*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong*

**Three easy soup recipes for winter weather**

For a semi-retired guy, I can’t believe just how busy I’m getting. I expected to sit on the porch, sipping tea or beer, depending on what time of the day it is, and watch the sunrise or sunset. Does beer go with sunrise or sunset? I’m still deciding.

But I was dealt a different deck of cards. In my board game of “retirement,” there is no block for actual sitting around and doing nothing. The rule is that I have to go round and round the block till I can’t breathe or move a muscle, and on the board that’s called total exhaustion. But I can’t complain. I’d rather be doing something productive than sitting around eating bonbons.

As you know, I teach cooking classes — Chinese, Mexican and Italian. Long story how a Chinese guy ended up teaching Mexican and Italian cuisine, but that’s what life is all about; it is just full of surprises.

Anyway, I was showing the students in my Chinese 102 class how to make egg drop soup. After I showed them the simple procedures, they tasted it and said, “Wow.” And then almost in unison, they exclaimed, “You mean that’s it? That’s all you have to do to make this delicious soup?”

What do you want me to say? Good things in life do not have to be difficult and complicated. So, let me share with you what I did. Talk about warming your heart on a cold evening, and it takes less than 10 minutes to make.

**Egg drop soup**

*(Serves four)*

* 2 quarts chicken stock
* 1/2 cup rice wine (sherry)
* 4 eggs, scrambled
* 1 stalk celery, diced
* 6 mushrooms, diced
* 1 tablespoon cornstarch
* 2 tablespoons cold water
* Shredded scallions (optional)
* Sesame oil (optional)

In a pot, heat 2 quarts of chicken stock. Add sherry, diced celery and mushrooms. Mix 1 tablespoon of cornstarch with 2 tablespoons of cold water. Add to boiling stock and mix gently.

When stock thickens up a bit, slowly pour in the scrambled eggs. Then turn the heat off immediately. Cover with lid to let the steam keep on working.

When ready to eat, place in separate bowls and sprinkle some shredded scallions on top with a couple of drops of sesame oil. Viola!

*Note: So that the eggs will form a floral pattern, the added cornstarch mix is a must.*

**Chicken corn soup**

*(Serves four)*

* 1 can creamed corn
* 1 can whole-kernel corn
* 1/2 cup sherry
* 4 eggs, scrambled
* 1 tablespoon chicken bouillon
* 4 oz. cooked chicken, diced
* 1 tablespoon cornstarch
* Sesame oil (optional)

In a pot, heat up the cans of creamed corn and whole-kernel corn, and add one can of water. When the water boils, add sherry, cooked diced chicken and chicken bouillon. Then add 1 tablespoon of cornstarch mix.

When soup thickens, drop the eggs slowly into the soup. Cover with lid and let it steam for a minute or two. Top with sesame oil. And here is your chicken corn soup.

When I was growing up, this was my favorite soup. We ordered it every time when my family went out for dinner. My brother and I would be smiling when we were eating it. And the restaurant owner would look at us and smile too because the soup cost is low and he would make more profit than with any other entrees.

**Cream of tomato soup**

Growing up in Hong Kong, eating a westernized meal was an adventure of its own. We used chopsticks with our meals. But, in a western restaurant, you used forks, spoons and knives. How quaint!

And tomatoes were imported, as the Chinese farmers had never heard of such a vegetable. They would slice the tomatoes paper-thin and put them on top of a salad or something. I was tickled pink when I bit into a piece of tomato then. But I had 10 pounds of them at home. What can I do with so many tomatoes?

Aha! Why not make a tomato bisque, a rich, thick tomato soup? So, I got out my Cuisinart, cut the tops off the tomatoes and just pureed them. Yes, all of them. And in a large pot, I would saute some garlic first, then just add the puree with some chicken bouillon.

Then I would add some cornstarch mix to thicken the stock, and then a handful of cheeses — mozzarella, cheddar, parmesan — and a pint of half and a half of evaporated milk. The soup should be rich and thick. Season it with salt and pepper, and serve it hot with garlic toast or crackers.

And of course, with a glass of Cabernet Sauvignon, what else could be better?

So, who cares if it is snowing outside?