TIME TO TRY A NEW CUISINE

I left work yesterday pondering what would be the topic for my next column. Walking through the door at home, there it was—two healthy young men making family dinner. They were busy chopping, breading, boiling, frying, and did I mention tasting. There was laughter, cajoling, and plenty of mess to clean up. It brought a huge smile to my face as I had waited two decades for this and I love anything I do not have to cook.

Alex, my middle son, was home for Spring break, a welcome rest from college life. With free time to spare, he decided he would try his hand at preparing the family a Japanese meal. Curious, I asked him, “Why Japanese?” Alex explained, “I enjoy so much of their entertainment like video games, movies and TV that I felt inspired to try their food.” Who knew video games could inspire cooking? A trip to an Asian market in Howard County brought some atypical foods into the house like dried seaweed, tofu, and kelp.

A close friend, Brendan, served as his partner in crime and I quickly had a flash back to Mt. Airy Middle School science lab, where they first met…their first experience with making strange concoctions. The two experimented making miso soup, fried rice, tonkatsu, and ramen noodles with chicken and tofu. Pickled mango and ginger added some crunch to the meal. For dessert there was pineapple sponge cake and sweet sakua tea. It was delicious with a few cooking mishaps and dishes that had to be remade. I stayed out of the kitchen and emphasized that making mistakes is really how one learns to cook.

May this true story inspire the children in your family, regardless of age or gender, to get into the kitchen and have a fun and creative cooking experience! Pick a cuisine that honors the food traditions of your ancestors or a place you would love to visit. Here are three distinctive recipes to get you started.

LATKES (JEWISH)

6 medium-sized potatoes
1 medium onion, grated
2 eggs
1/2 cup flour
Dash salt
Dash pepper
1 tablespoon cooking oil

Peel and quarter potatoes and soak in cold water until ready to grate. Drain, dry and grate potatoes into mixing bowl. Squeeze out excess water. Beat eggs well and add to potatoes. Add flour, salt, grated onions and pepper to the potato and egg mixture. Mix all ingredients well.

Preheat frying pan to 375° with cooking oil. Shape 8 small cakes, place in frying pan and press gently. Fry until the latkes are crisp and well browned on both sides. Drain on paper towels and serve hot. Makes 8 servings.

**PORTUGUESE GRILLED SEASONED COD**

4 pounds cod fillets
4 medium onions, coarsely chopped
Parsley, chopped
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil OR instant vegetable broth dissolved in water
3 pounds potatoes
16 olives
4 hard cooked eggs

Add oil to skillet. Brown cod fillets evenly on both sides, turning carefully. Place in baking dish and bake at 350° for 10 minutes.

Boil partially skinned potatoes. To the skillet add enough oil to sauté the onion and parsley. Add the vegetable broth and simmer to make a sauce for the fish.

Serve the fish fillet on a plate and add the sauce. Serve with small boiled potatoes. Garnish the plate with slices of hard cooked egg and olives.

**AFRICAN CHICKEN**

4 pounds chicken
1/4 cup oil
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon curry powder
1 large onion, peeled and sliced
1 large red sweet pepper, cut in strips
1 large tomato, sliced thin
1 1/2 cups uncooked rice
1/4 cup crunchy peanut butter
1/4 cup warm water

**GOURMET CHOCOLATE FONDUE (SWISS)**

1 1/2 cups gourmet chocolate chips
1/2 - 1 cup fat-free half and half

Melt together over low heat and dip your favorites: Fruit, angel cake, pretzels, etc. Can be served in a small fondue pot, kept warm with a candle or other gentle heat source.

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