

When Uncle Henry Takes Over!

by Lydia Lovell

Although Aunt Olivia took cooking very seriously and collected recipes with all the dedication of a professional chef, Uncle Henry delighted in recipes which poked fun at experts, recipes he could follow without ruining the ingredients or spoiling anyone's appetite with the results. Not only did he gather recipes like those, but he bought regional cookbooks and kept them on the shelves with Aunt Olivia's cookbooks. Every now and then when Aunt Olivia wondered aloud what to serve company on a Saturday night, Uncle Henry would offer to prepare dinner.

Aunt Olivia would then consider whether the expected guests would appreciate Uncle Henry's efforts. If she believed it safe (such as when she had invited us for dinner), she would say, "Oh, Henry dear, that would be such a great help." And he would get out his cookbooks and spend an evening studying and planning his menu. Let me share with you some excerpts from some of his cookbooks. One from Key West, Florida, contains a chapter written by the men of the community.

"Women are better cooks than men. No wonder...they can whip sense out of the way they give each other recipes. For example, they will say, 'Take a fair-sized pan, line it with flour, not too thick, and brown it a while in a fairly hot oven.' Or, 'pour in, kind of easy, about two gullups of black molasses, like you used to could get, and four or five good-sized drops of cream...'"

And Uncle Henry's chuckles became guffaws as he turned the pages. Aunt Olivia would ask, smiling, what tickled him so, and he would read aloud the recipe for **Good Gunk Spaghetti and Meat Balls**.

Figure out from the box how much spaghetti you want to cook. Read the fine print. It's different with different brands.

Maybe you like spaghetti a little sweeter than how it comes from the factory. It's better if you put a teaspoon or two of sugar or comparable sweetening substance in the water along with the salt when you boil it.

Meanwhile: Put a big frying pan over medium heat. If it cooks too slow or spatters grease all over adjacent walls, it isn't medium. Before the pan gets too hot, drop in three table-spoonsful of bacon drippings. Slice in some onion, real fine. Toss in some green pepper, cut up small. Red sweet pepper, too, if you can get it. A lot of celery ought to go in. Put in the quantity that looks right, according to how you feel about cut up celery. A few olives are swell, either the stuffed ones or the others, ripe or green. Take out pits. Mushrooms? Sure. Cut to size and stir in. Mix with a wooden spoon while it cooks until it looks like the onions and peppers are done. You've seen cooked onions and peppers. You'll know. Don't worry about the celery. You can't hurt it. Same with olives.

Now open a can of condensed tomato soup, the thick kind. Pour it in. It was cooked before it was canned, so it just needs heating. Stir everything around. Before it gets too hot is the best time to taste it. Might not have the right amount of pepper or salt or general zip. Put some in. You get good results with some ketchup, but not too much.

Boil the water. Cook the spaghetti. Dump it out in a sieve or



colander, or anything with holes in the bottom, to drain.

So you think this isn't new? How about the time you fooled with tomato paste and got a sauce so acidic it burned your stomach? Meatballs? Everybody knows how to make meat balls.

That's the sort of recipe Uncle Henry enjoyed most of all. From Block Island comes a recipe for **Mud Turtle**. It begins: 'Catch a mud turtle. When catching be sure to put a gaff hook in his mouth so he'll bite hard on it. (he won't let go). Lay turtle on chopping block, haul head out of shell with gaff hook. Chop off head with hatchet. After turtle stops moving (about one hour), cut off his toes as these are apt to hook you. Turn upside down, and with a sharp knife, cut around outer edge of shell. Shell will come off in one piece. Remove skin from legs. Meat can then be cut out in sections. Soak meat overnight in cold salted water. Drain. Cook half an hour in pressure cooker with salt and an onion. Cool and pick out bones with two spoons. Bones will be all shapes and sizes and cannot be removed before now. Turtle meat is now ready to use in any way desired.'

The recipe ends with the comment, "We like turtle in a stew, prepared just as you make beef stew." The same book supplies an excellent rule for **Fish Chowder**.

'Take one good-sized haddock, pollack, or cod. Skin it. Simmer (do not boil) until flakes separate easily from bones. Remove fish from water. SAVE the water. Break fish in fair-sized pieces. Dice four or five potatoes (more if you like) and boil not quite soft. Drain. Do not save this water. Dice up fine a good-sized chunk of salt pork, streak o'lean preferred. Fry with four or five onions, cut up fine, until slightly brown, stirring often. Drain grease. Combine pork, onions, fish, a couple of cups of fish water, and potatoes. Heat. Also heat to same temperature BEFORE MIXING one quart of milk together with one can evaporated milk. Combine mixtures and add a good-sized lump of butter, season with salt and pepper. Set on back of stove for about an hour. Be careful the chowder does not boil.'

While the Lovells were never heavy users of alcoholic beverages, on special occasions Uncle Henry liked to offer special cocktails made from recipes such as this one for **Frozen Quinby**.

This is a drink you eat with a spoon or inhale through a straw if you're patient enough to let it melt a little. Some call it a daiquiri, but they're talking about something produced by professional bartenders with lemons in an electric blender. A Quinby is superior in every respect, admired by men, and simply adored by the ladies. You, too, can be popular by learning to mix this delightful delicacy right in your own kitchen.

Take two eggs and separate them. If you have never done this, explanation is in order. Put one egg at the extreme left of your kitchen table and the other at the extreme right. Now remove all the ice cubes from your refrigerator and wrap them in a clean tea towel. Find a new Irish Linen one if you can. Then bang them with a gavel, sledge hammer, bung-starter, or croquet mallet until the ice (or the towel) is reduced to shards or shreds.

By this time the two eggs will have fallen off the table. Never mind. They aren't essential unless you want to whip the whites for froth. Well-distributed over the deck, they sort of get everyone in the mood for what follows. Attracted by the rumpus, your guests will now be in the kitchen asking if they can help. Observe their gymnastics as they negotiate the mixture of crushed ice and raw eggs underfoot.

Fill sherbet glasses with crushed ice, squeeze the juice of a lime into each glass, add a teaspoon of confectioner's sugar and dash in a generous jigger of good Bacardi rum. With the two halves of a colorful plastic straw cut crosswise stuck in each drink, your masterpiece is ready to serve.

Frozen Quinbys are just right for passing around and around the patio on a hot summer evening. Be sure to follow them up with plenty of solid food, though, unless you're willing to maintain your own sobriety and drive each guest home. Perhaps you are like Uncle Henry and take as much pleasure in reading about such delights as in sampling them. In either instance, bon appetit.