

'Mange! Mange!' — Italian grandmother's legacy

Several years ago Tomie DePaola wrote a charming children's book called "Watch Out for the Chicken Feet in Your Soup." The book is the story of a young boy's visit with his Italian grandmother who hugs him, pinches his cheeks and feeds him mounds of spaghetti. The grandmother lavishes love on the child and he, despite a veneer of grade-school cynicism, obviously loves her.

I think I enjoyed this book as much as I did because my children are blessed with a similar, story-book Italian grandmother, Mary Panunzio. She also gives warm bear-hugs, pinches cheeks and feeds her family lavishly, a token of her love. She even looks the part — plump, white-haired, wearing house dresses protected by large, grandmotherly aprons.

She is rarely without her apron except for state occasions because she is always attending to some large pot on the stove, simmering a homemade soup, stew or the spaghetti sauce for which she is famous.

Prepared in huge batches, her spaghetti and meatballs grace the table at every family gathering. Although the spaghetti might be thought of as the main course, the "side dishes" are substantial — boiled beef and greens, potatoes, bread, tossed salad, Jello salad, green beans, ham, milk, wine, at least four desserts and coffee. (What do you

mean you don't want seconds? Don't you like her cooking? Are you afraid she's trying to poison you? Maybe you're just shy? "Mange! Mange!" (Eat! Eat!)

ALL THIS FOOD is actually a cultural phenomenon. It speaks of a childhood in Italy spent in desperate poverty, of a family so poor that they sent their beloved Mary to the United States at the age of 16, a mail-order bride. The first class ticket sent to provide her passage was exchanged for the cheapest ticket available and the difference sent to put food on the table for the family she left behind.

The relative prosperity she enjoyed as a young wife was short-lived. The Great Depression robbed her of her gains and, along with millions of other Americans, her life became a struggle to provide her family with the basic necessities of life. Once again food was a precious, scarce commodity.

The scars remain. Deprivation is fresh in her memory. A woman who laughs easily and often, she is, nonetheless, convinced that what happened to her in the past could easily happen again. Don't overspend. Don't trust the banks. Cultivate good friends and family. They remain when all else is lost. And always — "Mange! Mange!"

THE TREND in Italy today is toward lighter meals. Consumption of pasta has dropped dramatically. The current generation has never known



A Question of Taste

By Hilary Keating Callaghan

real hunger. Their concern, as ours, is with overconsumption. Increasingly health-conscious, they no longer view a plump woman as a symbol of affluence. Their struggle is with overabundance rather than with scarcity.

The old school of cooking, however, should not be allowed to die out. Some day I might coax from Grandma Panunzio her recipe for rich, meaty spaghetti sauce.

Until then, I will not try to second-guess her methods but will go in another direction with pasta. The recipe below is certainly less authentic but has much to recommend it.

The hot pasta is dressed with a cold tomato-olive-vinaigrette mixture, resulting in a dish that somehow falls between a cold pasta salad and the traditional, steaming-hot plate of spaghetti — perfect for a warm summer evening.

The tomato sauce calls for garden-

fresh tomatoes, red onions and black olives — a lighter, more refreshing sauce than anything from a can.

Finally, cubes of mozzarella cheese and freshly grated Parmesan add substance and protein.

All that is needed for a complete Italian dinner is bread and wine. The bread could be, of course, an Italian or French loaf. A more interesting and authentic choice, however, would be Italian Garlic Bread. According to James Beard, this is the only garlic bread you will ever encounter in Italy. Flat rounds, studded with slivers of garlic, brushed with olive oil and sprinkled with coarse salt, this bread is ideal with any Italian menu or served alone, like a cracker.

The menu would be ideal to serve for a casual supper with close friends. All but the pasta can be prepared the day ahead, leaving you free to enjoy good company and share good memories.

PASTA WITH MOZZARELLA AND TOMATO SALAD SAUCE

- 1 lb. mezzani, rigati, rigatoni, or linguine
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1/4 tsp. pepper
- 1 tbsp. basil
- 4 cups diced tomatoes
- 1/2 cup diced red onions
- 1/2 cup small black olives
- 8 oz. mozzarella cheese, finely diced
- 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Cook pasta in boiling salted water according to package directions. Meanwhile, mash garlic with salt in a medium-sized bowl. Stir in vinegar, oil, pepper and basil. Add the tomatoes, onion, olives and toss to mix. Drain pasta and return to kettle. Add cheese and toss until heat of pasta begins to melt cheese. Add tomato mixture and toss again to blend. Serve immediately with additional Parmesan cheese. Makes four servings.

ITALIAN GARLIC BREAD

- 1 cup stone-ground whole wheat flour
- 1 1/2 cups unbleached flour

- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. active dry yeast
- 1 cup warm water
- 2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 tsp. rosemary (or more to taste)
- 1 1/2 tbsp. olive oil
- Coarse salt (kosher)
- Freshly ground black pepper

Combine the flours, salt, yeast and water in a mixing bowl. Blend well, then turn the dough onto a lightly floured board. Knead well, for about 15 minutes, and shape the dough into a ball. Place it in a lightly greased mixing bowl. Cover with a towel and let rise in a warm place until double in bulk, about 1 to 1 1/2 hours.

Turn the dough onto the board and knead once more. Put it back in the bowl and let rise again. Punch the dough down and turn it onto a lightly floured board. Roll it out to 1/2-inch thickness. Rub the surface of a baking sheet with oil. Transfer the round of dough to a baking sheet. Make indentations over the surface of the dough and insert a thin sliver of garlic and a bit of rosemary into each indentation. Pour the olive oil over the bread and rub gently with your hands. Sprinkle with coarse salt and pepper and bake 15 minutes or until golden brown. Remove the garlic before serving. 4 to 6 servings.

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4 Easy Recipes The Original Piña Colada

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Easy Piña Colada Cake

Makes one 10-inch cake

- 1 (18 1/2-ounce) package yellow cake mix
- 1 (8 1/2-ounce) package instant vanilla pudding and pie filling mix
- 1/2 cup plus 1 to 2 tablespoons Coco Lopez® Piña Colada Mix
- 1/2 cup light Puerto Rican rum
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup sifted confectioners' sugar

Preheat oven to 350°. In large mixer bowl, combine cake mix, pudding mix, 1/2 cup piña colada mix, rum, oil and eggs. Beat at medium speed 2 minutes. Pour into well greased and floured 10-inch bundt or tube pan. Bake 50 to 55 minutes. Cool slightly. Remove from pan. In small bowl, gradually add remaining piña colada mix to sugar mix until smooth. Drizzle over warm cake.

Original Piña Colada

Makes 1 serving

- 1/4 cup (2 oz.) pineapple juice
- 2 tablespoons (1 oz.) Coco Lopez Cream of Coconut
- 1 tbsp. (1 1/2 oz.) light Puerto Rican rum
- 1 cup ice
- Pineapple slice, chunk or spear
- Maraschino cherries

In blender, combine all ingredients except pineapple and cherries. Blend on high 20 or 30 seconds. Serve immediately garnished with pineapple and cherry.

Choco Cha-Cha Shake

Makes 1 serving

- 1 cup milk
- 1 banana, sliced
- 1 teaspoon chocolate-flavored syrup
- 1/4 cup Coco Lopez® Cream of Coconut

In blender container, combine ingredients; blend until smooth. Garnish as desired. Serve immediately.

Island Refresher

Makes 1 serving

- 1/2 cup Coco Lopez® Cream of Coconut
- 3/4 cup unsweetened pineapple juice or milk
- 3 scoops vanilla ice cream

In blender container, combine ingredients. Blend until smooth. Garnish as desired. Serve immediately. TIP: For a thicker shake, reduce pineapple juice.

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