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Sugar & Spice & Caramel Sundaes with Sweet & Salty Pecans

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Throughout my childhood and particularly during my teenage years, my mother was bound and determined to keep me busy. And not just me, my sister and brother were also targets of her unwavering resolve to keep our summer days packed. When we were little it was swimming lessons, tennis and sailing.

When we got older, it was a summer job. My sister did the mother's helper thing, made beds and lifeguarded. My brother bagged groceries until he was old enough to work construction and make some real money. I ran a little sandwich hut, waitressed and worked retail.

The sandwich hut was an entrepreneurial venture, not particularly profitable and only kept me busy for three days out of seven. The next year, with a bright smile and no experience, I donned an ugly white dress and even uglier white shoes and headed for the Sugar & Spice Restaurant.

A diner of sorts, the Sugar & Spice served mostly fried foods from early morning straight through dinner. There were burgers and hot dogs, fried chicken, fish and chips and tripe for the adventurous. Except for the cakes and pies which were home baked by one of the waitresses, the food was ordinary at best. Along with a crew of local regulars, the restaurant was kept busy with summer people, tourists, campers and their parents.

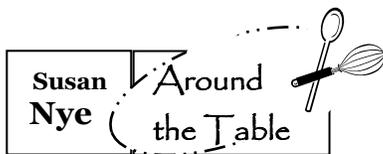
Sugar & Spice was more or less staffed for a sitcom. The tall and skinny boss sported a handlebar mustache and was as high strung as the short-order cook was laid back. Two happy-go-lucky teenage busboy/dishwashers and half a dozen waitresses in every size, shape and temperament completed the staff. The waitresses earned \$1 an hour plus tips which we shared with the dishwashers.

With few if any exceptions, the patrons kept a frugal eye on their purse strings. In spite of my winning smile, their tips tended to jingle rather than crinkle and ranged from the ridiculous to the absurd. Perhaps the most memorable gratuity came from an older and particularly demanding gentleman. He left a dime. I suppose I could have thrown it at him but he snuck out before I found his grand largess tucked under the edge of his plate.

I don't remember if I fell in love but I did date the milkman that summer. Between his sophomore and junior years at Dartmouth, Harry delivered milk from the local dairy and Sugar & Spice was on his route. We thought our nickname for him, Harry from the Dairy, was clever but I don't think he did. It didn't really matter because he was feeling bored and out of sorts until he met our motley crew. His ancient sports car had died and he had neither the cash nor the expertise to bring it back to life. Without a car or even bicycle, he was marooned on the dairy farm when he wasn't working. Much to his delight, I let him drive our ancient Land Rover a couple of times. I never did get a ride in the MG; it was towed back to Hanover in September.

All in all it was a good summer. Mom was happy that I was busy. I was happy that the cast of characters at the restaurant were both fun and interesting. Even if it wasn't love, dating a smart and funny college boy was pretty good too. And finally, in spite of my customer's miserly generosity, I went off to college with enough money to pay for books, beer and late night pizza.

I hope you are having a good summer and bon appétit!



Another recipe from Susan Nye:
Summer 2013/Volume 355

Caramel Sundaes with Sweet & Salty Pecans

A little sweet, a bit of spice and creamy ice cream, what's not to love? Don't skimp on the ice cream. The better the ice cream, the better your sundae! Enjoy!

Premium vanilla ice cream or gelato
Orange Caramel Sauce
Sweet & Salty Pecans

Scoop ice cream into dessert glasses or bowls, drizzle liberally with warm Orange Caramel sauce and sprinkle with Sweet & Salty Pecans.

Orange Caramel Sauce

Makes about 2 cups

2 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
2/3 cup orange juice
1/2 cup heavy cream
2 tablespoons Grand Marnier
1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract

Put the sugar and cinnamon in heavy saucepan and whisk to combine. Stir in the orange juice and cook, stirring, over medium-low heat until the sugar dissolves. Increase the heat to medium-high and bring to a boil. Swirling the pan occasionally, continue boiling until the caramel becomes a deep amber color, about 10 minutes.

Remove the pan from the heat, stir in the cream (the caramel will bubble vigorously) and cool for 5-10 minutes. Stir in the Grand Marnier and vanilla.

Cool to room temperature, cover and refrigerate.

To serve: reheat the sauce in a pan on the stove or in the microwave.

Sweet & Salty Pecans

1 cup chopped pecans
1 tablespoon butter, melted
3-4 tablespoons brown sugar
1/2-1 teaspoon sea salt

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Put the pecans in a bowl and toss with the melted butter. Add the brown sugar and salt and toss to combine.

Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Spread the pecans on the parchment paper in a single layer.

Bake at 375 degrees for 5-8 minutes or until the nuts are lightly browned and the sugar is bubbly. Remove the nuts from the oven and cool for a few minutes on the baking sheet. Carefully remove the parchment paper from the sheet pan and break up the nuts into small pieces.

Cool completely and store in an airtight container until ready to serve.

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