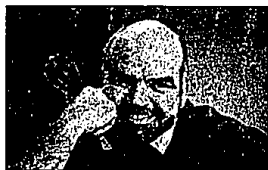


MONDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1993

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Janes Gang shares happy holiday recipe

I would be lying if I didn't admit the holidays are my favorite time of the year. You wouldn't believe me if I told you my shopping was done, everything was wrapped, and I spent the evening making cookies while Bing Crosby crooned "White Christmas" on the stereo.

But I'm making a promise to myself, and to the Janes Gang, that this week is going to be different. For the first time ever, the holidays are going to be fun. I'm going to take the "X" out of Xmas. Here are the ingredients for our happy holiday recipe.

Tonight, the Janes Gang will climb into the mini van and drive to Wyandotte.

Making goodies

I mention my momma frequently in this column and sometimes take advantage of her skills and knowledge. Tonight will be no different as the gang will gather with momma around the dining room table, and we'll roll up our sleeves and make stuffed dates, fudge and her signature holiday pastry called kifia.

This will be a new experience for the kids, and for momma, but maybe it will find a place in the back of their hearts to be treasured for years to come. For the record, you don't need a momma to do this, just someone who would usually spend the evening in a rocking chair draped with an afghan. This recipe can be as simple as Rice Krispy Treats or as complicated as baklava.

Tuesday will be a day of choice. A visit to the nursing home, an hour or two packing boxes for the needy or something as simple as bringing one of the Salvation Army bell ringers a cup of hot chocolate.

We have two favorite charities in our house, one chosen by the adults and one chosen by the kids. This is the time of year we'll need to show a little peace on earth and goodwill to all. On the way home, we'll drop off a box of old towels at the Humane Society shelter so a few strays might have a warm place to lay on Christmas night.

Thank you gifts

Wednesday night will be spent packing gift boxes for those we appreciate, but seldom thank for their services throughout the year. I might curse when my paper is late, but I silently give thanks when it's between the door on a blustery, rainy day. Fruitcakes are a pain and how many new newspaper people do you know who would appreciate a fruitcake? Something homemade and frosted with a check or gift certificate is better.

Thursday will be spent with best friends. Friends who gather with us to dine and share a glass of wine. We will laugh as we recall our culinary blunders of the year and then give thanks as we sit down to a bonafide table. The grown-ups will first pretend to be servers to the youngsters catering to their every dining whim and fancy. We will light candles, use the better dishes and pour sparkling grape juice in stemmed glasses, something the kids seldom get to appreciate.

We will party hard but with care, remembering the red ribbons that fly from our antenna.

Friday will be spent baking cookies for Santa (I still have one that believes) and will continue the time honored tradition of climbing up on the roof of the house to leave a bunch of carrots for the reindeer. A pot of steaming soup and a loaf of freshly baked bread will be on dinner as we gather around the telephone to scotch in to Uncle and Aunt Hank in Phoenix, Aunt Martha in Florida, Cousin Barb in Idaho and the other leaves on the branches of the old family tree.

At dusk we will light luminaria and will pick up Aunt Terry to spend the weekend with us. We will pop corn, string cranberries for the birds, make these last minute trips to the 24 hour 7-11 for the things we forgot all the while praying that the kids will tire quickly, go to bed and spend half the night assembling Easy-Bake Ovens and charging remote control race cars.

Through the years, the Janes Gang has accomplished all of the above mentioned goals, but never have they ever been able to be completed in just one week. Everyone needs a goal and this year our goals have been outlined and a copy of this article will be posted on the refrigerator door.

Will we accomplish it? With the help of an occasional home delivered pizza, I think that this year just might be the year.

From the Janes Gang house to your house, we wish you peace, prosperity and the happiest of holidays.

See Larry Jones' family-tested recipes inside. To leave a message for Chef Larry, dial 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1886.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Festive holiday brunch ideas.
- Clam Chowder Recipe Make over.

BE PREPARED FOR UNEXPECTED GIFTS

Be prepared. When someone drops by unexpectedly with a gift, surprise them with something from your gourmet pantry. It's not too late to make some last minute goodies, quick.

BY JOAN BORAM
SPECIAL WRITER



You can be jolly if you want to, but in reality this is the season for lists - lists of people to send greeting cards to; lists of people to buy gifts for, and "to do" lists of things that don't go on the other two lists.

We know as we start that somebody will turn up who isn't on our lists.

It's not so bad with cards - you can always hide behind a New Year's card - but what to do when Cousin Irene from St. Louis turns up? Or the neighbor down the street, who you don't really know that well, comes by with a plate of cookies?

Well, as they say in the Coast Guard, "Semper paratus." Always prepared. Take advantage of the halcyon days before the holidays to whip up a few specialties and store them in the freezer. When Cousin Irene shows up, just hand her something out of your cache, trimmed with a festive bow or ornament, and congratulate yourself for being so clever.

Caroline Gall's emergency gifts include cranberry-wine jelly. "It's easy to make, and everybody loves it, especially for Christmas breakfast," said the Plymouth resident. "It's pretty and tasty and the ingredients are always available in the supermarket, so I can make it before the holiday season and keep it in the fridge. You don't have to worry about storing it after it's open - it's gone almost as soon as you open the jar."

Gall also makes chili sauce and salsa in the summertime, when fresh tomatoes are available, and freezes them for her family and for gifts.

If you're a good cook, or at least better than some of your friends, consider writing up a



Quick gift: Cranberry-Apple Snack Mix makes a trim snack for last-minute holiday gifts for friends, neighbors and the people who serve you throughout the year. This snack mix is a sweet and crunchy blend of holiday flavors and is easy to make at home in your microwave oven.

gourmet menu and specify the date you'll cook, or give the recipient the option of a special date. Or take a matchbook from a favorite restaurant and attach a dinner invitation to it - be sure it's not in New York or Paris.

Select a special bottle of wine, and present it with a written toast for a happy holiday. Consult a book of poetry for a special sentiment or simply write the words for "toast" in several languages - *santo* (French); *salud* (Spanish); *salute* (Italian); *gesundheit* (German); and *skol* (Scandinavian).

Don't forget those few introverted souls who watch their calories even during this self-indulgent season. They would appreciate a delicious cranberry snack mix that you can whip up in your microwave in no time. Remember, while candy-coated chocolate does add color, they aren't exactly health food.

Janet Bailey of Farmington Hills, relies on her trusty microwave to supply her with last-minute gifts. "It's easy to make a gourmet mar-

malade in a few minutes, literally," said Bailey. "I keep an eye out for interesting small containers throughout the year. Nothing fancy or expensive - it could be a mug, or a jar that came with another product. One of my favorites is a graceful round jar of orange honey comes in."

"The twist-time marmalade is different, something you'd never find in a store, and the dried cherry chutney is a good substitute for cranberry sauce. It's especially appropriate this year, because of the shortage of fresh cranberries for Christmas dinner."

Sometimes, I make pound cake batter, freeze it, and pop it in the oven the day I need it. A warm cake seems much more festive than an ice-cold cake from the freezer!"

The book, "Microwave and More," by the California Culinary Academy (Orbis Press), gives these directions for freezing and baking batter:

See GIFTS, 2B

California brandies gain international status

FOCUS ON WINE



ELEANOR & RAY HEALD

crafted, doubly-distilled grape brandies in the tradition of cognac. While these three premium pot-distilled brandy makers are not in a marketing league with the "big four" cognac houses - Courvoisier, Hennessy, Martell and Remy Martin, they have elevated their craft to an internationally recognized status. Astute brandy drinkers have learned about the artisan California pot-distilled brandy producers principally by word of mouth, but the word is out and spreading fast.

Brandy is a generic term for a wood-aged spirit obtained from the distillation of wine or a fermented fruit mash. An alcoholic beverage answering this description may be produced in any part of the world. California grape brandy has been produced for over 200 years, interrupted only by Prohibition, and boasts over 200 producers.

Most California grape brandy makers use a continuous still and age in American oak, a large percentage of which are once-used, heavily charred, Bourbon barrels. The artisan producers use an Alambic pot-still and follow cognac production techniques. California brandies are distilled from the

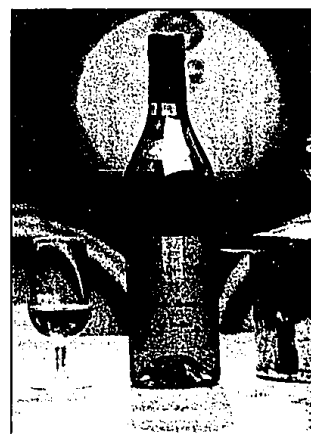
wine of several grape varieties, such as French colombar, pinot noir, gamay benojuais, folle blanche, chenin blanc, muscat canelli and palomino. In Cognac, the ugni blanc grape is used.

"My partner Hubert Germain-Robin brought an antique cognac still to my Mendocino County ranch," explains Ansley J. Coale Jr., president of Alambic Inc. "Each year he hand-distills 80 barrels of a cognac-style brandy bearing his name. Germain-Robin, whose family has produced Jules Robin cognac since 1762, uses traditional methods which have been abandoned in France as uncommercial. The result is a true connoisseur's brandy, equal to cognacs from the best small houses."

"Hubert makes every drop the way a distiller in Cognac would have made his 'Paradise' in 1890. By making brandy in California, we have significant advantages (over Cognac): no rain (at harvest), so our grapes have no rot; early harvest in a sunny climate, which means good flavor and high acidity; much use of non-traditional varieties, which adds complexity; modern California winemaking and storage equipment, yielding exceptionally clean wines of delicacy and finesse. All cellaring is in the finest Limousin barrels."

Located in the Carneros District of southern Napa Valley, Carneros Alambic produces RMS Special Reserve, a California brandy produced in the cognac method. The distillery, built in 1984, houses eight specially hand-crafted and hand-assembled copper potstills manufactured in Cognac. Carneros Alambic brandies are aged in 3700, 50-gallon Limousin oak barrels ranging in age from new to eight years old. "Instead of using one grape

See BRANDIES, 2B



Holiday beverage: Germain-Robin Alambic brandy is perfect served neat after dinner with freshly shelled nuts.