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Contact me at
susannye@tds.net

603/526 7319

PO Box 1875 - New London
New Hampshire 03257



When I was little we always took our summer vacation in August. I was just a toddler the first summer we rented Mrs. Bergenheim's ramshackle old cottage. My feet were tiny then and they're not terribly large to this day. Anyway, I was none too steady on my little feet and prone to tip over at the smallest provocation. One rainy afternoon, I was doing the toddler dash around

the cottage. I'm guessing my sister Brenda was chasing me or I was running in hopes that she'd take up the chase. Running through the kitchen, I fell over, banged into Mrs. Bergenheim's old cast-iron stove and lost a tooth.

I don't remember much but I'm sure it was pretty scary at the time. That said, it's not really clear who was more frightened, my mother, my sister, our baby sitter Ellie or me. What with all the blood, shrieks and tears, it must have been both loud and messy. Mom talked about it for years.

Although I steered clear of the stove for the rest of the summer and every summer thereafter, the event did not do any major damage to my fragile, little psyche. At least, I don't think it did. I suppose if I was one of those people who hated to cook, I could blame it on Mrs. Bergenheim and her cast iron stove.

I soon recovered and by some dental miracle a new baby tooth grew in to replace the old one. Which is a very good thing since in all the confusion, fuss and bother, no one remembered to put the tooth under my pillow for the tooth fairy. I don't know if she tried to visit or not but if she did, she went back to her tree hollow empty-handed. Well, not completely empty, she still had my quarter.

The little replacement tooth stayed put until I reached the second, or maybe it was third grade. That was the year that I lost most of my baby teeth to make way for permanent choppers. I spent a good portion of the year looking adorable with a toothless grin.

In spite of my dental miracle, my luck didn't hold. As they are apt to do, those permanent choppers grew in crooked and overcrowded. First, the dentist yanked four of them out by the roots. Then the orthodontist encased them in steel bands and wires. Every month for three years I visited the orthodontist's torture chamber. He was constantly stringing more wires and tightening them to the breaking point. To add insult to injury, he added rubber bands which periodically broke free and sprung across the dinner table or classroom. My once charming grin was a blinding flash of metal.

Braces couldn't have come at a worse time. I was thirteen and at my most vulnerable. My nose was already too big and beaky. Or at least, I thought it was. My very curly hair had a mind of its own. Like an overanxious teenager, it refused to calm down, preferring to jump out in a million different directions, especially on a hot, humid summer days. What's more, I was about five pounds heavier than my glamorous older sister. Yes, the very same older sister whose perfectly straight teeth didn't need braces. And yes again, the very same sister whose perfectly straight hair could have been featured in a shampoo ad in *Seventeen* magazine. Or so I thought.

Somehow I managed to survive it all, the teenage traumas and dramas. The braces came off. Either my nose shrunk or my face grew into it. Or maybe it was never all that big in the first place, just a charming little beak. I'd like to say that my hair was transformed from a frizzy mess to gorgeous waves. I'd like to say it but it wouldn't be true. (After all these years, is it possible that a few of those teenage traumas or dramas are still hanging around!?!)

Stay safe and enjoy the backside of summer. Bon appétit!





Artichoke Leaves with Shrimp

A few easy steps and definitely worth the effort. These artichoke leaves are one of my favorite appetizers. Enjoy!

1-2 large artichokes, trimmed
 Sun-dried Tomato Dip
 Small shrimp, peeled and cooked

Put the artichokes in a steamer basket set over just enough water to touch the bottom of the basket. Bring the water to boil. Reduce the heat to medium, cover, and steam for 45 minutes or until you can pull the leaves off easily and the flesh is tender. (You may need to add more water to the pot before the artichokes are cooked through.)

Remove the artichokes from the pot. When the artichokes are cool enough to handle, gently pull off the sturdy outer leaves. Reserve the floppy inner leaves and choke for another use.

Dab a little Sun-dried Tomato Dip at the base of each artichoke leaf and top with a small shrimp. Arrange the leaves on a platter and pass.

Sun-dried Tomato Dip

Makes about 1 cup

4 halves oil packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained and diced
 2 cloves garlic
 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
 2 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon or basil
 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
 Dash hot pepper sauce
 About 1/3 cup mayonnaise
 About 1/3 cup sour cream
 Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Combine the sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, vinegar, herbs and hot sauce in a small food processor and process until smooth. Add the mayonnaise and sour cream and process to combine.

Cover and refrigerate extra dip and serve it with raw veggies.



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