Kitchen Cupboard

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By Rosemary K. Jackson



Betty Groff in the kitchen with her grandchildren

My birthday was Jan. 12 and daughter Tracy came up from Broomall and son Bill from Oley to continue the tradition of taking mom out for the occasion. We went just down the road from Traditions of Hershey to the Rising Sun in Campbelltown. However, it brought back memories of when the occasion used to mean a trip down to Mount Joy and a celebration at Groff's Farm Restaurant in Lancaster County and an evening with Betty and Abe Groff, our friends of long-standing.

Our memories include son Bill getting to know Betty and Abe's son Charlie and Bill has the distinction of being the first male waiter at the restaurant. His favorite memory was the night Tom Brokaw from NBC News was there doing a story on Betty's Pennsylvania Dutch cooking, and he had been assigned as the waiter for the Brokaw party at dinner. I remember we asked Bill if he had said anything to Brokaw. He said yes, when Brokaw asked him what dish he was serving, Bill responded, "That's Chicken Stoltzfus."

The restaurant is long gone and Betty Groff passed in 2015, but what better to remember her than her recipe for Chicken Stoltzfus and her famous dessert, Cracker Pudding, which you were always served first before your main dinner entree because, as Betty used to say, she wanted you to have dessert first so, if you ate too much, you would have already had dessert!

Chicken Stoltzfus
1 large roasting chicken (about 5 lbs.), cleaned and giblets removed
water to cover, about 1 1/2 quarts
2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. black pepper
pinch of saffron, crushed

In a heavy crockpot, add all of the ingredients and bring to a boil. Partially cover, simmering on medium heat for 1 hour or until tender and legs separate easily from body. Remove chicken, debone and remove skin. Strain the broth and skim off the fat. Reduce (or boil down) to about 4 cups of broth while chicken is cooling. Cut meat into bitesize pieces. Set aside. Sauce: 3/4 cup butter or part margarine 3/4 cup flour 4 cups broth 1 cup light cream or 1/2 cup each of milk and evaporated milk 1/4 cup finely chopped fresh parsley or 1/8 cup dried parsley pre-baked pastry squares using pie crust cubed chicken parsley for garnish

In a deep pan or pot, melt the butter and stir in the flour. Cook over medium heat until it bubbles and is golden. Add the strained broth and cream, stirring constantly. Cook until sauce comes to a boil. Simmer until thickened and smooth. Reduce heat and add the chicken and parsley.

Serve on a heated platter by placing pre-baked pastry squares on the bottom and sides of the platter. Pour the chicken mixture over the pastry, garnish and serve at once. The marvel of this dish is the combination of the chicken and flake pastry. If left to stand, the pastry will gradually absorb the sauce. Makes 6 servings.

Cracker Pudding
1 qt. milk
2 eggs, separated
2/3 cup sugar
2 cups (1 pkg) broken saltine crackers (not rolled into crumbs)

1 cup grated coconut, fine or medium shred
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1/2 recipe of Great Meringue (optional)

In a heavy 3-quart pot, heat the milk almost to the boiling point. In a bowl, beat the egg yolks and sugar until frothy and light. Gradually add to the hot milk, reduce heat to medium. Crumble the crackers into the hot milk, stirring constantly until the mixture comes to a boil. Add the coconut and stir until the pudding bubbles thickly or heavily. Remove from heat and add the vanilla. Beat the egg whites until stiff but not dry. Fold into the pudding, return to stove and simmer on low for a few minutes. Pour into serving dish and top with Great Meringue. Toast under the broiler until golden. The meringue gives it an elegant touch. Makes 6 servings.

Great Meringue
2/3 cup egg whites (approximately 6 large eggs)
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1/3 tsp. cream or tartar
1/4 tsp. salt

Combine all the ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Place over a pan of hot water and stir until mixture feels slightly warm to the back of your hand or finger (about 15 seconds). Remove the bowl from the water and beat with a mixer (making sure the beaters are clean and free of fat) on high speed until the meringue holds firm peaks, about 1-2 minutes. Do not overbeat or the meringue will be dry and hard to spread on top of pudding.