



Feel Big and Strong - Vote & A Chicken in Every Pot

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Is it possible that Election Day is only a week away? It seems like the campaigns have been going on and on forever. Well, maybe that's because they have, or at least almost. After all New Hampshire is both the first in the nation primary and a swing state. In hopes of capturing our hearts, minds and votes, politicians have spent the last few years trudging through snow, rain, blistering heat and autumn leaves to shake our hands and kiss our babies.

My mother has always taken voting very seriously. She grew up close to Boston, birthplace of four presidents and home of the Tea Party. That's the original Tea Party. The one in 1773 when patriots threw overtaxed tea into the harbor. She loved history, particularly early American history. For more than a few years she guided tourists and school children through the Massachusetts State House. She loved sharing the buildings' art and architectural details. Even more she enjoyed sharing some of Boston's well- and not-so-well known history. Her favorite story was of a patriotic Nye ancestor who took part in the famous harbor tea fest. Family legend says that he pilfered a handful of the precious tea and brought it home to his mother in New Bedford.

When it came to politics my sister, brother and I were encouraged to have opinions and voice them with enthusiasm. But there was a but. If we wanted to take part in the discussion we had to participate in the process. My mother firmly believes that getting out the vote should start at home. We barely had time to open our presents and finish our birthday cakes before she hauled us down to the town hall to register. She didn't care if we shared her political leanings. It didn't matter if we registered Republican, Democrat or Independent. We mattered and therefore our votes mattered.

No sooner had I joined the voting rolls than a local election took me inside one of those mysterious voting booths. Voting was held in school gyms throughout town, so I'd seen the red, white and blue mini cabanas many times. Mum waited for the school bus to bring me home that day so we could cast our ballots together. It was not a major election, just a few local statutes or amendments were on the ballot. As far as I could tell they were written in some foreign language which pretended to be English but didn't wholly succeed. I don't remember what they were about or how I voted. All I remember is my mother's pride and excitement as I voted for the first time.

With her voice in my ear, I have managed to vote in most but (sorry Mum!) not all major elections. Even when I lived in Europe, I voted absentee. It was sometimes touch and go but I usually managed to meet the deadline. While many of my expatriate friends let it slide, I always felt quite virtuous for voting. Even if I was an ocean away.

I moved back to the US on the eve of the 2000 election. Unsure that my absentee ballot had been mailed in time, I watched the results late into the night, early the next morning and on and on for days and days. Jetlagged and reverse-culture shocked; I wondered if my one little vote could make a difference. As always, my mother categorically insisted that it did. Given that the election was finally won by only 537 votes in Florida, she was pretty close to right.

2012 promises to be another squeaker so regardless of your political leanings, don't forget to vote! Bob Schieffer, the moderator in the final presidential debate put it beautifully when he closed the evening with a quote from his mom, "Go vote, it makes you feel big and strong."

My mother would wholeheartedly agree.

Bon appétit!

A Chicken in Every Pot

In the old days politicians promised a chicken in every pot. Try this flavorful dish while you wait and watch the returns on Election Night. Enjoy!

Serves 6



About 1/3 cup all purpose flour
 1 teaspoon paprika
 Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
 1 1/2 – 2 pounds skinless boneless chicken breasts
 Olive oil
 6-8 cloves garlic, peeled and trimmed
 1 red onion, finely chopped
 1 carrot, finely chopped
 1 celery stalk, finely chopped
 1 teaspoon herbs de Provence
 Pinch red pepper flakes
 1 cup dry white wine
 1 cup chicken stock

2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
 1 bay leaf
 2 tablespoons cognac
 1/4 cup heavy cream

Combine the flour with the paprika and 1 teaspoon each salt and pepper. Pat the chicken dry and dredge it in the flour, shaking off the excess. Heat a little olive oil a large casserole over medium-high heat. Sauté the chicken until golden, 1-2 minutes per each side. Remove the chicken from the pan and reserve.

Add the garlic, carrot, celery and onion to the pan and season with herbs de Provence, pepper flakes, salt and pepper. Lower the heat to medium and sauté until golden, 5-7 minutes. Stir in the mustard and then slowly stir in the white wine and chicken stock. Add the bay leaf and bring to a simmer. Cover and simmer on low, stirring occasionally, for 10-15 minutes.

Return the chicken to the pan with any juices and wiggle the pieces down into the vegetables. Bring everything to a simmer, cover and simmer on low for 10-15 minutes or until the chicken is cooked through. Remove the chicken from the pan and cover to keep warm.

Remove the casserole from the heat and stir in the cognac. Return to medium high heat and simmer for 5-10 minutes to reduce and thicken the sauce. Whisk in the cream and simmer on low for a few minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Slice the chicken, transfer to a serving platter and drizzle with sauce. Serve immediately with any additional sauce to pass.