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"Gumbo Tales" Important Links



Tales of food, family and work: Dames share a feast of words

By Judy Hevrdejs 🍷

The stories were sweet, savory, tender, sometimes spicy and served with relish at "Dames in the Salon -- Feast of Words," in the home of Portia Belloc Lowndes. Perhaps it's what you'd expect when a dozen-plus members of Les Dames d'Escoffier recently embraced the art of storytelling beyond cocktail chatter and the limits of electronic communication as an opportunity to get to know members better.

There were a couple horror stories and richly told tales of food and families, as well as lots of laughter, thanks to some juicy bits. And, of course, wines and palomas (gin, grapefruit juice, cherry accented Maurin Quina aperitif) by mix master Jay Gratz for sipping, and goodies from Argyle Street (plus a ginger-basil chicken stew later) for savoring, before the storytelling began. And when it did...

There was Rita Gutekanst, former owner of Limelight Catering, talking about a restaurant (Sausalito) she opened in 1979 at LaSalle and Division streets. It closed three years later, helped along by a brutal 1979

December snowstorm, flooding a couple years later, and a problematic parking lot (cars broken into, customers giving car keys to someone they thought was a valet -- but wasn't). There was also the rifle-toting former line cook who robbed the restaurant. Crazy? Sure, but Gutekanst especially remembers one waitress who delivered on that restaurant mantra ("Check in. Get snacks. Check back.") when the police arrived.

Not as dangerous, but equally intense? Judith Dunbar Hines and a friend (a Washington, D.C. caterer who was very pregnant and on bed rest) preparing a meal for then-President Ronald Reagan at a historic house in D.C. They included a blueberry mousse with an apricot coulis on the menu. Unfortunately, Dunbar Hines' friend made the mousse, forgetting uncooked blueberries would not remain a lovely blue. "It was gray goop," she said. "We decorated it to death" with edible flowers. So they were shocked when they received a message from the event's florist: "We love how your dessert matched the centerpiece" of pale

lavender and orange flowers.

Over-boiled broccoli prompted Anupy Singla's transition from TV journalist to cookbook author and creator of a line of sauces and seasonings. "My Mom taught me how to cook," she said. "I come from a family of cooks." So after covering an airline tragedy (the 2005 Southwest Airlines crash at Midway Airport), she arrived home to find her children eating over-boiled broccoli cooked by the babysitter. It was then Singla decided to quit her job. A day later, her husband asked how her day was. "I said, 'I quit today.'" He said: "You what?" "Well you told me it was OK."...and, as she told the Dames, "The rest is history."

Other poignant stories involved food, families and those memories. Julie Chernoff, "Make It Better" dining editor, remembered learning to cook from Alberta Williams, a woman who worked full time for her mother and taught the youngster to make biscuits, pie crust and mac 'n' cheese. One day young Julie biked to buy ingredients, then surprised her parents by cooking a dinner of mushroom and onion

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| Dames listen to Kathy Ruff



| Deviled eggs from Portia Belloc-Loundes



| Kathy Ruff, Jay Gratz



Tales of food, family and work: Dames share a feast of words (cont.)

quiche, Caesar salad and chocolate mousse. Chernoff's mother now is 89, struggling with dementia and taste buds that no longer savor her daughter's culinary creations. It's difficult, Chernoff noted, when the person who's opinion means the most to you can no longer taste.

Ina Pinkney, aka The Breakfast Queen, and cookbook author and columnist, recalled road tripping with her family from Brooklyn to Miami Beach. On a driving break, Pinkney and her father went to a diner, the youngster's first such encounter with those swiveling round-topped chairs. She split a slice of fresh-baked pineapple pie with him: "He let me have the pointy part," she remembers. Towards the end of his life, father and daughter talked daily. His last words to Ina: "I adore you." "I adore you too, Daddy." Not long after, she found a pineapple pie in Treasure Island.

Laughter erupted when Dames recounted tales of traveling while pregnant, such as Belloc Lowndes' challenging run through an airport and food consultant Jill Haas' houseboat trip. Haas was 7 1/2 months pregnant when she and her husband joined a Canadian woman and her German boyfriend (they'd met years earlier during Haas' husband's posting in Tokyo) to travel off the coast of British Columbia. They knew of Jill's culinary skills, so assumed she'd be the cook. Once on board, though, the couple also announced it would be a "clothing optional vacation." There isn't room for details, but know the cook did request some clothing at dinner.

Speaking of details, should you need them, perhaps it's best to corner these members at the next Les Dames gathering: Tablescap's Kathy Ruff told about an almost-missed London-to-Milan flight (it wasn't her fault) and how her seat-mate encouraged her to drink lots of water because she looked rattled. "It was like a bad dream," she said, recalling she'd also worn a jumpsuit. And you might consider asking OPUS One's Gina Voci about a Napa business trip complicated by a forgotten negligee and a room with digitally-controlled lights, TV and curtains. Do ask her about those curtains..

| Dames, from left to right, Gina Voci, Ina Pinkney, Rita Gutekanst, Jill Haas, Judith Dunbar Hines, Julie Chernoff, Kathy Ruff



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Chorizo and seafood stew ❁

Prep: 45 minutes | Cook: 55 minutes | Makes: 6 servings

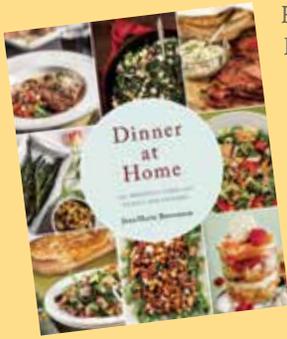
Reprinted with permission from "Dinner at Home," by JeanMarie Brownson (Agate Surrey, 2015)

8 ounces hearty French bread, cut into 1-inch cubes
3 tablespoons olive oil
Sweet or smoked paprika
3/4 teaspoon salt
12 ounces uncooked Mexican-style pork chorizo, removed from casing
1 small red onion, diced
1 small red bell pepper, seeded, diced
3 to 4 cloves garlic, crushed
1 cup dry white wine, dry sparkling wine or cava, or dry vermouth
1/2 of a 14.5-ounce can fire-roasted diced tomatoes, with liquid
2 cups chicken broth
2 pounds fresh littleneck clams, scrubbed
2 pounds fresh mussels, scrubbed, debearded
1 pound bay scallops, patted dry
Fresh cilantro, chopped
Fresh lime wedges

- 1 Heat oven to 375 degrees. Put bread cubes onto a large baking sheet. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons of the oil; toss well to coat. Sprinkle with paprika and 1/4 teaspoon of the salt. Bake, stirring often, until golden and crispy about 20 minutes. Cool. (Croutons will keep a couple of days wrapped in foil.)
- 2 Meanwhile, heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in the bottom of a large (5- to 6-quart) Dutch oven. Add chorizo, onion and bell pepper. Cook, breaking up the chorizo into small bits with a wooden spatula, until chorizo is cooked through and lightly browned, 12-14 minutes. Stir in garlic; cook 1 minute. Stir in wine; boil to reduce slightly, 1-2 minutes. Stir in tomatoes and broth; simmer 10 minutes. Season to taste with salt, about 1/2 teaspoon, depending on broth.
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A new book collects and showcases one Dame's favorite dinner recipes

By Amelia Levin



Finally, JeanMarie Brownson can recycle those endless stacks of newspaper clippings she has kept from her long-running column in the Chicago Tribune. "Dinner at Home: 140 Recipes to Enjoy with Family and Friends" (Agate Surrey, \$29.95) features the best recipes and stories from Brownson's bi-monthly column by the same name.

Released late last year, the book presents a collection of entrée, side, and starter recipes suitable for weeknight family meals, adventurous Sunday cooking and entertaining with friends, along with full meal ideas all in one "neat little package" with full-color photos hand-selected by Brownson and team from the Tribune's archives.

"The book gathers up all those recipes my kids and I cooked together on Sunday nights over the last eight years," Brownson says. Since 2007, Brownson has chronicled her experiences cooking with her husband Scott and then-teenage daughter Claire and son Glen (now 26 and 23, respectively). Together, they came up with recipe ideas based on dinners at friends' homes, inspirational trips around the world, and general culinary whims.

"One time, my son had tried Nashville chicken, so he asked if we could do a column on that, and for a while, my daughter was vegetarian, so we did some meatless dishes," she says. "It's a team effort — my son liked to do all the

grocery shopping, and then we all helped out with the cooking and cleaning. We always ate together most days of the week, but Sunday was when we had the most time to cook together as a family. It's important to slow down and sit down to eat at the table with the company of others — and no phones! I think those habits are really important to have."

Recipes are organized by course, from party snacks to soups and stews; salads and sandwiches like crispy fish BLTs with sriracha mayo; pastas and pizzas; entrees such as sautéed scallops with chermoula; veggies and sides such as lemon-garlic grilled portobello mushrooms with burrata and tomatoes, and desserts such as peaches and cream trifle with ginger and Bourbon. There also are holiday recipes and some for condiments, rubs and other staples, "to get you cooking faster," Brownson says. The meal plan section offers ideas for meatless occasions, birthday celebrations, game day parties and more. The "Comfort Me With Friends and Food" includes red lentil soup with lamb and fresh lemon, toasted flatbreads, arugula salad with shaved Parmesan, lemon vinaigrette and sumac, and coconut mango ice cream, plus an Amber beer and a pinot noir wine pairing suggestion.

Some of her favorite recipes in the book are the chorizo and seafood stew inspired by her first dinner away as an empty nester at Matt's in the Market in Seattle and the smoky grilled Delmonico mopped steaks, a recreation of a dry-rubbed steak and smoky sauce she and her family enjoyed on a ski trip. "I also love just going to the farmer's market and seeing what odd vegetables I can work with that week," she adds.

Brownson's three-decade career as a chef and food writer began as early as high school, when she cooked her way through Julia Child's books and later studied cooking at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris and in Mexico with Diana Kennedy.

She went on to become the Chicago Tribune's test kitchen director and associate food editor from 1980 until 1996, when she helped found Frontera Foods with acclaimed chef and restaurateur Rick Bayless, and Frontera Media Productions, where she continues to make an impact today. In fact, at the time of this interview, Brownson had just returned from a 17-day trip to the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico to assist filming the 11th season of Bayless' popular TV show, "Mexico -- One Plate at a Time." Over the years, Brownson also has co-authored three books with Bayless and his wife Deann, including the James Beard award-winning tome by the same name.

In "Dinner at Home," Brownson sheds light on some of these behind-the-scenes experiences in the food industry, with stories and charming anecdotes from her columns that she edited, and in some cases, rewrote to fit a traditional cookbook style.

The entire book process, which took place swiftly in just less than a year, also involved reviewing photos in the Tribune's archives for the best picks and some helpful input and grunt work from Joe Gray and Amy Carr at the paper and Perrin Davis, an editor at Agate. "I can't speak highly enough of the Agate and Tribune team," Brownson says. "This book ended up being a collection of my notes and tips from a lifetime in a kitchen."

| Chorizo and seafood stew, recipe at left

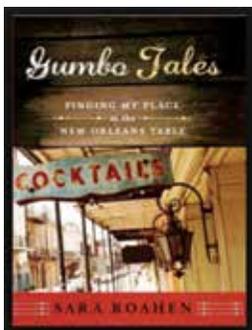


| JeanMarie Brownson



Dames Who Read celebrate an ode to New Orleans

By Carol Mighton Haddix 🍷



“A part of me...still fears eating the unknown as much as it fears, say, quivering spiders. Over time, however, I've learned to channel that anxiety into curiosity and even desire, which must be what enabled New Orleans' various gumbos to snag me, first by the nose, then by the belly, and soon enough by the heart.”

Sara Roahen's words in her 2008 book, “Gumbo Tales,” likewise snagged a group of Les Dames Who Read. Those who met in mid-February to discuss the book enjoyed Roahen's outsider's take on the food of New Orleans, from the many forms of gumbo to the often humorous stories behind the city's Sazeracs, Sno-Balls, crawfish, po-boys and even turducken.

And what better place to delve into the book further than Heaven on Seven, chef-owner Jimmy Bannos' venerable gustatory ode to New Orleans on the seventh floor of the Loop's Garland Building? Fortified with a round of Sazeracs and Hurricanes, the group and the discussion bounced between “Gumbo Tales” and Bannos' own spicy-rich version of gumbo. Then it was on to a meal of po-boys (oyster and shrimp); shrimp and grits with beef “debris” (long cooked shreds of beef), grilled andouille

on sweet potato polenta, the boudin with black-eyed peas and collards and the four-pie dessert course (pecan, chocolate pecan, peanut butter, key lime mousse).

The Dames, led by organizer Judith Hines, shared their own tales of New Orleans. “My husband proposed at Brennan's,” said Diane Sokolofsky. “I worked at Commander's Palace for two years as a hostess,” added Catherine Deevy. Bannos stopped by often during the evening to share his stories, too. “New Orleans pulls you in and never lets you go,” he said.

| Shrimp and oyster po' boys



| Dark chocolate pecan pie



| Jimmy Bannos of Heaven on Seven



| From left, Shannon Kinsella, Lois Levine, Toria Emas, Kathy Ruff



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What is your favorite food blog? Local or national, send your nomination to us for a future Panache article: carolmightonhaddix@gmail.com

And check out our website to learn more about our members! lesdameschicago.org

The spring fundraiser is right around the corner! See plans for “Culinarium -- Feast Your Senses” on May 16 at lesdameschicago.org.



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