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I love the 4th of July. I love the fireworks, the family cookout and meeting up with friends. When I was really little we spend the 4th on Cape Cod with my grandparents. Later we moved our summer vacation north to New Hampshire and Pleasant Lake. But my most vivid 4th of July memory is not from the Cape or the Lake. I might have been five. For some unknown (or no longer remembered) reason, we were stuck in the suburbs that year. We were without our extended family of grandparents and cousins but our next door neighbors joined us for salmon and peas.

My mom made a bit deal of it. She talked about salmon and peas as if it was a centuries old tradition. Turns out she was right. Abigail and John Adams celebrated the original Independence Day in 1776 with a feast of salmon and peas. (That's John the second President. Not to be confused with his cousin Sam Adams the statesman and patriot or Sam Adams the beer of no relation.)

As I remember it, that July 4th was the first time salmon graced our table. My dad was delighted and told a story about some cousin shipping a massive salmon from Washington or Oregon to his grandmother in Massachusetts. That was the first time we heard the story. We've heard it at least a couple dozen times since. If he decides to grill salmon over the holiday weekend, we'll probably hear it again.

Before dinner my mother assured my sister Brenda and I that we would love it. I wasn't one of those finicky kids so I wasn't particularly worried. Living in New England, we ate a lot of seafood. Throughout the winter, my mom baked scrod and haddock. In the summer my dad cooked swordfish steaks on the grill. We caught flounder in Buzzards Bay and Mom pan-fried them in brown butter. Steamed lobster and clams were a favorite summer feast. We dug the clams during low tide and picked our own lobsters out of a big cement tank at the fish market. (At least I picked out my own lobster. Brenda refused to put her hand in the tank so the fish man did it for her.) I figured fish was fish so what's not to love.

As we sat down to dinner, my mother warned everyone, especially us kids, to watch for bones. Mom assured us she'd done her best but feared she'd missed a few. She had. The big ones were easy to spot, the little tiny ones weren't.

It was all a bit tedious. About halfway through dinner, I got bored and decided I'd found them all. I took a big bite and straight away a bone lodged itself halfway down my throat. I started to do that gagging, choking thing. My parents immediately swept me up and away from the table. Before I knew it, I was leaning over the sink while they each gave me a good whomp on the back.

Both Mom and Dad were a bit frantic. It might have been my health and wellbeing. Or maybe they figured we didn't have time for a trip to the emergency room before the first fireworks lit the sky. Next thing I knew, my dad had me by the ankles and I was hanging upside down. My mom, sister and the neighbors crowded around and cheered while my dad gave me a good shake.

Eventually the bone popped out and we all returned to the table. I did not join the clean plate club that night but Mom let me have dessert anyway. It was strawberry shortcake. We made it to the fireworks with time to spare. They were wonderful but it was not the best 4th of July ever.

Have a wonderful holiday and bon appétit!

Grilled Salmon with Lemon-Basil Aioli

Why not serve grilled salmon at your 4th of July feast? The salmon I find in my local supermarket is more or less clear and cleaned of bones. Still, it's wise to do a quick check and pull out any strays. Enjoy!

Serves 8

Juice of 1/2 lemon
1-2 tablespoons olive oil
1 salmon fillet, skin-on, about 3 pounds
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Prepare a charcoal or gas grill. Fire should be very hot.

Check the filet for bones and use clean needle nose pliers to pull them out.

Whisk the lemon juice and olive oil together in a small bowl and spoon over the salmon. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and let the salmon sit for a few minutes.

Place the salmon, skin side up, on the grill. Depending on the thickness of the fish, grill for 8 to 10 minutes, carefully turning once with a wide spatula. (Tip: grill the salmon in a fish basket and you won't have worry about the fish falling apart on and into the grill. You can find them in housewares and hardware stores and on-line.)

Transfer the fish to a cutting board, skin side down, and let the fish to rest for 5-10 minutes before cutting into 1-inch slices. Serve warm, at room temperature or chilled with Lemon-Basil Aioli.

Lemon-Basil Aioli

Makes about 1 cup

1/2 cup olive oil
1/4 cup mayonnaise
1 cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 teaspoons anchovy paste
Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
1/4 teaspoon or to taste hot pepper sauce
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Combine all the ingredients in a blender or small food processor. Process to until smooth and creamy.

Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to combine the flavors. Whisk to recombine and serve.

* Classic Aioli calls for raw eggs. I'm not comfortable using raw eggs these days so (even though Julia and Martha would be horrified) I substitute the raw egg with mayonnaise.

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