

Private Chef, Catering & Cooking Classes

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Join Me Around the Table for an Eat Well-Do Good Dinner! Support the fight against Alzheimer's Disease & Enjoy delicious food & fun!

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Cook like a chef or just look like one!

You can find lots more information on the web at www.susannye.com and www.susannye.wordpress.com

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January weather is remarkable for two reasons. The first is the absolutely ridiculous, positively frigid temperatures. Who in their right mind wants to get out of bed when the mercury is hovering around minus fifteen degrees? Yes, you got that right, not fifteen degrees but MINUS fifteen degrees. By the way, for my friends in Switzerland that's Fahrenheit not centigrade. The coldest month, we can thank January for frostbite, frozen pipes and the strange but not exactly true belief that it can be *too cold to snow*.

The second is the January thaw. From one day to the next, the temperature skyrockets to forty or more. If it weren't for the rain and resulting ice dams and flooding, the thaw might be a welcome change. And did I mention what happens to the ski slopes during the thaw? Buckets upon buckets of rain create uncharted rivers and streams on every trail.

I grew up in a house of eternal optimism. Even if it was raining the proverbial cats and dogs, we left our cozy suburban home on Friday afternoon for a weekend of skiing. My dad was convinced that it was snowing just over the border in New Hampshire. When it was still pelting rain in Manchester, he assured us that the snowline must be around Warner. Which of course, it wasn't. The snowline was more or less a few hundred miles north of Montreal.

Never phased, he pulled the car into the driveway and assured us that it was snowing on the top of King Ridge. At a mere 1,500 feet above sea level, the only one he was fooling was himself. Even as he spoke, I'm not sure he was buying his story.

Before snowmaking, the New Hampshire ski season was short and not for the faint of heart. Ten weeks was a good year. And Dad was insistent that we make the most of our season pass in that short time. Blizzards, ice storms, January thaw or blistering cold, it didn't matter. If the mountain was open, we were expected to ski. So, in spite of the foggy drizzle on Saturday morning, we headed to the mountain.

Juggling our skis, we'd slip and slid across the icy parking lot to the lodge. All the while, Dad had his eyes on the sky, looking for some glimmer of sunshine. After stalling over cups of coffee and hot chocolate, we finally put on our boots and skis and headed out the door. For one maybe two runs, we'd splash down the trail. Cold rain didn't just soak our parkas and ski pants, it managed to find a path and sneak down the backs of our necks. As nasty as ten or fifteen below is, is there anything more miserable than thirty-five degrees and raining?

Home we went to play Monopoly, put together jigsaw puzzles or read by the fire. Done right, the January thaw wasn't all that bad.

Within day or two, those balmy temps were replaced with more seasonable weather. The trails froze up hard and fast. The next weekend, sheets of pearl grey ice covered the ski slopes and shone dully in the cold winter sun. Always the optimist, Dad declared the downhill rink, "hard, packed powder!" And off we went, another day of adventure and skiing in New Hampshire.

Happy skiing and bon appétit!

Susan



Mac & Cheese with Roasted Broccoli & Sun-dried Tomatoes



Turn plain Mac & Cheese into a beautiful, bubbling casserole with veggies and Italian cheeses. Enjoy!

Serves 8-10

Butter

About 2 pounds broccoli florets, cut into bite sized pieces

Olive oil

Balsamic vinegar

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

1 onion, chopped

3 cloves garlic, minced

2 ounces grated Parmesan cheese

2 ounces grated Pecorino Romano

4 ounces grated Fontina cheese

8 ounces grated mozzarella cheese

1 pound pasta – cavatappi, farfalle, penne or elbow macaroni

1 1/2 tablespoons flour

1 cup warm whole milk or half & half

1 cup sour cream

1 teaspoon hot sauce

Pinch nutmeg

10-12 halves oil packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained and chopped

About 1/2 cup toasted pine nuts

3 tablespoons fresh chopped basil

1 tablespoon fresh chopped flat leaf parsley

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Butter a large, shallow baking dish and set aside.

Put the broccoli florets on a large rimmed baking sheet, drizzle with enough equal parts olive oil and balsamic vinegar to lightly coat, sprinkle with salt and pepper and toss to combine. Spread the broccoli in a single layer and roast at 400 degrees for about 10 minutes. Add the onion and more oil and vinegar if necessary, toss to combine and continue roasting for 5 minutes. Add the garlic, toss again and roast for 5 minutes more. Reserve.

Reduce the oven temperature to 350 degrees. Put the cheeses in a large bowl and toss to combine. Reserve. Cook the pasta in a large pot of boiling salted water according to package directions less 1 minute.

While the pasta cooks, make the sauce. Melt 1 tablespoon butter in a heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour, season with hot sauce, nutmeg, salt and pepper and continue cooking and whisking for 1-2 minutes. Slowly whisk in the milk and bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to low, simmer and stir until the sauce thickens, about 5 minutes. Put the sour cream in a bowl and, a little at a time, whisk in the warm sauce until smooth.

Drain the pasta, return to the pot and toss with the broccoli, tomatoes, pine nuts, herbs and sauce. Add two-thirds of the cheeses and toss again. Transfer the pasta to the prepared baking dish and sprinkle with the remaining cheeses.

Bake uncovered for 30 minutes or until piping hot and golden brown. Remove from the oven, let rest for 5-10 minutes and serve.