*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic)*Inter-County Leader

**How to make a simple, easy French onion soup**

Do you believe that I actually taught a French cuisine cooking class? Yes, indeed, a Chinese guy teaching French cooking.

The class was in Rice Lake, and it was sold out; they had to put the overflow on a waiting list. I only allow 12 students in my class, as I would like to focus on each student’s abilities and to know their names so I can be more personal.

Most often times, I would call the student by their name so they can come to work with me. Being a man with no sense of direction, topped with a lousy memory, I have to use my own cheating method to get their names in proper order. I did that too when I was teaching at the culinary school in Milwaukee.

So, at the beginning of the class, after everyone is situated, I would draw a seating chart and ask whoever occupied the seat for their names. After I got everyone’s name down, I would announce that they would be seated in the same seat for the rest of the course; as I would call them by the wrong name if they switched seats.

Everyone laughed, but they got my message. It worked!

I hate to point to someone and say, “Hey you, can you come up here and work this with me?” I’ve been teaching all over different counties the past two years. I still have people calling my name at different places. My mind would draw a blank when I look at them. Goodness, where’s my seating chart?

Anyway, Julia Child is my idol. An ordinary American housewife would become an international legend specializing in French cuisine, who would ever imagine that? I love her cooking style and her sense of humor. When she teamed up with Jacques Pepin in her cooking show, it was entertaining and educating. They didn’t want to outdo each other.

Working on their own, they would notice the needs of the other and would stop what they were doing and help the other. Is that a dream or what?

I remember one time when she was dissecting a chicken, the whole chicken flew off the cutting board onto the floor. She kept giggling, picked up the chicken, washed it off, and kept on going like it never happened. That was on national TV!

Taught me a great lesson, mishaps happen all the time, in the kitchen and in our daily life. So what, pick up the pieces, laugh it off, and just keep moving forward. Don’t sweat the small stuff, focus on the big picture.

You’ve got people coming over, just keep cooking and serve them the best foods ever. Food is not just for eating, it is for sharing. So much to learn from a legend.

In my class, we made French onion soup, Beef Bourguignon, Poulet de Provencal and Coq au Vin. Oh, what a fun time we had.

The students made the French onion soup, and when they tasted their work, they all claimed that it was the best they ever had. Almost in one voice, they said, “You mean, that’s all it takes to make this delicious soup?" I gave them my Colonel Sanders’ smile and responded, “Yes, my dearest, there ain’t no secrets, are there?"

So, how to make this delicious soup? Simple and easy. Yes, there are a lot of steps to follow, but you can break down the process in different steps.

Are you ready? This is an easy version, so no need to compare it with the recipes composed by famous chefs.

**FRENCH ONION SOUP**

Ingredients (Serves 4)

* 4 large yellow onions, sliced thin
* 1 tbsp. minced garlic
* 1 stick butter
* 2 tbsp. beef bouillon
* 2 oz brandy
* 8 oz red wine
* 1 tbsp. sugar
* 2 tbsp flour (optional)
* 4 slices, toasted baguette (or French/Italian bread)
* 4 slices Gruyere cheese (or Provolone/Swiss Cheese)

In a large heated saucepan, add butter, sliced onions and 1 tablespoon of minced garlic. Saute until soft and tender. Add brandy and wine (and don’t forget the golden rule – add some to chef.) Add beef bouillon and 8 cups of water. Let simmer, add flour if you prefer a thicker broth. The broth should be rich and thick.

Ladle the broth into a soup crock, along with a slice of your toasted baguette. Top with cheese and heat in the oven at 400°F for 10 minutes. Remove from oven when cheese is bubbling. Sprinkle with paprika and serve.

Voila! Serve with more toasted baguette, it is a meal. And don’t forget a glass of pinot noir on the side.

That’s one thing about cooking, it might not turn out perfect the first time, but play with it a few times, and all of a sudden, you’ve found your own secret recipes.

There’s no magic in cooking, as the basic cooking methods are universal — baked, steamed, braised, fried, sautéed, smoked or pickled and the Chinese stir-fry.

Each country cooks with the ingredients that they find around them and create their own styles and recipes. Mix and match with this and that, and all of a sudden, new recipes are popping up left and right. It is amazing, and it is fun.

I can’t imagine eating the same standard staples every day. Adding or changing some ingredients will add more spice to your life.

Our favorite Mexican restaurant, Taco Bell, they follow that recipe of success, and hence came up with all the “new” specials they promote like crazy on TV. Chalupas, gorditas, what are they, really?

Well, that’s either a taco wrapped with an enchilada or vice versa. The basic ingredients are the same — refried beans, ground beef, lettuce, tomatoes, cheese, flour tortilla and taco shells. That’s it.

I admire those marketing geniuses who would convince the company to spend millions promoting a "recycled" product over and over. It is so convincing that we dummies would go, “wow, let’s go to Taco Bell and try out this new product!" Sad but true.

Thank goodness that there ain’t no Taco Bells around here. Maybe we are smarter than those city folks. Ha-ha.