



My father- - who loved Italians

My father was a Jew who wanted to be an Italian. that was the burning regret of his life. He loved Italians and everything Italian: the food, the music, the

art, the Mafia. he spent much more time hanging out with his Italian friends--the guys from the west side of Buffalo over at Spanos on Chippewa where they could be found at all hours drinking coffee and to speak endlessly of this, that and the other--sports, women, clothes, etc.

There were always some new suits or terrific hats or pairs of shoes to be had at a discount via a recently hijacked truck. The greatest thing you could say to my father was: you/re a Jew? I thought you were Italian!

But he wasn't Italian and could never be so he did the next best thing: he married one. Normally one of the things you can expect at the very least if you marry an Italian woman is for a decent plate of spaghetti to make its appearance on the dinner table from time to time.

But my father, poor guy, had managed to fall in love with a paradox: an Italian who hated food. My mother sat down to eat and these were her preferences: cigarettes, coffee, bacon. This was her diet that she thrived on until the end of her life--age 89.

The list of foods she maintained a safe distance from was endless and at the top were tomatoes. its a problem if your husband loves Italian food.

But she was a good cook--a terrific cook. she made things like fried chicken, roast pork, swiss steak fried potatoes with onions and loved to bake: pies, cakes, cookies, etc. Every Christmas she baked boxes of cookies for friends. But in the pasta dept--forget it. It was the sight and smell of tomatoes simmering in a pot that made her gag. My father would become desperate for a decent meatball or plate of ravioli and pay a visit on

his sister in law, or before she died, my grandmother.

Later on when I was living in LA and he and my mother had relocated to Yucca Valley, a desert community north of Palm Springs, I would visit on the weekend and bring with me a quart of sauce and jar of meatballs. I used my aunts recipe, handed down from my grandmother and god knows how far back this one goes.

That is the one I present here with some minor inclusions by way of an Italian housewife friend in Buffalo. You can take it from me: if its Italian food and someone from Buffalo is behind it recipe-wise--you may relax your mind.

Meatballs

There are two ways to make meatballs: firm and not so firm. I prefer the not so firm and to achieve the desired texture I add extra bread crumbs. My grandmother didn't use breadcrumbs. She baked her own bread and took two slices that she soaked in milk and to squeeze out the excess milk and mix into the meat.

Ingredients (10-12 meatballs)

1 lb ground beef
1 beaten egg.
2 slices white bread or a roll--French, Kaiser, egg, etc
1/2 cup breadcrumbs if desired
2 tablespoons parm. cheese
1 tbl/spoon ketchup
1 t/spoon nutmeg
1 t/spoon minced raisens (optional)
1/4 lb pork bones or butts (brown in skillet)

To prepare:

Soak bread in milk or half/half and squeeze out excess.

Beat one egg and in a large bowl add all ingredients. Mix well and form into balls, not too big 1"-1 1/2" dia

Brown meatballs in skillet with butter and Olive oil

Brown on two sides, then a third side. Transfer to paper towels and drain

Sauce

1 large can tomatoes
1 large can tomato sauce
1 small can tomato paste
Two cloves garlic, peeled but dont chop
1/2 onion diced
2 T/spoons chopped fresh basil
1 t/spoon sugar (optional--this is a Sicilian touch and, according to the northern Italians, the ultimate proof of the savagery of the breed)
salt/pepper to taste, pinch red pepper flakes

To prepare:

In a skillet sauté onions, garlic cloves in olive oil/butter

add tomatoes, simmer until tomatoes are soft and mash with potato masher.

Pour this into 8 quart pot.

Add tomato puree, tomato paste, salt/pepper to taste and pinch of red pepper flakes

add 1 quart water--use empty tomato can

Simmer over low heat, stirring occasionally for 2 hours. Add more water to thin sauce if needed

Add browned pork bones or butts

Add meatballs to sauce 20 minutes before serving. My grandmother liked to add a couple hardboiled eggs to the sauce (another Sicilian touch--that remains a mystery. But I do it because she did it. It's a nice touch if the yolk of the egg is still a little gooey)

Buon appetito!

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