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Like all good things, summer must end. When we were kids, that meant packing up



the station wagon and heading back to the burbs. As sad as my sister, brother and I were to see Labor Day come around, I think our return hit my mother the hardest. After all, we had new classes, teachers and classmates to excite us, unnerve us or bore us.

Fall may be my season but summer is hers. As a girl Mum loved spending the summer on the Cape. If it were possible, I'd say she loved summers on Pleasant Lake even more. To use Mum's words, she was *absolutely bereft* when it was time to leave paradise for the reality of home.

School always started bright and early on the Tuesday after Labor Day. Unlike many families, we always stayed in New Hampshire until the last possible minute. Most all of our friends were long gone by the time we packed up the car and headed south late Labor Day afternoon. Looking back I'm a little surprised that we didn't leave at dawn on Tuesday morning.

The other kids showed up looking sharp and ready to go on the first day of school. I still had sand in my hair. My friends' book bags were filled with shiny new notebooks, pencils and pens. Unless I somehow managed to scrounge up a scruffy old notepad and a stubby pencil, I arrived empty-handed.

Returning home from school that first afternoon, I did my best to convince my mother that I not only needed school supplies but speed was of the essence. Mum was never particularly sympathetic. With melodramatic flair, I insisted my teachers were threatening failure, detention or worse. Still in relax mode and with sand in her hair, Mum insisted the public school system would not, could not expel me because I didn't have a new pencil. I was not convinced.

Eventually, my pleas wore her down. Off we went to the Five & Dime to pick up middle school flotsam and jetsam.

Of course all the good stuff was long gone. The back-to-school aisle looked like a hurricane had blown through it. While I was swimming, sunning and waterskiing my friends had cornered the market on cool and cute school supplies. I was lucky to find a boring Bic pen and a dull and dreary black notebook. And forget book covers. My mother was too forlorn to understand why I would die before I'd let *The Beverly Hillbillies* cover my books. In lieu of hari-kari, I became quite expert at cutting and folding paper bags and made my own. My drawings might not have been the envy of the sixth grade but I thought I did okay. Perhaps that's why I ended up as an art major in college!

Not all gloom and glum, our return to the burbs also meant dinner at the Villa. Never a particularly enthusiastic cook, Mum was too blue that first day or two home to rattle her pots and pans. The Villa was a family favorite and we three kids were more than happy to go along. The noise level was a dull roar, the waitresses were bossy and the food was traditional Italian-American. It was wonderful. The Villa took some of the edge off the pain of being back in the burbs.



Whatever your post-Labor Day reality; I hope you are enjoying all that cooler weather brings. Bon appétit!

Susan

Chicken Parmagiana with Spaghetti Marinara

A family friendly dinner for kids from five to ninety-five! Enjoy!

Serves 8



1/2 cup flour
 1 teaspoon sea salt
 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
 1/2 teaspoon paprika
 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
 8 skinless, boneless chicken thighs (about 3 pounds)
 Olive oil
 3-4 cups Marinara Sauce (recipe follows)
 About 4 ounces mozzarella, shredded
 About 4 ounces fontina, shredded
 About 1 ounce Parmigiano-Reggiano, grated
 About 1 ounce Pecorino Romano, grated
 8 ounces spaghetti
 Additional grated Parmigiano-Reggiano and Pecorino Romano for the spaghetti (optional)

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees and put a large pot of water on high heat to boil.

Put the flour, salt, pepper, paprika and thyme in a shallow bowl and whisk to combine. Lightly coat both sides of the chicken with the seasoned flour.

Heat a little olive oil in a large skillet over medium high heat. Working in batches, cook the chicken 2-3 minutes per side or until golden. Transfer the chicken to a non-stick, rimmed baking sheet. Top each chicken thigh with 2-3 tablespoons Marinara Sauce and sprinkle with the cheeses. Bake the chicken at 375 for 10-15 minutes or until the chicken is completely cooked through and the cheeses are bubbling.

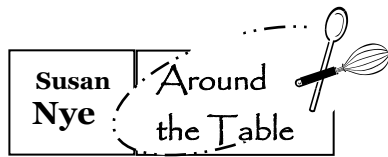
Meanwhile, cook the spaghetti according to package directions. Drain the pasta and return it to the pot with enough Marinara Sauce to coat. Don't drown the pasta in sauce. Cover the pot and let the spaghetti sit for about 1 minute to absorb some of the sauce.



Divide the spaghetti among 8 shallow bowls, top each with a chicken thigh and serve. Pass additional grated Parmigiano-Reggiano and Pecorino Romano for the pasta.

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Another recipe from Susan Nye: Early Fall 2012/Volume 315

Traditional Marinara Sauce

Makes about 3 quarts*

Olive oil

1 large onion, chopped

1-2 carrots, finely chopped

4 cloves garlic, minced

Pinch or to taste dried chili pepper flakes (optional)

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

1/2 cup dry red wine

9-10 cups (three 28-ounce cans) crushed tomatoes

2 sprigs fresh thyme

1 bay leaf

2 tablespoons each chopped, fresh basil and parsley

Heat a little olive oil in a heavy sauce pan over medium-high heat. Add the onion and carrot and season with pepper flakes, salt and pepper. Sauté until the onion is translucent. Add the garlic and sauté 1-2 minutes more.

Add the wine and simmer until reduced by half. Add the crushed tomatoes, thyme and bay leaf to the pot. Bring to a simmer, reduce the heat to low and simmer for 30 minutes. Stir in the basil and parsley and simmer for a minute or two more.

** You'll want to make plenty of sauce. It freezes beautifully and will come in handy throughout the fall and winter.*

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