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Join Me Around the Table for an Eat Well-Do Good Dinner!

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My mother loved Hospital Day. After Christmas and the Fourth of July, it was her favorite day of the year. Our family stumbled upon our first Hospital Day by a series of accidents. It started the previous winter. On a day trip to Pat's Peak, Dad missed the turn and we ended up at King Ridge, the upside down ski area. It was a great place for families and we returned more than once that winter. Come summer, my sister and I were sent off to camp in the midst of an early July heatwave. The bus had barely left the station before Mom, Dad and my little brother decided to beat the heat and head north for the long holiday weekend.



They went back to New London, where they discovered the crystal clear waters of Pleasant Lake. After years on the Cape, there were no worries of fog or inconvenient tides. The weather was perfect and the three of them were hooked. Right then and there, in spite of decades on the Cape, my parents abandoned Buzzard's Bay and never looked back. They'd already put down on a deposit on a rental but kissed it good-bye in favor of a musty cottage in the New Hampshire woods. It was a dicey decision since my grandparents lived on the Cape. I'd not sure what Mom and Dad came up with but they stammered some explanation and that was that.

On the first Saturday in August, the five of us arrived with our two dogs and duffle bags filled with swimsuits, shorts and t-shirts. Little did we know that Hospital Day was just hours away. Yes, it was Hospital Day then, not Days, and it was on Tuesday. If she was hooked before, Hospital Day sealed the deal for my mother. Mom loved the lake, the mountain and the relaxed tempo of the small town but she adored Hospital Day.

This admiration was in sharp contrast to her feelings about the two carnivals in our suburban hometown. She hated those two fairs. One was next to the police station and the second was run by the Sisters of Charity. It didn't matter; as far as she was concerned, these two events were either an accident or kidnapping ready to happen. Probably both.

Mom loved the innocence of Hospital Day. It was a small town country fair, run from start to finish by volunteers. There was not a chain-smoking, tattoo-wearing carnie in sight. She was worry-free and confident that her kids could wander at will. My brother John was four and delighted with the pony rides. At eleven, I was a bit more jaded and wondered why there was no Ferris wheel.

In addition to the easy innocence of the day, Mom was fascinated with the White Elephant table. It was something of a surprise, her attraction to this odd collection of not-quite-perfect tchotchkes and dust collectors. It was a surprise because Mom was never one for garage sales or flea markets. I guess she had too many other things to do on Saturday mornings.

But on the first Tuesday of August, the Hospital Day White Elephant table exerted a powerful, almost gravitational, pull on my mother. She would not, could not be rushed. Around she went, poking at a dusty lampshade here and contemplating an almost-complete set of hardly-chipped mugs there. Although she loved a bargain, Mom wanted more than that. She wanted something silly, preferably outrageous like a teapot shaped like an elephant or turtle or frog. She never found one, but every year, she made a point of buying at least one treasure. Whether she needed it or not.

Best of luck finding your white elephant this summer and bon appétit!

Susan

Orzo Salad with Lemony Pesto & Grilled Tomatoes

Local tomatoes and basil – two midsummer favorites! Enjoy them in to a tasty pasta salad. It's a perfect dish for a warm summer evening.

Serve 6-8

4-5 cups gently packed fresh basil leaves
 1-1 1/2 cups gently packed fresh flat leaf parsley leaves
 3-4 cloves garlic, minced
 Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
 Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
 About 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil and more for grilling the tomatoes
 8 ounces orzo pasta
 About 1/3 cup or to taste finely chopped red onion
 1/4-1/2 cup pine nuts, toasted
 About 2 ounces (1/2 cup) or to taste grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
 4-8 firm, smallish to medium-sized tomatoes, cut in half

Make the pesto: Put the basil, parsley, garlic and lemon juice in a food processor, season with salt and pepper and process until well combined. With the motor running, slowly add the olive oil and process until smooth. Makes about 1 1/2 cups and you'll need 1/4-1/2 cup for this recipe. If making ahead, cover and store in the refrigerator. Cover and store the extra in the refrigerator or freezer.

Cook the orzo in salted boiling water according to package directions. Drain well and transfer to a large bowl. Add the lemon zest, onion and pesto to taste and toss to combine. Tossing frequently, cool to room temperature, sprinkle with the pine nuts and 3/4 of the Parmigiano-Reggiano and toss to combine. If making ahead, cover and store in the refrigerator. Bring to room temperature before serving.



Preheat the grill to high.

Put the tomatoes in a bowl, drizzle with a little olive oil, season with salt and pepper and toss to coat. Place the tomatoes on the grill, cut side down and grill for 3-4 minutes. Turn and grill for 2-3 minutes more or until soft with nice grill marks.

To serve: mound the pasta in a deep platter or shallow bowl, place the warm tomatoes on top of the pasta and sprinkle the tomatoes with the remaining cheese.