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**For young skiers, nothing beats February vacation.** As kids, some of our friends went to Florida for the sunshine or New York for the arts. The Nyes were more than happy to head to New Hampshire. By mid-February, the brutally cold winds of January had blown back to the North Pole. Even if the longest day was still months away, the sun waited until at least five to set. Every year the Nye kids looked forward to the break and a wonderful week in New Hampshire.



As soon as school got out on Friday afternoon, we headed home to grab duffels and cram bags of groceries into the station wagon. Dad was expected to leave the office early. If he wasn't home by four, his phone would start to ring. Instead of potential customers looking for quotes, it was his children demanding he head home. Since he was as excited as we were, Dad didn't argue. Dogs, turtles and kids piled into the car and we headed north.

**With an entire week to explore every slope and hidden glade, the pace was a little more relaxed.** Especially if Dad headed back to the office for a day or two! If Mom was in charge, it was okay to hit the slopes at the crack of ten, even ten-thirty. Without Dad, there was less pressure to get in our daily quota of twenty-five (or was it more?) runs. Mom didn't mind if we left before the last chair dropped its final load of skiers on top of the mountain. Heck, when Mom was in charge, we could leave at lunchtime if a nor'easter was blowing. We just couldn't tell Dad that we spent the afternoon putting jigsaw puzzles together or baking brownies.

**In any case, sitting around the house didn't last long.** As soon as we got a second wind, it was back outside for sledding or deck jumping. There was a fairly steep hill across the street from our house and most of the trees had been cleared for sledding. In a very snowy year, the stumps and boulders were not a problem. What you can't see; can't hurt you. Can it? Although no limbs were lost or broken, at some point, someone's parents, not mine, must have taken a second look at those rocks. That was that and we were banished from the hill. The trees and scrub soon grew back. Today, you'd never know that a death-defying run was hidden among the rocks and under the trees. To make up for the loss, we tried a little cross-country skiing. While fun, cross-country couldn't quite match the dangerous thrill of careening through the dark on the sledding hill.

**With a ten or fifteen foot drop, deck jumping also required a fair amount of snow.** Mother Nature usually complied by mid-February. Every weekend throughout December and January, we shoveled the deck, slowly but surely adding to the pile below. That first jump provided a wonderful combination of sheer terror and utter exhilaration. As teenagers, my sister and I discovered that it was a great opportunity for sixteen year old boys to show off. It still is.

**I hope that you are enjoying the thrills, spills and fun of winter.** Or at least sitting back and enjoying fond memories of winter wonderland vacations.

Bon appétit!

## Coq Au Vin

*Warm and cozy, coq au vin is the perfect dinner after a day on the slopes. Add a salad and serve the stew with warm crusty bread or smashed potatoes. Enjoy!*

Serves 4-6

2-3 ounces bacon, chopped  
 1/2 cup all-purpose flour  
 Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper  
 6 chicken thighs or a combination of thighs and legs  
 1 onion, chopped  
 3 carrots, chopped  
 3-4 stalks celery, chopped  
 4 cloves garlic, chopped  
 1 teaspoon dried herbs de Provence  
 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme  
 1/4 cup cognac or brandy  
 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard  
 2 cups dry red wine  
 2 cups chicken stock or broth  
 1 bay leaf  
 16 ounces mushrooms  
 8 ounces frozen pearl onions  
 Garnish: fresh, chopped parsley



Preheat the oven to 325 degrees.

In a large, heavy skillet or Dutch oven, cook the bacon over medium heat until crisp. Transfer the bacon to paper towels to drain and reserve.

While the bacon browns, season the flour with salt and pepper and lightly coat the chicken. Raise the heat to medium-high and brown the chicken, about 3 minutes per side. Reserve.

Put the onion, celery and carrots in the pot, sprinkle with herbs, season with salt and pepper and sauté for about 8 minutes. Add the garlic and sauté for 2 minutes more. Remove the pan from heat, add the cognac and mustard and stir to combine.

Return the pot to the heat and gradually stir in the wine and stock. Add back the bacon and chicken and bring to a simmer. Cover and transfer the casserole to the oven. Cook at 325 degrees for 30 minutes.



*Another recipe from Susan Nye:  
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While the chicken is cooking, heat a little olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms and cook until golden.

Add the pearl onions and mushrooms to the chicken, return the casserole to the oven and continue cooking for 15 minutes.

Carefully remove the chicken and vegetables from the pot and arrange on a large serving platter. Cover and keep warm.

Return the pot to the stovetop and reduce the cooking liquid by about half over high heat. Ladle some sauce over the chicken and vegetables, sprinkle with chopped parsley and serve. Pass any extra sauce.