add the garlic slices and continue to stir for about 1 minute.

Add the water and vegetable cube, stirring to dissolve. Bring to a boil, then lower to a simmer and cover.

Simmer for 5-10 minutes, checking to make sure that liquid does not evaporate.

Serve with crusty bread to soak up the juices.

Fagiolini

Both my grandmothers had abundant vegetable gardens — one in the middle of the city and one on a country plot surrounded by weeping willow trees. I remember weeding one morning with my grandmother and complaining of being hungry. She grabbed a feathery handful of greenery, pulled a carrot from the earth, rinsed it under the garden faucet and handed it to me. Her philosophy of cooking vegetables was keep it simple and don't forget the olive oil and garlic. What follows with green beans can be interpreted for a myriad of seasonal vegetables.

1 lb. fresh string beans
3 tablespoons olive oil
2-3 cloves garlic, chopped fine
Salt and pepper to taste

Trim ends of beans.

Steam for 5-7 minutes until tender.

Heat olive oil in skillet and add garlic, stirring frequently. Do not allow garlic to brown.

Add beans, continuing to stir until beans are coated.

Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste.

String Beans, Potatoes and Tomatoes

This was one of my mother's hearty winter staples, but it is also wonderful the day after dressed with some olive oil and served as a salad. In *Across the Table*, it is one of the dishes that Rose packs for the picnic at the beach in Marblehead when she first broaches the subject of buying the restaurant to Al.

1 lb. potatoes, cut in 1-inch chunks
1 lb. fresh string beans, cut in 2-inch pieces
3 tablespoons olive oil
2 garlic cloves, cut in slivers
1 lb. fresh or canned diced tomatoes
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil or 1 tablespoon dried basil
Salt and pepper to taste

Boil potatoes until tender; drain and set aside.

Sauté string beans in olive oil for about 4 minutes.

Add garlic slivers and sauté until golden.

Add tomatoes, basil and potatoes.

Simmer for about 10 minutes.

Pasta

Lasagne

My daughter lived in Scotland for four years and was cooking for herself for the first time. She asked me to put together a collection of basic recipes for her (and which she now keeps in a monogrammed notebook). Like my mother, I've always cooked by the "handful" method, so writing down the recipes forced me to calculate measurements.

1 pound uncooked lasagne noodles
1 pound ricotta cheese
2 eggs
1 cup chopped parsley
8 ounces shredded mozzarella
2 quarts marinara sauce (see recipe on page 32)

Blend ricotta cheese, eggs, and parsley in a bowl.

Ladle marinara sauce to cover bottom of large baking dish.

Place one layer of uncooked lasagne noodles on top of marinara sauce.

Cover lasagne noodles with $\frac{1}{2}$ the ricotta-egg mixture.

Place layer of lasagne noodles on top of ricotta-egg mixture.

Ladle marinara sauce over noodles to cover.

Sprinkle ½ the shredded mozzarella on top of the marinara sauce.

Cover the mozzarella with the remainder of the ricotta-egg mixture.

Place another layer of lasagne noodles on top of ricotta-egg mixture.

Ladle marinara sauce over noodles to cover.

Sprinkle the remainder of the shredded mozzarella on top of the marinara sauce.

Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Variations:

Sauté one package of frozen chopped spinach with two chopped garlic cloves in olive oil and blend into the ricotta-egg mixture.

Sauté a pound of ground turkey and add to marinara sauce.

Baked Ziti

My daughter returned home from Scotland to do a post-baccalaureate program at a nearby college. Like my other two children, she's a vegetarian and an athlete. She is a marathon runner, so when she's preparing for a race we eat a lot of carbs at our house. We both love to cook, but when our schedules are particularly hectic we plan out a week of simple meals that will provide her with the fuel she'll need to run her race. One of the easiest, and a staple at my mother's table when I was growing up, is baked ziti. It can be thrown together in about twenty minutes, and while it bakes in the oven, you can make a salad (or sip a glass of wine).

1 pound ziti

½ pound ricotta

1 egg

1 quart marinara sauce (see recipe on page 32)

4 ounces shredded mozzarella

Boil the ziti until al dente. Drain.

Blend ricotta with egg.

Toss the ziti with marinara sauce in a baking dish.

Blend in ricotta-egg mixture.

Add more marinara sauce if it looks dry.

Bake for 30 minutes at 350 degrees.

Sprinkle top with mozzarella and bake for 5 more minutes until mozzarella is melted.

Manicotti

My grandmother made fresh pasta every Saturday, kneading and rolling out dough on a large board and then slicing it into the appropriate shape and drying the strips or squares on white cloths spread over the dining room table.

Handmade Manicotti as follows (or use packaged manicotti)

2 cups sifted flour
2 large eggs
1 ½ tablespoons water
¾ teaspoon salt

Sift flour onto pastry board and make a well in the center. Make sure the outer walls are high enough to contain the liquid ingredients.

Place eggs, water and salt in the well and beat eggs with a fork, slowly mixing in half the flour.

Mix in the rest of the flour by hand.

Knead the dough until it is smooth (about ten minutes).

Cut the dough in half and roll out each half until it is paper-thin, or, as my grandmother instructed, until you can

blow under it and the dough will lift. This is sweat-producing work that takes about 20 minutes per half.

Cut the sheets of dough into 3-inch squares.

Cook six at a time in boiling water for 5 minutes.

Remove one at a time with a slotted spoon and place flat on a damp towel.

Makes about 20 squares.

Spinach and Ricotta Filling

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 medium onion, chopped fine

10 ounces frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed to remove excess moisture

½ cup grated Parmigiano cheese

1 ¾ cup ricotta cheese

1 egg

Salt and pepper to taste

Sauté onion and spinach in olive oil until onion is soft.

Blend onion-spinach mixture with remaining ingredients.

Place 2 tablespoons of filling in middle of each manicotti square and then, starting at one edge, roll the pasta into a tube.

Spread a layer of marinara sauce (see recipe on page 32) on bottom of a 9" x 12" x 2" baking dish. Arrange the rolled manicotti on top of the sauce and cover with another layer of sauce.

Bake at 350° for 45 minutes.

Pasta con Piselli e Prosciutto

In *Across the Table*, not only special occasions, but special conversations at the Dantes require a carefully orchestrated meal. On the Sunday afternoon when Toni's fiancé comes to dinner to discuss the wedding, Rose narrates:

"I did what I always do when we have something important to discuss. I put care into what we were going to eat. For the pasta course I made orecchiette with peas and ham in a cream sauce. It was one of Toni's favorites."

1 lb. orecchiette pasta
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 medium onion, chopped into small dice
1 cup baby peas
1 cup diced cooked ham
2 cups heavy cream
Grated Parmigiano
Salt and pepper

Prepare orecchiette as directed.

Sauté the onion in butter over medium heat until soft.

Add peas and ham, stirring to mix with onions.

Add heavy cream, blending with ham and vegetables until gently bubbling. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

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Pasta e Fagioli

When I get home late and long for the comfort of a bowl of pasta, it's easy to pull together a staple of my mother's repertoire--pasta e fagioli--or, as it is commonly pronounced, "pasta fazool." Here's a simple version:

- 1 pound shaped pasta, such as shells, elbows or ditalini
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, coarsely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon dried basil or 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
- 1 28-ounce can chopped tomatoes
- 1 15.5-ounce can chick peas or cannellini beans

Cook pasta according to directions.

In a deep saucepan, sauté onions in olive oil until soft.

Add garlic and continue cooking for 1-2 minutes.

Add parsley and basil and stir to blend.

Add tomatoes and chick peas or beans.

Simmer for ten minutes on medium heat, stirring frequently.

Pour over pasta and serve.

Sauces

Marinara

1 medium onion
4 medium-to-large cloves of garlic
3 tablespoons olive oil
28-ounce can of crushed tomatoes
1 tablespoon dried basil or a handful of chopped fresh
basil leaves
Salt and pepper to taste

Chop the onion into small dice.

Peel and finely chop the garlic.

Sauté the onion in the olive oil in a heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat until the onions are soft but not browned. Stir frequently.

Add the chopped garlic and cook until the garlic is golden.

Add the crushed tomatoes, basil, salt and pepper, stirring until blended with the onions and garlic.

When sauce begins to bubble, lower to simmer. Stir frequently so that tomatoes do not stick to bottom of pot.

Note: You can double or triple the recipe. It keeps well in a glass jar in the refrigerator and can also be frozen.

Gravy—Avellino Style

Sunday dinner at my house when I was growing up was not complete without a pasta course sauced with what we called “gravy.” The term seems to be one used by Italian-Americans clustered in the Northeast whose families originated “vicino d’Avellino” – in the area around Avellino in Campania.

The base for gravy is the marinara sauce in the previous recipe, supplemented by an assortment of meats. My mother added meatballs, hot and sweet Italian sausage, and bracciola—flattened pieces of steak that were stuffed, rolled and tied. As a girl, it was my job to pick the parsley, oregano and basil from my mother’s herb garden at the end of our driveway, and sometimes I got to squeeze the water out of the soaked bread that made my mother’s meatballs so tender.

My father would often stop at Arthur Avenue in the Bronx on his way home from work to pick up fresh sausage spiced with whole fennel seeds, and round loaves of a crusty, rustic bread called “Campobasso” that was wonderful for soaking up the last remnants of gravy on the plate, or dunking in the pot simmering on the stove, as Vanessa describes in *Across the Table*.

Here are the basics for composing a rich “gravy.”

Meatballs

1 lb. ground turkey

2 eggs

1 cup stale Italian bread soaked in water, squeezed dry
and broken into small pieces

½ cup grated Parmigiano cheese

½ cup chopped fresh parsley

2 cloves garlic, minced

Salt and pepper to taste

Mix all ingredients together by hand until well blended.

Shape into balls about 2 inches in diameter and place on a cookie sheet.

Bake for 30 minutes in a 350° oven.

Sausage

1 lb. Italian pork or turkey sausage—either hot, sweet or mixed

Olive oil

Film a heavy frying pan with olive oil and brown the sausages over medium heat, turning frequently.

Bracciola

1 lb. round steak, pounded thin and trimmed into 4-inch squares

1/2 cup bread crumbs

1/4 cup grated Parmigiano cheese

2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil

2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

2 cloves minced garlic

1 tablespoon chopped pine nuts

Olive oil

Blend bread crumbs, cheese, herbs and pine nuts and add enough olive oil to bind the mixture.

On a flat surface, drop 1-2 tablespoons of the mixture in the center of each piece of beef.

Roll the beef tightly, wrap securely and tie with butcher's twine.

Film a heavy skillet with olive oil and brown the meat on all sides.

Composing the Gravy

Add the meats to a double batch of marinara sauce (previous recipe) and simmer for 1-2 hours on medium-low heat.

Serve with pasta, especially ziti, penne or shells, which are shapes that hold sauce well.

Meat, Fish and Eggs

Pot Roast

In *Across the Table*, when Toni starts dating blond, 6'6" Bobby Templeton from Belle Arbor, Indiana, his mother, Hazel, gives her a cookbook for Christmas, thoughtfully bookmarked with Bobby's favorite recipes. As Toni describes:

"I grew up watching my mother cook with no recipes at all except what was in her head. She would taste and adjust, with a handful of chopped parsley or a fragment of cheese hand-grated and tossed into the pot. I used to think that she had been born with the knowledge of how to cook, something she had absorbed in the womb.

Following a cookbook was a new experience for me, but I threw myself into learning how to produce the dishes Bobby had grown up with. Once a week I took the T to his apartment in Kendall Square near MIT, carrying a shopping bag filled with ingredients I'd never seen in my mother's pantry."

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One of the first dishes Toni learns how to create is pot roast. Here is my favorite version. The secret to its rich flavor is the combination of garlic, thyme and red wine:

1 large onion
2 large carrots
3 large cloves garlic
3-4 lbs. beef chuck roast
3 tablespoons flour
½ cup olive or canola oil
2 cups beef broth
1 cup red wine
1 tablespoon thyme
1 large bay leaf

Peel and chop onion, carrots and garlic into small dice.

Pat the beef dry. Place flour in a plastic bag and season with salt and pepper. Add beef and toss until coated with a layer of flour.

Heat oil in a Dutch oven and brown the beef on all sides and remove from pan.

Add chopped onion, carrots and garlic to pan and sauté until onion is golden, scraping up bits of meat from bottom of pan.

Add beef to vegetables.

Add beef broth, wine, thyme and bay leaf.

Bring liquid to a boil, then lower heat to a simmer.

Cover and cook on low heat for about two hours.

Serve with wide noodles.

Rabbit Cacciatore

I first ate rabbit when I lived in Italy and the cook at the Torre di Bellosguardo, where I lived, introduced me to a realm of edibles—like battered and fried zucchini flowers—that I had never encountered before. When I moved to the North End of Boston, where *Across the Table* is set, rabbit was a staple that could be found at any butcher. The following dish, served at Rose and Al's wedding, is rich and aromatic.

1 rabbit, about 3 pounds, cut into serving pieces
1/3 cup olive oil
1 small onion, minced
1 small stalk celery, minced
4 garlic cloves, minced
2 cups chopped tomatoes
1 cup dry white wine
2 tablespoons chopped parsley
2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme
2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano
2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary
2 small bay leaves

Heat oil in a Dutch oven or other large heavy pot. Brown the rabbit pieces and remove to a platter.

Add onion and celery and sauté until softened.

Add garlic and continue sautéing until onion and garlic are golden.

Return rabbit to pot and add tomatoes and wine, stirring and scraping up any brown bits from the bottom of the pot.

Add herbs.

Cover and simmer for about 35 minutes, until rabbit is cooked through.

Serve with fettuccine or other flat noodle.

Chicken Salmi

What my mother called "chicken salmi" when we were growing up is a pungent dish, simmered for hours so that the chicken falls off the bone. She didn't leave the recipe, and I couldn't find one in my search through my cookbooks. But here is a close approximation of my mother's version and one of the dishes Rose prepared for her picnic at Marblehead.

1 chicken, cut up into pieces
Olive oil
½ cup red wine vinegar
1/4 cup water
1 teaspoon dried oregano leaves
1 teaspoon dried basil leaves
3 garlic cloves, chopped fine
Salt and pepper to taste

Heat olive oil in a heavy, ovenproof casserole and brown the chicken pieces.

Add the remaining ingredients, cover the casserole and bake at 350 degrees for one hour, basting the chicken every 15 minutes.

As Rose explains, this tastes even better the second day, when the flavors have had a chance to meld.

Baked Fillet of Sole

This was a dish my mother often put on the table on Friday evenings, back in the day when Catholics didn't eat meat on Fridays. A light dish, Rose serves it in *Across the Table* on Good Friday, when she and Al tell Mike and Toni about Manny.

2 tablespoons butter
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 cup bread crumbs
4 fillets of sole
1 egg, lightly beaten
1 lemon, quartered
1 tablespoon parsley
Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350°

Melt butter and quickly sauté garlic until golden.

Add bread crumbs, stirring until blended with butter and garlic. Remove to a platter.

Dip sole fillets in egg and then breadcrumb mixture to coat.

Bake in shallow baking dish for 10 minutes.

Squeeze lemon wedges over fillets, sprinkle with parsley and serve.

Frittata

In *Across the Table*, one of the first challenges Rose faces in the early days of her marriage is cooking. Not learning how—which Rose had absorbed growing up in her mother’s kitchen—but coping with the unfamiliarity of the barely edible on a naval base in the middle of the Caribbean. Here is how she coped:

“They eat spicy in Trinidad. I knew Al was used to Calabrian cooking and that was spicy, so I gave a try with the local things. If I had to open another can of Spam and make it into something recognizable, I thought I would shoot myself. Or we’d both starve.

But fresh eggs I knew what to do with. I had some potatoes and onions and made a nice pan of frittata, with the greens on the side. Al came into the house and smelled the familiar aromas. He ate that night with gratitude and pleasure.”

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, chopped
2 medium potatoes, cooked and sliced
4 eggs, lightly beaten
2 tablespoons chopped parsley
½ cup shredded mozzarella cheese

Sauté onion in a heavy, ovenproof skillet until translucent.

Add potatoes and brown lightly on both sides.

Blend eggs and parsley and add to skillet.

Cook over low heat until eggs are almost set.

Sprinkle shredded mozzarella on top of eggs.

Place under broiler for a few minutes until eggs are set and cheese has melted and golden in color.

Cut into wedges to serve.

Desserts

Easter Pie

At my Uncle Pal's 90th birthday party, conversation drifted to the recipes of our Aunt Susie, the most extraordinary baker in the family. Each of us has a few fragments of her repertoire, and a story I had heard many years ago was repeated that afternoon. Susie "left out" ingredients when she passed on a recipe, the family insists, because nobody has been able to replicate her amazing culinary feats. In addition to the missing item, Susie's recipes often don't contain measurements, just a list of ingredients. She was a magician, unwilling to reveal her secrets.

Somehow, many years ago, I managed to extract from her the recipe for what we called the "sweet pie" at Easter, complete with amounts. It seems to work, so if something is missing, I haven't detected it. The recipe that follows is reduced by half from Susie's original.

Crust

[Susie used a pastry crust, but I discovered this cookie crust a few years ago and have continued to use it.]

1 ½ cup fine crumbs from either macaroon cookies or
anisette toast cookies

6 Tablespoons butter

Filling

1 lb. ricotta cheese

½ cup sugar

4 eggs

½ cup heavy cream

Zest of one lemon, grated

Zest of one orange, grated

½ cup orange juice

1 tsp. vanilla

Melt the butter and blend with the cookie crumbs.

Spread mixture over sides and bottom of a 9- or 10-inch pie plate. Bake for 15 minutes at 300 degrees. Cool.

Beat the eggs.

Combine all filling ingredients and stir until smooth.

Pour filling into pie shell.

Bake for 1 ½ hours at 350 degrees until filling is firm.

Squeeze lemon juice over top of the pie after baking and sprinkle with sugar.

Grandma's Cookies

My mother's mother lived in the country about 50 miles north of New York City in a stone house built by hand by my mason grandfather. In the summers, we grandchildren would spend extended periods of time with her, swimming in the dammed up brook at the edge of her property and eating at her table under the willow trees. In the winter she would travel south to visit us, staying with each of her children and their families for two or three days. The highlight of our visits to her or her sojourns with us was always her baking. To this day, all my cousins still refer to her signature cookie as "Grandma's cookie," and at a recent family reunion, a celebration of more than 90 people spread over four generations, the platter containing 6 dozen of these cookies was emptied within minutes—before any of the other desserts had even been touched.

Pastry

5 cups flour

1 ¼ cup sugar

6 teaspoons baking powder

6 eggs

1 1/8 cup margarine cut into
small bits (¼ inch)

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon lemon extract

1 teaspoon orange extract

Icing

¾ cup confectioner's sugar

1 teaspoon milk

Multicolored sprinkles

Sift flour, sugar and baking powder together and make well in center.

Beat eggs together, and then add to well. Cut in margarine. Add extracts. Stir and mix with hands. (Add more flour if dough is sticky.)

Break off small piece of dough and roll it with the palm of the hand to form a 5-inch rod. Form the rod into a knot and place on cookie sheet. Continue until all dough is shaped into knots.

Bake at 350° until lightly golden (about 8-12 minutes).

Brush warm cookies with icing and sprinkle with multicolored sprinkles. Makes about 4 dozen.

St. Joseph Cream Puffs

This is one of Aunt Susie's specialties. She had a separate kitchen in the basement of her house where she produced her confections. For my wedding, which was held at home, she prepared an elegant platter with dozens of different cookies and pastries, bursting with the flavors of anise and hazelnuts and almonds and pignoli. Her repertoire was extensive and imaginative and grew to incorporate "American" sweets such as chocolate chip cookies. But the traditional pastries that she made on special occasions—and always on March 19, the Feast of St. Joseph—were her light-as-air cream puffs.

The dish appears in two of my books. Giulia makes them for Salvatore when he comes to court her in *Dancing on Sunday Afternoons*, and Rose and Al in *Across the Table* prepare them together in silence after the revelations following Al's trip to Havana.

Pastry

1 cup water

½ cup butter

Pinch of salt

1 cup sifted flour

4 eggs

Filling

15-ounce container of ricotta cheese

¼ cup confectioner's sugar

1-2 tablespoons heavy cream

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

¼ teaspoon grated orange rind

Bring water, butter and salt to a rolling boil in a saucepan. Lower heat and add flour all at once, stirring vigorously until mixture pulls away from sides of pan (about 1 minute). Remove from heat and cool until mixture is lukewarm (about 10 minutes).

Beat in eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition until dough is smooth. Drop by the teaspoonful on lightly greased cookie sheet about 2 inches apart.

Bake at 450° for 10 minutes. Lower heat to 300° and bake for 15 to 20 minutes more until puffed and golden.

Blend together filling ingredients. When puffs are cool, make a slit on one side of each puff and fill with ricotta mixture. Makes about 4 dozen.

Struffoli

We knew Christmas was getting close at our house when my mother made the *struffoli*—tiny balls of fried dough that were coated in honey. Like many Italian recipes involving flour and eggs, the instructions begin with making a well in a mound of flour on a board. When I climbed Mt. Vesuvius for the first time I realized that those Neapolitan recipes must have been influenced by the shape of the ever-present volcano looming over the city.

Although my mother mixed the dough for the *struffoli*, my sister and I had the job of rolling the dough into long, skinny snakes, cutting the snakes into bits and rolling the bits between our fingertips into tiny balls. My mother then fried the balls quickly in the hottest oil until they were puffed and lightly browned. Once the crisp balls were drained, she swirled them gently in a simmering pot of honey and piled them into a pyramid on a cut-glass platter. That platter then sat on the sideboard in the dining room, served to guests who stopped by for a cup of coffee or glass of wine over the holidays.

It was always tempting to pull a few loose balls free from the bottom of the pile. I popped them into my mouth and sucked the honey from my fingers.

2 ½ cups sifted flour
¼ teaspoon salt
½ tablespoon confectioner's sugar
3 eggs
2 egg yolks
¼ cup butter
1 teaspoon grated lemon peel
2 cups canola oil
1½ cups honey
1/3 cup multicolored sprinkles

On a pastry board, place the flour in a mound and make a well in its center into which put the salt, sugar, eggs, egg yolks, butter and lemon peel.

Mix thoroughly, kneading dough with hands until it has the consistency of pie crust dough. Lightly roll the dough out until about ¼ inch thick.

Cut the dough with a pastry cutter into strips about ¼ inch wide. Roll these with the palm of the hand to form rods about the size of a pencil. Cut the rods into pieces about ¼ inch long and shape into balls.

Fry these balls in a deep saucepan in very hot oil. Drop as many of them at a time as will float in one layer without crowding. Fry about 3 to 5 minutes, turning occasionally, until puffed and lightly browned. Skim the balls out of the oil with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels.

Melt honey in saucepan over low heat for about 5 minutes. Add the fried dough balls to the honey and stir gently with wooden spoon until all the balls are coated with honey.

Arrange the coated balls in a cone-shaped mound on a platter and sprinkle with multicolored sprinkles.

Extras

Chestnut Stuffing

This chestnut stuffing is a family favorite, adapted by me for my three vegetarian children.

24 chestnuts, prepared as follows: Score a cross on the rounded side. Cover with water in a saucepan and boil for a few minutes. Remove from heat, peel and chop. This is a messy and time-consuming job, best done a day or two ahead. But it is well worth the trouble, because the chestnuts are the soul of this dish.

1 cup diced celery

1 cup diced onions

½ cup chopped parsley

Butter

1 package Pepperidge Farm Country-style cubed stuffing

1 cube Knorr vegetable broth

Cook celery and onion in butter until soft but not browned.

Add chestnuts and parsley.

Prepare stuffing according to package directions, using Knorr broth in place of water.

Blend vegetable/chestnut mixture into stuffing mix.

Place in Pyrex baking dish and bake for 30 minutes at 350.

Sausage, Egg and Anchovy Stuffing

Another of Rose's favorites that Mama brings to her in the hospital at Thanksgiving is this stuffing with sausage and anchovies. It's an example of how Italians adapted dishes to American traditions (this was usually a stuffing prepared for a breast of veal that I remember from my grandmother's table).

(For a 12-to 14-pound turkey)

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 lb. Italian sweet sausage, removed from casing and chopped

3 cups chopped onions

3 cups breadcrumbs

1 cup chopped parsley

6 chopped anchovy fillets

2 eggs, lightly beaten

2 whole, peeled hard-boiled eggs

Brown the chopped sausage in the olive oil, breaking it up into small crumbles.

Add the onions and sauté until soft and translucent.

Blend the sausage-onion mixture with the breadcrumbs, parsley, anchovies and beaten eggs.

Place 1/2 of stuffing mixture in bottom of turkey cavity; place hard-boiled eggs on top of stuffing layer; pack remaining stuffing around the hard-boiled eggs.

Pickled Eggplant

When I was a girl, the end of summer was always marked by two events—the week-long feast of the Madonna del’ Arco and the canning of the bounty of my grandmother’s garden. My mother and my aunts sat at an oilcloth-covered table under the pergola that supported my grandfather’s grapevines, peeling, slicing and preserving bushels of eggplants and tomatoes. I remember the scene vividly—the camaraderie of the women, the laughter, the sharing of work that would later feed their families—and I described it as one of the ways that Giulia, in *Dancing on Sunday Afternoons*, eases her homesickness as a newly arrived immigrant:

“With our sleeves rolled up and knives flailing, great mounds of purple-black eggplants fell victim to our energies. Like Paolo’s mother in Napoli, like our aunts up in the hills, we were slicing and salting, laying up melanzane in big crocks...”

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4-5 eggplants
Salt
2 quarts cider vinegar
4-5 red and green long Italian hot peppers, chopped into small dice
4-5 cloves garlic, minced
Olive oil
4 sterilized half-pint mason jars

Peel eggplant. Cut in half lengthwise, then in quarters. Slice into thin strips about 3/8" wide.

Layer strips in a non-metallic bowl, salting each layer.

Place a flat plate that fits inside the bowl on top of the eggplant and put a heavy object on top of the plate as a weight.

Allow to sit for 3 hours.

Drain the liquid from the bowl and squeeze the eggplant strips to remove as much liquid as possible. My mother used a potato press.

Place the eggplant back in the bowl and cover with cider vinegar. Weigh the eggplant down again with the plate and heavy object.

Soak the eggplant in the vinegar for at least 4 hours or overnight.

Drain the vinegar from the bowl and squeeze the eggplant strips again.

Mix the squeezed eggplant with the hot peppers, garlic and enough olive oil to combine well.

Fill mason jars with eggplant mixture. Before sealing, leave enough room at the top to add olive oil to completely cover the eggplant.

Cover with lids and rims that have been simmered in hot water.

Let rest for at least one week before using, storing the jars in a cool, dark place. After opening a jar, store in the refrigerator.

Serve as part of an antipasto platter.

Plum Preserves

It was the memory of my Aunt Susie's grape jelly that spurred my own initiation into the mysteries of turning ripe produce into preserves. During our sojourn in Germany, one of my husband's colleagues with an orchard had a bumper crop of plums and shared them with us. I have a wonderful plum tart recipe from my mother-in-law, and made it that night. But I had far too many plums and had to figure out what to do with them before they turned to mush. That is when I remembered Aunt Susie's paraffin-covered mason jars filled with Grandpa's grapes and decided one purple fruit was as good as another.

Since that summer twenty years ago I've put up plums almost every year, sometimes sharing the weekend-long labor with friends, as my mother and aunts did. My fingers turn purple, my kitchen is sticky and fragrant, and at the end of the day my counter is covered with rows of glistening jars filled with luscious fruit.

30 lbs. Italian prune plums
12-15 lbs. sugar

Rinse and slice plums into quarters.

Layer plums with sugar in a crock or large plastic container, in the proportion of $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar for every cup of plums.

Cover and allow to rest for 12-24 hours.

Bring the sugar-fruit mixture slowly to a boil and simmer until the fruit is a deep purple and translucent. It's important to cook the fruit in small batches of 4-6 cups at a time to preserve the best flavor.

Ladle fruit into hot sterile jars.

Stir the fruit to remove air pockets.

Wipe the rim, seal and store in a dark, cool place.

Yield: approximately 24 pounds of preserves (48 8-ounce jars)