

HAPPY HOLIDAY COCKTAIL

Having a few special holiday cocktails in your repertoire is always a wise move. Whether you're planning a dinner party or just trying to take the edge off after everyone leaves, this is one of my favorite go-to winter drinks. It's a variation on the classic Hot Toddy. After you down your second one, nothing will bother you.

INGREDIENTS ☐(2 drinks)

2 ounces bourbon

2 ounces Grand Marnier

18 ounces water

2 black tea bags (or tea of your choice)

2 teaspoons honey

2 squirts lemon

FOR GARNISH

2 orange slices, (thinly sliced)

2 lemon slices (thinly sliced)

2 cinnamon sticks

4 star anises

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

2, 12 ounce heat-proof clear mugs or glasses

PREPARATION

For this cocktail, you'll need 2 mugs for mixing and 2 clear mugs for presentation. Boil water and pour nine ounces of

water into each of your mixing cups. Add one tea bag in each cup and steep for 3-4 minutes, or strength of your choice.

Remove tea bags and pour in 1-ounce bourbon, 1-ounce Grand Marnier, 1-teaspoon honey and 1-squirt of lemon into each mixing mug. Stir until honey is dissolved.

In the clear presentation mugs or heatproof glasses, place one orange and one lemon slice in each mug so they stick to the side of the glass facing out. You'll find that thin slices work best because they are more yielding. Pour the liquid contents slowly into the clear mugs, trying not to disturb the slices.

Garnish each with a cinnamon stick and 2 star anises. Cheers!

HOW TO HAVE FUN AT YOUR OWN HOLIDAY PARTY

When I was first married, I hated throwing parties. It was so much work, I never got to enjoy one minute of it. I'd spend all day on my feet frantically trying to get everything together before our guests arrived. Then I'd run around refilling drinks and washing dishes as everyone else noshed away and settled into conversations.

But over the years, I've developed a foolproof plan that frees me up to join in on the fun. It does require an excel spreadsheet, make-ahead recipes, and a slightly anal-retentive nature.

2022/2023 NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY

CHEESE BOARD	SALMON ROULADES	GOUGERES	COQ AU VIN	ROASTED BRUSSEL SPROUTS	POTATO CAKE	PECAN PIE
Cheeses	Smoked salmon	Unsalted Butter	Bacon	2 lbs Brussel Sprouts	6 Russet Potatoes	Butter
Fig Spread	Cream Cheese	Parmesan	8 chicken thighs	Pecans	Garlic	Sugar
Mustard	Lemon	Eggs	Carrots	Maple Syrup	Sour Cream	Flour
Pate	Chives	Gruyere	1 Yellow, 12 small white	Onion	Chives	Honey
bread	Scallions	Nutmeg	Garlic	Garlic		Lyles Golden Syrup
olives		Flour	Brandy			Vanilla Extract
Chacuterie		Milk	Red Wine			Dark Rum
			Chicken Stock			Nutmeg
			Thyme			Eggs
			Mushrooms			2 cups pecans
						ice cream
DEC 28 WEDNESDAY	DEC 29 THURSDAY	DEC 30 FRIDAY	DEC 31 PARTY TIME!			
BUY ALL INGREDIENTS. EXCEPT BREAD	SELECT ALL SERVING TRAYS, PLATES, GLASSES - CLEAN ANYTHING THAT NEEDS CLEANING	MAKE COQ AU VIN	2:00pm Complete Cleanup and Set-up			
CLEAN HOUSE	SET UP ROOM/TABLES/BAR AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE	MAKE POTATO CAKE	3:00pm Make Gougeres			
	MAKE PECAN PIE	MAKE BRUSSEL SPROUTS	4:00pm Shower and Get Dressed			
			5:00 Prep Cheese Board			
			6:00 Prep and Plate Salmon Roulades			
			7:00 Reheat Coq Au Vin, Potato Cake, Brussel Sprouts			
			7:30 Guests arrive			

STEP #1 – Decide what kind of party you’re having. Is it a dinner party? Just cocktails and hors d’oeuvres? A brunch?

STEP #2 – Pick your dishes wisely. The key is finding recipes that can be done a day or so before and then just reheated or served cold.

STEP #3 – Make a spreadsheet. I’m not kidding. The first thing I do is label the dishes along the top. Next, I list the ingredients I need to buy beneath each dish. You can then cut and paste that section onto a separate page for your shopping list.

STEP #4 – Below the ingredients, I list the four days of the week leading up to the party. Below each day, I assign tasks that can be done ahead.

STEP #5 – Make sure to include things like cleaning the house, setting the table, prepping your bar, etc. to the list. These can be a real time suck, and it’s important to allot ample time for each.

STEP #6 – Stick to the plan. If you're feeling overwhelmed, there's no shame in asking someone to bring a dish. Just be specific about what you need.

STEP #7 – Assign tasks to your spouse, partner, kids, and/or good friends.

STEP #8 –If something doesn't come out well, don't worry about it. Chances are you've made way too much food anyway.

STEP #9 – Don't leave showering and getting dressed to the last minute. You'll always run out of time and you don't want to greet your guests looking like a worn out dishrag.

STEP#10 – Now pour yourself a cocktail and have a great time.

MINI-LATKES WITH SOUR CREAM AND IKURA

You can't have Hanukkah without potato latkes, but you can have potato latkes all-year-round. My mini-version is great for a cocktail party, especially served alongside some champagne. If you're feeling rich, it's great to top them with sour cream and a few ikura pearls. Ikura pearls are those big plump delightful orbs of salmon roe that you most often find in Japanese restaurants. But lately, I've been able to find them in Asian and non-Asian markets. They add a nice hit of salt with each bite. Of course, you can use real caviar or lumpfish as well.

The big tip for this dish is to make sure you've squeezed out as much water as possible from your grated potatoes and onion. This prevents splatters and increases the crispiness, because

no one wants to eat a soggy latke.

INGREDIENTS (Makes 16 minis)

- 2 russet potatoes
- 1 medium yellow onion
- 1 medium egg, beaten
- 3/8-cup panko
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon baking powder
- zest of 1/2 lemon
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- fresh ground pepper
- canola oil for frying

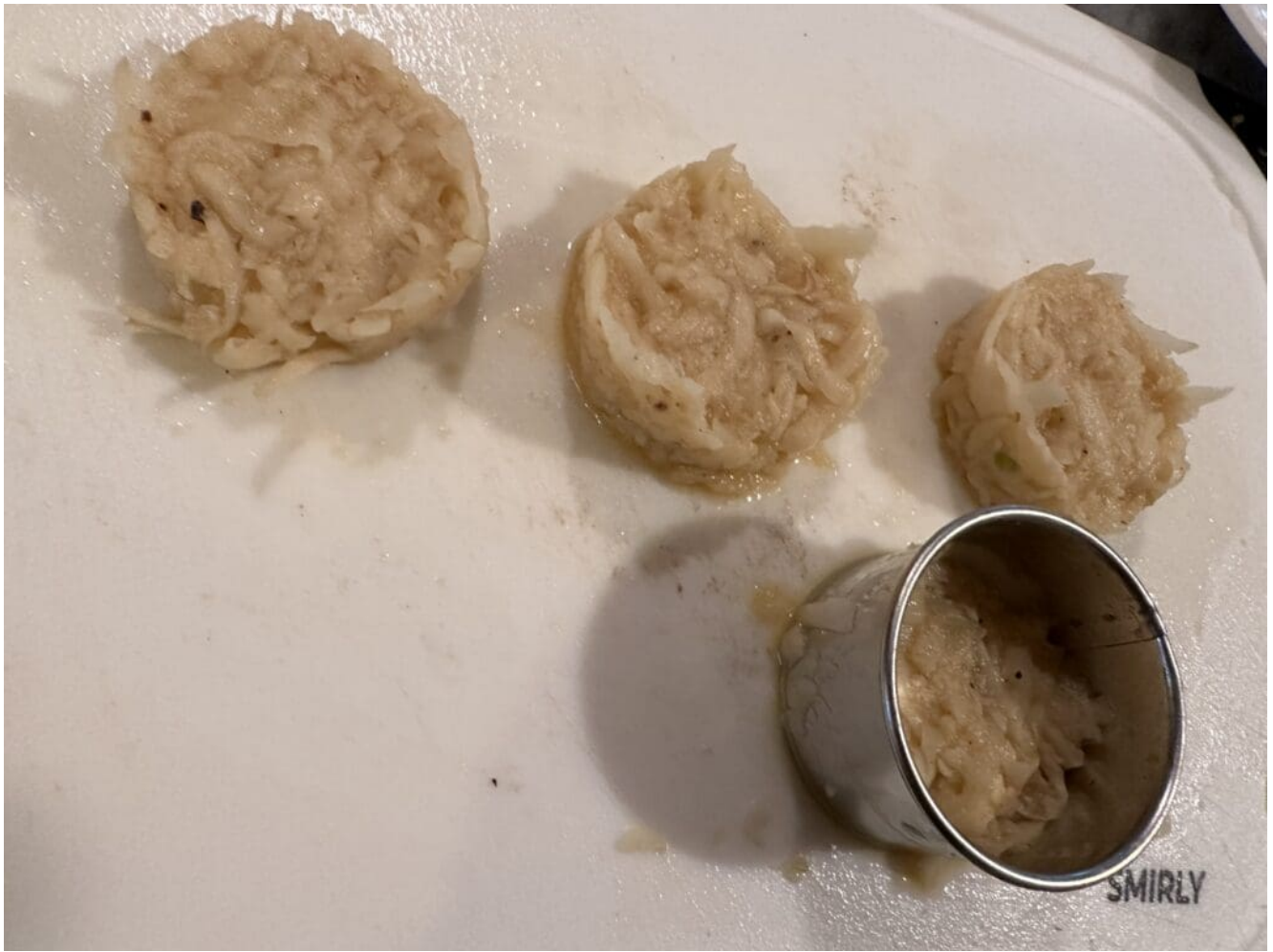
FOR GARNISH

- sour cream
- ikura
- 2 tablespoons chives, finely chopped

PREPARATION

Peel potatoes and onions. Grate all with the large hole side of a box grater. (NOTE: This can also be done in a food processor, but it does tend to make the vegetables a bit too mushy for my taste.)

Place in strainer and squeeze out as much water as possible. I often go the extra step and squeeze them in a clean dishtowel. Once well drained, empty the onions and potatoes into a large bowl. Stir in the egg, panko, baking powder, lemon zest, salt, and pepper. Set batter aside for 10 minutes.



Using a 2-inch round cookie cutter, fill the cutter with a small handful of the mixture, pressing down so that the latke is about $\frac{1}{2}$ " thick. Tamp it down tightly. Repeat until you have about 16 pieces.

Fill a large skillet with a 1/4-inch of canola oil. Heat over medium-high heat until very hot, but not smoking. Test with small piece of batter. If it sizzles, it's hot enough.

Working in batches and using spatulas, gently place the cut pieces into the skillet making sure not to crowd them. Lightly press down with the spatula to flatten them. Fry until browned on one side, flip, and continue to fry until other side is browned, about two-minutes each side.

Drain on paper towels and season with a light touch of salt. Keep warm in a 200-degree oven.

TO SERVE

Place the latkes on a platter. Top each with a dollop of sour cream. Gently place a few ikura pearls on top of the sour cream. Garnish with chives.



A NEW YORK CHRISTMAS

It's nearly a week before Christmas, and New York is magical with holiday lights hanging over the avenues like strings of shimmering diamond necklaces. Storefront windows along Fifth Avenue are dressed with oversized ornaments and mannequins dressed as Santa's helpers. People are loaded down with shopping bags and rushing about waiting for the dazzling light show projected against the walls at Saks.

I'm on a first date and we just finished dinner at a cute French bistro in the mid-fifties and decide to walk a bit. We nudge our way past the rushing masses and find a spot at the southwest corner of Rockefeller Center to admire the magnificent 75-foot Norway spruce Christmas tree. With its thousands of twinkling lights, it is more magnificent in person than any NBC-TV special can ever show. He reaches for my hand and the orchestra swells in my head. It is a movie moment. The smoky aroma of chestnuts roasting on the coals of the nearby street carts wafts past us as we share our first kiss.

It's been 35 years since that day and every year I drag my husband into the city to stand in that very spot where our magic began. He begrudgingly indulges my flare for the romantic, never admitting that he enjoys our annual ritual just as much as I do. As if on cue, the snow starts to lightly fall from the sky as he takes my hand and pulls me close. The sound system from the ice skating rink below is playing "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas." As we cuddle and watch the skaters, it is in that moment I realize that there's no better place to be at Christmas time than my beloved New York City. Happy Holidays!

HOMEMADE HOLIDAY GIFT SPICE

Not sure what to get those friends that seem to have everything for the holidays? I'm a big fan of homemade gifts. I love giving them and I love receiving them. Of course, the gifts I usually create involve food, so it's hard to go wrong.

One of my favorite things to give is my Magic Rub spice blend. You can just double, triple, or even decuple the recipe and then package it in cute containers. Feel free to mix and match spices according to your own taste.

INGREDIENTS

2 Tbsp Paprika

2 Tbsp Kosher Salt

1 Tbsp Ground Pepper

2 Tbsp Garlic Powder

1 Tbsp Onion Powder

1 Tbsp Brown Sugar

2 tsp Chipotle powder

1 tsp Cayenne

1 tsp Dried oregano

1 tsp Cumin

PREPARATION

Mix all ingredients together.

Adjust to taste.

Store in airtight container. Best used within three months.

AIRPORT ANONYMITY

I have a confession. I LOVE being alone. Don't get me wrong, I adore the people in my life and I don't want them to feel slighted, but sometimes I just like mingling with the masses, no one caring who I am or what I'm doing. I find being anonymous a great way to see the kindness—and crassness—in strangers. Take my waiter at O'Hare's Marcaroni Grill today, terminal 3 not far from American Airlines gate K2. He clearly is pressed due to short staffing, yet he has the time to encourage me to try the tiramisu. Okay, some may want to think that he's just trying to upcharge me, but I got the feeling he just didn't want me to miss it, particularly since I only ate half of my lasagna bolognese. I could have eaten the whole thing, after all, no one was looking, and who would know? Truthfully, my stomach would and probably the poor person who will be sitting next to me on my flight. And besides, it was a red sauce version, without any bechamel. Shameful. After a little back and forth with my waiter, he did convince me to get the tiramisu and it was well worth the extra calories, even as I patted myself on the back for only eating half of that too.

As I was leaving the restaurant, I noticed a woman clearly in no mood to be denied anything. When being told she had to wait for a table, she scoffed at the hostess and said, "Don't you realize I have a plane to catch in twenty minutes?" I don't think it dawned on her that the other 149,999 people at the airport were in the same predicament, nor would she care if she did know. She probably is the definition of a "Karen," but since that's my name, I don't identify with the presumptions

and I don't like to promote the use of it. Just pick someone you can't stand. Go ahead, I'll wait. You got it? Okay, that's what you should call her.

My flight is late, but I don't mind. Did I mention I just had a huge glass of Sauvignon Blanc and I'm wandering the concourse with free abandon since I can't get into any of the lounges because my Priority Pass only gets me a discount at Headphone Hub, and that's all the way over by gate E1A? Why did I get that thing anyway?

I stop at Hudson News wondering if my book will ever get published and be on display at one of their tables, fantasizing about some stranger reading the back cover, then deciding to buy it as I stand there. Should I offer to sign it, or keep my glee to myself? Will they chuckle out loud on their flight, annoying their seat partner as they read it or will their eyes begin to glaze over as their head nods? I pray for the former. I know I should buy one of the New York Times best sellers displayed on the table, but I opt for People Magazine, a guilty pleasure I've had since 1974.

Next door is InMotion, another one of those places that sells overpriced headphones and earbuds. I'm always on the lookout for a comfortable pair, the kind that loop over the back of ears and has a quarter sized cushioned earpiece that sits against the ear, not in it. I just can't wear earbuds because the openings to my ears are too small. They never stay in and I hate the way they feel. I bought a great over-the-ear pair at Brookstones at least fifteen years ago, but now I can't find anything like them anywhere. If you have any leads, please let me know.

Ooh look! Gate K-19 is going to Paris! I could wake up to croissants, cafe au lait, and the smell of Gitanes filling the air. I've got my Amex card. I could do it. I really could. Paris is gorgeous this time of year. Across the hallway, another flight is leaving for Dubai. From what I can tell,

Dubai is a made-up utopian city built in the middle of the desert that makes Vegas seem pedestrian. I'm fascinated by how it was built and the extravagance it holds. I'd love to go there, but damn, I don't have my passport with me. Maybe I should grab the flight to Honolulu. I love the way the humid air hits you just as you leave the plane and it's sweet how you're always greeted with a dendrobium lei. I wonder if I still like Mai Tais or if they are too sweet for me now. As I stand in the middle of the hallway pondering my options, people scurry by, some even hitting my bag in their haste. One woman almost barrels into me, taking me out of my slightly inebriated fantasy world. It's a good thing because I realize I've just been called for my flight home and all my underwear is heading to LaGuardia.

Now finally in my seat, we're told that air traffic control doesn't have a spot for us at the moment and we have to pull back from the gate and wait on the tarmac an additional 45 minutes. Had my father still been alive, his head would be exploding right about now. But all is well in my world with nothing pressing as I return home from a multi-day trip visiting my mother-in-law in her independent living apartment where the undersized full bed sags in the middle and my husband and I fall into each other—not in a good way. I can only last so long there, my spine feeling as if it's been twisted into a pretzel. He stays a few more days to help her with her computer and take her out to Red Lobster, assuming it's not Bingo night. Which means I have two days where I can watch rom-coms without my husband scoffing at me because I should be watching something of great import like The Mandalorian.

We're finally clear for take off as the sun sets to the west of Lake Michigan. The skies are multiple shades of red, a sailors delight. The woman next to me is alone too, snapping her seatbelt shut as she smiles with a type of sisterly acknowledgement. Her head pressed against the window, it's not

long before she falls asleep. I envy her, since I never can sleep on planes. I look over at her, wondering about her story, knowing I shouldn't ask. Maybe she needs some time to herself, to collect her thoughts or just take a rest with no one to bother her. I'm glad I have the aisle seat. She looks so at peace. I wouldn't want to disturb her. I know how she must feel.

FRENCH TART TENACITY

Just when I thought I didn't need any more tools for my kitchen, my beloved neighbors returned from France with a beautiful rectangular French Tart pan to add to my collection. Having anything in my kitchen made in France fills me with both anxiety and confidence. The anxiety comes from knowing my final plated dish will never rival a classic French chef's, yet the confidence comes from thinking that with the right tools, I might get close.

Anxious to make something worthy of their gift, I scour the internet for French Tart recipes. I thought I'd go savory to start. A mushroom and gruyere tart should hit the spot. I come upon a basic tart dough that seems simple enough, even if it is wildly fattening with 9 tablespoons of butter. That sounds French enough for me.

I measure out a cup and a half of flour, add in a teaspoon of sugar, $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon of salt and give it all a nice stir. I melt the butter as suggested, pour it into the well of the flour mixture with one tablespoon of water and mix. It comes together quickly into an almost clay-like texture.

The directions say to quickly press the dough while warm around the border of the pan and then use the remaining dough

to fill in the middle. But as soon as I start working the border, I can see there is no way there's enough dough to fill this pan. I re-read the recipe. I didn't leave anything out. Where did I go wrong?

It takes me a moment before I realize I'm an idiot. This recipe is designed for a 9"-round pan. Although my rectangular pan seems like it's about the same size, it's not. DO THE MATH. A 9"-round is 63 square inches and my pan is an 8" x 11", 88 square inches. Ugh! I should know better. It's late now and I'm hungry and out of patience. Rather than try to make more dough, I decide to scrap the whole thing and order in Chinese.



The next day, hopefully having learned from my mistake, I take another stab at it. Although technically it seems as if I only need to increase the recipe by half, I decide to double it just to be sure. Thank goodness I did, because I need every

bit of this dough to frame and fill the pan. I press the dough down to even it all out and then dock it as instructed. It doesn't look too bad at all. I place it in the oven to blind bake for fifteen minutes and then move onto the filling.

Prior to making the crust, I prep all my ingredients. I caramelize some onions, sauté the mushrooms, fry some bacon, grate the cheese and chop some herbs. This recipe calls for a cup of ricotta to be mixed with some egg yolk. Once done, it's like a beautiful off-white loose custard. This will be the bed for the other ingredients. Now all I need to do is assemble it all onto the crust.

I pull out the pan from the oven and the dough still looks a bit raw. It's supposed to be a golden brown. Did I get the timing off? Is there too much dough? I put it back in for another five minutes, then another. A total of 30-minutes later, it's finally starting to brown a little. Note to self – don't trust all recipes from the internet.

I let it cool for a bit and then start layer by layer. First the ricotta mixture is smoothed on, then I add the onions, bacon, cheese and herbs. It looks gorgeous. Back into the oven it goes. I start to clean up and then as I bring all the dirty bowls to the sink I realize I forgot to add the mushrooms! The tart has only been in the oven for a few minutes, so I quickly pull it out, almost dropping it, and then I sprinkle the mushrooms on top. As Julia Child would say, who's going to know?

Fortunately, whether the mushrooms were on top of the cheese or underneath it makes no difference. The end product is ready and finally comes out of the pan without cracking. It is picture perfect. The crust tastes like a savory shortbread, holding its shape for looks and crumbling upon each bite. And the mushroom/bacon/gruyere blend over the ricotta mixture is divine. Well worth the effort, even if it did take two days.

Making something for the first time is always challenging for me, but I do eventually learn from my mistakes. Next time, how does a leek, prosciutto, and egg tart sound to you? Hmm, sounds good to me too.

FRENCH MUSHROOM GRUYERE TART

How can anything with sautéed mushrooms, caramelized onions and grated gruyere be a bad idea? Even with an epic fail with the crust on my first try, the second time proved to be perfect. This tart is perfect for a dinner party or just a simple bistro night at home. Enjoy!

INGREDIENTS

For the crust:

3 cups of all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons sugar

1.5 teaspoon kosher salt

2 sticks of butter, plus 2 tablespoons

2 tablespoons of water

For the filling:

1 cup whole milk ricotta cheese

2 large egg yolks

Extra virgin olive oil

1 pound mushrooms

1 onion, sliced and rings separated

4 strips of bacon, rendered

1 tablespoon butter

1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced on diagonal

6 ounces gruyere cheese, large grate

PREPARATION

For the crust:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Combine dry ingredients (flour, salt, sugar) in a bowl and stir to combine. Make a well in the center.

Cut the butter into $\frac{1}{2}$ " squares and melt in a glass bowl in the microwave, about one-minute.

Pour butter and water into the flour mixture well, making sure to scrape all the butter out of the bowl. Stir until all the dry ingredients are incorporated and the dough comes together to form large crumbs. The dough will feel a bit wet, almost like clay.

While the dough is still warm, crumble two thirds of the dough around the rim of the tart pan, pressing it evenly around the sides and out onto the bottom of the pan. Crumble the remaining dough into the center. Using your fingers and palm of your hand, press down to even out dough. The sides should be just a little thicker than the bottom.

Use a flat glass or flat-bottomed measuring cup to smooth out the edges and further compact the dough in the bottom of the pan. Dip the glass or cup in flour if it sticks.

Prick the dough all over the bottom with a fork. This prevents the dough from puffing up.

Place the tart pan on a baking sheet and bake for 10-minutes. Remove from oven and press the crust down again with the glass or cup. Place back in oven and continue to bake until crust is pale golden brown, about another 10-12 minutes. (Everyone's oven is different, so keep an eye on crust. It may need more or less time to get to that light golden brown.) Set aside while you prep the filling.

For the filling:

Puree ricotta in processor until smooth, about one minute. Add in egg yolks and 1 tablespoon of oil and blend. Set aside.

Heat 2 tablespoons oil in heavy large skillet over medium heat. Add onion and sauté until caramelized, about 20 minutes. Set aside.

In same skillet, render bacon strips and set aside. When cool, chop bacon into $\frac{1}{2}$ " pieces and set aside.

In same skillet, turn heat up to medium-high. Add mushrooms into bacon fat and sauté for 7 minutes. If too dry, add a little olive oil. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Add one tablespoon of butter and sauté until mushrooms are tender, about 4 minutes longer. Mix in green onions. Set aside.

For assembly:

Spread ricotta mixture evenly along the bottom of the crust. Add in a layer of onions, then the mushrooms, then the bacon. Top with the grated cheese. Place back in the oven and bake for about another 5 minutes until the cheese melts.

NOTE: Try to use a French Scalloped Tart pan with a removable bottom. It makes it easy to release the tart once baked. Since there's so much butter in crust, I've never had to grease it before baking. If you don't have a removable pan, then you might want to butter whatever pan you use.

THANKSGIVING DRAMA

What's a holiday meal without a little drama? My family is far from a quiet bunch and I can still hear some of the arguments of years past ringing in my ears. One particular memory from my childhood is on an annual loop, the dialogue still fresh and crisp as if it were spoken in the next room...

The dining room becomes noisy as silverware clinks against plates, crystal glasses Nana bought on sale at Gimbels fill with cheap red wine, and loud conversations go back and forth and sideways.

"Did you hear Sadie and Carl are splitting?"

"Pass the noodle pudding, please."

"No kidding? They've been married 25 years, what happened?"

"Can I be excused?"

"He took up with his secretary, go figure."

"No! Sit down...Now!"

"That's so Bourgeois"

"Mom, great bird this year."

"Well, at least he's leaving Sadie with a nice pile of cash."

"You don't think it's too dry?"

"What is it with these guys, they get a little money and they think they're Cary Grant?"

"Barry's kicking me!"

"Not the dark meat. Maybe the white, but just a little."

"I bet she'll find someone new, if not for love, at least for revenge."

"Cut it out!"

"It's so hard getting a big bird to cook evenly. I think the oven is off a bit."

"She's not like that."

"That's enough!"

"But your stuffing is out of this world, as always."

Nana surveys the table noting that everyone is just about finishing up. "Karen, please help me clear the table."

She leans down and whispers in my ear, "Hold on with both hands."

Dad hands Nana his plate. "You know I only married Barbara to get to you, just to insure I'd get a good meal once in a while," Dad says, continuing to tease Nana.

Nana smiles. Mom doesn't. Although there's still a lot of loud talk, it doesn't feel as mean-spirited as when we're at Dad's parents' house. I don't know what Grandma and Grandpa do for Thanksgiving. They're never invited.

Like clockwork, my Uncle Allen pats his full stomach and says what he always says after a big meal: "Now, what's for dinner?"

I pull the plate away from my brother Barry before he's finished. He pulls it back, spilling some of the gravy on his shirt and yells, "You klutz!"

"I didn't do anything!"

"Okay, okay, that's enough out of you two," Dad barks. He notices I'm about to cry. "Hold off on the waterworks for once, sissy Mary."

I race out of the room, my face starting to flush red, almost dropping all the plates, but not.

"Do your parents know?" Aunt Toby says to Mom, just loud enough so Granddad can hear.

"Know what?" Granddad asks.

"Oh. Barbara's taking art classes. She wants to be a painter."

"Since when?"

"Oh Lou, don't you remember that painting she did in grade school of the house on 34th Street? I still have it," Nana says trying to remind him of better days.

"I don't remember that. No, there was no painting."

"But Lou...."

"But nothing. Who's supposed to keep an eye on the kids? I'm not going to drive you 20 minutes back and forth everyday to Barbara's house to look after them."

"Relax Lou," Dad butts in. "It's only a couple of days a week, and Barbara will be home before the kids get home from school."

"And you can afford this, Mr. Rockefeller?"

"Yeah. Business is good. Stop worrying."

Granddad turns to Mom. "You know, ever since you were a little girl, we all wondered where you came from. You were always a dreamer."

"If I didn't have my dreams," Mom says, "I would kill myself."

"Well, if you ask me, it's a waste of time," Granddad announces loudly.

"I didn't ask you," Mom whispers.

"What did you say?"

"I. DIDN'T. ASK. YOU!"

"Ugh, I think I'm getting a migraine," moans Nana.

Throwing down her napkin, Mom gets up to help Nana out of the room. "Dad, now look what you've done!"

Silence.

No matter how many ways Mom might try to explain her desire to paint, Granddad would think it's a dumb idea, Dad would be focused on the stuffing, and Nana would still remember Mom's first childhood painting. I get it. Nobody wants Mom to do anything more than be a mom – except Mom. But do you think it's bad that I just don't care that much because all I'm thinking about is when Nana is going to bring out her apple pie?

NANA'S APPLE PIE A LA MODE

When my nana passed away, there were only two things my brother Paul and I wanted of hers; her rolling pin and her stained, faded apple pie recipe she kept in her top kitchen draw next to some dried-out rubber bands that she saved for years. Paul has the recipe framed in his kitchen and I have the rolling pin. I've committed the recipe to memory.

Although Paul would say it's sacrilege, over the years I have

taken some liberties with Nana's recipe. It's all here in its purest form, but I do have a couple of suggestions:

1. This is a classic Crisco shortening crust recipe. If shortening freaks you out, you can make a butter crust. Personally, I prefer butter crusts, but if you want to stay true to Nana's version, you have to pull out the Crisco.

2. You shouldn't use a Cuisinart because they weren't invented when Nana started making pies. But I won't tell if you won't.

3. Nana used one teaspoon of cinnamon, which, personally, I feel is one teaspoon too many. I'm not a huge cinnamon fan. Don't tell anyone, but I really only use a $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon. But hey, if you like cinnamon, go for it—just don't say I didn't warn you.

4. Nana used Rome baking apples, but I prefer Granny Smiths. You can really use any firm apple you like, just avoid mushy ones.

5. When you prick the top of the pie with the tines of the fork you should form the letter "N" for Nana. You may use another letter, but it might break my heart.

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE CRUST

2 cups all-purpose flour, sifted

1/2 teaspoon salt

3/4 cup shortening (12 T)

4 – 6 tablespoons ice water

FOR PIE FILLING

1 cup sugar

1 teaspoon cinnamon (or much less)

1 heaping tablespoon all-purpose flour

1 dash salt

3 drops vanilla

1 squirt of lemon

2 1/2 pounds tart apples, (4 apples for an 8" pie, 6 apples for a 9" pie), sliced

1 T butter

1/2 cup raisins or walnuts (optional)

TO FINISH

1 egg yolk, mix w/splash water

1 T coarse raw sugar

Vanilla Ice Cream

PREPARATION

CRUST

Whisk together the salt and flour in a big bowl. Using a hand pastry blender, add in the shortening, working it into the salt/flour mixture until it resembles little pebbles.

Drizzle 4T of ice water, one tablespoon at a time over the flour mixture, tossing lightly with a fork. The pastry should be moist, not sticky. If it's still too dry, you can add up to 2 more tablespoons of ice water, if necessary.

Bring dough together, trying not to overwork it, and cut in half, making one half slightly larger than the other. Shape each half into a ball, then flatten it like a hamburger patty, wrap in clear wrap, and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

(Dough can be made day ahead or frozen.)

Take a piece of wax paper and place your pie plate upside down on the paper. Mark a circle around the pie plate in pencil and then flip the wax paper over because no one likes pencil-flavored dough. Roll out the larger dough half, using the penciled circle as your guide. Roll the dough a half-inch beyond the circle.

Repeat all of the above for the other dough half, although, no need to go too far beyond the penciled circle. Refrigerate both again for 30 minutes.

APPLE FILLING

Preheat oven to 425°.

In a small bowl, combine sugar, cinnamon, flour, and salt and mix well. Slice 7 cups of apples. Add the apples to the sugar mixture and toss lightly. Add the vanilla and toss just once more. If you like raisins, chopped nuts or other add-ins, now is the time to add in about a $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of your preference.

Take the larger dough out of the fridge and flip it over onto the pie plate. Gently peel off the wax paper and flatten dough to fit the pie plate. Allow the extra dough to flop over the lip for now. Feel free to trim any excess odd pieces so you have a nice round shape.

Gently pour apple mixture onto bottom crust, spreading out apples so they are at an even height throughout. Dot the apples with a little butter. Squirt some lemon juice over mixture.

Take the other dough half from the fridge and flip it on top of the apples. Make sure it's centered before gently removing the wax paper.

Fold the top edge of the crust over the bottom edge so that you have a nice seal around the lip. Or if the bottom crust

has more excess, fold the bottom over the top. The goal is to have the two crusts meet and look even around the edge. For a good seal, crimp the crusts together with a fork around the lip of the pie plate.

Prick the top of the pie with the tines of the fork so that you form the letter "N."

Beat egg yolk with one tablespoon of water and brush over the crust. Sprinkle coarse raw sugar on top.

Bake for 45 – 50 minutes or until the crust is golden brown. Remove from the oven, let cool until warm. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream.

Bottle the smell in your kitchen.