

Many people who read *The School of Essential Ingredients* have written and asked for recipes. Although I have often wondered what Lillian would think, I had a great deal of fun posting recipes as guest posts on blogs around the internet and now am collecting them here. My hope is that you will use these as springboards, as the start of your own experimentation process. Change ingredients and amounts as your nose and taste buds tell you to. Trust yourself and the food. Have fun. Lillian would approve of that, I know.

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## **Tom's Pasta Sauce**

*(originally a guest post on Books on the Brain, lisamm.wordpress.com)*

The idea for *The School of Essential Ingredients* came from a cooking class I took in Seattle, but the approach that Lillian has toward food came from my experience of living in Italy for two years. While I was there I learned to see food as a conversation between ingredients rather than a lock-step set of rules I needed to follow. At first, that dialogue between ingredients felt as if it, too, was in a foreign language along with the Italian, but over time I learned to relax, to immerse myself in the flavors and textures of the ingredients, to worry less about using recipes. In short, I learned to play with my food.

And what I learned is that cooking is a very forgiving activity. Switching out one ingredient for another is a creative act, not a destructive one. Coming out from behind the protective wall of a recipe allows us to come into closer contact with the food itself. Thinking of a recipe as the start of a conversation opens up endless possibilities.

I offer the following recipe with the hope that you will feel invited/directed/inspired to experiment. What would happen, for example, if you grated some orange peel into your sauce? Or used chicken sausage, or ground lamb with a bit of fresh rosemary? How might those bursts of creativity affect the life of someone you love?

### **Tom's Pasta Sauce Recipe**

2 tablespoons olive oil

1/2 extra-large soft chicken bouillon cube (for best results, use Knorr's extra-large soft chicken bouillon cubes)

1 cup onion, chopped

2 large garlic cloves, minced

1 pound ground Italian sausage

1/4 cup milk

1/4 cup red wine

1 28-ounce can whole tomatoes, drained and crushed in a food processor or chopped finely by hand

1 cup tomato sauce (more if you want)

Salt and pepper

1 pound penne pasta

Grated parmesan cheese (optional)

1. In a large sauté pan, heat olive oil on medium-low heat until bubbles form. Crush the half bouillon cube into the oil and mix thoroughly. Add onion and sauté for 2 minutes. Add garlic and sauté until translucent.
2. Add ground sausage, increase heat to medium, and cook until meat is no longer pink. Add milk and simmer until absorbed. (Don't worry if it looks strange at first; the milk will mellow the wine and make for a wonderful, lush sauce.) Add wine, reduce heat to low, and simmer until wine is absorbed. Add crushed tomatoes, tomato sauce, and salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a boil over high heat.
3. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 1-3 hours, covered if you want a rich, but slightly thinner sauce, uncovered if you want a thicker sauce and the smell to roam through your house.
4. Bring a large pot of water to boil. Cook penne pasta according to package directions, until al dente. Drain pasta and place in a large serving bowl. Ladle sauce over pasta; top with grated parmesan cheese if desired, and serve immediately.

Yield: 6-8 servings

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## **Carl's White Cake**

*(originally a guest post on [Bookingmama.blogspot.com](http://Bookingmama.blogspot.com))*

When I was writing *The School of Essential Ingredients*, my idea was to pair each character with a food that would help them - evoke a memory, spur a life change, heal a sorrow. Sometimes this match was obvious, easy, but for a long time I didn't know what Carl's food should be. I tried bread, omelettes, salt - nothing quite fit. And then I thought of cake and I heard the click, the sound in your head that lets you know you have put just the right pieces together in a work of fiction.

The only problem was that at the time I could have easily won a prize as the worst cake baker in the world. In that regard, Helen and I were soulmates. I have a sister-in-law who makes extraordinary cakes - lofty, light, sculptural in their decoration - but mine were more like those scrawled cards a toddler gives you, full of love but cringe-worthy in production.

But Carl needed a cake - and a white one at that, when everyone in my family is a chocolate fanatic - so I had to figure it out. In the process I learned chemistry and patience and magic. And if I may say so, this cake is delicious. Even the chocolate lovers agreed.

I'm including the recipe below, but Lillian wants to make sure I say that you should mess with it. If you are in a book club, consider trying this for your next get-together....

### **Carl's White Cake Recipe**

2 2/3 cups sifted cake flour

3 tsp baking powder

1/2 tsp salt

3/4 cup unsalted butter (room temp)

1 1/4 cup sugar

3 egg yolks

3 tsp vanilla extract

4 egg whites

1/4 cup sugar

3/4 cup milk

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Butter and flour 3 8" cake pans.

Separate eggs, set aside.

Sift together flour, baking powder and salt. Set aside.

Beat butter until soft. Add sugar; beat several minutes (until fluffy!). Add one egg yolk at a time, beating after.

Add flour mixture alternately with milk. Flour-milk-flour-milk-flour.

Beat egg whites. When peaks are soft, add sugar. Beat until peaks are stiff, but don't overbeat!

Fold egg whites into flour/milk mixture.

Cook 20-25 minutes. Cake is done when a toothpick comes out clean.

Frosting:

1 cup unsalted butter

4 cups confectioner's sugar (plus more if necessary)

1/4 cup milk

1/4 cup whipping cream

1 tsp vanilla

Beat butter until soft. Add sugar gradually, along with vanilla and milk/whipping cream.

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## **Claire's Roasted Crabs**

(originally a guest post on [readersrespit.blogspot.com](http://readersrespit.blogspot.com))

Some fifteen years ago now, my husband and I bought a slim bit of land on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington state. The property rose up some 250 feet, but technically it was waterfront and we bushwhacked our way through poison oak and clambered down ladders and ropes and stood, triumphant, on our beach. The view down the bay was endless; the seals poked their heads up from the water and looked at us with soft brown eyes. We fell in love.

Our beach is rocky and when the tide goes out it leaves behind a vast expanse of oysters. For some of our friends, the bounty is overwhelming and they sit on the rocks in a kind of stunned bliss for hours, oyster knife in hand. Alas, neither my husband nor I like oysters. We've tried. We've barbequed and baked, lemoned and hot sauced and stewed. Nothing doing.

We do, however, love crab, and there are crabs down in the deep, cold water just off our beach. So every summer we drag our canoe over the utterly offended mollusks and set out in search of crustaceans.

As a cautionary note, I'd like to say that crabbing by canoe is a highly questionable proposition. Still, my husband likes adventure, so we bought a lovely orange canoe that looked just like something you would put Girl Scouts in at summer camp. It lasted a few years until a big winter storm caved its side in while it lay tied up on the beach.

Now we have a new canoe - Tank Girl. Tank Girl is big and strong and so heavy that I truly do not understand how she floats. When the tide is out and the beach looks like a battleground littered with sharp-edged grenades... well, let's just say you have to like crabs to drag Tank Girl across all that to the water.

Which we do. And wanting to learn how to prepare our catch well led me to take a cooking class, where we were taught how to kill them with our bare hands. Which led to *The School of Essential Ingredients*.

People have asked for the recipe for roasted crab from Claire's chapter in the book, so here 'tis. And Claire and Helen want you to know that if you can only find already cooked crabs (or you don't relish the idea of killing them), you can also use this as a truly decadent dipping sauce. Or a pasta sauce. Or...

### **Claire's Crab Recipe**

2 live crabs

3/4 cup butter

3/4 cup onion, chopped

2 T ginger, minced

2 T garlic, minced

1 t salt

1/2 t red pepper flakes

1/4 cup fresh lemon juice

1/4 cup dry white wine

Lay live crab belly side down and hold from the rear with one hand (avoiding the big claws!). With the other hand, grip the edge of the back shell with your fingers. Pull up sharply to remove the shell, then cut the crab into two halves with a large knife. Wash the body cavity, removing lungs and guts. With large knife, cut between each of the legs and crack the shells with the side of the knife, to allow openings for the roasting sauce to enter. (for more extended description, you can go to pages 46-47 of *The School of Essential Ingredients*).

Melt butter in sauce pan over medium heat. Add onion and saute until translucent. Add ginger, garlic, salt, & red pepper flakes and saute about a minute until garlic becomes translucent but not browned.

Put crabs in a roasting pan & coat well with sauce. Roast for 15-20 minutes in 375 degree oven. Stir 2-3 times.

Warm lemon juice & white wine. Add to crab before serving.

Supply your guests with many, many napkins, baskets of crunchy french bread and a fresh green salad. Utensils for getting the meat from the shells are handy as well....

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## **Helen's Fondue**

(originally a guest post on [Redladyreadingroom-redlady.blogspot.com](http://Redladyreadingroom-redlady.blogspot.com))

People often ask me where they can find a restaurant or a cooking class like Lillian's in *The School of Essential Ingredients* – a place where needs that you didn't even know you had are met, where you realize that life can be beautiful or sad, but in any case is meant to be lived. My response is that Lillian's is fictional, but that magical restaurants exist. Sometimes you just stumble across them.

Which leads me to fondue. In *The School of Essential Ingredients*, fondue is a way for Lillian's cooking class to celebrate Valentine's Day, so it was with a feeling of serendipity that I found myself on Valentine's Day weekend this year in New York City with my 21-year-old daughter, trying to track down a fondue restaurant in the East Village that a friend had told her we HAD to find. It was called The Bourgeois Pig.

We decided to locate it while we were out exploring in the afternoon, just so we would know where to go that evening. We walked right by the address – no restaurant. We asked at a shop two doors down; the clerk had never heard of the place. We asked people on the street. Nothing. Finally, while getting our lunch order at a (fabulous) porchetta sandwich shop we mentioned it. Oh yes, they had heard about it. They pointed across the street to a blank building facade, its windows closed with wooden shutters. We went and found "The Bourgeois Pig" painted in small, curling letters on the door frame.

We came back at 7 pm to find magic – Paris in another century. The shutters open, candle-light flickering inside the windows. A man with a delicious resemblance to Johnny Depp standing at the door, dressed in cape and cravat, letting people in two at a time. We entered to find dim lighting, red flocked wallpaper, the tables pressed up against each other like lovers. The fondue was lush and warm and into it we dipped an incredible array of crusty bread and grapes, apple slices and roasted rosemary potatoes. The wine was cold; we talked about everything and nothing for hours; a (real) frenchman sitting at the bar sent my daughter a glass of champagne. Oh my.

So here is Helen's fondue, with some variations as suggested by a magical evening in New York City.

### **Helen's fondue recipe**

garlic clove, cut in half

1 1/2 cup white wine

2-3 T kirsch

1/2 lb Emmenthaler

1/2 lb Gruyere

1-2 T cornstarch

a pinch of nutmeg

Rub fondue pot with garlic clove. Add white wine and kirsch and heat. Grate cheese and put in plastic bag with cornstarch; shake until cornstarch covers cheese. Add cheese slowly to pot, stirring in a figure-8 motion. Add a small pinch of nutmeg at the end...

What shall you dip in your fondue? Try:

crusty french bread, cut in cubes

grapes

apple slices

roasted rosemary potatoes (cut new red potatoes in chunks, brush with olive oil, toss with a bit of salt and pepper and rosemary, then roast in a 375 degree oven until as soft as you like them – figure 30-45 minutes).

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## **Spring Risotto**

(originally a guest post on [BermudaOnion.wordpress.com](http://BermudaOnion.wordpress.com))

For a long time I thought of risotto as a winter dish. I love the idea of coming home after a cold and hectic day and standing at the stove, stirring chicken broth into the softly sizzling rice while listening to my children talking at the kitchen table. The dark outside the windows, the lights above the table and the stove. It feels safe and comforting, and the risotto when you eat it feels that way, too.

But then spring comes along, with its crazy combination of hope and green shoots coming up in the yard, but cool weather when you least expect it. I want to get excited and run out there among all that green, but I still want to feel safe and warm.

Which leads us straight to asparagus risotto, and if I can convince you to find the freshest and most local asparagus you can to make this dish, I will sleep easier tonight. Because once you eat asparagus that has been freshly picked, not shipped from who-knows-where until it toughens into spears that yes, indeed, could be used for swords at the table just as every child instinctively wants to do – well, once you eat the good stuff, you will never go back. You will be willing to wait all the rest of the year until asparagus season comes around again. And you will be reminded that waiting and anticipation are not bad things – and that the rewards for doing so can be incredible.

So here's a recipe for Lillian's asparagus risotto, with the hope that you will feel inspired to play with it yourself, as Lillian would want you to do. What other fresh vegetables might you use in another season? How about adding some lemon zest? Grilled shrimp? The possibilities are as infinite as spring...

### ***Spring Risotto Recipe***

4 cups chicken or vegetable broth

1/2 lb asparagus

3 T butter

3 T olive oil

1 cup chopped onions

1 1/3 cup arborio rice

1/2 cup white wine

1 bay leaf

salt and pepper (to taste)

lemon zest (optional)

shaved parmesan

Cut asparagus tips into 1 1/2 inch pieces. Cut half of the stocks into finely chopped pieces; cut the other half into 1 inch pieces.

Heat broth in a heavy saucepan. When boiling, add asparagus and cook until just tender (3-5 minutes). Take out asparagus with a slotted spoon and set aside in a bowl. Turn down heat under broth to a low simmer.

In a different heavy saucepan, melt butter and add olive oil. Add chopped onions and saute until translucent (about 5 minutes). Add rice and bay leaf and stir until well coated with the butter. Add wine and cook, stirring, until liquid has evaporated.

Add a ladleful of heated broth to the rice, stirring until liquid is absorbed. Continue adding a ladleful at a time, until broth is gone and rice is creamy but grains are still firm.

Add the asparagus and a pinch of lemon zest (optional). Add salt and pepper to taste. Put in a serving bowl and top with Parmesan shavings.

Prep time: 45-50 minutes (with much contemplative stirring)

Serves 6.