**Dinner Party Like a Farm Star**

Many of my favorite recipes come from the kitchens of farmer friends. There is a pleasing elegance to farm cookery. It’s a cuisine forged by the circumstances of a land-based lifestyle, yet makes total sense in the home kitchens of anyone who wants to serve healthy, plant-based  food, and lots of it. Farm cuisine is simple to prepare,  able to tame the kind of hunger that follows a day of hard work, and heavy on seasonal veggies.

In the winter there is more time, but fewer fresh ingredients to work with, and a farm cook knows how to convert the contents of a root cellar, pantry and freezer into a parade of interesting, non-repetitive dishes. They can take a little longer to prepare, but nobody minds having the warm stove on.  The result may not reflect the cornucopia of summertime, but hits the spot just the same.

Farm cooks pass around recipes like heirloom seeds. Each new kitchen is a pristine habitat in which one recipe can evolve into another. Among farmers, the DNA of a recipe can be conveyed in broad strokes. But as in a game of telephone, missing information can be replaced by an active imagination. Which is what accounts for the differences between Josh’s and Luci’s carrot pasta recipes.

Carrot pasta epitomizes what a farm cook might prepare in winter, but carrots are always in season, which makes this a go-to dish any time of year.  Rich, sweet, and full of fat and carbs, carrot pasta is what a human being wants to eat.

Josh first showed me the recipe, which he learned from Luci in a short phone conversation, and immediately went his merry way with. Luci had learned it from her sister’s second ex-husband, Ernesto, who learned it from his mom in Milan.

Knowing Josh and Luci as well as I do, it’s fun to see how their differing personalities and circumstances shape different versions of the same recipe.

Josh has no prep cook, but a full cleanup crew. These circumstances allow him to tornado through the kitchen, which dovetails well with the fact that he’s in more of a hurry.  Less detail-oriented, his improv game is as fluid as a jazz soloist.

Luci is more of a craftsman in the kitchen, and a stickler to what does and does not fly. If she needs a chopper she’ll rope anyone within shouting range — which is quite a large area.  By that time Josh, all by his lonesome with a podcast, will have already grated a load of carrots in a Cuisinart.

**Carrot Pasta**

This recipe includes both Josh and Luci’s renditions of carrot pasta. They are two sides of a similar coin, two data points on a graph of carrot pasta. Your job is to triangulate these two recipes to fit your lifestyle.

*Serves 4*

1 pound pasta (“big noodles like rigatoni work better at mixing with the sauce than skinny noodles that stick together, like angel hair” - Josh )
3 pounds peeled carrots, grated or sliced into thin coins, depending on your details
½ cup plus 2 tablespoons olive oil (Josh uses more than a cup but skips the cream later on, probably because he doesn’t have a cow)
2 tablespoons butter (a rare point of agreement)
1 hot pepper, sliced in half, which Luci adds “at some point”
1-2 cloves garlic, pressed, minced or crushed
6 ounces grated Parmesan, Romano or blend of both
1 cup heavy cream (if you have a cow. Or know where to get some cream.)
½ teaspoon black pepper
½ teaspoon salt
Optional: chopped anchovies, to taste
Garnish suggestion: parsley

Cook the carrots in a skillet on low heat with the ½ cup olive oil. Josh cooks his grated carrots for about 30 minutes, which for him is an eternity, stirring often. Luci cooks her coins for 2-3 hours, stirring occasionally, until they nearly disintegrate.

The carrots will release water as they cook down, and may spend some time submerged until the water cooks off. Winter carrots may not be too juicy, and you may even have to add a little water to keep the carrots cooking long enough to properly break down. About 90 minutes in, when the carrot slices taste faintly like artichoke hearts, add 3/4 of the cheese, the butter, half of the garlic and the hot pepper and anchovies if using, and let it slowly caramelize with the lid on, stirring every 20 minutes or so.  If it starts to solidify, add another cup of water and cover until the cheese dissolves.

Meanwhile, bring a pot of salted water to a boil and cook the noodles. Drain and, while still piping hot, toss with 2 tablespoons olive oil and the other half of the garlic.  Set aside.

When the carrots and cheese have melted together, add the cream, if using, and salt and black pepper to the sauce. Mix, but don’t homogenize. Luci’s husband called me to make sure I understood this.

“When the carrot coins have almost turned into a paste, at the very end, you add the cream. It’s like when you add milk to hot cereal but don’t totally mix it. The oil is floating on the cream, and the cream isn’t integrated.” His voice trailed off.

Toss the noodles in the sauce. Sprinkle the remaining cheese on top, garnish with something green, and serve.