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Hotel Intercontinental in Geneva. Even though we voted for different candidates (and her team won), we became friends. And we have stayed friends, in spite of the many changes in our lives and, now, more than 3,500 miles.

In the last few years of my almost two decade stay in Geneva, we were almost neighbors. It was a quick trip over the fields and through the woods to reach to the house she shared with her husband and kids. They are still there, on the edge of the vineyards, looking out at the Lake of Geneva and the French Alps. I lived in the next village and enjoyed that same view from my apartment on the third floor of a beautiful, old stone barn. I passed her house on my morning run and we spent many a Sunday afternoon walking in the vineyards. Sometimes with a stroller, sometimes not.

While I miss having her close by for a chat, a walk and a cup of tea, I particularly miss Julie during the Christmas season. Always effervescent, Julie embraces the holidays with enthusiasm. Her Christmas decorations rival the displays in Macy's famous windows. She loves to bake and throughout December her house is filled with the warming perfume of sugar and spice. And maybe best of all, she shares my love of Christmas carols.

Every year Julie kicks off the holiday season in early December with a party. It's a jolly event with people coming and going and a few, like me, probably staying too long. The tradition started with her parents when Julie was just a little girl and the party does double duty. It welcomes the holidays and celebrates her birthday. About halfway through the evening, Julie settles down in front of the piano and leads us all in song. I'm not sure if we ever get around to a rousing chorus Happy Birthday but we do sing a lot of Christmas carols. As far as I can figure, we more or less sing every carol that has ever been written. I must admit, my caroling is no match to her skill at the piano. Thankfully, she puts up with me anyway. I guess that's what good friends are for.

Julie's party has always been one of my favorite holiday celebrations. I miss it now that I am in New Hampshire. However, I promise I will be there in spirit. Maybe, no certainly, I'll hum a few carols throughout the day and evening of the party.



I hope that you have lots of opportunities over the next few weeks to raise you voice in joyful song and good cheer. Bon appétit!

Susan

Greek Stuffed Mushrooms



One or two bites, these hors d'oeuvres will be a big hit at your holiday (or any) party. Enjoy!

Makes about 3 dozen

Olive oil
8 ounces feta cheese, crumbled
1 shallot, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 teaspoon herbs de Provence
Dash hot sauce
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
1 pound frozen spinach

About 36 whole 1-2 bite-sized mushrooms, cleaned and stems removed
1/2-3/4 cup panko breadcrumbs
1-2 ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated

Put the spinach in a colander to thaw and drain.

Lightly coat a large skillet with olive oil and heat over medium. Add the shallot, herbs and hot sauce, season with salt and pepper and sauté for 3-5 minutes or until the shallot is translucent. Add the garlic and sauté 1 minute more.

Add the spinach and cook for a few minutes to remove any excess liquid. Turn off the heat and cool to room temperature.

Add the feta to the spinach, season with salt and pepper and toss to combine.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Put the breadcrumbs and grated Parmigiano-Reggiano in a small bowl and toss to combine.

Generously fill each mushroom cap with spinach and feta, sprinkle with the panko-parm mix and place on an oiled baking sheet. Bake at 400 degrees for 10 to 15 minutes or until piping hot and golden brown.

