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Fresh, Frugal, and Fabulous: A Woman's Guide to Cooking with Life

Tricia Mahoney

Kennesaw State University, triciamahoney@yahoo.com

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**FRESH, FRUGAL, AND FABULOUS:
A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO COOKING WITH LIFE**

By

Tricia Mahoney

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts in Professional Writing in the Department of English

In the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, Georgia

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College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Kennesaw State University
Kennesaw, Georgia
Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of
Tricia Mahoney

Has been approved by the committee
For the capstone requirement for the Master of Arts in
Professional Writing in the Department of English
At the Summer 2010 graduation

Capstone committee:

Melanie Sumner
Professor Melanie Sumner, Member

Anne Richards
Dr. Anne Richards, Member

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

I used to write letters to my dead sister. As a fourth grader, I knew she was sick, but I just didn't realize she was *that* sick. Seventeen seems young for a heart attack, but Kathleen suffered from a condition called teratology of flow. Both valves, which pump the heart, were on the same side of her heart, preventing the natural pumping motion associated with the organ. It is kind of like being born with two left feet...but worse. She worked hard at breathing and living every day of her life, but managed to thrive until the fall of 1973.

In 1970s, doctors were just starting to routinely do open heart surgery but my parents procrastinated—or refused, I am not sure—but they never went the surgical route to fix Kathleen's heart. Thus, she grew up on blood thinners, receiving oxygen (she had her own tank beside her bed), and many suggestions from many doctors. I, being seven years younger, often tagged along for doctors' visits and lab work, did homework with her beside her bed, listening to the hum of the tank as she took slow deep breaths, and generally did my best to annoy my big but frail sister. Maureen, my other sister, was six years older than I was. Kathleen and Maureen were what the relatives called Irish twins.

Kathleen grew to be a lovely young woman, with the musical tastes of Simon and Garfunkel and Carol King, a love of poetry, and wild flower posters all over her room. She went to school and to church, and even had a date or two, she just “tired easily and needed her rest” more than a normal seventeen-year-old. Maureen shadowed Kathleen at

school, keeping an eye on her, but went to ride her horse each afternoon after school. In the evenings, the two often fell asleep in each other's rooms, sharing secrets and creating their own little club within the family. They were not naïve to the health crises in our family. Prior to my birth, Bridget, the third-born daughter, never seem to develop like other babies. It became clear to everyone but my mother that she was severely mentally retarded. Kathleen and Maureen would take turns holding her down while my mother attempted to change her diaper. By the time she was four, Bridget lacked any speech abilities or life skills, from holding a fork to potty training. My mom refused to institutionalize her youngest, until she was clearly pregnant with me and just could not physically manage Bridget. So through all those times, Kathleen and Maureen clung together emotionally and often seemed to sense each other's needs.

On the eve of her death, Kathleen was "babysitting" me while our parents sipped martinis at a University of Houston faculty party where my father was a tenured professor. Maureen, the ever-avid equestrian, often hit the door from the barn late into the evening and that night was no different, but unfortunately, she had a babysitting gig down the street.

Kathleen decided to walk down the street and cover Maureen's babysitting job until she arrived. She appeared well enough to me, since we were eating our hot dogs and watching *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* when she suggested we walk down to the Postivich's. The rest became a blur, because we never made it down there. She fell in one of the small uniform yards of the Houston suburb, her head barely missing the concrete of the neighbor's walkway. I remember running to get help. Soon there were neighbors and ambulances, and my mother screaming, her black beehive hairdo bouncing

as she ran to where my sister lay, and the medics frantically working on and around her. I watched the scene from a tree I climbed, and I sat there until Maureen found me. It was just getting black dark in the daylight savings time. She climbed up the Pin Oak tree somewhere near the crisis scene, still wearing her jodhpurs from the barn.

“You stink like your horse,” I said to her.

“I know. Let’s go take a bath.”

“She’s not coming back is she?”

“No. I don’t think she is.”

At the cemetery site, I found a smooth rock about the size of my 10-year-old palm. I shoved it in my white go-go boot. I insisted on wearing the white boots instead of the black Mary Jane shoes since I used to entertain Kathleen with my version of Nancy Sinatra’s *These Boots are made for Walking*. My mother, an emotional wreck, smelled like Virginia Slims, vodka, and Estee Lauder. She wore a black dress with a black cape edged with little bitty felt balls that I played with, rolling them in my fingers, as I sat next to her at the grave site. She paid me little mind. In my head, I hummed along with Nancy, the memory of Kathleen clapping for me in the kitchen as I imitated the female Sinatra using a spatula as my microphone.

Fidgeting in the metal chair, wedged between my crying mother and sister, I stared at the rock. It lay just below the creamy white coffin, and it seemed to be talking to mes. When the group stood and sang another round of Ave Maria, I grabbed the rock, slid it down in my boot, and limped for the rest of the day. That evening I ceremonially named the rock George (why George, I still do not know) and sat George on my window seat. My first letter to Kathleen, projecting my confusion and sadness, sat under George

for him to convey to her in his own angelic way. It made perfect sense to me: As a Catholic, I kneeled in front of fake statues and prayed, so my rock was like a natural statue made from God's earth. While my letters to Kathleen divulged my pain the first few months, they later evolved into a daily journal of my most mundane observations of growing up in the seventies, with a family besieged with guilt and sorrow blanketed with a strong Irish Catholic culture where some things were just never talked about.

Kathleen's death and the events leading up to it were painful for each family member, and we handled it each in our own way. Instead of the painful experiences of childhood breaking me down, the journaling was a source of greater strength and awakening.

Writing became a critical outlet, and a natural interest in school. As Joan Didion, in her essay, *Why I Write*, stated: "All I knew was what I couldn't do. All I knew was what I wasn't and it took me some years to discover what I was" (Burroway 19).

My education seemed to be a process of who I could please, and what I could eliminate as a natural talent. It was apparent to only me that I was good at a lot of things, but not great at any one thing in particular. As I progressed through high school, I played basketball, ran track, and worked on student newspapers. I rarely started on the 4A state championship, Victoria Stingarees, but I was good for relief for the number 14 in the country post and usually a basket or two. I ran a five minute mile, and hated every second of it; my dad, with the stopwatch, insisted I could do better. I graduated in one piece in the top 20% of my class, with only a scholarship to a nearby junior college. It was way too close to that stopwatch.

Missouri promised snow, and no parental drop-ins. At a small liberal arts school, I continued to explore the idea of writing while pursuing a degree in English. As part of

my work-study employment, I worked in the publicity department and was a college photographer. By the time I entered my senior year, I was editor of the student newspaper and former editor of the yearbook, a rarity for a junior. After graduation, I considered going to graduate school for a degree in journalism, but my dad demanded I apply to law school. I did apply, was accepted, but then got married to the first man I could find instead of going to law school. And although I raised three beautiful daughters that continue to reward my life with interesting experiences every day, I often remember that moment in which I ignored the voice inside my head. What I lacked: courage that I could provide a living for myself with my craft, courage that I could stand on my own and face the consequences, courage to disappoint my father. Trusting that voice would have been so much easier.

As I look at all the many mistakes I have made in my life, the most prevalent mistake I made and often continue to make is the essential to facing life: Trusting and loving my own intuition. My guttural instinct. Thus, returning to school to earn a Master of Arts in Professional Writing validated the voice in my head. I often think that maybe I was crazy to listen to that voice, but more often than not, I believe that I am far better for trusting my instinct. When friends or colleagues in real estate ask me why I returned to school when I'm closing in on 50, I often reply that it is much better than therapy or rehab from drinking too much Chardonnay at Bunko with the neighbors. And while there is some small truth to every snarky comment, I believe that in 2008, I edged between being numb from pain and living an empty life with no hope and passion. A lonely vacuum sucked the very confidence and desire for me to move forward each day. However, because of my stubborn and prideful nature, I think I had to be in such a state

of brokenness that the pain throbbed in my soul before I could move forward. Like a shattered vase, I had to glue each piece back together to try and figure out what made me fit together as a person. Making lists of my ideal life and things I wished I had completed became a template as I tried to re-create a new life.

Usually this kind of soul-searching evolves out of a tragedy. Many people end up broken at some point in their lives and have to step through the glass, sweep it up, and glue it all back together. Some folks go through far worse things and some seem to do things right the first time, never experiencing a shattered life. So when I hear of stories of cancer, death, incest, abusive marriages, etc., I know some people have endured far worse pain, and that compared to many around the globe, I have had a blessed life. My brokenness was a tired culmination of surviving an abusive marriage, dysfunctional family of origin, poor decisions on my part, and an economic housing crisis. But whatever triggered my dissatisfaction with my current life, I am eternally grateful for it because it propelled me to grow. Believe it or not, I found George and started journaling again. Ralph Keyes, in the *Courage to Write*, talks about the fear that has followed me around my entire life. While the journaling is therapeutic to me personally, I lack the courage to do anything more with it other than hide it in a locked trunk when I fill up a book. Because I had buried my desire to write years ago, my journaling was nothing more than private joys and ranting. My inner explorations stayed in a chest, but I need to crack open a subject here and there and slowly tread through these explorations. I'd like to create some meaningful fiction from these experiences to entertain or cause one to think twice about a subject. Keyes said, "We all keep thoughts of ourselves in a zone of privacy. The bigger the zone, the worse our writing. A rich vein of material usually hides

within our protected self” (Keyes 64). I thought it was enough that I decided to write again. The more I learned, the more I realized how much I still had to learn. The deep internal conflict that held me back to begin with, the dragon of senseless cowardice, must be slayed in order to translate my stories into a worthwhile manuscript. When Joan Didion stated, “Grammar is a piano I play by ear” (Burroway 20), I laughed and laughed as I realized that had been my philosophy for years. But returning to school knocked some sense into me. And with some good habits of adulthood, I now study grammar fifteen minutes a day with my morning coffee.

Octavia Bulter is quoted for saying the following: “Forget Inspiration. Habit is more dependable. Habit will sustain you whether you’re inspired or not. Habit will help you finish and polish your stories. Inspiration won’t. Habit is persistence in practice.”

I used to repeat the line “Habit is persistence in practice” every day. I never thought I would apply it to writing. That simple statement helped me become a top producing realtor in 1996. Prior to returning to school, I ran a fast-paced, high-producing real estate practice. As a single mom with three girls, I managed our life with fun and grace, which helps when you are earning great cash. I knew in 2001 that I had I better take stronger measures and start saving more money. When I pulled up to my house one day, it occurred to me that I worked so everyone else could work: the maid was deboning my chicken, the yard man was cutting my yard, a pool man had swung by to do the monthly check, a math tutor patiently pouring knowledge into one of the girls. I knew then the machine I ran had to keep running. But after 9/11, the buyers were skittish, the renters in my investment homes had left or lost their jobs. It was not until March of 2002 that things seem to get better, and I think it was because the war started and there were no

major terrorist attacks because of our presence in Iraq. Home sales continued to climb and interest rates were good. Mainly I sold homes to transferring executives or to investors for their real estate portfolio.

I did three “flips” a year, buying slightly distressed or older homes and renovating them for profit. I even built a few new homes for resale purposes. I had a full-time assistant and still worked at some point every day. One Christmas, I had a contract with a short turn-around. The sellers were on a European cruise and finally called right as we started carving the turkey. I sat in the kitchen and negotiated a contract while my family ate the meal I prepared. But I did what I had to do, and I was rewarded for the effort and sacrifice of family time here and there. I took for granted the amount of houses I sold each month.

When my oldest daughter graduated from high school in 2005, I knew I had not really saved enough for college, so I sold the larger home and really cut back on expenses. Thank God I did because by 2006, the market was really slowing down. I laughed one night in October of 2007 when the media finally admitted we were in a housing slump, economic recession. I screamed, “Oh, REALLY?” I knew we were in a crisis by the summer of 2006.

Prior to the big slump, I averaged three or four closings a month. Then it slowed to one or two houses a month. Now in 2010 I am averaging one house a month, and I am working harder than ever to sell just that one house a month. It is not unusual to have zero closings for two and three months, which means absolutely no cash flow. None. Zip. And there is no unemployment checks for self-employed small business owners. The National Association of Realtors boasts of 1.2 million members, which

includes realtors, brokers, appraisers, property managers, and commercial agents. All of whom pay for their own insurance and business expenses. Now in 2010, I think the trickle down-and-around effect took place, as employees were laid off from lumber yards to carpet factories to teachers being furloughed, all because the decrease in home prices and collected taxes have made cities adjust their yearly budgets. It's amazing how the housing sector and the liberal lending practices spiraled to the internal economic meltdown of America. Theodore Roosevelt is credited with saying that it's a recession when your neighbor loses his job, and a depression when you lose your own job.

So I guess, for all intents and purposes, the loss of sales was like a loss of job, which lead to a mini-meltdown, complete with belly-aching, since I had no buy out, benefits, or salary to ride through the crisis. Selling real estate since 2007 has been worse than being unemployed. Sellers text and call about why their homes are worth less, and why has it been on the market for over six months? I shudder each day, sharing the market data and articles from Trendgraphix to tax assessments. As I traveled from client to client, I pondered how our early American ancestors didn't collect unemployment when the locusts ate their crops. Yet I pouted, worried, and compared myself to employed citizens as I drove by restaurants and saw the cars in the parking lots, commenting that *they* can eat out with their families. And in the pity party, I started to wonder if maybe it is my skills, my attitude, or karma keeping me from selling houses. Nothing is happening but life around me. The kids still need money for college, bras, and shoes. And talk about resentment. It became apparent that for all my good intentions, I created spoiled, over-indulged children. The recession was a rude

awakening for everyone in my family, complete with slammed doors, shouts, and tears. It made me feel even worse than I already felt. According to Susie Ormond, women love to take care of our loved ones, and I definitely derived satisfaction and my own personal self-worth by providing for my children. With no regular income flowing in, I cut back as much as I could, but it was like being the only one singing in a sing-along while the others sang loud and strong and messed me up. The girls were disappointed in me and mad, over-entitled, and probably scared. College was paid for by the Pell Grant, school loans in their own names, and work-study job as part of their financial aid. What seemed like a burden to them was an expectation for me when I was raised. Back in 1980, I paid for most of my school as well as my clothes and my spending money. I wanted my children to have a stress-free suburban childhood complete with summer camps, yearly beach vacations, a car at seventeen, college without loans. But my economy, as shaky as the government's, had no bail out. Our bail out was getting jobs and loans, and living thrifty.

Now my children say the same thing as I did as a teenager: they would not be like their mother and that they will save more money and not end up broke. Yeah! I hope so. However, after these four years of sudden sparseness, each one of us is smarter with our money, more grateful for our opportunities and more cognizant of the world around us, from the national issues at hand to global issues, to a basic consciousness of what is really vital and what is complete fluff.

Perhaps the most important thing was that I too went back to school. I probably should have gone back and retooled with a computer science degree or medical technology, but I decided to start listening to the voice in my head. I can always claim

the voice is loud and end up in a mental institution (just kidding). I will incorporate this degree into making money. I am listening to the voice, journaling, and placing George the rock on my prayers.

Pursuing the MAPW degree enhanced my skill set in three major ways. One: to get over being afraid of technology. I used to earn enough to pay someone to do my fliers and virtual tours for my real estate listings, and I paid way too much out of sheer fear and ignorance. Now, I am saving money and getting them done when I need them, and the fliers and virtual tours have the creative edge that I learned in coursework from the MAPW program.

In addition, I know the lingo of the new technology and am not afraid to go ahead and tackle a self-propelled tutorial on a new website or technology concept like Twitter or Wordpress. When I do get stuck, I can ask a techie expert, because now I at least have a general idea of *what to ask*. I can actually converse about the problem and not have a glazed over deer-in-the-headlights kind of look.

One of the most interesting events that happened in researching for this capstone project was the creation of a local farmers market in my little suburban city. The research came from methods I learned in the MAPW curriculum combined with a the confidence to listen to my intuition. I researched by traveling to other markets, conducting interviews, and attending seminars by leaders out of Washington D.C. (who started the latest market exclusively for Michelle Obama) and Blowing Rock, North Carolina. With this data and my newfound ability to create a basic PowerPoint, I successfully wrote a new city ordinance and had it successfully voted in May.

May 18 was one of our very first markets, with only five local farmers and several food artisans, including cheese, bread, and spices. Over 800 people visited. By the time June rolled around, the market averaged over 1,000 visitors, with a total of 33 vendors, many giving up market spots in the greater Atlanta area, to join our market. Now, in the height of the season, the farmers are selling about 1,500 pounds of produce a week, and making close to \$1,000 a week. Most are thrilled that their sales are up 20% from other markets in the metroplex, yet they are home from the local Peachtree City Market within ten minutes. Several restaurants are starting to send their chefs on Wednesday and Saturday mornings in order to add items to their menu. Since Farm-to-table is a hot topic, this is just the tip of the iceberg as to where this market could end up as a community group and as a viable economic source for me. As marketing director, I am paying myself a mere \$100 a week, but the farmers' market has been beneficial in other ways too: Several customers from my real estate practice have seen me at the market, which has increased my listing base to one or two a month that I would not have had otherwise. In addition, I am a featured speaker at two Chamber of Commerce events in August. I am hoping to get the 501(C)3 official nonprofit tax-deferred status this fall so I can research and write proposals for a community garden and educational program that travels from school to school.

In essence, listening to my voice has not made me financially solvent, but it is leading me in a new direction that will be rewarding and sustainable at the very least. The combination of innate marketing skills with new knowledge and a renewed commitment to learn, practice, and listen to my inner voice has forever changed my life, and in turn, others I directly and indirectly influence.

A NOTE ON THE RECIPES

My love of food began as a journey of discovery as a teenager of the seventies. My dad supplemented his teaching salary as a football coach, and to that end was health conscience, a no-nonsense eater always ready to refrain from eating too much salt or sugar. Then came the vitamin craze with fish oil at every meal, and the no-fat craze, and I absorbed and incorporated my own mantra of healthy eating to a human extent, but not an obsessive extent. My mother, an artist, exercised her creativity in the kitchen as well, and was not opposed to new trends and time saving measures. Our first microwave commanded the kitchen and was as big as the kitchen itself, and my mother nuked everything in sight. Thus, my food experiences were healthy, sometimes exotics out of an new Indian cookbook my mother bought while purchasing incense, to pre-packaged American with cheese whiz, rice and broccoli casserole anchoring a plate with microwaved cod. What both parents emphasized was conscious eating, to fill the body with good fuel, and to be artistic and interesting in the endeavor. I absorbed most lessons, but I contend a good honest dessert is better than any fat-free brownie mix nuked in a microwave.

With that in mind, the recipes included in this book are primarily intended for cost-conscience individuals, especially single mothers, who want to provide basic healthy meals for their families without breaking the bank. To this end, the recipes often include white flour, white sugar, butter, etc. because they are usually cheaper and more cost-effective to use than their organic counterparts. Most can definitely be substituted with

whole-wheat flour, stone ground versions, organic sugars, from stevia substitutes and the like. More and more discussions are taking place about the meaning of organic and the industrialization of the food sources. Thus, I felt like it requires a separate discussion of the agribusiness of organic versus sustainably grown produce, massive food production issues, so I made the decision to keep to the basics in regards to ingredients. It is a philosophical challenge to eat as chemically free as possible, and I myself would rather eat a product made with locally grown items, with very few chemicals, though not certified organic based on the government label, than a product shipped 1,500 miles grown supposedly organic. It takes a concerted effort to eat well these days, and the recipes included intend to inspire a reader to take their culinary spending and eating habits to a new and different level. Being aware and taking action where action can be taken continued my culinary journey and my desire to expand that journey exists today. Thus, the recipes included are healthier (and tastier) than the store-bought or restaurant-bought versions, foods that entertain energy, whether it be physical or creative energy, and foods that remind us to slow down and enjoy the journey whether you're on a smooth road or bumpy road, food is the fuel for life.

CHAPTER ONE: HUMBLE PIE

At age twenty-nine, I was the sole provider for my three daughters, ages seven, five, and one, with only \$114.00 in the bank. After years of marriage, replete with constant put-downs and self-defeating behavior, I divorced my husband to make a new life for myself and my daughters. As I embarked on this new phase of my life, I remembered a few lessons, and some pertinent advice, learned in high school.

“If you have good looks, a good job, and good credit, you can do just about anything in this world,” Mrs. Oyens, my high school home economics teacher, stated as we strolled out of class one day. In 1980, her classes were sprinkled with witty womanisms that I recalled often as I marched my way through adulthood. A sassy teacher, Mrs. Oyens gave sage advice, post the bra-burning Gloria Steinem years, that kept me goal-oriented in many ways. Subconsciously, I wanted to be like her. The epitome of the perfect mom who taught school, she glided through our south Texas high school in a Grace Kelly sort of way, joking candidly with students without ever losing her manners, and she earned our respect by treating us all as important individuals. With eyes in the back of her head, she relegated her re-named Home Economics class to Family Living as she tried to social engineer boys into the kitchen and girls to think for themselves. She had wisdom without being old, and her natural friendliness made it easy to absorb her opinions and advice.

One day she separated the boys from the girls and had the boys make a meal in our pretend classroom kitchen, while she took us girls out in the hall to the stairs to make us practice walking up and down the stairs—like ladies. Candies, the backless shoes with three-inch wooden heels, were in fashion at the time, and just about every one of us had on some version of the shoe. Our fashion sense still conformed like seventh graders, so Mrs. Oyens felt it necessary for the female seniors of the class of 1980 to learn the appropriate way to maneuver stairs in heels. “Glide, ladies! Glide! There is nothing sexy about a woman who cannot walk in heels.” Now, while this lesson was not in the sanctioned classroom book, I don’t take a large flight of stairs without thinking about that day.

Perhaps her most profound statement, that I often recalled throughout the years, was her final remark to the senior girls. Signing various yearbooks, laughing and talking about her years in college, she flung, “...and soon you all will be off and married and bringing by your babies to see me here at school, thanking me for those cooking lessons! But most importantly, remember this: Know how to be a lady in every room in the house. The key to a happy marriage is to be a cook in the kitchen, a lady in the living room, and a whore in the bedroom.” Years later, her words rang true as I struggled to be the perfect wife, when neither one of us had a clue how to be a couple, let alone a team for life. While her words had merit, they didn’t seem to be enough. What I needed to be taught wasn’t in the curriculum: how to deal with broken hearts, families, blended families, and chasing down child support. Ultimately, I relied on her statement of good looks, good job, and good credit to get by. Despite obstacles along the way, I created a good life.

Although I still often trip on any given set of stairs, I can feed an army if I need to, make decisions, and do just fine with or without a marital status.

If I could write the curriculum for a Home and Family course, I would require a refresher course or continuing education course every ten years, at age thirty, forty, fifty, sixty. Why? Because it is human nature to get off track. Look at the gym attendance in January and February in any city of any state and then look again by June. The average rate of member retention is only 72.4% by the end of the year (International Health, Racquet, and Sportsclub Association). Many people start out the year with the intention to work out regularly, but most of them give up before the year is out.

Most of us live with good intentions and many of us lead perfectly “successful” lives. We are a nation of people who live with good intentions, but many of us often fall short. What we fail to hear in high school is really what we need to most remember: At some point in your life, you will be tired. Many will give up and just barely exist; others will recover from pitfalls and grow stronger. Be ready. It will happen to you. Thus, a refresher course at various intervals, particularly at mid-life or after a traumatic event such as a job loss, divorce, death would be helpful, maybe even life saving. It can be the smallest of things that finally puts a person over the edge at mid-life.

For example, I would never have believed that someday as I drove to an important meeting I'd glance in my side mirror and see a ginormous chin hair protruding from my face. How does that happen? And how did I miss it? And weight gain. Not I'm-depressed-and-keep-eating weight gain, but I'm living and doing and yet all of a sudden, I'm forty-five and nothing fits. What the hell? There must be a group of female angels that love to wreak havoc in my middle age and I just don't understand the divine reason

yet. I do know that weight and women have a long history together and I, along with most, struggle with the constant battle to conform to the world's expectations regarding the perfect figure, plus my own expectations, which equal unrealistic expectations. By now, in my middle age, some expectations got burned in the trash pile (but I still refuse to have loose chin hairs). I think the goals and weight should be as individual as the person who lives in her body. Bottom line: Do I feel I am at my best physical self, and what do I do each day to achieve and maintain my best self? I ask myself this often. Yeah, I was a size six at age twenty-three. And my best self at forty-eight is a size eight on occasions but most comfortable in a size ten. I have wrinkles, a road map of my life. I could get Botox, a fake tan, and look like an aged prune, but I'd rather travel to a place I have not seen before. So while I struggle with my aging, I am more worried about keeping up the energy it takes to recover from mistakes. If you need a little free motivation, go to your local high school graduation, whether you know someone graduating or not.

Every spring, we as a society practice the rite of graduation, with motivational speeches at every high school and college commencement. While the advice is specifically aimed at the graduates, if even one piece of advice is implemented, it can be invaluable. However, in light of the moment, few hear between the lines to register to long-term memory how tired you will be when the inevitable obstacle appears. So, is it the obstacle itself or a person's energy level when faced with a crisis that is the true obstacle? With focus and energy, any issue derives a desired outcome. What no one can really tell is how to re-boot when you crash.

No question, middle age takes more work. Exhausted and spent, I struggled with more than loose chin hairs. Career-wise, my business had tanked, and the expenses and

overhead had gotten out of control. Another little fact I did not take head to: You need more money than you save. Save and diversify. But mostly save. I'll say it again: SAVE, dammit!

Women in general are spenders. And I was no different. It made me feel good to provide for my daughters the things that I did not have in my childhood. And if you read and talk to most Americans, I am not alone. I may be under the bridge, but I can either be a bag lady or I can get some 'getty up' and re-build.

It's 2010 and we in the United States have been in an economic slump since 2007. Some people just keep spending, just like the government. These are precarious times, and my industry, real estate, led us into the mess. And I didn't save enough to live through this length of a slump. Many of us have less money than before, whether it was invested in the stock market or real estate. Yet, no one really likes to talk about it on a personal level. Folks will comment as a nation or as a concept, but people are uncomfortable admitting their level of failure in this area of their lives. And it is hard when you are tired. Just thinking about it makes you tired. I wanted to crawl back to childhood and have a huge do-over...

But then I woke up. I attempted more sleep, but when I woke up and it was still there: my life, my children, and my problems. I needed a refresher course or a course on life. Night after night I endured another fretful night of sleep: shoulding and coulding myself into further exhaustion.

I longed for the stereotypical mid-life crisis, complete with a red sports car with a young hottie. I wanted the hot car and disposable cash, jetting around the city, going to fine restaurants. Since women in their forties are fashionable, coined "cougars," I

imagined myself shirking all responsibility and driving off in a white Jaguar with tan leather seats, with a thirty-ish man from Italy (of course). But who would take care of me later? Who would take care of my mom, complete the FAFSAs for my college-age children, etc?

Yeah, like I'm headed off to the car lot right now to buy the convertible—in my dreams. But a more accurate picture of mid-life is a tired wrinkled person with about \$8,000 in credit card debt, two to three kids, a mortgage, aging parents, a job they would love to improve or change careers all together. I know I am not alone, but it sure feels like I'm alone. After all, no one wants to admit anything—just look at the parking lot of restaurants on a Friday night. How many should really be going out to eat?

In my darkest of places I often compared myself—the worst thing you should really do—and fell into a complete pity party. Intellectually I knew better, but I did it anyway. And I got up each day and kept moving and working, but with a heavy heart and a fake smile.

I have a friend who works in downtown Atlanta. She absolutely hates all the homeless people, because many are on crack and are quite verbally crazy. Her true fear is that one will be violent towards her. She arrives in daylight and leaves in daylight, and walks with other office workers to her car. Safety in numbers is her motto. One day I picked her up for lunch on a side street by her office building. There was a petite black woman with hot pink house shoes, red shorts, and thin grey tank top covering her emaciated chest. Her hair stood straight up about six inches, a comb resting crookedly, like a gapped toothy smile. Her arms and hands were open wide and she was talking to the air. I couldn't resist, so I rolled down my window.

“Hey! Who ya talking to?” I asked her, my car about two feet from her. She approached my car and said, “Why, my angel. She’s right there.” And she pointed to the empty space in the road.

“Really? I can’t see her. What does she have on?”

“Oh, she’s naked. Cause she’s hot. It be a hot day in Atlanta. And since no one can see her but me, she naked.”

“Oh. I see. Whatch ya’ll chatting about?”

“Oh, she be telling me you be coming by. She be telling me you have blessings for me.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. She saying she be sending me an angel today and you must be her, cause here you are.”

My friend jumped in the car and scolded me all the way to the restaurant. She sees homeless people so often that she is immune to their begging, but I felt connected to the woman, because I realized that could be me if I didn’t get it together. And despite her outfit, and her smell, she still managed to get by. She grabbed her opportunities however they presented themselves and begged for enough money to eat each day. How was she different than anyone in sales?

After lunch, I suddenly directed my car to one of my favorite fishing spots along Sequin River in Georgia. I learned to fly fish for my fortieth birthday, so it was a good spot to ponder how I was going manage through the rest of my life.

About two hours later, before reaching my spot, I stopped along the way at a Super Wal-Mart and grabbed my supplies: index cards, pens and colored pencils, a

notebook, wine, cheese, water, grapes, a cheap blanket and a pillow. I considered living in the woods for a day or two. Would I become homeless?

With my picnic of wine and cheese around me, I started listing my true goals—not the ones that sound all pretty at the commencement speeches, but my fears, realistic goals, and some dreams so that I could get some sort of daily blueprint that motivated me to keep moving.

None of this is profoundly original. There are sections and sections of motivational books in bookstores, yoga classes, teas, counselors, pole-dancing classes, you name it—thousand of ideas to overcome a mid-life slump. But for me, I wanted more than a recharged battery. I wanted peace. If I am going to have to work the rest of my life, and if I am going to have to make up for lost investments and bad relational decisions, how do I not let the baggage weigh me down? How do I transcend past it all, or do I give up and take my baggage to the bridge?

I divided the index cards by color: green, hot pink, orange, yellow, and white. With the white stack I just started writing my dreams of who I wanted to be, do, and have. As I would do as part of a focus group for an organization, I wrote a mission statement for myself. This took some time and evolved even after I worked on it several more sessions. What happened that afternoon was more of a moment of reconciliation with my disappointments and failures. I decided to move on and get a plan. So let's get a visual: On my blanket I had the four stacks of colored index cards, the white stack in the middle, a notebook in my hand, and my wine and picnic off to the side. I doodled and made lists in the notebook and then revised many items into goals. I divided the sections into quadrants: spiritual goals on green cards, physical goals on yellow cards, career and

fiscal goals on blue cards, family goals on hot pink cards. Within each category I listed positive activities that would lead to an actual big goal. In my notebook, I listed all the things that could prevent me from living true to my goals. I do not think I could have done this exercise any earlier in my life. You have to be ready to get real with yourself. As necessary as it was to note the negative, only the positive action items went on the goal cards. For example, if my goal was to lose ten pounds in six months, it had four actual activities that would help achieve that goal.

I made the list to look like this:

GOAL: I will lose ten pounds by July 1 and buy a size eight dress.

- Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, I will do Pilates and walk 2.5 miles.
- Tuesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, I will walk 5 miles. (Rest on Fridays.)
- I will only eat 1300 calories a day and I will record them.
- I will eat small amounts often by packing my lunch and baggies of healthy snacks.
- I will eat breakfast every day.

Some of my goals reinforced my good habits, and I made a very specific schedule to minimize my bad habits. I literally read every day on a pink index card that I enjoyed being on time to all appointments. And you know what? I started leaving a little earlier, stopped cramming in too much, and arrived to appointments on time. By listing my average day, I could see where I wasted a lot of time. There was no way to read and do everything I wanted based on my current schedule. There are 168 hours in a week. After

working an average of 50 in real estate, sleeping 49 hours, eating an average of 10 hours a week, waiting in traffic for 14 hours a week, I realized how precious time is.

Television? Facebook? All needed to be monitored.

I allowed myself to watch to TV shows during the week, by scheduling. I scheduled my news time, my chat time with my children, even my wine time with girlfriends. It felt rigid at times, but I knew I needed the discipline. I have to say I did not like it or live it as consistently as intended, but it overall worked in creating some new habits, and got some positive momentum going. By following the goal system that I created, and not another motivational book or a Bible study, I owned it. Have you ever read something, knowing it was good, but still felt overwhelmed at the end of reading it? Up to my point of almost wanting to be homeless, I felt the same way. With a little bit of momentum going, other positive books and ideas seemed to be another reminder that I was in a funk. My little index card system was not as easy to implement as it was to read each day, and I wanted to just take an antidepressant or check into a spa in the desert for six weeks, but it was cheap, did not require health insurance, and it worked for me.

My mission statement evolved, and I attained a few of my goals. Better yet, I felt like I could get up in the morning and look forward to my years of working, as it was my daily mantra, my reason for living. It wasn't so I could retire and do nothing; it was so I could live and work, and enjoy working.

My mission: To live a balanced life in which I earn a living that contributes to the world by helping people provide a home for themselves, eat and live authentically, motivate and entertain through my written work, and get paid well.

In addition to accomplishing my goals, I tithe, give time to my family, friends, and worthwhile causes to improve the human experience. What's your mission?

CHAPTER TWO: MEETING WITH LEFTOVERS

I remember the day I took my daughter, Julia, who was 15 at the time, to the movies. I struggled to stay connected with her as she entered her teen years. She'd rather hang out with her friends than with me. I insisted on some time together, so we analyzed which show, which location (a challenge when you live in a metro area), and what we would do after our movie.

Along the way, I reminisced with her about other movies we had seen together, anticipating the dark arena and cool air conditioning on a hot Georgia day. We stood in line, talked about the stars as if we were personal friends of theirs, and anticipated the comfy seats in the new state-of-the-art theatre, the popcorn, and Coke. Could we get butter on our popcorn? Sure. We finally got up to the line, I passed my debit card through the plexiglass to the do-I-have-to-be-here attendant, and over the loudspeaker she announced my card had been declined. A silence waved through the line. I dug for cash. Immediately, Julia stated that it's OK, she'd rather not see the movie anyway. We stepped out of line and ended up back in the car and headed for home.

I forgot about the automatic debits that hit my account. With a negative sixteen dollars in my bank account, I swore always to have a back-up twenty dollars in my wallet.

For saving purposes, I had taken what little emergency funds I had in my savings account to a small bank that could not be found on every corner, with no debit card. I

wanted it to be difficult to break into that account. But embarrassed in front of my daughter that I had no money, I would have gotten into the account at any cost, gone to the movie, and probably for an overpriced meal afterwards, complete with the Death by Chocolate for dessert.

Instead, I admitted my mistake and we went home, a little quiet, and put on a movie from our own collection. Was she disappointed? Probably. Was I embarrassed? Absolutely. But my financial life would never improve if I didn't start facing reality. Not only was I making less than half of what I used to make, but I had to watch when and how my money flowed through my account. It is hard to have fun when you are financially treading in deep, shark-infested waters. And it was hard to connect with a daughter who was scared I had no money.

Ultimately, we all want to feel safe in all situations, and our children trust us to have enough to provide. Yet we get sucked in the tornado of spending along with our fellow consumers, and kids latch on to our wallets like leeches in the rain forest afraid of being extinct. Now my situation was certainly different than most. Most people have a regular paycheck. I had big paychecks, then no paychecks. "Feast or famine" was a common phrase in our household. However, it didn't make it easier when there were no real estate closings in the horizon. With an increased vigor to save, more serious cutbacks ensued. Every, and I mean every, penny had a purpose.

At first I rocked along through the beginning of the housing crisis, thinking it would get better and didn't really alter my spending habits to the severity of the times ahead. It meant nothing to schedule forty dollar hair cuts for the girls and myself. But we should have been at a Great Clips with coupons. I would go to my card game, with a

large shrimp ceviche appetizer, a twenty dollar bottle of wine, a ten dollar gift for the hostess, and my ten bucks for the betting pool. In the months ahead, I suddenly became too busy to attend.

At first, I didn't care about going out or seeing people. In fact, I had nothing good to say, so why bother? The green-eyed monster living inside my head and I had caustic conversations at most functions, which made being pleasant even harder. Did I really want to hear about the fabulous trip Nancy just went on with her husband? Or how someone just got their a mole removed? My thoughts were: "You have a husband, and you have healthcare. I can't relate to either of you, so why am I sipping wine that I really can't afford with you?"

Staying away from expensive social gatherings is a must when getting finances under control. And it is very hard to say no, or not let others know that you are in a financial crisis, if for no other reason than personal pride. Who wants to admit to their friends that I can't afford to do something they don't even think twice about?

Gossip is bound to happen. People love to gossip about others' misfortunes. I think it is because they are secretly afraid it could happen to them. And they're right. The length and the severity of the latest recession illuminated the vulnerability of most people and large entities, from AIG to Fannie Mae, creating the opportunity for folks to make some serious changes. Yet, when I pass by restaurants, they are full. The National Restaurant Association reports \$580 billion in sales so far for 2010, estimating that average households spend \$2,698 on food away from home (The National Restaurant Association). People probably want to socialize more, feeling the need to discuss their very basic survival issues.

For about six months I stopped going to any social functions. From business groups, at fifteen dollars a breakfast, to card games and birthday parties—I literally saved about two hundred dollars a month. Saved? I didn't have to spend it; I just didn't try and spend it. Either way, it was one less thing to worry about. However, I did notice my sales were continuing to decrease in frequency.

Real estate is a people business, and most of my business is derived from networking. Working on a committee at the kids schools, gardening club, bunko, the usual suburban social outlets provided me a chance to run into people. Often business came my way through social networking the old-fashioned way, prior to Facebook and other social networking sites.

I carefully began adding back my social outlets, often working it backwards: if I had sixty dollars in discretionary income until the next closing, what was the optimum way to spend it? Lunch dates seemed frivolous, yet important. They became coffee dates. Savings: ten or more dollars. If you need to treat your guest, you are only out the five-dollar overpriced coffee versus the twelve-dollar overpriced salad. Try this for frugality: you order hot water and add a lemon, stating you're on a health kick. Most places only charge you a dime. The important thing was to socialize with your friend or work associate, not spend money. If it's a really good friend, have a cup of tea or java at home and make some banana bread. Put on your own jazz on the radio to create your own coffee shop atmosphere.

If you're not shuffling kids around, Saturdays are often great days to get together with friends. Host a come-as-you-are coffee party. Your friends should come over, un-showered, in pajamas, workout clothes, jeans, or whatever, and bring their favorite

mug. The focus is the time together, not how clean your house is or is not, who wears what, or who has done what, etc.

I like to call my Saturday mornings “think tanks.” Gather friends and associates, who are different from you by design and by nature, in different career genres. If you are an artist, cultivate a friendship with an engineer. If you are an introvert, have a few extroverts. Choose your group based on differences and explain the purpose as a think tank discussion. Each personality and career person adds a different dimension to the problem by generating their unique perspective on an issue. Try this in the most casual, basic setting, and have each person suggest an area where they could use some fresh thoughts. They may enter tired and empty from a busy week, but leave full of ideas that give them energy and hope. Don’t worry about your home or your refreshments. Make the discussion the focus.

Naturally, setting the environment to generate a good discussion is important. I have always, always found food to be the great equalizer. Warm drinks when it is cold, and cool drinks when it’s hot, invite friendship. Keep it simple, but offer something. Hot chocolate and spiced cider are seasonal favorites. Or even peppermint tea—cheap and delicious. The important thing is to make your guests comfortable enough to contribute to the conversation. Start the discussion and pull your introverts into the discussion early. Each think tank gets better and better as people value the wisdom of the others and look forward to each get together.

If you need to have a party with alcohol and you have little to no money for it, make it a tasting event. Set some really creative but low-cost financial parameters for each guest so you do not burden your guests. For example, do a red wine tasting: each

guest brings a bottle of wine from a foreign country that costs less than ten dollars.

Devise a general card with a list of qualities for each category. Folks share in the cost of the alcohol for the party, focus on tasting the wine rather than drinking a bottle each, and you entertain without breaking the bank. Serve mini-pizzas with a variety of toppings made from a homemade crust for the gourmet chef in you, or use a ten-cent can of biscuits as the base of any pizza to make appetizers easy and very cheap. You can make pizzas with caramelized onions and goat cheese for about twenty-five cents a serving—no one could get that in a frozen pizza.

In general, people like to bring something to a party. Expand the idea of tasting to beer, or any specialty drink. I have done large tables on my driveway for individual margarita stations sponsored by each guest. Much like a chili cook-off, prizes and bragging rights are big motivators. Have fun and enjoy your friends. Simplicity and creativity are key. No one really cares what your house looks like or if your linens match. If someone does, don't invite them. If you have a social must, do so, but forego the anxiety. Remember, in the big scheme of things, nothing is that important.

There may be months when, as you re-structure your financial life, you do no entertaining, you go to no movies, no coffee dates, or even a cheap taco run. Make it a game with yourself and your kids. My daughter and I got caught up in organizing pictures. We alphabetized our videos and watched them based on the alphabet. We cleaned closets and had two garage sales. I eventually built up some emergency savings and we scheduled a special date once a month. No longer did we take anything for granted. Everything had a place and a ranking financially. We valued our outings together and our tenacity to make wise choices with our 'extra' money.

RECIPES

Appetizers

Bruschetta

Caramelized Onion Pizzas with Goat Cheese and Toasted Walnuts

Herb Appetizer Cheesecake

Party Perfect Mini Quiches

Sliced Pears with Blue Cheese and Toasted Pecans

Spiced Pecans

Summer Vegetable Ceviche

Sunset Sangria

Dips

Corn Dip

Curry Vegetable Dip

Lean and Mean Bean Dip

APPETIZERS

Bruschetta

2 cups chopped tomato
1 cup chopped red bell pepper
1 cup chopped yellow pepper
1 cup chopped purple onions
¼ cup chopped fresh basil
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
2 teaspoons lemon juice
4 garlic cloves: 1 peeled and minced, 3 peeled and halved
1 teaspoon dried oregano or 1 tablespoon fresh oregano
Fresh ground pepper to taste
8 slices Italian bread

In a large mixing bowl, combine tomato, red and yellow bell peppers, onion, basil, vinegar, lemon juice, minced garlic, oregano and pepper. Toss thoroughly.

Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour. Preheat broiler.

Arrange bread on broiler rack. Broil about 2 minutes per side or until browned.

Remove bread from oven and rub top of bread with garlic halves. Discard garlic. Top bread with a mound of salad mixture and serve.

Caramelized Onion Pizzas with Goat Cheese and Toasted Walnuts

2 large onions
¼ cup butter
¼ cup olive oil
¼ cup brown sugar
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
Biscuit dough or Martha White pre-packaged crust
Crumbled goat cheese
Toasted walnuts

To caramelize the onions:

Slice 2 large onions into ¼ inch slices. Sauté in ¼ cup butter and ¼ cup olive oil. Add ¼ cup brown sugar and cook until they are limp, brown and almost crispy, which takes about 30 minutes. Just before they are finished, add 2 tablespoons of balsamic vinegar and continue to cook until it is absorbed.

Set aside. Roll out your own homemade pizza crust. Option 1: Martha White pre-packages a crust for about 44 cents a package and all you do is add water. Option 2: Take biscuit dough, which is about 10 cents in the freezer section, and flatten out each roll to make a very small round. Spray or butter a cook sheet or pizza stone. Lightly brush with garlic olive oil and bake until very light brown. Add caramelized onion, crumbled goat cheese, and a few toasted walnuts.

Bake until warm, but not melted completely.

Herb Appetizer Cheesecake

1 cup dry breadcrumbs
¼ cup butter, melted
¼ cup olive oil
2 cups fresh basil leaves
½ teaspoon salt
1 garlic clove, cut in half
2 8-ounce packages cream cheese, softened
1 cup ricotta cheese
3 eggs
½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
½ cup pine nuts

Combine crumbs and margarine; press into bottom of a 9 inch spring form pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes.

Place oil, basil, salt and garlic in blender container. Cover and process on high until smooth. Combine basil mixture, cream cheese and ricotta cheese, mixing at medium speed on electric mixer until well blended. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Blend in parmesan cheese; pour over crust. Top with pine nuts. Bake at 325 degrees for 1 hour and 15 minutes. Loosen cake from rim of pan; cool before removing rim of pan. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Party Perfect Mini Quiches

1 12-ounce can evaporated milk
3 large eggs, beaten
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
2 cups (8 ounce package) shredded cheddar cheese
2 cups chopped, frozen broccoli, thawed and drained
½ cup chopped red bell pepper

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and lightly flour twelve 2 ½ inch muffin cups.

Whisk evaporated milk, eggs, flour, salt and black pepper in medium bowl until blended. Stir in cheese, broccoli and bell pepper. Spoon ¼ to 1/3 cup of mixture into each prepared muffin cup, filling almost to rim. Stir mixture frequently to evenly distribute ingredients.

Bake for 23 to 28 minutes or until knife inserted near center comes out clean and tops are lightly browned. Cool in pans for 15 minutes. Run knife or small, flat spatula around inside edges of muffin cups. Carefully remove quiches.

Note: The number of quiches will depend on the size of your muffin cups. Bake time may need some adjusting.

Tip: Quiches can be made ahead and frozen. To reheat, place on baking sheet and bake in preheated oven at 325 degrees.

Sliced Pears with Blue Cheese and Toasted Pecans

2 pears (one green skinned and one red skinned) soaked in lemon juice and patted dry

3 ounces of cream cheese

3 ounces of blue cheese or gorgonzola crumbles

Toasted and lightly salted pecans, finely chopped

.

Slice pears $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thin.

Mix cheese together and light spread on pear slices.

Sprinkle with pecans.

Spiced Pecans

	2 Cup Yield	4 Cup Yield	8 Cup Yield
Cumin	½ teaspoon cumin	1 teaspoon	2 teaspoons
Chili Powder	½ teaspoon	1 teaspoon	2 teaspoons
Garlic Salt	½ teaspoon	1 teaspoon	2 teaspoons
Cayenne Pepper	¼ teaspoon	½ teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Ginger	¼ teaspoon	½ teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Cinnamon	¼ teaspoon	½ teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Kosher Salt	to taste	to taste	to taste

Heat over low heat: 2 tablespoons olive oil (¼ cup for 4 cups and ½ cup for 8 cups).

Blend in spice mixture and simmer 3 to 4 minutes to blend flavor.

In a bowl put 2 cups pecan halves (4 cups or 8 cups). Pour oil and spice mixture over nuts. Stir well until coated. Spread one-layer deep on cookie tin.

Bake at 300 degrees for 10 to 15 minutes, shaking every 5 minutes. Watch carefully. Remove from oven. Stir and sprinkle to taste with kosher salt. Let mixture rest for several hours before putting into storage container.

Summer Vegetable Ceviche

For a special treat if the budget allows, add boiled shrimp and crab.

2 cups peeled and diced (¼ inch) hothouse cucumbers
1 cup diced (¼ inch) red bell pepper
1 cup diced (¼ inch) green bell pepper
1 cup diced (¼ inch) yellow bell pepper
½ cup onion
½ cup fresh chopped cilantro
1 to 2 roasted Serrano peppers, de-seeded and finely minced.
1 cup tomato juice
1/8 cup of red wine vinegar
2 tablespoons of olive oil
Jalapeno olives
Black olives

Mix and chill all the ingredients. Place in festive glasses like martini or wine glasses. Garnish with a stack of Jalapeno olives alternating with jumbo black olives.

Sunset Sangria

3 teaspoons finely shredded lime peel
1 cup lime juice
¼ cup sugar
Ice
1 750-ml. bottle Pinot Noir or Syrah, chilled
1 nectarine, pitted and sliced

In a 1 quart glass measuring cup combine lime peel, lime juice and sugar; add water to equal 4 cups. Stir to dissolve sugar. Cover and refrigerate at least 2 hours.

To serve: place in 6 (16-ounce) glasses. Add 2/3 cup lime juice mixture to each glass. Pouring along side of glass, slowly add ½ cup wine. Thread nectarine slices on skewers and add to glasses.

Yield: 6 servings

DIPS

Corn Dip

1 16-ounce can Mexican corn, drained
4 ounces shredded pepperjack cheese
½ cup mayonnaise
½ cup shredded parmesan cheese
Jalapeno slices

Mix all ingredients. Spread in baking dish and top with jalapeno slices.

Bake at 350 degrees for 20 to 25 minutes.

Curry Vegetable Dip

1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
1/3 cup cottage cheese
3 tablespoons milk
2 to 2½ teaspoons curry powder
2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
2 drops Tabasco sauce
¼ teaspoon onion powder
3 drops hot sauce

Process ingredients in a food processor until smooth, stopping to scrape down sides.
Serve with fresh vegetables.

Yield: 1¼ cups

Lean and Mean Bean Dip

1 15-ounce can of no sodium black beans, rinsed and drained
½ cup fresh cilantro leaves
1 medium chopped red onion
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
1 tablespoon orange juice
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
½ teaspoon minced, canned chipotle chili in adobo
¼ teaspoon salt

In a food processor, blend the beans, cilantro leaves, onion, garlic, lime juice, orange juice, olive oil, chili and salt. Blend until dip is smooth and creamy, scraping down the sides of the bowl once or twice as needed.

CHAPTER THREE: WHEN CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP AIN'T ENOUGH

I love the titles of self-help and motivational books. Sometimes I wander through the bookstores reading them for my own free therapy sessions. Unless it is a recent bestseller, they're always in the back of the store—*way* back in the store. After walking a mile to the far left of travel books and the children's area, rows and rows of self-growth category books await to fix me and my dearest loved ones. As I browse the shelves, I sneak observations of other people browsing, and they of course, glean side-glances to see if they are being watched. I often like to find the most self-conscious looking person and strike up a conversation with them. If they seem particularly unfriendly or uptight, I usually embellish my story: I just got out of a mental hospital in Milledgeville, Georgia, and need more reading material. Usually, I just keep my mouth shut, but I love trying to figure out what could be so daunting about a person's marriage, their children, and their business. I can't imagine what could be so bad; they usually look well-dressed, well-coifed, well-to-do, and well-fed.

I find that most proactive people like self-help books. Self-motivation is a good thing—like chocolate, there is never enough. However, if a person only repeats what he read in a self-help book, quoting snappy phrases and mantras, it can be a problem. When you try to have a meaningful conversation with someone and all you get is self-help slogans, it's like talking to an over-the-top new Christian or someone who is on a crazy diet: It can alienate you further from good meaning.

A gal I work with was fighting off the recession blues, and she would walk into the work room with a new voice inside her head every day.

“Hey, Susan. How are you?”

“Grrrrreeaaaat! If it’s gonna BE, it’s up to ME!”

“Oh, that’s catchy. I like it.”

“Yes, I say it every day, all the time right now.”

“Is it helping?”

“No. Not really. But I’m not jumping off the building yet, either.”

“Good point. I’ll add it to my plethora of mantras.”

There are probably self-help books for folks who are addicted to self-help books.

After a while, many messages sound the same, but how is that any different than shopping for a blouse in the mall, each store touting the same latest style? So it is with books as well. What does the latest famous person have to save about love and money? Or weight loss and self-esteem?

And I suppose there are worse things than being addicted to self-help books. For me, they generate hope and compassion for myself and mankind. Smelling the coffee from the in-store coffee shop, listening to a jazz vibe echoing in the background, gazing at titles clamoring for my subconscious needs: *The NO Energy Bus*, *Eat Thin to Win*, *How to Fix Anything Including Your Heart*, *Buy Me and All Your Problems Will Go Away*. All these titles are like neon signs to my mind. They let me know I am not alone in my craziness, and that we are a nation of screwed up people. Most of my problems are small and solvable. So I bought stacks of books, from *Think and Grow Rich* to *Men are from Mars, and Women from Venus*, but nothing seemed to work for me.

I annihilate authors with criticism. How would *she* know? She's on a talk show and magazine covers every other week. They have no idea what it is **REALLY LIKE** to be burned out, disappointed, mad, and scared. But I buy the book anyway. And there is always at least one worthy take-away from any self-help book I read.

Mental motivation is like nutritional dieting. You have to decide when. And everyone is different as to what shakes things up and get things moving again. Between 2007 and 2008 I read everything on the library's self-help shelves and still felt empty. I had a wonderful prayer life with God, my spiritual being, cried with patience that I am being taught great lessons for future use, and felt guilty that I still felt empty. People who aren't on empty always say, "Well, you just need Jesus. Have you been saved?" I went through each day appearing to be alive and felt dead all at the same time. Chicken Soup for the Soul was NOT ENOUGH.

What was important was that I did not give up. I read the books on my reading list. I listened to my inner voice—I didn't always like what it was saying, but I did continue to make an effort each day towards the smallest and largest of goals. Keep trying anything to shake up your soul. If you have money, go to the spa. If you don't, create one at home. It sounds corny and right out of the budget section of the favorite household magazine, but do it. Why not? Do something every day to work on your mental energy.

As I mentioned before, I'm a big list maker. Make a list of ideas and follow it and see how you feel after each attempt. Make lists for little projects and big projects. Sometimes I made lists for 15 minutes at a time. This can be good if you are very

overwhelmed. Think of it like eating ice cream with a tiny spoon. Each bite is good and you can get to the bottom of the bowl if you just keep trying.

Again, each person is different, but this worked for me. Serving others. I stopped worrying about myself and my pocketbook. I came to terms with my mistakes, and the fact that my house was worth less to the point I could not really sell it. What money I had invested in my 401K was worth half. I spent too much money on my children, and had a new understanding of what the word “emergency” meant. Emergency savings is not for pizza on a Friday night and to-die-for jeans that are finally on sale. Knowing that I had to work for probably the rest of my life, and no retirement really to speak of, I decided to serve in a greater capacity, those who needed me in what small ways I could provide. I would work the rest of my life, and so what? So will most of the humans in this world.

It wasn't this big “Aha!” moment or anything. It's just something that crept up on me. I started reading to children in an elementary school, since that was one of my favorite things to do when my children were in elementary school. Then I signed up at church to be a storyteller. It was easy and simple, and I started to feel a little flutter in my heart. I was alive. It felt like the T-shirt: Life. Be in it.

One of the most significant serving experiences was bringing food to a halfway house in downtown Atlanta. Trinity House Community Services maintains a rehabilitation program for adult men, all of whom have been homeless and addicted to alcohol and drugs. Each resident attends a state detox program and then interviews with staff and a panel of senior residents; basically, each candidate has to be ‘voted’ into the program. The program is more like a brotherhood, and it has a 90% success rate.

As part of the program, they eat dinner with groups, usually churches; folks who come from big suburban churches to the inner city, their car doors locked and the GPS directing them to the old church in an inner-city area that houses the group on a side street just shadowing a major interstate highway.

Bell Street, a one-way street parallel to a major interstate, is neighbors with one abandoned building, two couches in a parking lot, a neighborhood bar adjacent to Trinity House, and a new upscale building. I panicked looking at my parking options, which seemed too far away to be safe or part of a makeshift living room.

The guys are waiting out front, anticipating the arrival of the guests. As soon as they see a mini-van, SUV, or luxury sedan with a driver wide-eyed and scared, they jump up and direct them down an alley to parking behind the church. Wearing red or green T-shirts, the men smile as they earnestly direct you to the parking area like you were parking at a ball game. The green shirts indicate the guys who have been in the program six months or less, and the red shirts indicate the veteran residents. Each resident can live at Trinity House for up to two years. They must have an emergency savings of at least \$2,500.00 before they leave. They have around-the-clock availability to a licensed counselor. They must get a job within three months of being clean, and the Trinity House staff helps in the job search process. Monday through Friday they share their meal time with groups from churches, boy scout troops, etc.: anyone who prepares food for fifty people. There are usually about thirty-five men from Trinity House and fifteen people from an outside group.

When folks from a group walk into the fifty-three-year-old remodeled church, green shirts take the dishes and place them in the general room, which is an old chapel

that serves as one of the general meeting and eating rooms. The setting sun filters colors from the stained glass into the room as the colors shadow the faces of the quiet, nervous first-time visitors.

Willy, a senior resident, takes charge. For first time visitors, he gives tours of the home and how the program works. Willy has no front teeth and talks in third person most of the tour. Most residents stay in a large room with bunk beds, in a large military-type fashion. Only senior residents are privileged to use one of the eight private rooms.

There is a general living room, several meeting rooms, and one computer room, which is only open during certain supervised hours. Willy talks about “Willy after he entered Trinity House,” his life changes and references to Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Aristotle, all with a lisp and nodding when he says something he likes.

After the tour is finished, a general prayer is said, and each guest goes through the buffet line and fills up a plate of food. Then each resident goes through the buffet line and sits by a guest. There is always a group leader, usually a green-shirt resident, who leads the dinner discussion.

First the person introduces himself.

“Hello, my name is Waheem.”

Everyone answers, “Hi, Waheem.”

Then he talks about his day, or his story, and then ends by saying, “And I pass to my left.” The group answers, “Thanks for sharing.” And then the next person starts, whether it is a resident or a guest, and it goes on around the room until the last person shares something about themselves. Average people express themselves and each guest

sometimes unexpectedly opens up after hearing residents tell very gritty and harsh tales of being addicted, living on the streets and their recovery. I think more suburban citizens get a wakeup call by the sharing and the forthright comments. After the meal and sharing time, Willy stands up to explain the origin of the “power clap.”

The power clap originated as a spontaneous response by Marcus Garvey, a civil rights leader in the early 1960s. He was leading a peace rally at the Madison Square Garden in New York City, and the Garden had fewer seats than the amount of people in attendance. Mr. Garvey wanted the large crowd to feel the presence of all the attendees and acknowledge the folks who stood in the Garden perimeter. The resounding sound of one single clap made in unison became a significant symbol of Garvey and the power of people. Trinity House adopted the power clap.

As a way of honoring their guests to thank them for their gifts and support, Willy, the leader for the evening, stands at the end of the meal and explains the origin of the power clap. He power claps to an older woman who made an awesome peach cobbler. There are usually seven power claps a dinner, and they often compliment a guest for sharing food or a story about themselves, or to a fellow brother for getting a job, staying clean, or any variety of compliments big and small. The bridge created at dinner continues to expand with the power clap.

Everyone stands in a circle and on the count of three, we clap. Part of the game is to listen. If the leader says TREE instead of THREE, do not clap. If someone claps by mistake, he has to do their funny dance in place as a penalty. Humor and making a fool of oneself is a great equalizer. Bad dancing by a suburbanite sparks laughter, along with the challenge to hear or listen to the leader, especially if he is like Willy and missing

teeth, since “tree” and “three” really sounds the same from Willy. Somewhere in the compliments and the silliness a new bridge forms solid with understanding between the rehabilitating drug addicts, often with criminal backgrounds, and suburban kids who had to unplug from their Nintendo and computers for the evening, along with their mothers or their fathers, hardworking but lost in their own issues, all people leave that room with a little more humility and a little more compassion for all mankind.

Hearing firsthand where and how residents lived prior to Trinity House, which was often a life of despair and literally a bridge or box, and to see them save money on a minimum wage job and take a GED class, could not be conveyed the same in a book.

What worked for me was to serve and go beyond the book shelf. With my girls grown now, I read every day and I physically volunteer somewhere at least once a week. Focusing on serving rather than self and self-improvement seems to arrive at the same results. And I’m not the only one who thinks so. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 63.4 million people volunteered in 2009, 30.1% of which were women (up from 29.4% of women volunteers in 2008) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Even though I only cooked and served for Trinity House once a month, the residents and their stories stayed with me. I looked at homeless people differently, and was not as disgusted or afraid of them. My inner bag lady related to their circumstances, and though I felt bad, I did not want to end up like them either. If guys with no education, no teeth, no deep retirement fund made such a difference in the world we live in by their spirit, their resolve and their love of mankind, I could attempt to be and do my best each day.

RECIPES

Soups and Stews

Asian Dumpling Soup with Shiitakes and Edamame
Black Bean and Chorizo Soup with Cumin Toasts
Cream of Poblano Soup
Curried Butternut Squash Soup
Garden Minestrone
Farmers Market Gazpacho
Roasted Garlic and Basil Tomato Soup
Roasted Red Pepper Soup
Tomato Basil Cream Soup
Zucchini Soup
Tender Beef Stew
Vegetarian Polka Dot Stew

Chili and Chowders

Chicken Chili
Hearty Texas Red Chili
Corn and Crab Chowder
Corn and Potato Chowder
Roasted Summer Corn and Lobster Chowder with Tarragon and Chives
Shrimp and Corn Chowder

SOUPS AND STEWS

Asian Dumpling Soup with Shiitakes and Edamame

2 32-ounce containers low-sodium chicken broth
1 2-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and thinly sliced
1 16-ounce package frozen pot sticker dumplings or Japanese gyoza
1 large carrot, halved lengthwise and sliced
4 ounces shiitake or white mushrooms, stems discarded and caps thinly sliced
2 cups frozen shelled edamame
1 bunch watercress, thick stems removed (about 3 cups)
1 tablespoon low-sodium soy sauce
Kosher salt
4 scallions, sliced

In a large saucepan, bring the broth and ginger to a boil. Add pot stickers and carrots and simmer until just tender, 8 to 10 minutes.

Add mushrooms and edamame and simmer until heated through, about 2 minutes.

Stir in watercress, soy sauce, and ½ teaspoon salt. Sprinkle with scallions before serving.

Yield: 4 servings

Black Bean and Chorizo Soup with Cumin Toasts

For the Cumin Toast:

2 tablespoons olive oil

½ teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon ground cumin

8 slices country white bread

For the Black Bean Soup and Assembly:

½ cup olive oil

1 ½ cups chopped Spanish chorizo

1 large onion, chopped

2 medium carrots, chopped

3 garlic cloves, minced

1 pound dried black beans

6 cups water

2 fresh bay leaves

½ teaspoon sea salt

½ teaspoon ground cumin

¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

To prepare the toasts:

Heat oven to 400 degrees. In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, salt and cumin. Brush the sliced bread with the oil and toast until golden brown on one side, about 5 minutes. Set aside.

To prepare the soup:

In a large (3½ quart) Dutch oven or soup pot over medium heat, add the olive oil. Cook the chorizo, onion and carrots until soft. Add the garlic and cook until aromatic, about 1 minute.

Stir in the beans, water, and bay leaves, and bring to a simmer over high heat. Reduce the soup to a bare simmer over low heat. Cover and cook for 1 hour.

Stir in the salt, cumin, cayenne and black pepper and cook until the beans are tender, about 1 more hour, stirring occasionally. When the beans are soft, puree 1 cup of the soup in a blender or food processor, add back to the pot.

Serve the soup with the cumin toasts. The soup will keep, refrigerated, for 5 days.

Yield: 8 servings

Cream of Poblano Soup

This soup has an authentic Mexican flavor to it.

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
3 poblano chile peppers, roasted, peeled, seeded and diced
½ cup onion, chopped
½ cup carrots, chopped
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
4 cups water
2 cups chicken stock
¾ cup half and half
2 tablespoons fresh cilantro, minced
½ teaspoon salt
1½ cups tortilla chips, crushed
6 ounces Monterey jack cheese, shredded (1½ cups)
½ pound chorizo, casings removed, crumbled, browned and drained (optional)

Melt butter in a large saucepan. Add poblanos, onion, and carrots. Sauté 5 minutes or until vegetables are soft. Sprinkle with flour. Sauté an additional 5 minutes.

Whisk in water and chicken stock until blended. Simmer uncovered for 30 minutes. Transfer soup in batches to a blender or food processor. Process until smooth.

Return to saucepan. Add half-and-half, 1 tablespoon cilantro. Garnish with cheese and chips.

Yield: 6 servings

Curried Butternut Squash Soup

1 leek, chopped
1 yellow onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 tablespoon butter
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 butternut squash, peeled and cut into 2-inch cubes (about 3 pounds squash)
6 to 8 cups chicken broth
½ green apple, unpeeled, diced
1 tablespoon fresh grated ginger
1 teaspoon salt (or to taste)
½ teaspoon pepper
½ teaspoon curry powder
¼ teaspoon nutmeg
1 cup evaporated milk or cream

In stockpot, sauté leek, onion and garlic in butter and oil until soft. Add squash, 6 cups chicken broth, apple, salt, pepper, ginger and curry powder. Heat to boiling and cook for 20 to 30 minutes until squash is very soft. Cool a little so it can be handled.

Using an immersion blender, puree soup, being very careful of the hot liquid. Alternately, puree half the soup at a time in a blender and then return it to the pot. If needed, add more chicken broth to thin the soup. Add milk and nutmeg, stir to combine. Heat and serve.

Garnish with a dash of sour cream or yogurt (thinned with milk) and a sprinkle of toasted pumpkin seeds.

Yield: 10 to 12 servings

Garden Minestrone

1 tablespoon olive oil
1 cup chopped onion
2 teaspoons chopped fresh oregano
4 garlic cloves, minced
3 cups chopped yellow squash
3 cups chopped zucchini
1 cup chopped carrot
1 cup fresh corn kernels (about 2 ears)
4 cups chopped tomato, divided
3 14-ounce cans fat-free, low-sodium chicken broth, divided
½ cup uncooked ditalini pasta (very short tube-shaped macaroni)
1 15½-ounce can Great Northern beans, rinsed and drained
1 6-ounce package fresh baby spinach
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 cup (4 ounces) grated Asiago cheese

Heat oil in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add onion to pan; sauté 3 minutes or until softened. Add oregano and garlic; sauté 1 minute. Stir in squash, zucchini, carrot, and corn; sauté 5 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Remove from heat.

Place 3 cups tomato and 1 can broth in a blender; process until smooth. Add tomato mixture to pan; return pan to heat. Stir in remaining 1 cup tomato and remaining 2 cans broth; bring mixture to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer 20 minutes.

Add pasta and beans to pan; cook 10 minutes or until pasta is tender, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat. Stir in spinach, salt and ½ teaspoon pepper. Ladle soup into individual bowls, top with cheese.

Garnish with coarsely ground black pepper if desired.

Yield: 8 servings

Farmers Market Gazpacho

2 cups peeled and diced (1/4 inch) hothouse cucumber
2 cups diced (1/4 inch) red bell pepper
2 cups diced (1/4 inch) ripe tomato
1/2 cup diced (1/4 inch) red onion
2 cups tomato juice
1/2 cup red wine vinegar
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 heavy dashes of Tabasco Sauce

Place all the diced veggies in a bowl. Add the tomato juice, vinegar and olive oil, season with Tabasco, sea salt and pepper.

Transfer half of the mixture into a blender or food processor and pulse the machine on and off to coarsely puree the contents. Return the pureed mixture to the bowl and stir to combine. Refrigerate for at least 4 to 6 hours before serving.

Great to double or triple for a large gathering.

Roasted Garlic and Basil Tomato Soup

3 large garlic cloves, slightly flattened
1 3-ounce package shallots, peeled and halved
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 14½-ounce can Italian-style stewed tomatoes, undrained
1½ cups chicken broth, divided
½ teaspoon hot sauce
½ teaspoon balsamic vinegar
¼ teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
Pinch of ground red pepper
2 tablespoons minced fresh basil
Basil pesto toast (optional)

Place garlic and shallots in an 8-inch square pan lined with aluminum foil; drizzle with oil. Bake at 450 degrees for 15 minutes, stirring twice. Allow to cool.

Process garlic, shallots, tomatoes, ¾ cup chicken broth, hot sauce, balsamic vinegar, salt, pepper, and ground red pepper in a blender or food processor until smooth, stopping to scrape down sides.

Cook tomato mixture and remaining ¾ cup broth in a medium saucepan over medium heat 5 minutes or until thoroughly heated. Stir in basil; serve immediately with basil pesto toast, if desired.

Yield: 2 servings

Roasted Red Pepper Soup

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
3 to 4 cloves garlic, minced
1 medium onion, chopped
1 medium russet potato, chopped
4 cups water
1 15-ounce jar roasted red peppers
Salt and pepper to taste
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

In a large saucepan, sauté garlic, onion and potato in olive oil over medium-high heat 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add water and continue to cook 30 minutes or until potatoes are tender.

Add roasted red peppers and puree soup in a blender or food processor. Simmer over medium heat 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Stir in lemon juice before serving. Serve hot.

Garnish with sprigs of fresh marjoram or basil.

Yield: 6 servings

Tomato Basil Cream Soup

3 to 4 shallots, diced
½ pound leeks, chopped
1 celery stalk, chopped
2 to 3 garlic cloves, pressed
2 tablespoons oil
2 14½-ounce cans Italian-style tomatoes, undrained and chopped
1 tablespoon dried basil
2 14½-ounce cans chicken broth
¼ teaspoon salt
1 cup whipping cream

Cook shallots, leeks, celery, and garlic in hot oil in a Dutch oven over low heat 10 to 12 minutes or until tender (do not brown). Add tomatoes and basil; cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, 10 minutes. Add broth and salt; bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, 1 hour. Cool.

Process half of mixture in a food processor or blender until smooth, stopping once to scrape down sides. Transfer to freezer container; repeat procedure with remaining mixture. Freeze up to 1 month.

Remove from freezer and thaw in refrigerator overnight. Heat in a large saucepan over medium heat. Stir in whipping cream; cook, stirring constantly, until thoroughly heated (do not boil).

Garnish with lemon slices or fresh basil sprigs.

Yield: 6½ cups

Zucchini Soup

This recipe is a great way to use zucchini from your garden. It freezes well and will be welcomed by anyone on a cold fall day!

1 medium onion, chopped
1 cooking apple, peeled, cored and chopped
2 tablespoons butter or margarine, melted
4 cups chicken broth
3 cups unpeeled, diced zucchini (about 3 medium)
1 cup milk
¼ cup whipping cream
¼ teaspoon pepper

Sauté onion and apple in butter in a Dutch oven until tender. Add broth and zucchini; bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer 30 minutes until zucchini is tender. Spoon mixture into container of an electric blender and process until smooth.

Return zucchini mixture to Dutch oven; stir in milk, whipping cream and pepper. Cook over low heat stirring constantly until well heated.

Yield: about 8 cups

Tender Beef Stew

1 sirloin steak
2 teaspoons olive oil
2 small cans V-8 juice
1 medium onion, chopped
1 small bell pepper, chopped
1 celery rib
1 tablespoon minced garlic
1 bay leaf
Salt and pepper to taste
¼ cup of red wine
3 or 4 new potatoes
6 or 7 baby carrots
Baby zucchini chunks (can use green beans or green peas)
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 cup or 10 cherry tomatoes

Cube sirloin steak; brown in olive oil. Cover with V-8 juice, onion, bell pepper, celery, garlic and bay leaf. Add salt, pepper and a little red wine to taste. Simmer for an hour at the lowest heat or in a crock pot for an hour or more.

Add new potatoes, baby carrots and simmer until tender. Add zucchini. Cook until thoroughly heated but not mushy. Depending on the heat of your stove, an hour should do it. Remove veggies.

Add cornstarch to 1 cup juice. Cook until thickened. Put veggies and meat back in pot and stir. Top with cherry tomatoes.

Serve with couscous, rice, or corn bread.

Yield: 2 servings

Vegetarian Polka Dot Stew

2 cups water
1 cup Israeli couscous
2 medium carrots, sliced
1 plum tomato, chopped
¼ cup chopped onion
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 19-ounce cans ready-to-serve tomato soup
1 15-ounce can black beans, rinsed and drained
1 10-ounce package frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
2 tablespoons minced fresh basil or 2 teaspoons dried basil
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon dried oregano
½ teaspoon dried marjoram
¼ teaspoon pepper
Shredded Parmesan cheese

In a large saucepan, bring water to a boil. Stir in the couscous, carrots, tomato, onion and garlic. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; simmer, uncovered for 10 to 15 minutes or until tender and water is absorbed. Stir in the remaining ingredients; heat through. Sprinkle with cheese.

Yield: 5 servings

CHILI AND CHOWDERS

Chicken Chili

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 onion, chopped
3 cloves garlic, crushed
4 boned and skinned chicken breast halves
1 to 2 tablespoons chili powder
2 teaspoons cumin
1 28-ounce can of tomatoes (whole or chopped), drained
1 16-ounce can of light kidney beans, drained and rinsed
1 16-ounce can of dark kidney beans, drained and rinsed
1 16-ounce can of corn, drained

Cut raw chicken into bite size pieces. Heat oil over medium heat. Add onions and garlic. Cook 2 to 3 minutes. Add chicken, chili powder, and cumin. Cook 5 minutes or more until chicken is no longer pink. Add tomatoes, beans, and corn. Bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer covered for 15 minutes. Uncover and cook an additional 5 to 10 minutes until sauce is thickened.

Serve over rice, top with shredded cheddar cheese.

Hearty Texas Red Chili

2 pounds boneless chuck roast, cut into ½ inch cubes
5 tablespoons chili powder
4 tablespoons olive oil
1 pound hot bulk sausage
1 medium green bell pepper, chopped
1 medium onion, chopped
2 14½-ounce cans beef broth
2 diced jalapeno peppers
1 28-ounce can diced tomatoes with juice
2 teaspoons salt
2 tablespoons ground cumin
1 tablespoon garlic powder
1 tablespoon paprika
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
3 tablespoons food thickener

In a large bowl, combine 1 tablespoon chili powder with the cubed beef.

Heat oil in a 6-quart crockpot or Dutch oven and brown the meat.

Remove meat and juice and set aside

Add sausage, onion, green pepper, and jalapeno peppers and cook until sausage begins to turn grey.

Add remaining ingredients, including the beef and any accumulated juices.

Cook on low heat for 6 to 8 hours

Add food thickener and stir until thickened. Beans can be added at this point if so desired.

Garnish with cheese, sour cream and scallions.

Yield: approximately 1 gallon

Corn and Crab Chowder

6 bacon slices
1 celery rib, diced
1 medium size green bell pepper, diced
1 medium onion, diced
1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and diced
1 32-ounce container chicken broth
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
3 cups fresh corn kernels (6 ears)
1 pound fresh lump crabmeat, drained and picked*
1 cup whipping cream
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper

Cook bacon in a Dutch oven over medium heat 8 to 10 minutes or until crisp. Remove bacon, and drain on paper towels, reserving 2 tablespoons drippings in Dutch oven. Crumble bacon.

Sauté celery, green bell pepper, onion, and jalapeno pepper in hot drippings 5 to 6 minutes or until tender.

Whisk together broth and flour until smooth. Add to celery mixture. Stir in corn. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, 30 minutes. Gently stir in crabmeat, whipping cream, cilantro, salt, and pepper; cook 4 to 5 minutes or until thoroughly heated.

Serve warm with crumbled bacon and oyster crackers.

* 1 pound peeled cooked shrimp or chopped cooked chicken may be substituted.

Yield: 10 cups

Corn and Potato Chowder

2 cups diced potatoes
1 cup sliced carrots
¾ cup chopped celery
¼ cup chopped green onion
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
¾ cup water
2 cups corn
1½ cups milk
½ cup evaporated milk or cream
1 cup diced pasteurized cheese

Simmer potatoes, carrots, celery, green onion, salt, pepper and water, covered, 15 minutes. Add corn and simmer another 5 minutes. Add milk, cream and cheese; stir until cheese melts and soup is heated. Do not boil.

Roasted Summer Corn and Lobster Chowder with Tarragon and Chives

2 live 1½ pound Maine lobsters
6 ears fresh corn, shucked
¼ pound applewood smoked bacon, julienned
1 large yellow onion, diced ¼ inch
2 large carrots, peeled, diced ¼ inch
3 celery stalks, diced ¼ inch
2 large russet potatoes
½ cup sweet vermouth
½ cup dry white wine
1 ½ quart lobster stock
2 cups heavy cream
4 tablespoons finely chopped tarragon
4 tablespoons finely chopped parsley
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
½ tablespoon Tabasco

For the lobsters:

In heavily salted and rapidly boiling water, submerge lobsters. Cover and cook for 5 minutes. Remove lobsters and cool in a bath of ice water. When cool, remove meat from tail, knuckle and claws. Reserve.

REMEMBER: You don't have to use lobster! You can omit all together, add some shrimp, or add some crab! Any shellfish will work. Lobster is a treat but not a necessity!

For the corn:

Rub corn with olive oil to coat. Season liberally with salt and pepper. Place on a sheet and roast in a 400-degree oven for 12 minutes. Cool, slice kernels from the cob. Put aside.

For the chowder:

In a heavy bottomed 5 quart stockpot, melt butter over medium high heat. Add bacon until crispy. Add carrots, onions, celery and potatoes. Sweat vegetables for about 5 minutes, until softened but not browning. Add corn, then glaze with white wine and vermouth. When most of the wine has evaporated, add stock and increase heat, bringing it to a simmer. Reduce heat and let simmer about 12 minutes. Add cream, diced lobster meat, and return to simmer. Add herbs, season with salt and pepper and Tabasco. Serve into soup bowls immediately.

Garnish each bowl with a lobster claw and a sprinkle of chive.

Shrimp and Corn Chowder

1 to 1½ pounds large shrimp (16 to 20) peeled and deveined, tail on
¼ cup olive oil
1 to 2 tablespoons chopped fresh garlic
3 cups fresh (or frozen and thawed) whole kernels of corn
1½ cups chicken stock
1 cup heavy cream or half-and-half
2 jalapeno peppers, seeds removed and finely chopped
¼ cup red bell pepper, small dice
¼ cup yellow onion, small dice
¼ cup celery, small dice
1 tablespoon butter
1 tablespoon chopped cilantro leaves
2 corn tortillas, thinly sliced and fried crisp
Small bunch cilantro leaves for garnish
Tabasco sauce to taste
Salt and pepper to taste
Old Bay seasoning

In a small bowl, combine raw shrimp, olive oil and garlic. Marinate 30 to 60 minutes. Grill shrimp (don't overcook). Put 8 whole grilled shrimp aside for garnish. Remove tails from the remaining grilled shrimp and chop into large chunks. Keep warm.

In blender, combine half of the corn and chicken stock. Blend until smooth. In a large saucepan, sauté onion and celery in a tablespoon of butter until soft. Add the finely chopped jalapeno pepper and stir until warm. Add blended corn and stock mixture and the remaining corn. Bring to a boil, then simmer for 10 minutes. Stir in red bell pepper and chopped cilantro. Season to taste with hot pepper sauce, salt and pepper. Divide chopped grilled shrimp equally among 8 servings.

Garnish each bowl with cilantro leaves and a whole grilled shrimp.

Yield: 8 servings

CHAPTER FOUR: SO YOU'RE NOT THE BIGGEST LOSER

Whoever designed dressing rooms has a sick sense of humor. And you can't return bathing suits, so you have to try them on. And how can Lycra cost THAT much? Recently, I bought my first bathing suit in five years. It took me that long to recover from the last bathing suit shopping experience. In fact, the last one I bought was from Wal-Mart, and I didn't even try it on. It cost \$13.99 and worked as good as the high-priced models in the department stores. After reading more about Wal-Mart's human resource policies, I decided to ban the store. With coupons and with a one-day savings sale, I purchased a bathing suit for about five dollars more than I did in 2005 at Wal-Mart. I probably just supported some sweat shop mogul from Malaysia, but I do have a new bathing suit.

As I walk the beach, I see young bodies often in better shape than I was at that age, and often in worse shape than I was at that age. The world is a cruel place when it comes to our body image, especially women. Starting as early as nine or ten years old, girls try to fit into the massive worldview of the perfect body. Television advertising from Barbie to Brittany Spears center on a boobylicious lifestyle that is enforced by reality television shows like *Bachelorette* and runway models. While a good many of us have opted out of watching these shows, students in public or private schools cannot ignore the world around them. Body image is everywhere.

Despite the obsession with a thin, tan, perfect-figured body, we have a national obesity issue as well.¹ I think obesity is our single greatest threat to public health. About two-thirds of adults and one-third of children in the United States are overweight.

For most people, eating healthy is like swimming upstream: It's not that they can't do it, it's just so hard. Combined with work responsibilities and kids' activities, many people just opt for convenient foods that are loaded with added sugars, fats, and preservatives.

There is no question that it is often cheaper to eat processed food on sale than to eat fresh foods. You can get about five bean burritos at Taco Bell with chips and sugary sodas for less than five dollars. Unfortunately, continued food consumption of this type is like fueling your car with bad gas. Soon the engine will be knocking and the car will be in the shop while you're looking for answers to the obvious.

There is a plethora of information on nutrition, weight, dieting, you name it—we are a nation of obsessed, body-conscious, yet lazy people. Let's keep it to four basic points.

Point One: You have only one body. Whether you love it or hate it, it's yours for life, so accept it. **Accept it.** What counts is what's inside your body, and your effort to be your best physical self. Are you treating your body with love and care? Do you fill the tank with good premium quality fuel or just the cheap stuff?

¹ 2010 dietary guidelines by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Department of Health and Human Services.

Point two: Reduce excess weight or potential excess weight by cutting your calorie intake and increase physical activity. Get out and do something every day. You do not need a fancy gym membership to do something. Walk around the block, clean your floors on your hands and knees, grab some weights when you watch the evening news. The point is to move somehow, some way each day. For weight loss, map out a schedule of doing something different to shake up your body. Walk, bike ride, do a yoga DVD. None of these things cost money to join or require a fancy outfit to work in. The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans suggest that adults get at least 2.5 hours of moderate-intensity activity each week, such as walking, or 1.25 hours of vigorous activity such as jogging, bike riding or swimming laps. Children and teens should do an hour or more of vigorous activity each day. Map out your day and week to include physical exercise.

Point three: Shift to a more plant-based diet that emphasizes vegetables, including salads, dry beans, fruits, whole grains, nuts and seeds. If it comes out of the ground, it's a mainstay. Minimize marbled meats to once a month, and increase the intake of seafood and lean meats. Even though these are expensive, use them as accessories to a salad or dish rather than a main entry. Use them in moderation, along with fat-free milk products and eggs. Start your base meal with the plant-based food, and then add the other stuff like decorations on a cake. Just enough but not too much.

There are ways to get fresh vegetables cheaper. In the spring and summer, find your farmers' market. If you are on a super-tight budget, go towards the end of the

market and ask for a discount from the farmer. The farmer may not want to take it home, or was planning to donate it to a charity anyway. If you want fresher rather than cheaper, get there early for the best selection

Buy organic in the grocery store to avoid unnecessary chemicals, but only on things you cannot peel. A regular potato peeled is better than no potato if you could not afford an organic potato.

Planning is important when eating fresh produce. If you know you are gone all day at work, it is so easy to eat out and get caught in a high-fat afternoon coma. Plan your week and your meals. You would not plan a cross-country car ride without some pit stops, so plan your pit stops accordingly. Get out the Tupperware and pack a salad with the produce you bought at the farmers' market. Add the peach for your afternoon snack. Think of food from the ground up and walk right by those vending machines.

Point four: Get over the “I don't have time” excuse. It takes work and planning to significantly reduce the intake of foods containing added sugars, fats, and sodium. If you have to eat anything out of a package, read your labels. It takes more time to die of cancer, heart disease, and the thousands of other ailments we bring on by poor nutritional habits. To make it fun, if you like to see incremental improvements, keep a food diary, Many PDAs have an application where you can input your daily food intake. There are even applications that list the sodium in foods. And sodium is everywhere, especially in sweet, processed foods. Cut sodium intake to no more than 1500 milligrams a day.

RECIPES

Salads

Baby Blue Salad
Fiesta Corn Salad
Jicama Salad
Jiffy Waldorf Salad
Roasted Beef Salad with Goat Cheese and Pistachios
Spicy Cucumber Salad with Peanuts
Wild Rice and Pepper Salad

Salsas

Fresh Mango Salsa
Peach Salsa

Dressings/Spreads

Balsamic Vinaigrette
Cilantro Pesto
Citrus-Cumin Vinaigrette
Creamy Basil Vinaigrette
Creamy Dijon Dressing
Fresh Citrus Sauce
Hot Chile Vinaigrette
Lemon Basil Salad Dressing
Lime Peanut Dressing
Minted Lime Dressing
Oregano Vinaigrette
Peanut Sauce
Walnut-Garlic Vinaigrette

SALADS

Baby Blue Salad

1 pound mixed salad greens
Balsamic vinaigrette
4 ounces blue cheese, crumbled
2 oranges, peeled and cut into thin slices
1 pint strawberries, quartered
Spiced pecans

Toss greens with balsamic vinaigrette and crumbled blue cheese. Place on 6 individual plates. Arrange orange slices over greens; sprinkle with strawberries and top with spiced pecans.

Yield: 6 servings

Fiesta Corn Salad

3 pounds fresh corn kernels (cut from cob and blanched 3 minutes)

or

3 10-ounce packages frozen corn kernels (thawed and drained)

4 medium tomatoes, seeded and diced (do not peel)

1 medium sweet onion or 1 bunch green onions, minced

1 green bell pepper, cored, seeded, finely diced

1 orange bell pepper, cored, seeded, finely diced

1 red bell pepper, cored, seeded, finely diced

¼ cup olive oil

¼ cup red wine vinegar

2 teaspoons chili powder

½ teaspoon ground cumin

8 ounces Monterey Jack cheese (plain or with jalapenos), cut into ½ inch dice

¼ cup chopped cilantro

Place corn in mixing bowl with tomatoes, onion and bell peppers.

In separate bowl, combine olive oil, vinegar, chili powder and cumin; whisk to blend and pour over vegetables. Toss until ingredients are coated. Add cheese and cilantro. Gently toss. This salad tastes best served at room temperature.

For picnic, store in well-sealed plastic container; place in ice chest. As optional garnish, pack a few sprigs of cilantro in paper towels and place on top of salad; unwrap and garnish just before serving. Salad can be refrigerated up to 3 days.

Yield: 10 to 12 servings

Jicama Salad

2 teaspoons fresh lime juice
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
2 teaspoons chopped cilantro leaves
1/2 teaspoon minced, seeded
Jalapeno pepper
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 1/2 cups peeled, julienned jicama
(about 1/2 medium jicama)

Stir all together all ingredients except jicama in a medium bowl. Add jicama and toss well to combine.

Yield: 1 1/4 cups

Jiffy Waldorf Salad

1 8-ounce package cream cheese
¼ cup milk
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 teaspoons lemon juice
2 medium apples, cored and cut into wedges
1 cup seedless green grapes
½ cup pitted dates, halved
Lettuce leaves
½ cup chopped walnuts

Combine softened cream cheese, milk and 1 tablespoon lemon juice; heat until smooth. Sprinkle 2 teaspoons lemon juice over apples.

Arrange apples, grapes, and dates on a lettuce lined tray. Drizzle with cream cheese mixture and sprinkle with walnuts.

Yield: 4 servings

Roasted Beef Salad with Goat Cheese and Pistachios

34 small beets
3 garlic cloves
1 thyme sprig
6½ tablespoons canola oil
Kosher salt
Freshly ground pepper
½ cup unsalted pistachios
¼ cup sherry vinegar
1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
6 ounces fresh goat cheese
1 cup micro greens or mache
1 tablespoon pistachio oil (optional)

In a baking dish, toss the beets with the garlic, thyme and 2 tablespoons of the canola oil; season with salt and pepper. Cover with foil and bake in a 350-degree oven for 30 minutes or until tender. Let cool, then peel and quarter the beets. Transfer the beets to a bowl; if using golden and red, put them in separate bowls.

Toss the pistachios with ½ tablespoon of the canola oil and season with salt and pepper. Toast in the oven for 5 minutes. In a bowl, whisk the vinegar with the olive oil and the remaining 1/4 cup of canola oil. Toss the beets with the vinaigrette, season with salt and pepper and arrange on a platter. Crumble the goat cheese on top and sprinkle with the pistachios and micro greens; drizzle with the pistachio oil and serve.

Spicy Cucumber Salad with Peanuts

1½ pounds cucumber, peeled, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced (about 4 cups)
2 teaspoons kosher salt
½ cup rice vinegar
½ cup water
3 tablespoons sugar
¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper
2 tablespoons minced red onion
2 tablespoons chopped dry roasted peanuts

Place the cucumber slices in a colander; sprinkle with salt. Toss well. Drain 1 hour. Place cucumber slices on several layers of paper towels; cover with additional paper towels. Let stand 5 minutes, pressing down occasionally. Rinse and pat dry.

Combine vinegar, water, sugar and pepper in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cook until reduced to 1/3 cup (about 10 minutes). Remove vinegar reduction from heat; cool. Stir in onion. Combine cucumbers and vinegar reduction in a medium bowl; toss well. Sprinkle with peanuts.

Yield: 4 servings

Wild Rice and Pepper Salad

1 6-ounce package long grain and wild rice
½ cup Miracle Whip salad dressing or real mayonnaise
2 tablespoons olive oil
½ teaspoon black pepper
¼ teaspoon grated lemon peel
1 cup chopped red pepper
1 cup chopped yellow pepper
¼ cup green onion pieces (1 inch)

Prepare rice as directed on package. Cool. Combine salad dressing, oil, black pepper and lemon peel; mix well. Add rice, peppers and onions; mix lightly. Serve at room temperature or chilled.

Yield: 6 servings

SALSAS

Fresh Mango Salsa

2 ripe mangoes, peeled and finely chopped*
½ red bell pepper, finely chopped
½ purple onion, finely chopped
1 small clove garlic, crushed
2½ tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
2 to 3 tablespoons chopped fresh mint
1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper

Stir together all ingredients. Cover and chill 3 hours.

* 1 26-ounce jar mango slices drained and finely chopped.

Yield: 2 cups

Peach Salsa

½ teaspoon minced ginger
5 peaches, peeled and chopped
¼ cup minced green onions
1½ tablespoons of sugar
½ teaspoon of dry mustard
1½ tablespoons of lime juice
1/8 teaspoon of salt
1/8 teaspoon of white pepper

Combine ginger and ¼ of the peaches in an electric blender. Process until smooth.
Combine the rest of the ingredients, and gently stir.
Refrigerate.

Enjoy on top of fresh grilled fish, chicken, or with chips!

DRESSINGS/SPREADS**Balsamic Vinaigrette**

½ cup balsamic vinegar
3 tablespoons Dijon mustard
3 tablespoons honey
2 garlic cloves, minced
3 small shallots, minced
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
1 cup olive oil

Whisk together all ingredients EXCEPT olive oil until blended. Gradually whisk in olive oil.

Yield: 1 2/3 cups

Cilantro Pesto

2 cloves garlic
4 ounces freshly grated Parmesan cheese
2 cups fresh cilantro, hard packed
1/3 cup lightly toasted pine nuts (walnuts or pecans may be used)
6 tablespoons canola oil
¼ to ½ teaspoon salt

Place all ingredients in blender or food processor and blend until smooth.
Refrigerate or freeze.

Citrus-Cumin Vinaigrette

1 teaspoon cumin seeds
½ cup freshly squeezed orange juice
2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon honey
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
¼ teaspoon sea salt
Freshly ground pepper

Toast cumin seeds in a small skillet over medium-high heat until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat; cool slightly. Transfer to a spice grinder, and process until finely ground.

Combine all ingredients in the jar of a blender; blend until smooth. Store covered in the refrigerator up to 3 days.

Yield: ¾ cup

Creamy Basil Vinaigrette

Prep: 10 minutes

½ cup plain fat-free yogurt
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
2 tablespoons balsamic vinaigrette
2 tablespoons honey
¼ cups red wine vinegar
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper

Whisk together all ingredients.
Serve immediately or cover and refrigerate.

Yields: about 1 cup

Creamy Dijon Dressing

1 8-ounce carton dairy sour cream
1/3 cup milk
2 tablespoons vinegar
2 tablespoons Dijon-style mustard
1½ teaspoon fines herbs, crushed

or

1 teaspoon snipped fresh tarragon,
1 teaspoon snipped fresh parsley,
1 teaspoon snipped fresh dillweed

In a small mixing bowl, stir together sour cream and milk; add vinegar, mustard and fine herbs or fresh tarragon, parsley and dillweed. Stir till smooth. Cover and chill.

Yield: 1 cup

Fresh Citrus Sauce

½ cup sugar
1½ tablespoon cornstarch
1½ cups fresh orange juice
1 teaspoon lemon zest
¼ cup fresh lemon juice

Combine sugar and cornstarch in a small saucepan; whisk in orange juice. Bring to a boil over medium heat, whisking constantly; boil 1 minute. Remove from heat, and whisk in lemon zest and juice. Cool 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Transfer to an airtight container; place heavy duty plastic wrap directly on warm sauce (to prevent a film from forming); chill 2 hours before serving. Store in refrigerator with plastic wrap on surface of sauce up to 1 week.

Yield: about 1¾ cups

Hot Chile Vinaigrette

¼ cup raspberry vinegar
3 tablespoons lemon juice
2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon pepper
½ cup extra virgin olive oil
3 tablespoons minced fresh herbs (basil, rosemary, oregano, sage, mint, or thyme)
Chile oil*

Whisk together first 7 ingredients. Gradually whisk in olive and chile oils. Stir in desired fresh herbs. Chill.

* If you can't find chile oil, steep several split-fresh jalapeno or Serrano peppers in olive oil for 1 to 2 days.

Yield: 1½ cups

Lemon-Basil Salad Dressing

1 cup loosely packed fresh lemon-basil leaves
2 cloves garlic, peeled
1½ teaspoons fresh oregano leaves
1 cup extra virgin olive oil
¼ cup fresh lemon juice
½ cup freshly grated parmesan cheese

In food processor with chopping blade or blender, combine all ingredients and process until smooth. Transfer to small pitcher to serve immediately or pour dressing into jar. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.

Yield: 1½ cups

Lime-Peanut Dressing

½ cup lime juice
3 tablespoons sugar
3 tablespoons finely chopped unsalted roasted peanuts
2 tablespoons fish sauce
1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro
4 garlic cloves, minced

Stir together all ingredients until blended. Serve dressing over mixed salad greens and assorted fresh vegetables.

Yield: 1 cup

Minted-Lime Dressing

1 8-ounce carton plain yogurt
½ to 1 teaspoon finely shredded lime peel
1 tablespoon lime juice
2 ½ teaspoons sugar
2 teaspoons finely snipped fresh mint
or
½ teaspoon dried mint, crushed
¼ teaspoon salt

In a small mixing bowl stir together the plain yogurt, shredded lime peel, lime juice, sugar, fresh mint or dried mint and the salt. Cover and place in the refrigerator.

Yield: 1 cup

Oregano Vinaigrette

¼ cup lemon juice
1 to 2 garlic cloves
1 tablespoon capers, drained
½ cup loosely packed oregano leaves
½ cup olive oil

Process first 4 ingredients in a blender until smooth stopping to scrape down sides. Turn blender on high; gradually add oil in a slow steady stream. Chill if desired.

Yield: about 2/3 cup

Peanut Sauce

¾ cup light coconut milk
1/3 cup crunchy peanut butter
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon brown sugar
1 to 2 garlic cloves
1 teaspoon chopped fresh ginger
¼ teaspoon ground red pepper
¼ cup milk
1 teaspoon grated lemon rind

Cook coconut milk, crunchy peanut butter, lemon juice, soy sauce, brown sugar, cloves, ginger, and red pepper in a small saucepan over medium heat, stirring often, for 15 minutes or until thickened. Process mixture in a food processor and reheat.

Use over sautéed chicken, leftover roasted chicken, or any leftover beef, pork or fish. Great sides are steamed rice, edamames, or stir-fried vegetables.

Walnut-Garlic Vinaigrette

¼ cup walnut pieces
3 cloves garlic
1 teaspoon paprika
¼ teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper
½ cup olive or salad oil
¼ cup vinegar

In a small heavy skillet, toast the walnut pieces over medium-low heat for 10 to 15 minutes or until golden, stirring occasionally. Allow to cool.

In a blender container or a food processor bowl, combine the toasted walnuts, the garlic, paprika, salt and pepper; cover and blend or process until the walnuts are finely ground.

With the blender or food processor running, add the oil in a slow, steady stream, stopping to scrape down sides of the blender container or the food processor bowl as necessary. Add the vinegar. Cover and blend or process until the mixture is combined. Transfer to a storage container. Cover and place in the refrigerator.

Yield: 1 ¼ cups

CHAPTER FIVE: LET'S BE FRANK

Folks will discuss just about anything these days, from Brittany Spears' judgment lapses, to Bill Clinton's sexual adventures, to the number of foreclosures in the country. There is no subject off the radar as long as it is not on a personal level. However, very few people want to admit that they wake up at night worried about how they are going to buy new tires, pay their out-of-pocket medical, let alone retire at 65. As a country, we have a propensity to point out the faults in others rather than look at ourselves as part of any problem. We are a debt-denying nation from the White House down to our own house.

Back when life moved at a more leisurely pace, folks often floated their finances as if the world lived on a boat. Short before pay day? Then a person just cashed a check at a friendly grocery store and counted on the fact it took at least two days to clear and wouldn't clear before payday.

Granted, it was a risky management strategy. It was possible the check could bounce, you might get hit with a hefty fee, face the embarrassment of making good on the check at the service center, and find a new place to buy groceries. Now this strategy is not even an option. I don't even own paper checks. All bills are paid online, and nothing is sent without money in the account. Electronic cash, the debit card, has eliminated the float. I am often drowning before the next payday, and if you could tap into the brains of your fellow commuters while they drive to work, they probably are as well.

According to a survey conducted by the National Foundation for Credit Counseling's 2010 Financial Literacy Survey, only 40 % of consumers say they'd have the cash for an emergency or unexpected expense. Based on my own opinion that very few admit how bad they are managing their finances, I'll bet it is probably higher than 40%. More than 50% said they would borrow money from family and friends, which I think is really funny considering the fact that only 40% have money, which means more than likely your sibling or buddy is as bad off as you. The survey shares that 29% are credit-worthy enough to take out a loan, and 25% would charge it to a credit card. This is not a worthy savings plan. I had a girlfriend who counted on her unused credit card balance as her emergency fund. After the recession started dancing a full-tilt boogie, her credit card company reduced her available balance without notice. When she was summoned for a family funeral, she had no money to buy the airline ticket. Now she hoped the dead loved one left something in the will so she could establish a real emergency fund. And that's another common savings plan: banking on inheritance. With folks living longer and the costs of healthcare increasing, I'd rather bet on horses than an inheritance. And let me get this straight, I'm supposed to toil so I can leave something to children who refuse to toil and plan ahead? Then I failed as a parent if they are counting on me dying in order for them to maintain their lifestyles.

Perhaps one of the biggest lessons of this last economic carbuncle is that some folks are getting the message. No longer do I have visions of travel and leisure, I just don't want to be a burden to my children. Forget leaving them a pot of gold, I just don't want to cost them anything.

It's time we all live about 30% below our means. Just like losing weight, it is easier said than done. It can be really tough with two days before pay day, or perhaps you're waiting on your house to sell, for a spouse to get a new job, etc. Some pay day alternatives are better than others. Avoid pay day lenders, the companies that provide short-term loans ranging from \$100 to \$1,000. Fees generally range from \$15 to \$30 per \$100. They are easy, fast, and expensive. Don't even bother trying to calculate the interest rates: they are more than 100% at the few places I walked into in the metro Atlanta area. You may get a tank of gas and a few groceries, but remember, it cuts into your next paycheck. You are now in the hole, getting less than you think on pay day.

This is where we as consumers need to put on our big girl pants and stop wearing diapers. Look at your overall budget and get busy downsizing everything from cars to houses, and look into borrowing from your retirement as your band-aid. Not only are you using your money but typically the interest rate is much less, and you are paying yourself back, versus Guido at the loan company. Worst case scenario: If you lose your job or leave, you will have to pay yourself back usually within 30 to 90 days. Otherwise it is just like a withdrawal into your 401K plan. There are penalties of paying income tax on it, and a 10% early withdrawal penalty, but you created the situation, right? And it is still a lower interest rate than the money store down the street or your credit card at 21% or 22%.

This is a good short-term answer, but you cannot wait until you are completely out of money to tap into this option. The loans do take time to process. Together as a family, really look ahead at your cash flow and attack the problem like you all would if you were on a sinking ship.

There is no floating along the river anymore. If you continue borrowing, you will never ahead.

I remember when I started to write down what I spent each month in groceries. I have a food fetish much like other women have a shoe fetish. I love grocery stores. It is pure therapy to walk through a gourmet store like a Fresh Market or Whole Foods. I love studying the different types of olive oils and vinegars, wines, cheeses, pastas. I dream of visiting those foreign countries that originated such succulent palates. Unfortunately, something had to be done with this food shopping habit of mine. Much like cleaning a garage, I took everything out of the pantry and placed each item on the kitchen table. I made up menus with items I already had in my freezer. There was a moratorium on grocery shopping until we used up the items from the pantry and freezer. I sent one of my daughters to the store for milk and eggs and that's it. I took what I would normally spend and started my emergency savings account. When it got to the point when we were living like Old Mother Hubbard, I bought a few basics at the large warehouse grocery and focused on my per-unit cost. I eliminated all processed and packaged foods. I no longer bought instant onion soup for dip or pot roast marinade. Most of the time, there was no pot roast anyway, but if I needed to, I could make a marinade from scratch out of bouillon and put it in an old jelly jar. My scratch-made marinade tasted fresher and had less sodium.

In order to keep the flours fresh and the cereal crisp, I invested in stackable Tupperware. In order not to spend any "real" money, I bought the Tupperware with my earnings from a major garage sale. Dave Ramsey, author and financial planner, says, "Sell everything but the kids." Well, I did and it felt great. I had a new efficient pantry,

and hosted a Tupperware party to inspire like-minded friends to do the same. With the sales from the party I bought several new pots and pans. With a clean start in my kitchen, I started from the ground up on my budget. We ate at home and went out only once a month as a family.

In the clean-out process, we, as a family of girls, realized we horde beauty products. Where I may have been a foodie, collecting interesting products and exotic sauces, my daughters were addicted to buying shampoo. We took the same lesson from my pantry and cleaned out the three bathrooms and hall closet. Obscene amounts of shampoo, conditioners and body washes were stored. Totaled at full retail value, we had over \$800 dollars in beauty products. We sorted, combined packaging, and used the products for eleven months before we needed to buy a bottle of anything. By cutting down those necessary beauty purchases, one hundred sixty dollars a month was saved compared to the prior year. We could be obscenely crazy over beauty products, but I think there are a lot of lonely shampoo bottles wasting away in sinks across the country.

While it is hip to exercise thrift in this valley of an economy, it was not always the case. I think for many of us children of the sixties, our parents were raised with Depression-era values, and I, more than anyone, wanted to prove I could earn enough and not have to suffer through cars without air conditioning, cold showers, and modest meals consisting of franks and beans, or what we called in our family, “beanie weenies.”

Most birthday gifts were items of necessities, like underwear, tennis shoes, and clothing for school. I doubt very much my father would have ever sprung for an iPod or cell phone for my fifteenth birthday. Our shopping days consisted of thrift stores, the Sears catalogue for window shopping, and the catalogue that came from saving stamps at

the grocery store. I loved collecting those stamps with my mother, and I couldn't wait to get home and sit at the kitchen table, carefully tear apart each quarter-inch green stamp and place them in the book.

Once a month or so we bought so many groceries that we got the bigger yellow stamp. While mother made dinner, I would add and re-add up how many stickers were in my book and what it could possibly buy. I remember I got a doll that danced in place. I had to put two size D batteries in her. She probably weighed more than one of my kids at age two. I found the doll in my attic during one of our cleaning and garage sale preparations. I tried to relay to my children the fun of collecting stamps to buy the doll, but they looked at me with blank stares and faraway looks as if I were from another planet. Perhaps we do live on a different planet now.

Fast forward from 1965 to 2005. Kids today are dropped off at malls for an afternoon of hanging and shopping. They can't even get on the Internet to do homework without a site popping up to offer a discount purchasing opportunity. If they order a book from Amazon, they get five suggestions for five similar books or products. They are far from victims, but the world we live in and my over-providing for them has given them an unrealistic view of earning, spending, and saving money. Perhaps the recent recession has enlightened many families, but most still live a luxurious life. With our recent commitment to live below our means, my daughters got a lesson in humility and resourcefulness.

We began our own coupon challenge after they were disgusted that I bought the no-name tampons with cardboard. They preferred the plastic applicators so heavily advertised. We decided that we would try to buy better tampons, toilet paper that didn't

feel like cardboard, and other national brand products, but only if we had a coupon. If we went to a big box store, we must have a coupon ready. I mentioned this to a friend at work and I was simply amazed at the depth of her couponing. Instead of the stamps from fifty years ago, now there are major powerhouse Web sites, like www.southernsavers.com, that enable you to download and print coupons for any specific item you use. No longer do you feel tempted (well, I still am sometimes) to purchase a product just because you have a coupon. By reading Web sites and various individuals' blogs and replies, I learned how to shave over one hundred dollars a week in my grocery bill. In 2009 my weekly grocery bill was hovering around one hundred twenty-five dollars. I now spend about twenty-four dollars a week, and I spend about twenty dollars at the farmers' market that I helped start in my community. And looking at it now, I am ashamed at the money I wasted on groceries and household items. We are eating great foods! If we buy anything from the store pre-packaged, prepared, or a beauty and health aid, we have a coupon for it. Now I have Oil of Olay products for a year, and some weeks I do buy ahead because of a coupon, but overall it has been a huge savings.

Online coupon sites are everywhere, and there are even couponing groups and networks you can join. I keep a plastic sleeve in an 8x10 notebook with dates written with a Sharpie pen. Those coupons that expire with that date closest to it get placed in that plastic sleeve. I keep the notebook in the back of my car with my recyclable bags. Once you get used to getting it out once a week and then returning it into your car, you will get used to the whole process.

On Sunday, I read the metro Atlanta paper and clip those coupons. Try only to clip what you use. I print from my favorite sites on my home computer. Most office

computers have a program that will not let you print. Also, here is a little known fact: Those online coupons have a micro-read chip, so that when you print it from your home computer, then it will not take another at that store from your printer at home. However, my girls and I have a printer for each of us and each laptop we own (the benefit of college-age girls now) and during the summers, they print coupons on their printers as well. So we often have three coupons per product.

Another source for coupons is the store booklets. Walk in and grab those first to strategize your shopping. For example, at Publix there is often a ten dollar gas card if you buy fifty dollars in groceries. With my new austerity plan, I do not always need fifty dollars in groceries, but I do offer to help the elderly lady across the street and pick up her groceries for her. Then I have enough to get ten dollars in free gas on a gas card. I drive two tanks of gas a week, so if I go twice, once on Saturday and once before the coupon expires, I have saved twenty dollars in gas that week.

While shopping, be aware of blinkies, peelies, and tear pads. These are all at eye level on the aisles trying to grab your attention and offer you savings on something. Use them only if you use the product. Fifty-cent coupons and under, on double coupon day, are worth almost a dollar. Thus, a thirty-five-cent coupon is really seventy cents if the store automatically offers double coupons. I always shop at the same store, and it is a Publix. It is the one store that I have found that takes a manufacturer's coupon and a store coupon at the same time. In addition, those ten items for a certain savings? You still get the per-item savings even if you do not buy ten cans of tuna fish. In addition, they are always ready with the rain checks if they are out of the product or sometimes they will substitute a like product just to keep you happy.

I may not get to collect stamps and buy a cool doll anymore, but I can buy better beauty products and hopefully instill a long-term lifestyle choice even when times are good. I pray that my children will institute some small habits so that they can be generous in spending when it comes to helping others, maybe traveling abroad, or enjoying a Christmas in which they give and receive a few nice gifts and not necessities. So, I have returned to my couponing roots. I hope the roots I've instilled in my daughters stay grounded for another generation of shoppers.

RECIPES

Beef

Bolognese Sauce
Carne Asada
Pot Roast
Short Ribs with Cheesy Grits

Chicken

Barbecue Chicken Pizza
Chicken and Vegetable Pot Pie
Chicken Bryan with Lemon Butter Sauce
Chicken Skewers with Peanut Sauce
Cointreau-Glazed Chicken Wings
Creole Fried Rice
Crock Pot Chicken
King Ranch Chicken
Grilled Chicken on Rosemary Branches with Lavender Honey
Roasted Chicken with Lemon, Garlic, and Rosemary
Roasted Chicken with Onion Gravy
Santa Fe Chicken Stew
Seared Chicken Thighs with Malbec Plum Glaze

Pork

Grilled Peaches and Pork
Grilled Pork Tenderloin with Black Bean Salsa
Pulled Pork Tacos

Seafood

Lemony Shrimp with White Beans and Couscous
Shrimp and Sausage Stew

BEEF**Bolognese Sauce**

1 medium onion
2 large carrots
3 stalks celery
1 ounce pancetta, very finely chopped
1 pound ground beef (not lean)
1 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
1/8 teaspoon allspice
1 cup whole milk
1 cup dry white wine
1 (15 ounce) can diced tomatoes with their juice
1 pound pasta
Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, for grating

Finely chop onion, carrot and celery. In a heavy bottomed saucepan or Dutch oven over low heat, cook pancetta until all fat is rendered and pancetta is just beginning to brown. Add chopped vegetables; raise heat to medium and cook, stirring frequently, until onion is translucent and soft.

Add ground beef, breaking it up with a spoon. Add salt, pepper, and allspice. Cook until meat is brown.

Add milk. When it begins to simmer, reduce heat to low and cook at a gentle simmer, stirring occasionally until milk has mostly boiled away, about 30 minutes. Add white wine and cook as with milk until wine has mostly boiled away. Add tomatoes and juice; bring to a simmer. Cover pot, reduce heat to low and allow sauce to cook very gently at barest simmer, 2½ to 3 hours. Season to taste with remaining salt.

Just before sauce is done, bring a pot of water to boil, salt it generously and boil pasta according to package directions. Drain, mix with a third of sauce, then serve with remaining sauce on top with lots of grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese.

Yield: 4 servings

Carne Asada

1½ pounds of beef steak, cubed
1 large onion, chopped
4 cloves garlic
2 teaspoons olive oil
2 cans tomatoes or 6 large fresh tomatoes (slightly boil with skins peeled)
2 cups pecans
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cumin
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
2 large potatoes, peeled and cubed
4 medium carrots, peeled

Sauté beef, onion and garlic in olive oil. In blender, add the tomatoes and pecans. Add mixture to meat and season with salt, cumin, and cayenne pepper. Simmer and add potatoes and carrots. Cook slow for 3 hours or in crock pot all day.

Pot Roast

¼ cup olive oil
2 1-pound beef roasts
4 carrots, peeled and cut into large pieces
4 celery ribs, cut into large pieces
1 large onion, quartered
3 large potatoes, peeled and cut into large chunks
¼ cup whole garlic
2 large tomatoes, chopped
2 to 3 cups low sodium beef broth
1 teaspoon fresh thyme, de-stemmed and chopped
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon pepper

In a large braising pan on medium high heat, add oil. Add the beef roasts and brown on all sides. Remove the roasts from the pan and set aside.

Add carrots, celery, onion, potatoes and garlic to the pan and sauté until lightly brown, then remove the vegetables from the pan and set aside. Return the beef roasts to the pan, add tomatoes, beef stock, and thyme. Cover and cook on low heat for 1 hour. Add reserved vegetables and cook an additional 30 minutes (add a little more broth if needed). Remove from heat and let rest, covered, for 20 minutes. Season to taste and serve.

Yield: 4 servings

Short Ribs with Cheesy Grits

4 medium carrots cut into 1-inch pieces
2 cups frozen pearl onions (from a 16-ounce bag)
4 garlic cloves, minced
4 pounds bone-in beef short ribs
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 14½-ounce can diced tomatoes
¾ cup low sodium beef broth
¼ cup dry red wine
½ cup coarsely chopped fresh flat leaf parsley
2 tablespoons cornstarch
3 tablespoons tomato paste
2 bay leaves
1 cup quick cooking grits
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup finely shredded Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Combine carrot, onions and garlic in a 6 quart slow cooker.

Rinse ribs and pat dry; season with salt and pepper. Heat oil in a large, wide pot over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking. Add ribs, in batches, and cook, turning until browned on all sides, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a slow cooker.

Stir together tomatoes, broth, wine, parsley, cornstarch and tomato paste in a bowl; pour over ribs. Cook on low heat for 8 to 10 hours or until tender and falling off bone.

Make cheesy grit recipe. Or cook 1 cup quick cooking grits, add salt and the Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. Ladle grits into stew bowls, topping with ribs and vegetables.

CHICKEN

Barbecue Chicken Pizza

6 ounces prepared pizza dough
Brush of chile oil
¾ cup mozzarella cheese, shredded
7 tomatoes slices
2 ounces barbecued chicken, cubed
2 ounces red onions, julienned
2 ounces barbecue sauce
Chopped cilantro for garnish

Roll out 6 ounces of prepared pizza dough, then brush on chile oil and evenly spread the shredded mozzarella cheese. Be sure to leave a ½ inch crust all the way around. Next, spread the tomato slices, barbecued chicken cubes, red onions and barbecue sauce over the top. Bake for about 5 minutes at 550 degrees. Remove pizza from oven and sprinkle with chopped cilantro leaves.

Yield: 1 serving

Chicken and Vegetable Pot Pie

1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 onions, chopped
4 carrots, diced
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
½ cup dry white wine
2 cups 1% milk
1 10-ounce package frozen peas
1 tablespoon fresh thyme
1 teaspoon sea salt
¼ teaspoon black pepper
1 9-inch store bought pie crust, thawed

Heat oven to 400 degrees. Cook the chicken in a pot of simmering water until cooked through, 10 to 12 minutes; let cool then shred.

Meanwhile, heat the oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the onions and carrots and cook, stirring frequently, until they begin to soften, 6 to 8 minutes (do not let them darken). Sprinkle the flour over the vegetables and cook, stirring for 1 minute.

Add the wine and cook until evaporated, about 5 minutes. Add the milk and simmer until the sauce thickens, 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in the chicken, peas, thyme, salt and pepper. Transfer to a shallow 1½ to 2 quart baking dish.

Lay the crust on top, pressing to seal. Cut several vents in the crust. Place the pot pie on a baking sheet and bake until the sauce bubbles and the crust is golden, 30 to 35 minutes.

Yield: 6 servings

Chicken Bryan with Lemon Butter Sauce

4 chicken breasts
2 ounces goat cheese
2 teaspoons olive oil
10-12 pieces of sliced sundried tomatoes
1 tablespoon chopped basil

Lemon Butter Sauce:

2 teaspoons butter
2 teaspoons finely chopped garlic
2 teaspoons finely chopped onion
2 tablespoons white wine
2 tablespoons lemon juice
Kosher salt
1/8 teaspoon white pepper
1 stick (1/4 pound) cold unsalted butter, cut into small cubes

For the lemon butter sauce, place butter, garlic, and onion in a pot over medium high heat and sauté until garlic and onion are soft and transparent. Do not let garlic and onion burn. Add white wine, lemon juice, kosher salt and white pepper. Bring to a boil, then set heat to medium and let it reduce. After liquids have reduced and you have about ¼ of what you started with, reduce heat to low and gradually add cold butter, beating with wire whisk to allow butter to blend and melt to a creamy sauce.

Season chicken on both sides with salt and pepper. Dab with olive oil. Grill chicken until cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees. Place one slice of goat cheese on top of chicken and continue to cook until warm. Place lemon butter sauce in a sauté pan over medium low heat and add sundried tomatoes and basil. Heat gently until hot, but do not overheat or sauce will break. When goat cheese is warm, place chicken on warmed plate and spoon sauce over top.

Chicken Skewers with Peanut Sauce

1 pound skinless, boneless chicken breast
1 14-ounce can light coconut milk
2 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon grated lemon rind
1 tablespoon curry powder
2 teaspoons grated lime rind
2 teaspoons ground coriander
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
16 8-inch skewers
Peanut Sauce

Cut chicken into ½ inch wide strips. Place in a shallow dish or zip top plastic freezer bag. Stir together coconut milk, sugar, lemon rind, curry powder, lime rind, coriander, salt, and pepper. Pour over chicken. Cover or seal and chill for 2 hours.

Thread 2 to 3 pieces onto each skewer. Grill over medium high heat (350 to 400 degrees) 2 to 3 minutes on each side or until done. Serve with peanut sauce.

Peanut Sauce:

¾ cup light coconut milk
1/3 cup crunchy peanut butter
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon brown sugar
1 garlic clove
1 teaspoon chopped fresh ginger
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
¼ cup milk
1 teaspoon grated lemon rind

Cook coconut milk, crunchy peanut butter, lemon juice, soy sauce, brown sugar, clove, ginger, and black pepper in a small saucepan over medium heat, stirring often, 15 minutes or until thickened. Add milk and lemon rind. Process mixture in a food processor. Reheat.

Cointreau-Glazed Chicken Wings

1/4 cup Cointreau
1 cup fresh orange juice
2 tablespoons grated orange zest
5 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 cup soy sauce
1 tablespoon brown sugar
1 1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper
4 pounds chicken wings

Heat the oven to 400 degrees. In a large bowl, combine the Cointreau with the orange juice, orange zest, garlic, soy sauce, brown sugar, salt, and pepper. Add the chicken wings and toss to coat.

On two large baking sheets, arrange the wings in a single layer. Reserve 1/4 cup of the orange mixture and spoon the rest of the mixture over the wings. Bake for 20 minutes. Turn the wings over and baste them with the reserved orange mixture. Cook until just done, about 10 minutes longer.

Creole Fried Rice

1 cup uncooked long grain rice
2 cups chicken broth
1 pound skinned and boned chicken thighs
1½ teaspoons Creole seasoning, divided
2 tablespoons canola oil
½ pound andouille or smoked sausage, sliced
½ small onion, chopped
½ small green bell pepper, chopped
2 garlic cloves, chopped
1 cup frozen sliced okra, thawed
3 plum tomatoes, chopped
2 green onions, sliced (green part only)

Cook rice according to package directions, substituting chicken broth for water. Spread cooked rice in a thin layer on a baking sheet. Let cool 30 minutes or until completely cool.

Cut chicken thighs into 1 inch pieces and toss with 1 teaspoon Creole seasoning.

Cook chicken in oil in a large skillet over medium heat 3 minutes; add sausage and cook 3 to 4 minutes or until lightly browned. Add onion, bell pepper and garlic and cook 5 minutes or until onion is tender. Stir in okra and remaining ½ teaspoon Creole seasoning. Increase heat to high; add rice and cook, stirring constantly, 4 minutes or until thoroughly heated. Stir in tomatoes. Sprinkle with sliced green onions and serve immediately.

Yield: 6 servings

Crock Pot Chicken

3 cups sliced celery
3 cups sliced carrots
2 cups sliced onion
6 boneless chicken breasts
1 can cream of mushroom soup
1 envelope onion soup mix
1 teaspoon dried thyme
1 teaspoon pepper
½ teaspoon tarragon
2 tablespoons cornstarch
1/3 cup white wine or chicken broth

Place vegetables and chicken in slow cooker. In bowl, combine soup and spices. Pour over chicken, cook slow 4 to 5 hours.

Mix cornstarch with wine or broth and stir in with other ingredients. Turn on high for thirty minutes. Serve with rice.

Grilled Chicken on Rosemary Branches with Lavender Honey

1 pound chicken tenders
½ cup olive oil
3 cloves garlic, smashed and peeled
1 tablespoon dark brown sugar
¾ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon pepper
14 to 16 fresh rosemary branches, about 7 inches long

Lavender Honey:

1 cup honey, preferably raw
2 teaspoons dried lavender buds (12 sprigs about 3 inches long)

Make the lavender honey: In a small sauce pan, stir the honey over low heat until very warm. Stir in the lavender, cover and remove from the heat. Let it sit for at least 24 hours. When ready to use as a glaze, warm over low heat until thin enough to be brushed.

Prepare the chicken: Place the chicken in a large zip top bag and add the oil, garlic, brown sugar, salt and pepper. Marinate for 2 to 3 hours in the refrigerator.

Strip the leaves off the bottom of the rosemary branches, leaving just a few leaves at the very top. Sharpen the bottom ends of the branches with a paring knife to make it easier to skewer the chicken. Cut chicken into ½ inch wide pieces and skewer on lavender branches. Grill over medium high heat (350 to 400 degrees) 2 to 3 minutes on each side or until done.

King Ranch Chicken

3 to 4 cups cooked chicken pieces
1 can Ro-tel tomatoes
2 cans cream of mushroom soup
2 cans cream of celery soup
2 cans evaporated milk
2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
2 onions, chopped
1 teaspoon olive oil
3 packages soft corn tortillas

In a small skillet, sauté onions in olive oil. In a bowl, whisk together cream of mushroom soup, cream of celery soup, and milk for the sauce.

In a shallow baking dish layer tortillas, chicken, cheese and sauce together. Cook on 400 degrees for 30 minutes or until hot and bubbly.

Roasted Chicken with Lemon, Garlic and Rosemary

2 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon salt
1½ tablespoon freshly ground pepper
2/3 cup fresh rosemary sprigs, coarsely chopped
2 cups olive oil
3 2½-pound to 3-pound whole chicken, cut up
3 lemons, sliced

Whisk together garlic, lemon juice, salt, pepper, and rosemary sprigs until blended; gradually whisk in olive oil. Pour mixture evenly into 3 large heavy duty zip top plastic bags; add chicken pieces and lemon slices. Seal and chill 8 hours, turning bags occasionally.

Line 2 15x10 inch jellyroll pans with heavy duty aluminum foil. Remove chicken pieces from marinade and arrange in pans. Drizzle with marinade.

Bake at 425 degrees for 1 hour or until done, basting with pan juices every 20 minutes.

Garnish: fresh rosemary sprigs

Yield: 12 servings

Roasted Chicken with Onion Gravy

1 4-pound to 5-pound whole chicken
1 teaspoon sea salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
3 medium onions
2 lemons
3 tablespoons butter, melted
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
2 cups canned chicken stock

Heat oven to 500 degrees. Rinse chicken and pat dry with paper towels. Season inside with salt and pepper. Slice 2 onions crosswise into $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick rings. Place in a single layer in a roasting pan, about 13x16 inches. Slice 1 lemon into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick rings, and place on top of onions. Cut remaining onion and lemon into wedges and stuff into cavity of chicken. Tie legs together with kitchen twine and place on bed of onions and lemon. Brush with melted butter and cook, basting occasionally, until chicken reaches an internal temperature of 165 degrees, approximately 50 minutes to 1 hour. Cover with foil if skin gets too brown. Transfer chicken to platter or cutting board to rest while making gravy.

Place pan with onions and drippings over medium heat. Sprinkle with flour and stir constantly until well combined. Add chicken stock and cook, stirring occasionally, until gravy thickens, about 3 minutes. Strain and season with salt and pepper. Serve over chicken, mashed parsnips, and potatoes.

Santa Fe Chicken Stew

1 bunch green onions, chopped
3 teaspoons olive oil
2 cups shredded cooked chicken
1 15-ounce can kidney beans, drained
1 14½-ounce can Mexican-style stewed tomatoes, undrained
1 10½-ounce can chicken broth, undiluted
1 8¾-ounce can whole kernel corn, drained
1 4½-ounce can chopped green chiles, undrained
2 teaspoons chili powder
½ cup chopped fresh cilantro or parsley

Sauté green onions in hot oil in a medium saucepan 2 minutes. Stir in chicken, kidney beans, stewed tomatoes, chicken broth, corn, green chiles, and chili powder. Bring to a boil; cover, reduce heat, and simmer 10 minutes. Stir in cilantro.

Yield: 4 servings

Seared Chicken Thighs with Malbec Plum Glaze

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
6 boneless chicken thighs
2 shallots, finely chopped
½ cup Malbec wine
½ cup plum chutney
½ cup chicken broth
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon black pepper

Heat a sauté pan over medium high heat for two minutes or until very hot. While pan heats, season chicken thighs with salt and pepper. Add olive oil to pan and swirl to coat. Sear chicken thighs for 2 to 4 minutes, carefully shaking them loose to prevent sticking. Turn chicken over and repeat.

Remove chicken from pan and set aside. Add chopped shallots to pan and quickly sauté for two minutes until fragrant and barely translucent. Remove pan from heat and add wine, scraping up any browned bits from the pan.

Turn heat to low and return pan to heat. Add chutney and chicken stock, stirring to combine. Add chicken and any accumulated pan drippings to pan and allow chicken to finish cooking through, approximately five to seven minutes. Serve immediately.

Serving tip: This dish is delicious over garlic mashed potatoes or wild rice pilaf.

PORK

Grilled Peaches and Pork

4 4-ounce boneless center cut pork loin chops
¼ cup balsamic vinegar, divided
3 tablespoons fresh lime juice
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon, freshly ground black pepper
4 large peaches, peeled, halved and pitted (about 12 ounces)
Cooking spray
6 cups trimmed arugula
1 teaspoon turbinado or granulated sugar

Place each piece of pork between 2 sheets of heavy duty plastic wrap and pound each piece to ¼ inch thickness using a meat mallet or a rolling pin.

Combine 2 tablespoons vinegar, juice, thyme, salt, and pepper in a small bowl. Reserve 1 tablespoon juice mixture. Pour the remaining juice mixture in a large zip top plastic bag. Add pork, seal, and marinate in refrigerator for 1 hour, turning occasionally.

Preheat grill to medium heat.

Place peaches, cut sides up on a plate; drizzle with remaining 2 tablespoons vinegar.

Place pork on grill rack coated with cooking spray; grill 3 minutes on each side or until pork is done. Set aside.

Place peaches, cut sides down on grill rack; grill 4 minutes or until soft and slightly browned. Turn and cook 2 minutes or until heated through. Cut each peach half into 4 slices. Slice pieces of pork into 1 inch thick strips.

Drizzle trimmed arugula with reserved 1 tablespoon juice mixture, tossing to coat. Divide arugula evenly among 4 plates. Top with grilled pork strips and peach slices; sprinkle evenly with turbinado sugar.

Yield: 4 servings

Grilled Pork Tenderloin with Black Bean Salsa

1 pork tenderloin, about 1¼ pounds
¾ cup light lime vinaigrette dressing
½ teaspoon ground cumin
1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
1 10-ounce can pineapple tidbits, drained
½ sweet red pepper, finely chopped
1/8 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper

Place tenderloin in a large zip top plastic bag. Whisk together the vinaigrette and cumin in a measuring cup. Pour ½ cup of the dressing into bag with pork. Let marinate at room temperature while heating grill.

Heat grill to medium high. Once hot, remove pork from marinade and grill for 18 minutes, turning frequently, until it registers 140 degrees on an instant read thermometer. Remove to a cutting board, tent with foil and let rest 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a small bowl, stir together the black beans, pineapple, red pepper, salt, pepper, and remaining ¼ cup cumin dressing mixture. Slice pork on a slight diagonal into ¼ inch thick slices. Serve with salsa alongside.

Yield: 4 servings

Pulled Pork Tacos

2 cups store-bought salsa, plus more for serving
3 tablespoons chili powder
2 tablespoons dried oregano
2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 2½-pound boneless pork butt or shoulder, trimmed of excess fat
18 corn tortillas
½ cup fresh cilantro sprigs
¾ cup sour cream
1 lime, cut into wedges

In a 4 to 6 quart slow cooker, combine the salsa, chili powder, oregano, cocoa, and salt. Add the pork and turn to coat.

Cook covered until the meat is tender and pulls apart easily, on high for 4 to 5 hours or on low for 7 to 8 hours.

Twenty minutes before serving, heat oven to 350 degrees. Stack the tortillas, wrap them in foil and bake until warm, about 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, using 2 forks, shred the pork and stir into the cooking liquid. Serve with the tortillas, cilantro, sour cream, lime and extra salsa.

Yield: 6 servings

SEAFOOD**Lemony Shrimp with White Beans and Couscous**

Prep: 20 minutes

1 10-ounce box couscous
Kosher salt
black pepper
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 to 3 cloves garlic, chopped
4 scallions, chopped
1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and de-veined
1 15½-ounce can cannelloni beans, rinsed
½ cup fresh flat leaf parsley
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

In a saucepan, bring 2 cups water to a boil. Stir in the couscous and ¼ teaspoon salt. Cover and let sit off heat for 5 minutes; fluff with a fork before serving.

Meanwhile, heat 1 tablespoon of the butter in a large skillet over medium high heat. Add the garlic and scallions and cook for 30 seconds. Add the shrimp and cook, stirring, until they begin to turn pink, about 3 minutes.

Stir in the beans, parsley, lemon juice, the remaining butter, 1 teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Cook until heated through, 2 to 3 minutes. Serve with the couscous.

Yield: 4 servings

Shrimp and Sausage Stew

4 pounds peeled raw large shrimp
3 large onions, chopped
¼ cup canola oil
2 15-ounce cans tomato sauce
3 14½-ounce cans diced tomatoes with zesty green chiles
5 celery ribs, cut into 1 inch pieces
3 green bell peppers, seeded and cut into 1 inch strips
6 garlic cloves, chopped and divided
1 1-pound package spicy smoked sausage, sliced
3 cups uncooked jasmine or long grain rice
6 green onions, chopped
1 cup chopped fresh parsley
2 tablespoons Cajun seasoning
¼ cup cornstarch

Butterfly shrimp by making a deep slit down back of each from large end to tail, cutting to but not through inside curve of shrimp. De-vein shrimp.

Cook onions in hot oil in a large Dutch oven over medium heat, stirring often, 35 to 40 minutes or until golden brown. Add tomato sauce and cook, stirring occasionally, 25 to 30 minutes or until thickened. Add diced tomatoes with green chiles, celery, bell peppers and 2 cups water.

Bring to a boil over medium high heat; reduce heat to medium and simmer 30 minutes or until sauce thickens slightly. Add 3 garlic cloves and simmer 30 minutes, stirring in 1 to 2 cups of water as needed to maintain a stew-like consistency. Stir in sausage and simmer 30 minutes, stirring in 1 to 2 cups water as needed. Skim grease from surface as needed.

Meanwhile, prepare rice according to package directions.

Stir green onions, parsley, Cajun seasoning, and remaining 3 garlic cloves into sausage mixture. Simmer 10 minutes. Add shrimp and bring to a boil over medium high heat.

CHAPTER SIX: BROCCOLI, BEANS, AND BUDGETS

Research is a lot like digging in the dirt: you start with a goal, perhaps to dig a hole for a young plant, but find something completely different, like a decaying stump or really great soil that needs some nitrates. Or in the process of the project you decide to plant something totally different. I started a project on ways to cut my grocery budget, thinking that couponing and adding more beans and less meat would be the extent of my story. Little did I know that by trying to creatively cut back on my grocery spending I would initiate and run a local farmers' market. After a year of research—which included two seminars, six visits to other markets in different parts of the country, two presentations to city leaders, one presentation to shop owners of the proposed parking lot, 90 phone calls, and 20 farm visits recruiting farmers to stay local and not travel over an hour to an established market—my suburban community boasts a twice-a-week market. In addition to marketing homes, I now market a farmers' market as the Executive Director of a newly established nonprofit group that sponsors the farmers' market.

About 800 shoppers visit on Saturdays and 400 during the week. My suburban utopia has over 90,000 residents in the county and surrounding area. The farmers tell me it is awesome as each day they prepare their produce for local shoppers and each day their baskets return empty. They are making more money and spending less time driving to the other markets—and it is only our first season as a group. Each farmer smiles and talks to each other about planting more of this or trying some of that, coordinating their

efforts to attract the public, offer a variety, and make money. They feel appreciated and hopeful as new consumers admire their food as art.

My restless surge of energy manifested this project, and the project became bigger and stronger than my recession-depression. In the process of research, my desire to share my findings of how to eat fresh with social meaning and save money, I found my light again. By digging into a subject, I found a nugget, a spark to rekindle my personal fire and fuel my soul.

My town is now part of a national trend that will continue to grow. Between 1994 and 2008, farmers' markets doubled in the United States to more than 4,685 nationwide. The United States Department of Agriculture estimates that more than one billion dollars of produce sales exists in the farmers' market sect (Cotler 30).

I know that it is something special on a variety of levels. When I see people nod, hug, and chat with excitement, comparing how they are going to stuff their squash or sharing their grandmother's zucchini bread recipe, I know that the market is more than buying food cheaper and fresher than at the big box store down the street. And while the air conditioning of a large store is nice, I revel in handing out fresh snow cones to keep the kids cool so they want to come back with their parents.

The primitive nature of the market assures the survival skills of humans. We can grow what we eat—and if you don't grow it, you can buy it from the hand that actually planted a seed, nurtured it, picked off hookworms, traveled to a parking lot, set up a tent, spread out a gingham tablecloth, placed it a basket for you to pick your favorite one, and drive home. The entire event, mundane to most, occurred without a tractor-trailer. Self-sustaining acts small in nature grow like the plants, and through the growth of these small

acts we build confidence in the concept of sustainability. The act of growing or knowing who produced your food makes you keenly aware of the very basics of life.

As a cook, I must learn and be willing to learn all over again. When trying new recipes from a different culture, I have to throw out the way I normally do things. Since we have become a nation of industrial eaters, we may have to re-learn how to eat as well. Unless you stock up and learn how to blanch and freeze, you will not eat asparagus in October or strawberries in December if you embrace the eating local lifestyle. You will, however, eat with more nutrients and save money. Have you ever purchased overpriced foreign produce in the off-season?

Eating local can be another form of discipline, something we Americans are not fond of. In our super-convenient world, we like what we like when we like it. Supporting your local farmer does take a little extra effort. You cannot run to the market at ten o'clock at night, pick a tomato and the latest trash gossip magazine. However, if all travel systems were shut down for a several days and the grocery stores were vacant of food, I could drive to several farms and pick up fresh salad greens, peaches, eggs, stone-ground bread, grass-fed beef, and free-range chickens. And the farmers would know my name, and I would know their name.

Everyone loves a deal. I can't pass up shoes on sale or produce on sale. There is nothing like buying a pile of fresh corn at a low-barrel price. I can't help but stock up. When I buy more than I need, I pass it on to friends or, lately, I've learned to freeze it. I grew up in the age where microwaves were new and convenience was in; thus, I never learned how to can, and quite frankly, I'm afraid my canning would be more like an eighth grade science experiment with jars of odd things growing. My storage of choice is

the freezer. It is best to *blanch* before freezing: cook vegetables quickly then toss them into an ice bath. By taking this step, the blanching process kills any bacteria, stops the food-ripening enzymes, slows vitamin and mineral loss, and zaps them with a bright color. Those veggies are clean, locked with vitamins, and ready to hibernate for you to have a summer harvest in winter.

Here's my biggest hint that really helps, especially if you do not cook for more than one or two people. **Before you place your blanched vegetables or fruit in freezer bags, line them up on a cookie sheet and pre-freeze them a little.** By taking this step, the individual pieces do not congeal together in a single big block. I can take out a few pieces of broccoli, or enough berries for one smoothie.

Total prep time involved with freezing is thirty minutes. On a cold, dark winter night, nothing beats a homemade tomato sauce with summer tomatoes. So prepare your vegetables and fruit. Fruit does not need to be blanched, and most vegetables only need to be cooked in boiling water for two minutes. Don't forget to place them in the ice bath to keep them crisp. Spread veggies or fruit in a single layer and freeze until solid, at least thirty minutes. Pack the frozen veggies or fruit in quart or gallon size freezer bags. Use your coupons and buy good ones with zip seal or double strips to avoid any chance of freezer burn. To reheat your veggies in a microwave, just add a tablespoon of water, cover, and reheat for a quick dinner. Or place them in a steamer basket over an inch of boiling water. You'll be amazed that you can taste the difference between your truly fresh frozen and store-bought fresh frozen vegetables. So now you have no excuse not to buy that bargain at the farmers' market—just freeze it!

RECIPES

Vegetables

Acorn Squash Stuffed with Apricots and Cornbread
Apples and Sweet Potatoes
Braised Red Cabbage
Broccoli with Lemon Zest and Parsley
Garden Tomato Sauce
Greens with Hot Chile Vinaigrette
Grilled Vegetables with Romesco Sauce
Snow Peas with Cashews
Spinach Sauté
Squash Blossoms
Squash Casserole
Tangy Green Beans with Pimiento
Tri-Colored Peppers with Fresh Herbs
Vidalia Onion Casserole

Rice and Beans

Black Bean Cakes with Mole Salsa
Chili Rice
Fried Brown Rice with Asparagus and Almonds

Grits

Cheese Grits
Saga Blue Chile Grits
Tomato Grits

VEGETABLES

Acorn Squash Stuffed with Apricots and Cornbread

3 acorn squash (about 1 to 2 pounds each), halved lengthwise and seeded
4 cups cornbread cut in ½ inch cubes
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil plus more for brushing squash
1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced
1/3 cup thinly sliced celery
1½ teaspoon dry sage or 2 tablespoons minced fresh
2 teaspoons finely chopped garlic
1 ½ cups hot water or vegetable broth
½ cup chopped dried apricots
½ cup pecans, lightly toasted and chopped
2 tablespoons finely chopped flat leaf parsley
¼ teaspoon each salt and freshly ground pepper

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Have ready baking pan(s) large enough to hold squash in one layer and a rimmed baking sheet.

Place squash cut side down in pan(s). Brush skin with 2 teaspoons oil. Pour in ½ inch boiling water. Bake 20 minutes or until squash are barely tender when pierced. Transfer to a plate until cool enough to handle.

Meanwhile, prepare stuffing: Increase oven to 400 degrees. Spread cornbread cubes on baking sheet and bake about 10 minutes, turning occasionally, until lightly browned. Put in a bowl.

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large, heavy skillet over medium low heat. Add onion, celery, sage and garlic. Sauté 20 minutes, stirring often until onion is caramelized. Add water and apricots. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer 10 minutes or until liquid is reduced by about 1/3. Remove from heat; stir in pecans, parsley, fresh sage, salt and pepper, then gently stir in cornbread.

Reduce oven to 350 degrees. Stuff squash with cornbread mixture; return to pan(s).

Bake 1 hour or until squash pierces easily with the tip of a knife. To serve, cut each in half lengthwise again.

Yield: 12 servings

Apples and Sweet Potatoes

1 2-pound can sweet potatoes or 2 pounds fresh, boiled and peeled
2 cups apples, sliced and peeled
¾ cup maple syrup
¼ cup melted butter
1 teaspoon salt

Slice potatoes lengthwise and place them into a well-greased 12x8x2 casserole dish. Arrange apple slices on top of the potatoes. Combine the syrup, butter and salt. Pour over the potatoes and apples. Cover and bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Remove the cover and continue to bake for another 30 minutes or until apples are tender, basting frequently.

Braised Red Cabbage

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 small onion, coarsely chopped
2 medium apples cut into ½ inch slices
1 medium head red cabbage, halved, cored and shredded
½ cup apple cider vinegar
¼ cup water
¼ cup sugar
¼ teaspoon each coarse salt and freshly ground pepper

Heat the butter and oil together in a medium stockpot over medium heat until butter is melted. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally until translucent but not brown, about 3 minutes. Stir in apples and cook 3 minutes more.

Add the cabbage, vinegar, water, and sugar; season with salt and pepper. Cover and reduce heat to medium low. Cook stirring occasionally until wilted and cooked through, about 20 minutes. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

Broccoli with Lemon Zest and Parsley

1 pound broccoli florets
5 teaspoons olive oil, divided
2 teaspoons minced garlic
½ cup fresh whole wheat breadcrumbs
2 teaspoons lemon zest
2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
¼ teaspoon sea salt

Steam broccoli for 4 to 6 minutes until barely tender. Remove from heat.

Meanwhile heat 3 teaspoons olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add garlic, then breadcrumbs, stirring and cooking constantly until crumbs turn a few shades darker, about 3 minutes. Pour mixture into a small bowl. Stir in lemon zest, parsley, cheese and red pepper flakes.

Wipe skillet, then add remaining 2 teaspoons oil. Add broccoli. Sprinkle with salt. Sauté over medium high heat until heated through and any excess water has evaporated. Arrange on a serving platter. Sprinkle with breadcrumb mixture and serve.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

Garden Tomato Sauce

5 pounds cored whole tomatoes, frozen or fresh
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 medium onions, chopped
5 cloves of garlic, minced
1 tablespoon fresh chopped basil
1 tablespoon fresh chopped oregano
1 ½ tsp of salt
1 tsp of pepper
1 tsp sugar

For frozen tomatoes, run the tomatoes under water and rub off the skins. Let them thaw in the refrigerator or defrost in microwave if they are mostly thawed. If using fresh tomatoes, bring a large pot of water to boil. Make a small X in the bottom of each tomato and plunge into the boiling water. When skins look loose, about 30 seconds to 2 minutes, remove and place in an ice bath and for a minute or two. Remove and chop the tomatoes, reserving all juice.

Heat oil in a Dutch oven and sauté garlic and onion. Add all tomatoes, juice, herbs, and seasoning. Bring to a boil then reduce heat to a simmer, stirring occasionally. Taste and season as it simmers to your taste. (I tend to add a lot of garlic and basil, and a shot of dry red wine the last ten minutes.)

Greens with Hot Chile Vinaigrette

8 ounces gourmet salad greens
2 tablespoons thinly sliced fresh mint leaves
2 tablespoons thinly sliced fresh basil leaves
½ cup tightly packed fresh cilantro sprigs
3 ¼-inch thick purple onion slices
½ jicama, cut into thin strips
12 large strawberries, halved
½ cup Hot Chile Vinaigrette
4 ounces roasted pepitas*

Combine salad greens, mint leaves, basil leaves, cilantro sprigs, onion slices, jicama, and strawberries; drizzle with Hot Chile Vinaigrette and toss gently. Sprinkle with pepitas.

*Pepitas are pumpkin seeds sold in many supermarkets and health food stores.

Yield: 6 servings

Grilled Vegetables with Romesco Sauce

8 plum tomatoes (about 1½ pounds), cored and halved
4 medium size zucchini, sliced in half lengthwise
2 sweet red peppers, cored, seeded and quartered
2 yellow peppers, cored, seeded and quartered
1 pound asparagus, ends trimmed
1 pound large mushrooms, stemmed
7 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1½ teaspoons salt
1¼ teaspoons black pepper
1/3 cup toasted slivered almonds
1 slice white bread, torn into pieces
2 to 3 cloves garlic, peeled
2 tablespoons sherry wine vinegar

Heat a gas grill to medium high or prepare a charcoal grill with medium hot coals.

Place tomatoes, zucchini, red and yellow peppers, asparagus, and mushrooms in a large bowl and toss with 4 tablespoons of the olive oil, 1 teaspoon of the salt and 1 teaspoon of the pepper. Toss in batches if necessary.

Grill in batches if necessary for about 5 to 6 minutes per side. Set aside.

In the bowl of a food processor, add almonds, bread and garlic. Process until the nuts are ground. Add 4 of the grilled tomatoes, the remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil, the remaining ½ teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and vinegar. Process until it has the consistency of paste. Cover sauce and chill.

Serve vegetables with romesco sauce and garlic bread.

Yield: 6 servings

Snow Peas with Cashews

1 teaspoon olive oil
1 teaspoon freshly grated orange zest
8 ounce fresh snow peas, trimmed
¼ teaspoon salt
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 tablespoon finely chopped unsalted cashews

Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium low heat. Add orange zest and stir often; cook 1 minute or just until fragrant.

Add snow peas; sprinkle with salt and pepper. Increase heat to medium high and stir often. Cook 3 to 4 minutes until crisp tender. Remove from heat; sprinkle with cashews.

Yield: 4 servings

Spinach Sauté

1 10-ounce package spinach (about 16 loosely packed cups)
1 tablespoons olive oil
4 scallions, sliced
¼ cup golden raisins
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper

Heat oil in skillet over medium high heat. Add the scallions and raisins and cook, stirring for 30 seconds. Add spinach, salt, and pepper. Cook, tossing, until just wilted, 1 to 2 minutes; stir in the lemon juice.

Yield: 4 servings

Squash Casserole

1½ pounds of squash
1 can of cream of chicken soup
1 8-ounce carton of sour cream
1 4-ounce jar of pimientos or ¼ cup of fresh red pepper
1 can or 8½ ounces of water chestnuts, sliced and drained
2 medium onions chopped
½ cup butter divided
½ to 1 package of herb stuffing mix

Cook squash in salted water until tender, approximately 12 minutes. Drain well and add cream of chicken soup, sour cream, pimientos or red pepper, water chestnuts, and onions.

Meanwhile melt 5 tablespoons of the butter in the skillet. Add stuffing and mix well. Press stuffing mixture into bottom of a 2 quart baking dish or long pan. Save the rest for the top of the casserole.

Pour squash mixture over stuffing and sprinkle remaining stuffing on top. Dot with remaining butter. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes.

Optional: cheese can be added on top as well.

Yield: 8 servings

Squash Blossoms

Yellow squash or zucchini blossoms
¼ cup onion, minced
1 clove garlic, minced
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
Ground beef, or sausage, shrimp, crab, brown rice, or a combination
1 cup Monterrey Jack cheese
1 tablespoon fresh oregano or 2 teaspoons dried oregano
½ teaspoon sea salt
½ teaspoon pepper

Tempura Batter:

2 eggs
1 cup water
1½ cups flour

Beat two eggs and pour in 1 cup of water, and 1 and ½ cups of flour.

Fresh yellow squash or zucchini blossoms, male or female, with flower open. They are best picked and used the same day, with the flowers usually open in the morning. If they are closed or sleepy, do not bother them. Wide eyed and open only. Rinse very carefully, and pat dry.

Sauté onion and garlic in extra virgin olive oil.

Stuff the inside of the flower with any of the following: Ground beef, sausage, shrimp, crab, brown rice, or any combination of the above. After meat or rice is cooked add Monterrey Jack cheese and fresh oregano. Add sea salt and pepper.

Gently submerge a stuffed flower into tempura batter and let excess batter drip off. Heat a pan with a small amount of oil in pan. Pan fry each flower until golden brown, about 6 minutes on each side. Keep warm.

Tangy Green Beans with Pimiento

1½ pounds green beans, trimmed
4 bacon slices
1 large onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 2-ounce jar diced pimiento, drained
¼ cup red wine vinegar
1 teaspoon sugar
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon pepper
½ teaspoon cumin seeds

Cook green beans in boiling water and cover 4 to 5 minutes. Drain and plunge beans into ice water to stop cooking process; set aside.

Cook bacon in a large skillet until crisp; remove bacon from skillet and drain on paper towels, reserving 2 tablespoons drippings in skillet. Crumble bacon and set aside.

Sauté onion and garlic in hot bacon drippings over medium high heat until tender. Stir in pimiento, red wine vinegar, sugar, salt, pepper, and cumin seeds. Stir in beans; reduce heat, cover and simmer 5 minutes. Sprinkle with bacon.

Yield: 6 servings

Tri-Colored Peppers with Fresh Herbs

2 teaspoons olive oil
1 each large red, yellow and orange pepper, cut in narrow strips
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon minced fresh basil or 1 teaspoon dried basil
1 teaspoon minced fresh oregano or ¼ teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme or ¼ teaspoon dried thyme
1/8 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium high heat. Add peppers. Sauté 3 minutes, or until crisp tender.

Add garlic; sauté 1 minute. Add remaining ingredients, cover and cook 2 minutes. Serve immediately.

Yield: 4 servings

Vidalia Onion Casserole

4 cups sliced Vidalia onions (about 2 large onions)
1 cup water
1 stick real butter
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon sugar
2½ tablespoon of cornstarch
1 cup evaporated milk
½ cup saltine crackers

Simmer onions in water for about 15 minutes. Add sugar, salt, and butter. Mix cornstarch and milk. Add to simmering onions. Remove from heat when smooth. Pour into a buttered baking dish and cover with cracker crumbs. Dot with butter and bake at 400 degrees for 10 minutes until lightly browned. If made ahead and chilled in refrigerator, bake for 30 minutes.

RICE AND BEANS

Black Bean Cakes with Mole Salsa

1 15-ounce can black beans, rinsed and drained
1 egg, beaten
1 cup shredded zucchini
½ cup dry bread crumbs
¼ cup shredded Mexican cheese blend
2 tablespoons chili powder
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon ground cumin
2 tablespoon olive oil

Salsa:

2 medium tomatoes, chopped
1 small green pepper, chopped
3 tablespoons grated chocolate
1 green onion, thinly sliced
2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro
1 tablespoon lime juice
1 to 2 teaspoons minced chipotle pepper in adobo sauce
1 teaspoon honey

In a small bowl, mash beans. Add the egg, zucchini, bread crumbs, cheese, chili powder, salt, baking powder, and cumin; mix well. Shape into six patties; brush both sides with oil. Place on a baking sheet.

Broil 3 to 4 inches from the heat for 3 to 4 minutes on each side or until a thermometer reads 160 degrees.

Meanwhile, in a small bowl, combine the salsa ingredients. Serve with black bean cakes.

Yield: 6 servings

Chili Rice

3 tablespoons olive oil
1 red onion, finely chopped
1 green pepper, finely chopped
1 red bell pepper, finely chopped
1 jalapeno, seeded and minced
1 cup chopped plum tomatoes
2 tablespoons minced garlic
¾ pound ground beef or turkey
2 cups long grain white rice
2 cups low sodium chicken broth
1 cup rinsed and drained kidney beans
1 tablespoon chili powder
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon paprika
3 tablespoons chopped scallions, for garnish

Heat oil in a medium size stock pot over medium heat. Add onion, peppers, and jalapeno, and cook for about 10 minutes or until translucent.

Add tomatoes, garlic, and beef or turkey to pot, and cook for 8 minutes or until meat is cooked through; drain any fat.

Stir rice into pot and reduce heat to low. Cook for 3 minutes while stirring.

Add broth, beans, chili powder, salt, pepper, paprika and ½ cup water to pot. Bring to a simmer over medium high heat, then reduce heat to medium; cover and cook for 20 minutes. Fluff with a fork and sprinkle with scallions before serving.

Yield: 12 servings

Fried Brown Rice with Asparagus and Almonds

2 tablespoons rice vinegar
1 teaspoon sesame oil
1 garlic clove, minced
½ inch piece of fresh ginger, grated
10 asparagus spears, cut diagonally into 1 inch pieces
¾ cups cooked brown rice
½ cup garbanzo beans, rinsed, drained, and chopped
2 tablespoons slivered almonds, toasted
2 green onions, chopped

In a skillet, combine vinegar, oil, garlic, ginger, and asparagus, and sauté for 5 minutes. Add cooked rice and chopped beans and sauté for another 5 to 7 minutes. Top with almonds and green onions.

Yield: 1 serving

GRITS

Cheese Grits

1 cup grits
1 stick butter
1½ cups sharp cheddar cheese
3 eggs beaten
¾ cup milk
½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
Dash garlic salt

Cook grits according to directions. Stir in butter and cheese until melted. Add milk to eggs and stir well into grits. Add seasoning.

Bake casserole at 325 degrees for 1 hour or until set.

Saga Blue Chile Grits

3 cups milk
1 garlic clove, minced
1¼ teaspoons salt, divided
1 cup quick cooking grits
½ cup (4 ounces) crumbled Saga blue cheese
1/3 cup butter or margarine, cubed
½ cup whipping cream
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
2 egg whites, lightly beaten
1 4-ounce can whole green chiles, drained and chopped
2 tablespoons freshly shredded Parmesan cheese
2 teaspoons chopped fresh basil
1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
¼ teaspoon pepper

Bring milk, garlic, and 1 teaspoon salt to a boil in a medium saucepan; gradually stir in grits. Cover pan, reduce heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes.

Whisk in blue cheese and butter until melted. Whisk in remaining ¼ teaspoon salt, whipping cream, and remaining ingredients; pour into a lightly greased 1½ quart soufflé dish.

Bake at 325 degrees for 1 hour and 10 minutes. (Center may be slightly soft.)

Tomato Grits

2 cups water
1¼ cups milk
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup quick cooking grits
½ cup plus 1 tablespoon butter
1/3 cup diced green onions
4 ounces Velveeta cheese
¼ teaspoon garlic powder
2½ cups shredded cheddar cheese
1 10-ounce can diced tomatoes and green chilies

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In a saucepan, bring the water and milk to a boil. Add the salt and slowly add the grits and return to a boil, stirring constantly for 1 minute. Reduce heat, cover, and cook for 3 minutes. While stirring the grits, add ½ cup of butter and stir until butter is melted. Cover and cook for 3 to 5 minutes or until the grits are thick and creamy. Remove from heat and set aside.

In a skillet, sauté onions in the remaining tablespoon of butter for 1 minute. Add the Velveeta, garlic powder, 1½ cups cheddar, and onions to grits, stirring until the cheese is melted. Add to tomatoes and mix well. Pour the grits into a greased 8x11x2 inch casserole dish and bake for 40 minutes. Sprinkle remaining 1 cup cheese over the casserole for the last 5 minutes of cooking time.

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

CHAPTER SEVEN: PIECE OF CAKE

Dinner is like the sunset: it will happen no matter what. Folks have been battling dinner options—whether to cook; should we go out and if so, where; or who will cook, what to cook; and other related food issues—since the beginning of time. But like the sunset, it happens every day about the same time. I am the mother of three girls, and for most of their lives, I have been single. I also worked and made great money, so we did our share of going out to eat when it was a crazy day.

Then when the girls hit puberty, two things happened: they got huge boobs, which I attributed to all the hormones in our food sources, and they started asking for more and more money. After 9/11, I got my first glimpse of what it would be like to not have two or three closings a month. And I truly wanted my children to share my love for cooking, so I decided to re-prioritize and organize by teaching my kids to cook and manage money. It happened by accident. I instituted a new allowance system coined “the envelope budget.” Each girl had an individual folder in a file drawer with important and necessary documents, such as permission slips, teacher notes, tests that needed to be signed, etc. On top of the file drawer were three notebooks with each girl’s chore chart and her money envelopes. Each chore chart had a list of items and an assigned point value for each category. A total score of 700 was needed each week in order to earn their money. For example, making the bed every day was worth 25 points. Folding clothes, mowing the yard, and cleaning the pool were worth 100 points each, etc. I designed the

chore chart with some freedom to fail and with opportunities to make up missed chores. But one absolutely necessary item on the chore chart was family spirit. Negative infractions, like talking ugly, stealing your sister's curlers, or general fighting, cost the girls their 150 family spirit points. If the infraction was serious enough, the girls would be fined.

Each girl had an envelope for savings, tithing, birthday party money, entertainment, and clothes. Each envelope received deposits when the girls turned in their chore charts by 8:00pm on Sunday evenings. And if the charts were not turned in by 8:00pm Sunday night, no deposits would be made to the envelopes. This seemed to work really well, and I think the girls liked having money jingle in their pockets. And if they needed money to go out, they grabbed it from their envelopes.

My oldest daughter, Meredith, ran out of entertainment money one week when she was supposed to go out with friends. I joked and said, "Why don't you do what I do and just cook for them since you're out of money?" Next thing I knew, we were looking for a recipe she could make on her own so she could invite her friends over. A gourmet was born. She has always loved mangos, and I had ten sitting there in a basket. I helped her 'dress' a chicken, reminding her of Amelia Bedelia stories. We placed the chicken on a bed of lemongrass and slow-roasted it for three hours. During that time, I worked in my home office while she looked for the recipe for mango glaze to garnish the chicken. She asked lots of questions like "What is a teaspoon versus a tablespoon?" "What does corn starch do?" "Is this mashed enough?" It thrilled me to answer her questions and watch her work in the kitchen. I showed her how to cook plain rice in coconut milk and add a few almonds as a side dish for her mango chicken.

At first her friends were a little disappointed that they were not going to the local chain restaurant, but when they saw Meredith's gourmet-cooked meal, it was like they were playing house all over again, except the food was real. Soon it was the cool thing to come over to Meredith's to eat instead of the local pizza joint or McDonald's. I did not take out money out of her entertainment envelope for the groceries, because I loved to see her explore my refrigerator and learn about food.

Since Meredith was so successful, I assigned each girl one night a week to cook. They had to tell me on Sunday night what they wanted to cook so I could buy the ingredients. Even my youngest daughter, Julia, at eight years old, had a night. Julia's night usually consisted of a ground beef dish like tacos or sloppy joes, but she learned to cook the meat properly, to measure the taco package, and to place the shells in the oven to heat up.

By preplanning the week's meals, we maintained a grocery budget. However, it was still a rather plush budget, with salmon filets, pork tenderloin, and shrimp with saffron sauce, but we were eating at home more, learning a valuable skill, and connecting as women.

When the real estate market dove into the deep waters of recession, Meredith reminded me that I could probably cut back on the groceries. We bought food like Carrie bought shoes in *Sex and the City*.

By Thanksgiving break of 2008, I knew she had a point. There was very little money for Christmas, and I had no closings on the books. As college students, they each needed a job over Christmas break, but how would they get work when they all went off

to school and did not return home until the December 8? Most gift wrappers and holiday help were hired before the Thanksgiving weekend.

Once again, we looked to our kitchen to provide the inspiration. Mallory, who was a freshman studying musical theatre in New York City, also held a job at a cupcake factory known for its sugary delectable's on the Upper East Side, where she learned the art of frosting a cupcake to look like the tower of pisa. When she declared our kitchen the Christmas Cupcake Factory, the three girls had instant jobs. They sent flyers to their friends via email and Facebook. Mallory took pictures of red velvet cupcakes with peppermint sprinkles as her profile image and wrote daily status updates on her adventures in the kitchen.

I made up a name (Four Chicks) with a girly pink logo, and printed labels for cake boxes. I placed flyers in various offices, from doctors to real estate. Their sales were steady, with about four dozen cupcakes delivered each day, in addition to six pies and three or four cheesecakes. Julia, who had just gotten her driver's license, seemed to be the head delivery queen. She was still learning the skill of driving, which was even more challenging with the frosted items in tow, but she only lost one round of cupcakes and two pumpkin pies.

We baked right up to Christmas Eve and tallied the money to just over \$1,000—not bad for short notice and little advertising. Each of them learned about all the hard work behind those cute bakeries, and it all started with some basic skills taught at home so they wouldn't be afraid of the measuring cups. I taught them more than how to cook; I taught them how to look at what they could do versus what they couldn't do, and I hope that lesson is the backbone of their work ethic.

Although I made some mistakes over the years, like not saving enough money and some investment decisions, I do not regret the lessons my children and I learned, nor do I regret the investment I made in my children by sharing my mistakes and teaching the life skills to handle financial challenges. Life guarantees some curves and some short stops, but choosing to recover is key. With resourcefulness and hard work, just about anything can be accomplished.

RECIPES

Breads

Apple Raisin Muffins
Banana Bread
Bread Pudding
Cinnamon Apple Dumplings
Cranberry Orange Scones
Irish Bread
Old-Fashioned Brown Bread
Rosemary-Raisin Bread

Desserts

Cherry Cheesecake Bars
Chocolate-Dipped Marshmallows
Chocolate Mousse
Chocolate Panini
Chocolate Ricotta Mousse
Crustless Brownie Pie
Deep Dish Peach Cobbler
Howard Hammond's Fudge Sauce
Mixed Berry Tartlets
Oatmeal Raisin Cookies
Oh Henry
Old-Fashioned Carrot Cake
Peanut Butter and Chocolate Cookie Cups
Pear Tart
Praline Pudding Cake
Pumpkin Cheesecake
Sweet Tart Crust
Toasted Coconut Refrigerator Cake
Vanilla Pudding
Very Berry Cobbler

BREADS

Apple Raisin Muffins

1 cup water
2 cups sugar
2 cups grated apples
2½ cups raisins
1 cup (2 sticks) butter
3 teaspoons ground cinnamon
2 teaspoons freshly grated nutmeg
½ teaspoon ground cloves
1 cup chopped walnuts
2 teaspoons baking soda
3½ cups all-purpose flour

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine the water, sugar, apples, raisins, butter, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves in a saucepan; bring to a boil. Remove pan from the heat and cool completely.

In a large bowl, stir the nuts and baking soda into the flour. Add the cooled mixture to the bowl and stir until blended. Fill greased miniature muffin tins with batter to the top. Bake for 15 minutes.

Banana Bread

3 ripe bananas
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 cup sugar
½ cup butter or shortening
2 eggs
¼ teaspoon of salt
2 cups flour
½ teaspoon nutmeg

In a small bowl, mix banana with baking soda and ½ cup sugar. Set aside.

In mixing bowl, cream butter, ½ cup sugar, eggs, and salt. Add flour and nutmeg. Add banana mixture. Mix well. Pour batter into 1 bread loaf pan and 3 small 5½x3 inch loaf pans.

Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.

Bread Pudding

1 loaf French bread
1 quart milk
3 eggs
2 cups sugar
2 tablespoons vanilla
3 tablespoons butter
1 cup raisins

Soak bread in milk. Add remaining ingredients, except the butter. Melt butter and add. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 to 30 minutes until firm.

Sauce:

1 stick butter
1 cup powder sugar
1 egg
Bourbon (optional)

Cook sugar and butter in double boiler. Add egg and beat. Add bourbon to taste.

Cinnamon Apple Dumplings

1 12-ounce package Escalloped apples
¼ cup butter
¼ cup sugar
¼ cup water
1 8-ounce package refrigerated crescent rolls
¼ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ cup chopped pecans, toasted

Thaw apples in microwave at medium (50%) power 6 to 7 minutes; set aside.

Melt butter in an 11x7 inch baking dish; set aside

Cook granulated sugar and ¼ cup water in a saucepan over medium heat until sugar melts; set aside.

Roll out crescent dough and cut in squares. Add apple mixture to butter and pour sugar mixture evenly over apples. Place one crescent roll square on top of each apple. Sprinkle lightly with sugar. Bake at 350 until brown and bubbly. Serve warm with fresh whip cream or ice cream.

Homemade Whip Cream:

1 pint heavy whipping cream
¼ cup powdered sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract, amaretto, or almond extract

Chill your mixing bowl by placing it in the freezer for at least 20 minutes. Add heavy whipping cream and beat on high, slowly adding ¼ cup powdered sugar. Add more or less sugar, depending on your taste. Add vanilla extract, amaretto, or almond extract.

Cranberry Orange Scones

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon grated orange rind
½ cup butter, cut up
2/3 cup buttermilk*
1 cup dried cranberries
1 tablespoon milk
1 tablespoon sugar

Combine flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt and orange rind; cut in butter with a pastry blender until mixture is crumbly. Add buttermilk and dried cranberries, stirring just until moistened.

Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface; knead 5 or 6 times. Pat into an 8 inch circle. Cut dough into 8 wedges and place the wedges 1 inch apart on a lightly greased baking sheet. Brush with milk and sprinkle with 1 tablespoon sugar.

Bake at 425 degrees for 15 minutes or until scones are golden brown.

*If you don't have buttermilk on hand, add 1 tablespoon of lemon juice or vinegar to milk. Let stand until milk curdles.

Yield: 8 servings

Old-Fashioned Brown Bread

2 1/3 cups boiling water
1 cup old-fashioned oats
1/2 cup butter, cubed
1/3 cup molasses
5 1/2 to 6 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
5 teaspoons active dry yeast
2 teaspoons salt

In a large bowl, pour boiling water over oats. Stir in butter and molasses. Let stand until mixture cools to 120 to 130 degrees, stirring occasionally.

In another bowl, combine 3 1/2 cups flour, yeast and salt. Beat in oat mixture until blended. Stir in enough remaining flour to form soft dough.

Turn dough onto floured surface; knead until smooth and elastic, about 6 to 8 minutes. Place in a greased bowl, turning once to grease the top. Cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled, about 1 hour.

Punch dough down. Turn onto a lightly floured surface; divide in half. Shape into loaves. Place in two greased 9x5 inch loaf pans. Cover and let rise until doubled, about 30 minutes.

Bake at 375 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from pans to wire racks to cool.

Yield: 2 loaves

Irish Bread

3½ cups flour
2/3 cup sugar
1½ cups buttermilk
1½ cups raisins
2 tablespoons melted butter
1 tablespoon caraway seeds
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
2 beaten eggs

Mix flour, sugar, salt, soda and baking powder; stir. Add buttermilk, melted butter and beaten eggs to flour mixture only until all is moistened. Don't beat like a cake. Add raisins and caraway seeds.

Rosemary-Raisin Bread

6 to 6½ cups all-purpose flour
2 packages active dry yeast
2½ cups milk
3 tablespoons sugar
2 tablespoons butter
2 teaspoon salt
2 egg yolks
1¼ cups golden or dark raisins
5 teaspoons dried rosemary, crushed
1 egg yolk, beaten
1 tablespoon milk

In a very large mixing bowl combine 3 cups flour and yeast; set aside. In a medium saucepan heat and stir together the milk, sugar, butter, and salt until warm (120 to 130 degrees) and butter almost melts. Add warm milk mixture to flour mixture. Add 1 egg yolk; stir until combined. Beat with an electric mixer on low speed for 30 seconds, scraping the sides of the bowl constantly. Beat the mixture on high speed for 3 minutes more. Sprinkle the flour mixture with the raisins and the rosemary. Using a wooden spoon, stir in as much of the remaining flour as you can.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Knead in enough of the remaining flour to make moderately stiff dough that is smooth and elastic, about 6 to 8 minutes total. Shape the dough into a ball. Place dough in a lightly greased bowl, turning once to grease surface. Cover and let rise in a warm place until it doubles in size (about 45 to 60 minutes). Punch dough down. Turn onto a lightly floured surface. Divide dough in half. Cover and let rest for 10 minutes. Lightly grease two 8x4x2 inch or 9x5x3 inch loaf pans. Shape each half of the dough into a loaf. Place in prepared pans. Cover and let rise in a warm place until nearly double in size (30 to 40 minutes).

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

For the glaze, combine the remaining egg yolk and milk; brush lightly over tops of risen dough. Using a serrated knife, make a long shallow cut down the length of dough in each pan. Bake about 40 minutes or until loaf is golden brown and crusty. The bread should sound hollow when tapped. Cover loosely with foil during the last 10 minutes of baking to prevent over-browning, if necessary. Loosen bread and remove from pans immediately. Cool on wire racks.

Yield: 2 loaves

Sweet Tart Crust

1¼ cups flour
6 tablespoons cold butter
1 egg yolk
½ teaspoon almond extract
3 tablespoons sugar
Pinch of salt
3 tablespoons ice water

Put all ingredients except water in food processor until blended. Turn on food processor and pour water through tube. When pastry forms a ball, turn off machine. (This should only take a few seconds.)

DESSERTS

Cherry Cheesecake Bars

2 cups all-purpose flour
1½ cups uncooked quick cooking oats
¾ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
½ cup butter or margarine, softened
1 8-ounce package reduced fat cream cheese, softened
1 14-ounce can low-fat sweetened condensed milk
½ teaspoon almond extract
1 21-ounce can light cherry fruit filling

Line a 13x9 inch pan with aluminum foil. Lightly grease foil.

Combine flour, oats, brown sugar, and margarine in a large bowl, stirring until crumbly. Reserve 1 cup crumb mixture. Press remaining mixture into the bottom of prepared pan.

Bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes.

Beat cream cheese at medium speed with an electric mixer for 1 minute or until fluffy. Gradually add condensed milk and almond extract, beating until smooth. Spread over crust and top with fruit filling. Sprinkle with reserved 1 cup crumb mixture.

Bake at 350 degrees for 45 to 50 minutes or until golden.

Cool on a wire rack. Lift cheese cake out of pan using foil. Cut into bars and chill.

Yield: 2½ dozen bars.

Chocolate-Dipped Marshmallows

12 marshmallows

2 ounces semisweet chocolate, melted

3 tablespoons toppings (such as chopped pistachios, shredded coconut, chopped pecans or crumbled graham crackers)

Dip half of each marshmallow in melted chocolate, letting the excess drip off. Sprinkle with your desired toppings. Serve immediately or chill until firm, about 20 minutes.

Yield: 12

Chocolate Mousse

8 egg yolks
2/3 cup sugar
1/2 cup water
8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
12 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped
2 teaspoons vanilla
1 cup chilled heavy cream

Garnish: fresh raspberries, mint leaves or chocolate shavings

Whisk egg yolks, sugar, butter and water in double boiler over simmering (not boiling) water; whisk constantly until instant read thermometer reads 160 degrees and mixture has thickened. Add chocolate; stir until melted and mixture is smooth. Stir in vanilla. Remove from heat; cool. With electric mixer beat cream until it forms soft peaks; fold into chocolate mixture. Spoon into 12 6-ounce serving dishes. Chill until set, about 4 hours.

Yield: 12 servings

Chocolate Panini

4 slices challah or white bread
2 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped

Form 2 sandwiches with the bread and chocolate. Transfer to a hot panini press or waffle iron and cook until the bread is golden and the chocolate has melted, 2 to 3 minutes.

Yield: 2 servings

Chocolate Ricotta Mousse

1 15-ounce container ricotta (about 2 cups)
3 tablespoons powdered sugar
4 ounces semisweet chocolate, melted,
1 ounce semisweet chocolate, shaved, for topping

In a food processor, blend the ricotta, sugar, and melted chocolate until smooth. Divide among bowls and top with the shaved chocolate. The mousse can be refrigerated until ready to serve, up to 2 days. Bring to room temperature before serving.

Yield: 4 servings

Crustless Brownie Pie

1 cup sugar
½ cup flour
¼ cup cocoa
½ cup butter, softened
2 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
½ cup chopped pecans
Whipped cream or ice cream

Combine sugar, flour, cocoa, butter, eggs, and vanilla, and beat 4 minutes at medium speed. Stir in nuts, spread batter evenly in buttered 9-inch pie plate.

Bake at 325 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes (pie will puff and then fall slightly).

Serve with cream.

Deep Dish Peach Cobbler

2 cups fresh peaches, peeled and sliced
1¼ cups sugar
½ teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon almond extract

Crust:

½ cup butter
¾ cup flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
Pinch of salt
¾ cup milk

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Put peaches, sugar, cinnamon, and almond extract in bowl and stir until well mixed or coated.

In oven, melt butter in a deep baking pan. In a medium bowl, stir in remaining ingredients except peaches.

Pour batter over peaches. Make sure it is evenly distributed but DO NOT stir. Carefully place peaches on top of buttered batter. Any sugar left, sprinkle on top. DO NOT STIR. Bake for 1 hour. Surprise! The peaches go to the bottom and the crust rises to the top.

Old-Fashioned Carrot Cake

1 10-ounce package shredded carrots (3 cups)
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
2 cups sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
4 large eggs
¾ cup canola oil
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
Cream cheese frosting

Cream Cheese Frosting:

1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
½ cup butter, softened
1 16-ounce package powdered sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Beat cream cheese and butter at medium speed with an electric mixer until fluffy; gradually add powdered sugar, beating well. Stir in vanilla.

Grease 3 9-inch round cake pans and line with wax paper; grease and flour wax paper. Combine first 7 ingredients in a large bowl; add eggs, oil and vanilla, stirring until blended. Pour into prepared pans.

Bake at 350 degrees for 25 minutes or until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool in pans on wire racks 10 minutes; remove from pans and cool completely on wire racks.

Spread cream cheese frosting between layers and on top and sides of cake. Chill. Freeze cake up to 3 months if desired.

Yield: about 3 cups

Howard Hammond's Fudge Sauce

3 tablespoons butter
4 squares dark unsweetened chocolate
1½ cups sugar
1 cup milk
1 teaspoon vanilla
¼ cup dry sherry (optional)

Melt butter and dark unsweetened chocolate. Add sugar and milk. Boil until sugar melts (about 7 minutes). Add 1 teaspoon vanilla. Add dry sherry, if desired.

Mixed Berry Tartlets

1 15-ounce package rolled refrigerated unbaked pie crusts
2 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 12-ounce package frozen mixed berries
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1/3 cup whipping cream
1/4 cups purchased lemon curd
1 1/2 teaspoon sugar
1/4 teaspoon vanilla

Let pie crusts stand at room temperature for 15 minutes. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Lightly coat 12 2 1/2-inch muffin cups with cooking spray. For pastry shells, unroll pie crusts. Use a 3 1/2 to 4 inch round cutter to cut 6 rounds from each crust. Press rounds into prepared muffin cups, pleating to fit.

For tartlet filling, in a medium bowl combine 2 tablespoons sugar and cornstarch; stir in berries and lemon juice. Spoon berry mixture into pastry shells. Bake for 20 minutes or until pastry is golden. Cool in muffin cups on a wire rack for 5 minutes. Carefully remove tartlets from muffin cups; cool completely on wire rack.

In a medium mixing bowl, combine whipping cream, lemon curd, 1 teaspoon sugar and vanilla; beat with wire whisk or with electric mixer on medium speed until cream mixture mounds and is fluffy. Spoon onto tarts.

Yield: 12 servings

Oatmeal Raisin Cookies

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 cup unsalted butter, softened
1 cup sugar
1 cup dark brown sugar, packed
2 eggs
2 teaspoons vanilla
3 cups oats (not instant)
1¾ cups raisins (or dried cherries or dried cranberries)

Whisk together flour, baking soda, baking powder, and kosher salt; set aside. Cream together butter, sugar, brown sugar, eggs, and vanilla. Stir flour mixture into creamed mixture. Stir in oats and raisins.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Form cookies and bake 11 to 13 minutes (on center rack) or until golden, but still moist beneath cracks on top. Remove from oven; let cookies sit on baking sheet for 2 minutes before removing to a wire rack to cool.

Yield: 3 dozen cookies

Oh Henry

4 cups quick oats
2/3 cup butter
½ cup white Karo syrup
1 cup brown sugar
3 teaspoons vanilla
6 ounces chocolate chips
2/3 cup of crunchy peanut butter

Cream butter and sugar. Add Karo syrup, brown sugar, and vanilla. Put in a 13x9x3 pan (can use cookie sheet and cooking spray). Press with fingers. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 to 16 minutes.

While baking, mix chocolate chips with peanut butter. Spread on dough after cooling slightly. Cut into bars and refrigerate.

Peanut Butter and Chocolate Cookie Cups

¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter, softened
1/3 cup granulated sugar
1½ cups all-purpose flour
1 2/3 cup (11-ounce package) chocolate morsels, divided
2 large eggs
1 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Heavily grease 36 mini-muffin cups.

Beat butter and sugar in small mixer bowl until creamy. Add flour and beat until mixture is evenly moist and crumbly. Roll rounded teaspoon of dough into a ball; press onto bottom and half way up side of muffin cup. Repeat with remaining dough. Place five chocolate morsels in each cup.

Beat eggs in medium bowl with wire whisk. Stir in sweetened condensed milk and vanilla extract. Spoon into muffin cups, filling almost to top of each cup.

Bake 15 to 18 minutes or until centers are puffed and edges are just beginning to brown. Remove from oven to wire rack. Gently run knife around edges of cakes. Let centers flatten. While still warm, top cakes with half of remaining morsels (they will soften and retain their shape). Repeat with remaining morsels. Cool completely in pan on wire rack. With tip of knife, release cakes from cups.

Yield: 36 cookie cups

Pear Tart

5 cups sliced pears
2 ounces blanched almonds, slivered
3 Pepperidge Farm Chessmen cookies
½ teaspoon almond extract
2 tablespoons sugar
1 ½ tablespoon orange juice

Glaze:

2 tablespoons sugar
½ cup red currant jelly

Grind almonds and cookies in machine. Add almond extract. Sprinkle over tart crust. Fan pears out in a spiral pattern and sprinkle with sugar and orange juice.

Cook tart and paint with glaze.

Praline Pudding Cake

¾ cup packed dark brown sugar
1¼ cups plus 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour, divided
¾ cup granulated sugar
½ cup chopped pecans, toasted
1 tablespoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon salt
½ cup evaporated milk
2 tablespoons stick butter, melted
1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
1¾ cups boiling water
2 cups fresh whipped topping

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Combine brown sugar and 1 tablespoon flour in a small bowl. Lightly spoon 1¼ cups flour into dry measuring cups; level with a knife. Combine with granulated sugar, 1/3 cup pecans, baking powder and salt in a medium bowl; make a well in center of mixture. Combine milk, butter and vanilla in a bowl; add to flour mixture. Stir just until moist.

Spread batter into 8-inch square baking pan; sprinkle with brown sugar mixture. Pour boiling water over batter (do not stir). Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes or until pudding is bubbly and cake springs back when touched lightly in center. Serve warm with whipped topping. Garnish with pecans.

Yield: 8 servings

Pumpkin Cheesecake

Crust:

2 cups graham cracker crumbs
3 tablespoons light brown sugar
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 stick melted salted butter

Filling:

3 8-ounce packages cream cheese, room temperature
1 15-ounce can pureed pumpkin
3 eggs plus 1 egg yolk
¼ cup sour cream
1½ cups sugar
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon fresh ground nutmeg
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

For crust: In medium bowl, combine crumbs, sugar and cinnamon. Add melted butter. Press down flat into a 9-inch spring form pan. Set aside.

For filling: Beat cream cheese until smooth. Add pumpkin puree, eggs, egg yolk, sour cream, sugar, and spices. Add flour and vanilla. Beat together until well combined.

Pour into crust. Spread out evenly and bake for 1 hour. Remove from oven and let sit for 15 minutes. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 4 hours.

Yield: 8 servings

Toasted Coconut Refrigerator Cake

½ cup flaked sweetened coconut
1 cup heavy (or whipping) cream, whipped to a soft peak
2 cups vanilla pudding
2 pound cakes (such as Sara Lee), about 11 ounces each

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spread the coconut on a baking sheet and toast in oven until golden, about 10 minutes, shaking the tray once about halfway through the cooking time. Remove and let cool. In a medium bowl, gently fold together the whipped cream and pudding. Slice each cake vertically in half and slice each half horizontally into three ½ inch layers. Line an 8x8 inch square pan with 4 slices of cake to make 1 layer. Top with about 1 cup of the pudding mixture, spreading to cover the cake. Repeat the process to form 3 layers, ending with the pudding mixture. Refrigerate for 1 hour.

Garnish with the toasted coconut and serve.

Yield: 6 to 8 servings

Vanilla Pudding

½ cup sugar
3 tablespoons cornstarch
Pinch of salt
2 cups whole milk
2 egg yolks
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Whisk together sugar, cornstarch and salt in a saucepan.

Pour ¼ cup of the milk into the sugar mixture, stirring to form a smooth paste. Whisk in the remaining milk and egg yolks. Cook the pudding mixture over low heat, stirring continuously with a wooden spoon until thickened, about 15 minutes. Do not allow it to boil. Remove from heat and stir in the butter and vanilla.

Scrape the pudding into a bowl. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing the surface to make an airtight seal and prevent a skin from forming. Refrigerate until well chilled, about 1 hour.

Very Berry Cobbler

½ cup butter or margarine
1½ cups fresh or frozen blueberries, thawed
1½ cups strawberries, halved
1 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar, divided
½ teaspoon grated lemon rind
½ teaspoon ground cardamom
1 cup chopped walnuts or pecans, toasted
1¼ cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 cup milk

Melt butter in a shallow 8-inch square baking dish in a 350 degree oven.

Toss together blueberries, strawberries, 2 tablespoons sugar, lemon rind, and cardamom.

Combine 1 cup sugar, walnuts or pecans, flour, and baking powder. Stir in milk until blended. Pour into baking dish. Spoon berry mixture with juice into center of batter (do not stir).

Bake at 350 degrees for 40 to 45 minutes. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream.

Yield: 6 servings

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RÉSUMÉ: TRICIA MAHONEY

EDUCATION

M.A. in Professional Writing, Kennesaw State University, 2010
 B.A. in English, William Woods University, 1984
 Real Estate Broker, State of Georgia, 1998

SKILLS

- Experienced with Microsoft 2007, Microsoft Works, Power Point, WebCT
- Experienced with current research methods and strategies
- Editing professional and academic documents
- Reading, assessing and problem-solving
- Teaching and training in academic and corporate settings
- Grant writing
- Photography and editorial design
- Marketing, customer service, negotiating positive outcomes

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 2007 – Present | <p>Associate Broker, <i>Prudential Georgia Realty</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing properties using significantly superb technology tools • View and analyze properties, negotiate contracts for optimum investment benefits for each client • Manage all issues relating to real estate transaction for a smooth and successful closing • Create and administer business strategies for growth and momentum of business • Lead training and motivational seminars for fellow employees |
| 2008-2009 | <p>Teaching Assistant, <i>Kennesaw State University, Anthropology Department</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed and administered grading systems • Administered policy and classroom procedures • Evaluated essays, monitored debates and other classroom activities |
| 1995 – 2007 | <p>Associate Broker, <i>Remax Around Atlanta Results</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed and grew business as a new realtor and citizen in the community • Advanced knowledge by obtaining educational designations • Utilized creative marketing skills and strong work ethic to sell over 500 homes before moving business to Prudential Georgia Realty |
| 1993 – 1994 | <p>Bank Marketing Officer, <i>Tyler Bank & Trust</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating print advertising, employee motivational newsletters, and training tools. • Writing, editing and purchasing media advertising with local TV and radio outlets. • Implementing customer service events in four different banking communities in Texas. |

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Secured a grant for the development of the Adventure Program of Smith County Juvenile Services in Tyler, Texas. Organized at-risk youth to originate a piece of art to be used as a two-block mural. Interviewed and recruited mural artists to train and work along with the youth. Complete the mural as well as several smaller ones in the community (1992–1993).
- Created a recycling awareness program in Tyler, Texas. Organized pilot recycling program through city services.
- Created Financial Peace Advocates, Inc., a 501(3)(C) organization whose focus and mission is to educate and empower women through financial literacy education programs (2007–present).
- Storyteller through Book Pal, a subsidiary of the Screen Actors Guild (2005–present).
- Storyteller and volunteer, Southside Church (2007–present).

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND HONORS

- **Georgia Writers Association**
Intern with organization during spring 2009. Active in event planning, brainstorming sessions, editing, writing, and administrative tasks.
- **American Association of University Women**
- **Chi Omega Sorority**
Alumnae President, Southern Crescent Chapter, 2008
- **National Association of Realtors**
- **Fayette County Board of Realtors**
Phoenix Award, Million Dollar Club 14 years
- **Certified Residential Specialist**
Top 2% of Realtors Nationwide
- **Graduate Realtors Institute**
- **E-Pro Designation**
- **Fayette County Board of Women Realtors**