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And just like that it's August and the summer is half over. I've never understood why the first day of summer, the summer solstice is called midsummer. What was Mr. Shakespeare thinking? Or maybe we should blame the Romans or Celts or Vikings. I'll let you take your pick. As far as I'm concerned the first week of August is midsummer. If you're a half-empty type, then you will cry and moan or at least feel a little blue. If you're the half-full type, you should celebrate with bonfires and feasting and maybe a little dancing and cavorting.

That's what they do in Switzerland. Maybe not the dancing and cavorting part, the Swiss are not known for their cavorting. August 1st is National Day, the Swiss equivalent of our Independence Day or Bastille Day in France. Well not exactly, Fête Nationale Suisse commemorates the creation of the Swiss federation not the start of a revolution. It goes back to 1291 but was not an official holiday until 1994. I had a chance to celebrate a few Fête Nationales when I lived there. It was all pretty low key but then again so are the Swiss. A few people plant little flags in their flower boxes with the geraniums and spend the evening outside with a picnic and cookout. As soon as it's dark or almost, kids set off fireworks. A few fields and front lawns catch fire but were usually stamped out pretty quickly. The night ends with bonfires.

Here we celebrate the first week of August with Hospital Day. Unlike the Swiss, New London didn't wait a century or two or seven to start the party. The hospital was founded in 1918 and the first Hospital Day was celebrated six years later. It started as a simple country fair to raise money for the hospital. At some point it added a midway with rides and games.

The midway robbed the fair of its rustic charm but had its fans, most notably any and every small child, 'tween and teen for miles around. A few of those kids are already in mourning as this year's fair is returning to its roots. Family fun and games on the town green will replace the Whirly-gig and Twister. Would-be sharp shooters will have to settle for Zumba, decorate a cupcake or add their dash and talent to the community mural.



The highlight of the fair, the parade with its floats, antique cars, fire engines and marching band will roll up Main Street as always. One year my friends and I, or more correctly one or two of our fathers, built a terrific float. They constructed a ski slope on the front of an enormous old truck and a tennis court on the back. All the kids in the neighborhood put on bathing suits, tennis whites or ski clothes and piled onto the truck. The skiers precariously balanced on their skis in front. A couple of kids played tennis on the miniature court. Two little kids sat on the tailgate with their fishing poles and a few beauties sunbathed. The beach was closed for the parade so the lifeguard joined our motley crew. He duct-taped a roller skate to the bottom of an old water-ski, attached a rope to the truck and gracefully jumped the wake from one end of Main Street to the other.

We thought we were magnificent but the esteemed but tragically misguided judges did not agree. It was with great disappointment that our clever float did not win the grand prize or second or even third. While we were heartbroken, our mothers didn't care. All the planning and painting and decorating kept us busy and out of their hair for a least a couple of afternoons.

Enjoy Hospital Day and the backside of summer. Bon appétit!

Insalata Caprese (Mozzarella Tomato & Basil Salad)

Insalata Caprese is a bright and beautiful start to a summer meal. Enjoy!



Serves 8-12

2 pints grape or cherry tomatoes (a colorful mix of red, yellow and even purple is nice!)
Balsamic vinegar
Extra virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
1 medium red onion, cut in half lengthwise and then in thin wedges
12 ounce ball Mozzarella cheese, thinly sliced
Black oil-cured Greek olives
Pistou (recipe follows)

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Put 1 pint of tomatoes onto a sheet pan, drizzle with a little balsamic vinegar and olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Toss to combine. Roast at 375 degrees for about 30 minutes or until the tomatoes are soft and lightly browned. Cool.

Put the onion onto a sheet pan, drizzle with a little balsamic vinegar and olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Toss to combine. Roast at 375 degrees for about 20 minutes or until the onion is soft and lightly browned. Cool.

To serve: arrange 2 slices of mozzarella on individual plates. Slice the remaining pint of tomatoes in half and place 4 or 5 halves on each plate. Spoon a little mound of roasted onions onto each plate and top with a couple of roasted tomatoes. Drizzle the cheese and tomatoes with a little pistou, add a few olives to each plate and serve.

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