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For many grownups snow days lack the allure they held back in childhood. That twenty or thirty minute drive to work stretches into an hour, even two. And for those of us that work from home, well, it's business as usual except we have to find time to shovel the driveway on top of everything else.

All that said; I still love a snow day. Except for the snowplows which zoom by from time to time, the neighborhood is quiet and ever so peaceful. Every few hours I step outside with my yardstick (I am an optimist) and measure the mounting snow. With every inch, I anticipate better and better skiing. (As well as a little back breaking work with my shovel and snow blower.)

There is both good news and bad news about working from home. You get to work in your jammies. You don't have to commute through rain, sleet or snow; you don't have to commute at all. The coffee and tea are better, much better if you work at my house. However, when you need a break, there's no water cooler and no office gossip to titillate and entertain. Plus a foot of snow is not an excuse to play hooky.

Every once in a while, not often, a blizzard blows in at a most opportune time. I have no pressing deadlines, no mile high stack of paperwork. I can take some time to be a kid again and enjoy a snow day. When we were little we didn't stay home on snowy days, we headed outside to play in the snow. Bundled up like Eskimos, we braved the flying flakes and spent the day on skis or built snowmen.

Last week the stars aligned. Mother Nature dumped a foot of fluffy, new snow on a day when I had nothing (well almost nothing) urgent to do. But I did not dash off to the mountain or run out to make snow angels. Nope! I must confess I've become a bit of a fair weather skier. At least a decade ago, I decided I'd had enough of skiing in whiteouts with snow wiping across my cheeks and creeping down my neck.

So when the going got rough and snow piled up higher and higher, this tough girl stayed home. I spent most of the day warm and cozy in the kitchen. What choice did I have? It was either cook or spend the day filing and April 15th is still a long way away.



Blame it on the cauliflower. While wandering through the supermarket to stock up before the storm, I spotted a very big, very beautiful cauliflower. It was flawless, absolutely gorgeous. I was helpless. Seduced by its charms, I couldn't leave it behind. With the snow coming down fast and furious, it only seemed right to turn that cauliflower into something stupendous. Plus I was in a pasta kind of mood. Which is nothing new; I've been in a pasta kind of mood since I was five. Maybe four but I can't remember that far back.

If you have never tried them together, cauliflower and pasta are wonderful. Toss roasted cauliflower with a little olive oil, garlic and spicy pepper flakes, a hint of anchovies and long ribbons of fettuccine. Finish it off with a dusting of parmesan and enjoy! And when it's really snowy and cold why not bake up a decadent mac and cheese. After all, you'll definitely need it to warm up once you've finally finished shoveling and digging out from the storm.

Enjoy the snow, stay warm and,

Bon appétit!

Susan

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Mac & Cheese with Cauliflower & Bacon

Serves 6

6 ounces bacon, chopped
Pinch (or to taste) chili flakes
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
1 large cauliflower, cut in florets
Olive oil
1 medium red onion, cut in half length-wise and then in thin wedges
2 garlic cloves, chopped
3 tablespoons dry sherry
2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
2 cups whole milk
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
Pinch ground nutmeg
1 cup sour cream
6 ounces Fontina cheese, grated
6 ounces Cheddar cheese, grated
4 ounces (divided) Parmesan cheese, grated
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
12 ounces cellentani (double spirals),
orecchiette, macaroni or other short sturdy pasta
1 cup bread crumbs
1 teaspoon dried Italian herbs



Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Butter a large baking dish.

Cook the bacon in a heavy sauté pan over low heat until brown and crispy. Remove the bacon from the pan, drain on paper towels and reserve. Add the chili flakes to the pan and cook on low for 1-2 minutes. Turn off the heat and whisk the balsamic vinegar into the bacon fat.

Put the cauliflower in a large roasting pan, drizzle with the bacon fat-vinegar mixture and toss to combine. Roast the cauliflower at 375 degrees until golden and tender, 20-30 minutes. Remove from the oven and reserve.

While the cauliflower is roasting, heat a little olive in a sauté pan over medium heat, add the onion and cook until it starts to turn translucent. Add the garlic cook for 1-2 minutes more. Stir in the sherry and continue to cook for a few more minutes. Set aside.

Melt the butter in a heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour and thyme and cook, whisking for 1 minute. Slowly whisk in the milk. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to low and simmer, whisking often, until the sauce thickens, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat, whisk in the mustard and nutmeg. Stir in the Fontina, Cheddar and half the Parmesan. Whisk in the sour cream, check for seasoning and add salt and pepper to taste.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook according to package directions, less 1 minute. Drain the pasta and return it to the pot. Add the bacon, cauliflower, onions and cheese sauce, gently toss to combine and pour into the prepared baking dish.

Bake for 20 minutes at 375 degrees. Sprinkle the crumbs over the pasta and bake for another 10-15 minutes, until it is bubbly and golden brown and serve.