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Mother and my maternal grandmother taught me to cook before I left home. After Mother grew tired of ordering freckle remover through the mail and gimmicks to straighten flop ears, she and Granny decided they'd never find a girl willing to marry a redheaded, freckle-faced boy who had ears sticking out like the wings on a dodo bird, and a rusty cowlick spread over the back of his head the way a game rooster's tail feathers part in mating season.

What they didn't realize was those extra large ears worked like interceptors on a radar tower. I still remember their exact words sitting at the kitchen table, while I was supposed to be outside playing in the front yard.

My Mother: "Mamma, I wanted a little blonde-headed, blue-eyed girl so bad, and look what I have: a rusty headed, snaggle-toothed boy so ugly, Brother Brown asked me to cover his face with a blanket at the christening service."

My Grandmother: "Sister, (mother's family name) I woe the day I didn't let you go off and leave him in the nursery at the hospital. We are going have to teach him to cook, or he'll starve to death once he leaves home."

Next morning, Granny started showing me how to bake biscuits. Every time I take the anti-malaria, quinine base drug to go overseas, I am reminded of her recipe. Mother provided the basics of roasting meat and frying potatoes. By the time, I left for college, cooking three meals a day was no challenge at all. Although my first lessons were on wood-

burning stoves rather than butane, I gained enough experience to convert over to natural gas and electric fuel to feed my roommates and myself for four years.

Wood stove cooking did bring good luck. In 1950, an old cook in the back of the Victory Club in Piedras Negras, Mexico, showed me his method of cooking Salsa Portuguesa, or Portuguese Sauce. He looked more like a huge pirate, cocking his bandanna-covered head to favor a bad eye and shifting his skillet on and off a flaming fire with smoke pouring in the room from cracks in the stovepipe.

The recipe originated with a Portuguese mining engineer down in Northern Mexico. I want to say Musquiz, Coahuila, but that was a long time ago. Soon all the major restaurants catering to tourists along the Border offered versions of chicken Portuguese and tortillas Portuguese. "Versions" is quite accurate; Mrs. Crosby's Bar and Restaurant in Ciudad Acuna must have found a substitute for chicken breasts in the wild hawks toughened by flying in the high Sierras of Mexico, as the meat hidden under the sauce was the consistency of dental floss, or perhaps a stout-woven fish net.

Only on my terms will I share the true method of making Portuguese sauce. My recipes aren't available for explorers and experimenters. Read on if you agree to my conditions. I also suppose you know how to broil the scrawny little beasts supermarkets advertise as "fryers." But proceed no further,

if you plan on changing so much as one letter in the wording of the recipe.

Portuguese Sauce is made in the following way: In four ounces of unsalted, sweet butter, sauté one large chopped white onion, two cloves of garlic and two small cans of roasted Ortega chiles until soft. (Remember our deal. If you substitute jalapenos or habanero peppers, return to "Go.") Peel and quarter six of the most expensive medium sized tomatoes available to add to the sauté. Pick the heavyweights, the juicier ones. Cook over low heat until the tomatoes are beginning to soften. (The Mexican pirate at the Victory Club did the flaming-act for drama.) Mash three beef bullion cubes to add to the broth, plus a tablespoon of whole cumin seeds. Grate two pounds of mild cheddar cheese. Gradually stir the cheese into the mixture, adding more cheese, (like maybe 10 more ounces,) to thicken the sauce, never bringing it to a boil.

In this quantity, a half dozen broiled fryers can be covered with the sauce, or dozens of corn tortilla chips can be used as spoons to eat from the pot. Bunglers may want to garnish the plates of chicken with black olives and a brown sauce the way Portuguese chicken is served on the Border. I think I can make a brown sauce and I know I can open a jar of olives. But I am positive I cannot cure acute indigestion from eating black olives floating in a greasy brown sauce.