

From Aunt Olivia's kitchen

For dietary dilettantes

by Lydia Lovell

As their faded photographs will testify, Aunt Olivia and Uncle Henry were not people who put much stock in low-calorie diets. Even so, some of the recipes Aunt Olivia used frequently produced results which Uncle Henry praised and which, upon close analysis, were, indeed, low in calories and saturated fats. Aunt Olivia didn't purposely prepare diet food but, on the other hand, nothing was wasted. If, for example, she had skimmed the cream from the milk the night before and made a rich dessert to follow her fish dinner, then skimmed milk was used in **Fish Chowder** the next day.

1 lb. left-over cooked haddock or cod
(or **1 pt. cleaned and drained clams or quahogs, with juice reserved**)
4 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
4 carrots, peeled and sliced 1/4" thick
2T. butter or oleo
1 large onion, peeled and sliced 1/8" thick
1 C. boiling water
2C. skim milk, scalded
salt and pepper to taste

In a medium saucepan, melt oleo and cook the onion slices in the fat until golden. As soon as the onions begin to brown, add boiling water, carrots and potatoes. Cover and cook over low heat 20 minutes until vegetables are tender. Add cooked fish together with any pan drippings saved. Heat until steaming. Combine with scalding hot milk (not boiling), adjust seasonings and serve immediately. If using raw clams, add them to vegetables when they are tender, steam five minutes, and then combine with scalding hot milk, adjust seasonings, and serve. Do not allow to boil or mixture will curdle.

One of Uncle Henry's favorite salad dressings used up some more of the skimmed milk. If Aunt Olivia thought of the dressing as being low-calorie, she never told him of it. She called it **Bridget's Creamy Dressing** because Bridget Daley from whom she had received the recipe while attending a quilting bee, had provided no other title.

1 C. cottage cheese **1/3 C. skim milk**
2 t. chopped scallion tops **1 T. dried parsley flakes**
1/4 t. salt **1/8 t. pepper**

Stir ingredients together until smooth (or mix them in blender or food processor if you prefer) and refrigerate overnight. Makes about a cup-and-a-half; keeps well, tightly covered, in the refrigerator.

Bridget's Creamy Dressing, although much lower in calories than mayonnaise, can't compare for use by serious dieters with the **Irish Salad Dressing** that follows:

1 C. white vinegar **1/2 t. salt substitute**
12 pkts. sugar substitute **1/8 t. pepper**

Combine ingredients in a small bottle and shake well until sugar substitute dissolves.

Either of these dressings is much better than none at all on a sliced-cucumber-and-diced-scallion salad with tomato chunks, and either one is quite nice drizzled over sliced avocado (although avocado cannot qualify as diet food).

Like fish, chicken has made a name for itself as healthy protein, and especially if the chicken has been skinned before cooking. One problem faced by most of us who cook for men is that they seem to have a comparatively low tolerance for chicken unless it comes to the table dressed in gravies, sauces, or surrounded with rich foods that effectively negate our choice of chicken instead of beef to begin with. But there are solutions and one of them is **Creole Sauce**.

2 T. instant minced onion **1/8 t. black pepper**
1/2 C. chopped green pepper **1 bay leaf**
1 16-oz. can tomatoes, chopped **2 whole cloves**
 1 t. salt or salt-substitute
1 T. dried parsley flakes **Dash Tabasco**

With the exception of the Tabasco, combine all ingredients, including the juice of the tomatoes, and bring to a boil in a medium saucepan. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer 20 minutes. Remove cover and simmer 10 minutes longer. Remove from heat, stir in Tabasco. Fish-out bay leaf and cloves before serving over **Baked Chicken and Rice**.

To prepare the chicken and rice, combine one can of chicken broth, 1/2 C. brown rice, and one peeled and sliced medium onion in a shallow baking pan. Arrange six chicken thighs and/or breasts from which the skins have been removed in a single layer over the rice. Bake 45 minutes to an hour at 350°, basting at 15 minutes and 30 minutes with the baking liquid. When the rice has absorbed all the liquid, chicken will be done. Serve with Creole Sauce.

A householder, prowling the meat counters looking for bargains or for something special to tempt an appetite weary of dieting, may be understandably offended by the price of veal. Consider, on the other hand, the total bill-plus-tip should you succumb to an alternative — eating out.

Having made that rationalization, four veal cutlets may not seem quite such an extravagance. And by using a bit of ingenuity, the entire meal can be low-cal and delicious.

Once committed to buying the veal, your other ingredients are inexpensive. Stop at the dairy counter for a quart of buttermilk and a pint of cottage cheese. From among the vegetables, choose two or three small tender zucchini and at least four small white onions. Check your staples to insure you have available garlic powder, thyme, lemon juice, non-stick vegetable shortening in a spray can, and a little dry white or rose wine.

At home, combine 1 t. garlic powder, 1/4 t. salt, 1/8 t. fresh-ground black pepper, and a tiny pinch of thyme. Sprinkle the mixture over the cutlets, rubbing it into the meat. Spray a shallow baking dish with shortening before placing cutlets in the dish. Peel and slice the onions very thin. Peel and slice the zucchini 1/4" thick. Toss onions and zucchini together and scatter over and around cutlets. Pour in half-a-cup of wine, cover tightly, and bake at 350° for 45 minutes. Veal chops may be substituted for cutlets if you prefer.

Meanwhile, prepare **Imitation Sour Cream**. Combine in blender jar or food processor 1 C. buttermilk, 1 pint cottage cheese, 1/2 t. lemon juice, and 1/8 t. salt. Process until smooth. Serve the sauce separately to be used on the veal cutlets as desired. Irish salad dressing with sliced tomatoes garnished with snipped fresh basil leaves is a delicious accompaniment.

Should your family prefer a more traditional gravy, bring to a boil two cups of fat-free beef stock or bouillon. Blend 1 T. cornstarch with a little cold stock, then pour into hot stock, stirring constantly until mixture thickens. Season with grated onion, herbs, salt and pepper.

If veal cutlets or chops are utterly beyond your budget, you may find **Oriental Steak** a satisfactory substitute. Prepared this way, one sirloin steak makes a meal for two dieters. Slice raw steak across the grain and on the diagonal in very thin slices. Put meat slices in a bowl and sprinkle with 1 t. garlic salt, 1/4 t. fresh-ground black pepper, and 1/2 t. ground ginger. Stir to distribute seasonings evenly. Add half-a-cup of soy sauce to meat; toss thoroughly; refrigerate for four hours. Heat two T. peanut oil in a large skillet (or a wok), over high heat and brown steak slices quickly. Remove meat from pan and set aside. Reduce heat and add a green pepper, seeded and sliced coarsely, and one small thin-sliced onion. Stir-fry for two minutes over high heat.

Drain a can of mushrooms, reserving juice. Add mushrooms to pan and fry one minute. Add mushroom liquid, remainder of soy sauce marinade, and the meat. Lower heat, cover, simmer 15 minutes until tender. Serve over fluffy steamed rice or over heated and drained bean sprouts.

Neither Uncle Henry nor Aunt Olivia would have been chosen as models to illustrate a handbook for modern dieters, but both lived to ripe old ages and enjoyed good appetites to the end of their days. While Aunt Olivia gave little thought to avoiding fattening foods, and while her primary concern was pleasing those who came to her table, she often chose to serve, perhaps intuitively, a low-calorie dish that balanced, nutritionally, a rich dessert we all enjoyed without a single twinge of guilt. Perhaps these suggestions can help you achieve the same result.

Bon appetit.