

My Cooking Mentor



My mother would have turned 101 this year. I still miss her although she's been gone for decades.

At parties, people often asked my mother if she taught me to cook. "Not like this", she'd say. What she meant was she never taught me to be a gourmet cook. She never had the time or the audience to consume the kinds of foods I serve at parties. She was feeding 7 kids and a husband of Irish heritage who never wanted things too fancy. A good steak and a wedge of lettuce with Russian dressing was gourmet to my Dad.

My mother loved to come to my house for parties. She'd come a few days ahead and stay on through. She'd sit at the end of my kitchen counter and was fully entertained watching me cook. She never asked if she could help. I think she decided it was her time to observe and I gladly had her company.

Mom thought the parties I threw were gorgeous. She was so proud that she had given me the old china and crystal. When I was small those things stayed locked in a cupboard so they would not get broken. She would tell people how happy she was to see me using them and repeatedly told me not to feel guilty if something broke.

Mom taught me so much about cooking she'd never admit. She taught me never to fear a crowd. She regularly cooked for over 20 people on holidays. I've cooked for as many as 232. She taught me never to get flustered. Now I teach people that there's always "Plan B". You can take a failed crostini and turn it into dip. You can always find another way. She taught me to enjoy the party and the preparation. She never taught me to enjoy cleaning up, but we've invented the "Patented 10-minute Clean Up" since then. Everyone helps; spurred on and entertained by the music and laughter. There's more; much more.

Thanks, Mom, for teaching me so much.

Cheers,