On Commence Avec Un Roux

Goat Stew ... (Would We Kid You?)

By Peggy Mengis

“First you make a roux...”

Needless to say, this is the first commandment for making stews, gumbos and sauce piquantes.

Three recipes which start with this basic direction are among my most prized possessions. They came from a young man in Opelousas nearly thirty years ago. Lote Thistlethwaite, nicknamed “Goat” by those close to him, loved to hunt and fish, and he also loved to concoct the most tantalizing dishes with his catch.

Lote wasn’t one to measure. An easy-going, carefree character with a keen sense of humor, he cooked instinctively, adding a handful of this and a pinch of that, and the finished product defied description.

A U.S. Marine Corps Reserve aviator called back during the Korean War, Lote went down with his plane, but I think of him often when I use his recipes. He had a zest for living that he translated into his culinary creations.

He started his recipe for court-bouillon, a rich, savory fish stew, with the usual, “First you make a roux.”

“Heat three or four tablespoons vegetable oil in the pot and add three or four onions, two or three cloves of garlic, four stalks of celery, a green pepper, some green onion, and some parsley, all chopped fine.

“Cook until the mixture is limp-limp. Add a can of mashed tomatoes, then a can of tomato sauce. Add some water, then tabasco, salt and red pepper and one-third bottle of Worcestershire sauce, and a pinch of thyme. Add the juice of one-third lemon. Let the mixture cook down and about a half hour before serving, add the fish.

When asked to explain the difference between “limp” and “limp-limp,” Lote retorted, “Well, cher, if you don’t know the difference between ‘limp’ (which he pronounced almost like ‘lamp’) and ‘limp-limp,’ you shouldn’t be trying to cook!”

What kind of fish to use?

“Catfish is good,” Lote said. Other recipes call for redfish. Lote used whatever he happened to catch.

His recipe for sauce piquante was short and simple—

“Same thing as courtbouillon, except thick-thick.” (He wasn’t asked to explain the difference between “thick” and “thick-thick.”)

On hunting trips, any wild game shot was put into the sauce piquante pot. Listening to the tales of the savory stews that were cooked in the woods by the hunters at the end of the day was enough to make your mouth water.

Imagine the aroma arising from a quail sauce piquante. Or squirrel, or rabbit, or perhaps a combination pot luck of the day’s bounty.

The third recipe that I fell heir to was one for bouillabaisse.

Lote would take a large fish and filet it. His favorite for bouillabaisse, too, was catfish.

“After you filet the fish, take the bones and boil them, and save the stock. Take an onion, cut it four ways and put it into the water with thyme, parsley, garlic and two bay leaves. Mix salt, red pepper, thyme, broken bay leaves, and chopped parsley and rub this seasoning into the fish filets.

“Chop up three onions, three onion tops, celery, green pepper and garlic. Brown chopped vegetables in three tablespoons of olive oil.

“Add fish. Cook five minutes on each side.

“You can add a few shrimp if you want. After cooking take the fish out and set it on the side. Add the fish stock to the sauce and add a can of mashed tomatoes and one pint of white port wine. Cook down some, then put the fish back in. Cover and cook about twenty minutes longer.

“In the meantime, fry the bread in oleo. Put the fish on top of the bread, cover with sauce and eat.”

“And that is good-good, cher.”