



TAILORED TASTE TIDBITS

VOLUME IV, ISSUE II APRIL 2009 FOOD NEWS FROM TAILORED TASTE PERSONAL CHEF SERVICE

Balance

Balance, as defined by Merriam Webster, is the “stability produced by even distribution of weight on each side of the vertical axis.”

Wikipedia explains it more broadly as “a desirable point between two or more opposite forces.” With chefs, our goal is to find that desirable point by juggling the four* taste sensations we all experience – sweet, salty, sour and bitter.

Singly each of these tastes can be overwhelming or downright unpleasant – think of sucking on a lemon slice or eating a spoonful of sugar straight up. However, when combined in the perfect balance, magic happens as in lemon juice & sugar blended into lemon curd.

Taste is affected by the application of heat as well. For instance, cooking sugar to a caramel state adds a desirable bitter element while gently heating bitter onions ultimately adds sweetness.

Asian cuisine best exemplifies the balancing of flavors. Nearly every savory Asian recipe calls for a bit of sugar or mirin (sweetened rice wine) added to a salty soy sauce base along with dash of rice wine vinegar or lime juice. Tossing in a vegetable such as cabbage to add a bitter element results in a deliciously balanced dish.

Most of us naturally seek this balance in cooking – who hasn’t squeezed a lemon over asparagus to add a fresh zing or added a pinch of salt to a sweet dish to point up the flavors? Keeping these four tastes in mind when in the kitchen helps us know what’s missing from a dish we’ve created and guides us in making it satisfy our taste buds.

In life, I believe we all seek a similar balance. Work, rest, giving, taking, joy, and a pinch of sorrow (maybe a sad movie!) when experienced in just the right amounts, bring a stasis, a stillness, a peace to us. The difficult part is finding the balance – keeping work from being all-consuming or rest from turning to idleness and boredom.

In this newsletter you’ll read about some of the things I do when not cooking to attempt to find that balance within my life. Oh and I’m working on my tree pose in Yoga as well!

*Some claim there are 5 or 6 sensations – we’ll talk about that another time.

A Brush with Fame

In February I volunteered at the Ovarian Cancer National Alliance Fundraiser, *Turn Up the Heat with Women Chefs*. The guest speaker was Chef Sara Moulton, food editor of *Gourmet* magazine, PBS series host, and frequent guest chef on *Good Morning America*. Unbeknownst to her, she has been my mentor/hero/idol for quite a long time. I find her recipes to be reliable and inspired.



Ris Lacoste, Sara Moulton & me.
Photo courtesy of Dara Bunjon.

So, when asked to escort Chef Moulton to meet each of the 35 volunteer women chefs, I was weak-kneed and nearly speechless. Spending time with Sara and the top area women in my field was daunting.

My nerves were wasted as Sara is down-to-earth and warm. We chatted about food (of course), her PBS series, the cookbook she is working on (her 3rd) and other rather mundane things while greeting the local chefs and tasting their delicious dishes.

Oh what a night!

Small World

It truly is a small world as people and groups overlap. As you read on the front of this newsletter, I have been involved with Ovarian Cancer National Alliance (OCNA) fundraiser for the last three years. I am also a local event coordinator for Women Chefs & Restaurateurs (WCR). The two groups have officially joined forces and one of our WCR members is working with OCNA in a huge way.

About this time last year I wrote about **Laurey Masterton** and her wonderful book, *Elsie's Biscuits*. Come to find out, Laurey is a 20-year survivor of ovarian cancer which is very rare indeed.

To celebrate that milestone and to raise awareness about this disease, Laurey is currently riding her bike from California to Florida. To read all about this ambitious adventure, check out her blog: <http://www.laureybikes.blogspot.com>

Recipe – Asparagus Crostini

8 slices of hearty bread
1 garlic clove, cut in half
Asiago cheese to cover bread slices
1 Tablespoon olive oil, good quality
Salt & Pepper, to taste
12 thin asparagus spears
1 Tablespoon balsamic vinegar

Preheat oven to 425. Toast bread until lightly tanned. While hot, rub with cut side of garlic clove & top with cheese.

Line a baking sheet with foil. Snap tough ends off asparagus, slice into bite-size pieces & place on baking sheet. Drizzle with oil, sprinkle with salt & pepper and toss to coat. Roast in hot oven for 8 minutes. Remove & turn off oven but leave door closed to maintain heat. Toss with balsamic vinegar & top toasts. Pop back into oven briefly to melt cheese. Enjoy!

Loosely based upon a recipe from Sara Moulton *Cooks at Home*



At last year's Women Chefs & Restaurateurs conference in New Orleans, I met Cathy Berg of Share Our Strength who was recruiting volunteers to teach their Operation Frontline program. I invited her to speak at a chapter meeting of personal chefs. As one of the three volunteer chefs, I can report that it is a fabulous experience I plan repeat often.

Teamed with a nutritionist from the Capital Area Food Bank (the local organization that implements Operation Frontline), I was to teach very basic cooking skills to 11 eighth grade students from the Washington Middle School for Girls over the course of six weeks.

Dishes were made as nutritionally sound as possible from readily-available, inexpensive ingredients. That, in itself, was a challenge. Add 11 teenagers to the mix and life gets very interesting. Actually the girls did well with firm guidance. They had a surprising amount of knowledge about nutrition but it was not all accurate as most of it came directly from TV commercials. For instance, Angela Leone, our nutritionist worked hard to make them understand that all fats are not evil and that the reason we should eat breakfast is to fuel our bodies not just to “stay focused” as the frosted mini wheat cartoon character would have us think.

The highlight of the six weeks was our last class and ‘graduation’ where we cooked a 4-course meal in 90 minutes and then gathered together to enjoy it. Slyly we reviewed the nutritional information as we dined. Each girl received a certificate and a Food Bank water bottle as they posed for their photos. The nutritionists and chef received hand-made cards signed by each of our students. One note to me said, “Thanks for reminding me to scrape the cutting board with the back of the knife.” See, they did learn something. ;-)



Graduation Day!
That's me with Diamond, Anniana & Tara Barth from the Capital Area Food Bank

The Capital Area Food Bank welcomes volunteers of all backgrounds as well as donations of gently used kitchen equipment that you might no longer need. I'd be glad to collect these items from you and deliver to the Food Bank – just let me know.

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