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Treat Yourself to an
Around the Table
Chef's Apron

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More information the web at
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It's that time of year when we scratch our heads and figure out our New Year's resolutions. For some it will be easy. They make and break the same promises every year. Get fit, quit smoking, learn a new language, you name it they have promised to do it; not once but many times. I'd say I'm hit and miss on New Year's resolutions. I've kept a few and broken many but more often than not I forget to make them.

But not this year. I've been thinking about the kind of year I want to have in 2010. There is nothing like a new decade to give me the sense that something grand, something special should happen. Maybe it's the holidays; maybe it's the Christmas carols that keep spinning around in my head but I've resolved to fill 2010 with joy.

You remember joy. It was the feeling you had when a nor'easter blew in and you celebrated with a glorious snow day. It was the smell of spring and the first daffodils after a long winter. It was the first time you got up on water skis or hit a home run. It was the fireworks on the Fourth of July and playing hide and seek until after 10 o'clock on a warm summer night. And it was jumping in a huge pile of leaves on a crisp fall afternoon.

I came to this momentous decision a few weeks ago on one of my walks around the lake. It was one of those days when it's dark before you know it and the air is bone-chilling cold and damp. I was striding along at full speed to keep from freezing and tunelessly humming the Twelve days of Christmas. As I was trying to sort out that confusing mix of too much poultry, I had a bit of epiphany. Or maybe my brain froze. In any case, I decided that 2010 should be filled with joy.

Not a good year. Not a year filled with fun or interesting times or success. No, pure and simple I want it to be a year filled with joy. At this point I'm still a bit hazy on what it means to live a joyful life. It may be wishful thinking, or maybe hoping, but I don't suppose it will be all that difficult. No matter how easy or tough the process, you can't beat the results. I'm sure there are tons of self-help books that I could read. For better or worse, I think I'll just fumble around and figure it out on my own. The exploration and the journey will be part of the adventure.

If I have any hope of finding joy, I will need to dump some of the baggage I've been carrying around, all those shoulda's, coulda's and woulda's. I'm resolving to close the book on any nagging what-if's, especially those attached to ancient disappointments, dilemmas and, yes, even failures. Learn from them yes, dwell on them no.

Next, I will make time to enjoy the here and now. Sure, I will still keep a calendar, make plans and follow up on to-do lists. I'll still dream. However, I won't cloud a perfect afternoon with troublesome guilt over an impending deadline. I'll enjoy the sunshine and return to my keyboard refreshed and energized. I won't bring anxious worries into my kitchen just beautiful, fresh ingredients. I'll relax by the fire with friends or a good book, not worrisome doubts. Whew, I'm already starting to feel pretty joyful!

Wishing you a wonderful, joy filled New Year!

Bon appétit!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Susan'.



Cook like a chef...

or just look like one!

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Around the Table Chef's Apron**

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too little time? Too busy to cook?*

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**PO Box 1875 - New London
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Potato, Leek & Kale Soup

The cold and wind can be brutal in January. A hearty soup is the perfect solution.

Enjoy!

Serves 8

2 slices bacon, diced
1 onion, chopped
2 carrots, chopped
2 stalks celery, chopped
1 leek, white and light green parts only, cut in half and sliced
3 garlic cloves, chopped
1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
1 bunch kale, tough core removed and chopped
4 potatoes
1 teaspoon herbs de Provence
1 bay leaf
1/2 cup dry white wine
1 1/2 quarts chicken stock
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Garnish: fresh chopped parsley

1. Put the bacon in a large stockpot and cook over medium heat until crispy. Remove the bacon from the pan and drain off most of the fat.
2. Add the onions, carrots, celery and leek; cook over medium heat for 10 to 15 minutes, until the onions are translucent. Add the garlic and red pepper flakes, season with salt and pepper. Cook over medium heat for 2-3 minutes more.
3. Add the kale, potatoes, herbs, wine and chicken stock; bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 15-20 minutes until potatoes are tender.
4. Taste for seasoning and serve hot in large bowls sprinkled with fresh parsley.

Chef's tip: If you have a piece of parmesan cheese rind, add it to the soup along with the chicken stock. It adds a wonderful flavor and depth to your soup.

This soup is best made the day before. Cool to room temperature and refrigerate. Remove the bay leaf and parmesan rind before serving.