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Life is a gift of nature; but beautiful living is the gift of wisdom...Greek Adage

March 2010: "Putting Some Bones On Your Meat"...Cooking with Bones

A logical extension of last month's newsletter on bone stocks is to think now about incorporating bones into everyday cooking. To do this is to revive the traditional bone cuisine and culture of our forebears. Our ancestors valued every part of the animal--but even more than muscle meats, they prized the rich nutrition of organ meats, marrow and bones.

Bones, of course, give structure and foundation to any living being, and bones are tied to the basic prenatal "essence" energy endowed to each of us at conception/birth. Both Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) appreciate the vital importance of this life-force/self-actualizing energy, called *Ojas* (Ayurveda) or *Jing* (TCM). For the Chinese, *jing* is linked to vitality, reproduction and growth, wisdom, and the calm focus and willpower necessary to set and achieve personal goals. The kidneys (which work alongside the adrenal glands) act as the storehouse of this energy and control the growth and ongoing development of the bones, teeth, and marrow. The health of our bones, then, mirrors our own vitality, attuned wisdom, and core energy: We are "bone weary;" "we feel it in our bones;" or we are "chilled to the bone." A "strong kidney" is associated with willpower and the ability to make things happen. Classical literature alludes to this... in Homer, Oddesseus "lacks kidney" [the Odyssey]; and, in Shakespeare, "Thy bones are marrow less" [Macbeth]. Bones, then, reflect our reservoir of "kidney essence" energy, as well as our zest for and our connection to life.¹

Cooking with bones can itself be an emotionally satisfying experience by connecting us to the structure and essence of the animal whose life was sacrificed for our own well-being. And, using bones fosters an age-old tradition of conservation and gratitude. Bones relinquish, through long slow cooking, their collagen/gelatin and mineral essence, enriching any dish and making it easier to assimilate. So, cooking with bones can be good for us, both physically² and spiritually.

Bones and Beans. Bones, with their minerals and fat, add nutrition, nuance, and taste to any dish made with beans or legumes. Ham hocks, for example, add a smoky richness and satisfying depth to split peas and are the perfect complement to any dried bean or legume. Lamb shanks—with their flavor, collagen, marrow and fat—transform baby limas or white beans (such as navy or great northern) into a

¹ For a summary overview, see Daverick Leggett's *Recipes for Self-Healing* and/or Paul Pitchford's *Healing with Wholefoods*.

² See February10 Newsletter.

velvety-smooth, mouth-watering delicacy. Meat bones with a high bone/collagen-to-meat ratio—such as knuckles, hocks, neck bones, and shanks—add flavor and nutrition to beans and legumes and can lift an ordinary meal, making it a sublime experience. Veal meat bones, because they have a higher *bone/collagen-to-meat ratio* relative to beef, are an especially good choice.

Bones and Meat. Bones belong to meat as much as meat belongs to bones. Like fat, bones slow the cooking process, ensuring that meat does not cook too quickly. Fat is able to do this because it conducts heat less readily than does lean muscle. Bones do this too because their porous construction acts as an insulator that slows the transfer of heat.³ This is why cooked meat is more succulent and juicy the closer it is to the bone, giving rise to the expression, “The nearer the bone, the sweeter the meat.”

Cooking with Bones. Cooking with bones is open to your own whimsy. You need few rules, and you can hardly go wrong. Just check what you have on hand, and see what looks good when you shop. On a recent trip to Whole Foods, I found packages of kosher, skinned turkey necks. I bought several packages, came home, put them in a slow cooker, covered them with boiling water, added some bay leaves and thyme, and went out for the afternoon. I returned six hours later to find succulent, deliciously sweet, savory meat that readily fell off the bone. My family enjoyed eating the meat as a wonderful, improvised main course accompanied by steamed vegetables and quinoa that I had on hand (and, I used the stock for soup the next day). The high ratio of bone-to-meat (the insulating concept) protected the meat so that every bite was moist, flavorful, and delicious—with the added fun of eating with our fingers. When I think about it, I wonder why we do not view boney cuts as a delicacy and prize them over skinless filets. Boney parts like necks are economical, rich in collagen and have one of the highest bone-to-meat ratios of any cut, so the meat is succulent and delicious.

Use your imagination. See what ingredients you have already--beans, legumes, grains, or vegetables—that might be enriched by adding a soup bone or two. Then, when you shop, see what is available and have fun following your whims. I had no thought to make a dinner centered on turkey necks (!!!), but they proved to be both fun to eat and delicious, as well.

Similarly, on a recent trip to the butcher, I found organic smoked ham hocks and knew that I had split peas in my pantry. Wanting to keep the fat content reasonable—to just the amount needed to enhance the taste—I simmered the hocks first, skimmed most of the fat, and used the stock to make a wonderfully gelatinous split pea stew dotted throughout with big chunks of roll-cut carrots. If you are concerned about fat, you can cook meat bones like ox tails or hocks in advance, separate the fat, and then cook with the meat, stock, and bones to add robust flavor but with much of the fat removed.

I hope this newsletter will inspire you to cook with soup bones in the cold, damp, windy days of March and early spring. With little effort and with a slow cooker at your side, you can fill the house with wonderful welcoming aromas. Conventional recipes with multiple ingredients start on page 6. But first,

³ Harold McGee, *On Food and Cooking*, 153.

since I often cut corners, I have included several minimalist ideas below. And, I want to revisit American cuisine of a century ago with some original Fanny Farmer recipes given on the two pages that follow. I hope this variety provides ideas for making substitutions and creating your own innovations.

Lamb Shanks

2-6 lamb shanks

Garlic cloves, to taste

Fresh sprigs of rosemary, to taste

Wash the lamb shanks. Place in slow cooker to fit along with garlic and rosemary. Add just enough boiling water to cover. Turn cooker to High, then to Low after the water comes to a good simmer. Simmer for about five hours, depending on the size of the shanks, until the meat begins to pull away from the bone. To try the marrow, serve with a chop stick, a knife, and a toasted slice of rustic bread. [You may note that I do not brown the lamb shanks before I put them in the slow cooker. They come out just fine without this step, though the stock may be less rich.]

Organic Turkey Necks

Turkey necks to fit half-way up your slow cooker

Bay leaves, to taste

Dried or fresh thyme, to taste

Wash turkey necks and place in a slow cooker. Add boiling water just to cover, along with bay leaves and thyme. Turn cooker to High until liquid reaches a slow simmer, then to Low. Meat is ready when it begins to fall off the bone, about 5-6 hours. These are delicious and well-suited as a finger-food main course. Necks, with their very high bone-to-meat ratio, create a moist, delicate treat.

Split Peas with Smoked Ham Hocks

1 pound split peas, washed and picked over

2 onions, diced

3 carrots, roll-cut or sliced

1 smoked ham hock

3-6 bay leaves

Wash the ham hock and put into a slow cooker. Cover with boiling water. Turn the cooker to High and then to Low once it reaches a slow simmer. Allow to cook 5-6 hours. Pour off the stock and cool quickly. Start another "batch" with the hock and boiling water. A hock will render several rounds of stock. Use the extra stock for other recipes. Stocks freeze well (see February 2010).

Once the first "batch" of stock has thoroughly cooled in the refrigerator, skim off the fat. It should be very gelatinous, the consistency of Jello "jigglers."

To make the soup, you can follow your own favorite split pea soup recipe, using the hock stock in place of water. Or you can follow the simple recipe above: sauté the onions in butter until soft. Add the peas, carrots, bay leaves and enough stock to cover. Bring to a boil, lower the heat and allow to simmer, partly covered, until peas and carrots are very tender, about 1-2 hours. Remove the bay leaves. The soup will have a wonderful richness and smoky flavor. When chilled, because the stock is so gelatinous, the soup will hold the shape of any mold and can be sliced and eaten cold, or heated again to be eaten as a soup. Gelatin is the most forgiving of all thickeners, it can be heated and cooled numerous times, jelling and re-jelling again and again.

Recipes from Fanny Farmer and the Boston Cooking School, 1896.⁴

Fanny Farmer was a visionary, an artist, a food conservationist, and a scientist of the culinary arts. Her cookbook, published more than a century ago, was the first comprehensive cookbook to use rigor, both in defining cooking terms (e.g., “parboiling”) and standards of measure (e.g., “one level cupful”). Fanny Farmer was also interested in nutrition and saw her 1896 cookbook to be a way to help Americans improve their health through wholesome, home cooking:

“I certainly feel that the time is not far distant when a knowledge of the principles of diet will be an essential part of one’s education. Then mankind will eat to live, will be able to do better mental and physical work, and disease will be less frequent.” ...Fanny M. Farmer, 1896

Of course, in 1896, Ms. Farmer could not have predicted the American shift during the 100 years to follow away from home cooking toward processed/manufactured foods and fast foods. Nor could she have foreseen our modern “foods” based so much upon refined sugar and flour, refined vegetable oils, trans fats, and high fructose corn syrup...nor the widespread incidence of chronic disease.

But, nothing lasts forever, of course. Your response to my February newsletter on bone stocks makes me feel that we truly long for a return to a more traditional way of cooking—and the deep satisfaction on both a physical and spiritual level that it can bring. Just look at the revival in sales of the Julia Child Cookbook in response to the movie *Julie and Julia*. After years of low-fat eating, a return to boeuf bourguignon and to using butter may feel not only good but also “just right.”

Scotch Broth, Fanny Farmer [For a modern version using leg of lamb, see page 9]

3 pounds lamb (shanks, fore-quarter, etc.)
½ cup barley, soaked in cold water 12 hours
4 T. butter
¼ cup each diced carrot, celery, onion, and turnip
2 T. flour; salt and pepper
½ T. finely chopped parsley

Cut lean meat in 1” cubes, put in kettle, cover with 3 pints cold water, bring quickly to boiling point, skim, add barley. Simmer 1 ½ hours or until meat is tender. Put bones in second kettle, cover with cold water, heat slowly to boiling point, skim, and simmer 1½ hours. Strain water from bones and add to meat. Fry vegetables in 2 T. butter 5 minutes, add to soup with salt and pepper to taste and cook until vegetables are soft. Thicken with remaining butter and flour cooked together. Add parsley just before serving. Rice may be used in place of barley.

⁴ I owe a good friend for inspiring me to venture into Fanny Farmer lore. She wrote me that one of her favorite dishes with bones is a Scotch Broth adapted from Fanny Farmer (above), and it is offered here with my appreciation to her. In her innovative and health-conscious spirit, she adds plenty of chopped garlic, onions, and other vegetables in adapting this basic recipe to her own fancy.

Ox-Tail Soup, Fanny Farmer

1 ½ pounds oxtail, in 2" pieces
2 T. flour
2 T. butter
4 cups brown stock or bouillon
2 carrots, diced
2 stalks celery, diced

½ cup diced turnip
1 medium onion, diced
1 T. lemon juice
2 t. Worcestershire sauce
Salt
Freshly ground pepper

Dust the oxtail pieces with flour. Heat the oil in a soup pot, add the oxtail, and brown slowly on all sides. Drain the oil from the pot, remove the meat, and slowly add the stock and 4 cups of water, scraping the bottom of the pot to deglaze it. Return the meat to the pot, partially cover, and simmer for 2 ½ hours or until the meat is tender, adding more water to replace any that evaporates. Strain the soup and allow the meat and bones to cook enough to be handled. Remove the meat from the bones and return it to the soup. Add the carrots, celery, turnip, and onion to the soup and simmer for another 30 minutes or until tender. Stir in the lemon juice, Worcestershire, and salt and pepper to taste; serve very hot.

Braised Lamb Shanks, Fanny Farmer

4 lamb shanks
2 fat cloves of garlic, each in 8 slivers
2 T. flour
3 T. shortening
1 bay leaf
1 T. grated lemon rind

1/3 cup lemon juice
Salt
Freshly ground pepper
4 carrots, in ½" pieces
8 small onions, peeled

Cut four slits in the flesh of each lamb shank; insert a sliver of garlic in each slit. Lightly dust the shanks with flour. Heat the shortening in a Dutch oven or a heavy pot with a lid. Put the shanks in and brown on all sides. Remove all but 1 Tablespoon fat. Add the bay leaf, lemon rind, lemon juice, and ¼ cup water, and sprinkle salt and pepper over all. Lower the heat, cover, and simmer for 1½-2 hours, depending on the tenderness of the shanks. Add the carrots and onions for the last 40 minutes of cooking. Remove shanks and vegetables to a platter and keep warm. Serve with the pot juices or make a gravy.

Note: The remaining recipes in this newsletter are more contemporary in nature. If you are interested in additional Fanny Farmer recipes and commentary, the full text of the 1918 edition is available through www.bartelby.com

Lamb Shank Soup

1 pound dried baby Lima beans

1 ½ lbs. lamb shanks

1 clove garlic, minced

4 cups chicken broth

4 cups filtered water

1 cup diced carrot

1 cup minced onion

1 cup minced celery

2 T. butter or ghee

Soak beans overnight in water, to cover by several inches. In a heavy sauce pan, brown lamb shanks in butter in. Pour off fat and add remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 2 hours. Remove lamb shanks, take meat off the bone, cube it, and return it to the soup. [This soup can be simmered, after the browning stage, in a slow cooker.]

Adapted from cooks.com

Split Pea Soup with Lamb Shanks

2 large lamb shanks [or a meaty ham bone]

1 medium onion, diced

4 cloves garlic, minced

2 carrots, diced

2 celery ribs, diced

1 medium baking potato, peeled and diced; or 1 package instant oatmeal

2 T. butter

Salt and pepper to taste

1 t. thyme

3 bay leaves

2 cups split peas, rinsed and drained

6 cups chicken broth

½ cup dry white wine [sherry instead of wine if using a ham bone]

3 cups water

Brown lamb shanks in an 8-quart stock pot in 2 T. butter. [Skip browning step if using a ham bone.] Remove; and add 2 T. butter to pot and sauté onion, garlic, carrot, celery, and potatoes until limp. Add lamb shanks back to the pot with remaining ingredients. Cover, bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer and cook about 2 hours, stirring occasionally, until lamb shanks are tender. Remove shanks from soup, pull meat from bones and return meat to soup, simmering about 30 minutes longer. Remove bay leaves and serve.

Adapted from cooks.com

Chicken and Chickpeas with Spinach

1 t. turmeric
Butter or ghee for browning
4 pounds chicken pieces, skin on breasts, skinned legs and thighs
3 minced onions
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 T. cumin seeds
Salt and pepper to taste
12 oz. chicken broth
1 T. grated lemon zest
2 T. freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 19 oz. can chickpeas, drained and rinsed or 1 cup dried, cooked and drained
1 pound fresh spinach leaves, washed thoroughly by immersing and rinsing well in plenty of water.

In a heavy skillet, brown chicken in batches in the butter. Transfer to a slow cooker. Add more butter to the skillet and then the onions, cooking until softened. Add garlic, cumin seeds, turmeric, salt and pepper and cook, stirring for 1 minute. Add chicken broth, lemon zest and juice and chickpeas and bring to a boil. Pour mixture over the chicken, cover, and cook on Low for 5-6 hours, or on High for 2 ½-3 hours, until juices run clear when chicken is pierced with a fork. Add spinach and combine by stirring. Cover and cook on High for 20 minutes until spinach is cooked through. *Adapted from Judith Finlayson*

Lamb Shanks Braised in Guinness

¼ cup flour
1 t. salt and ½ t. cracked pepper
4 pounds lamb shanks
2 T. butter
4 onions, minced
6 gloves garlic, minced
1 T. dried thyme
2 T. tomato paste
1 ½ cups Guinness or other dark beer
½ cup condensed beef broth, undiluted

On a plate, combine flour with salt and pepper and lightly coat shanks, shaking off excess. In a skillet, heat butter over medium-high heat; brown lamb in batches; transfer each to a slow cooker. Reduce heat and add onions to the skillet, stirring until softened. Add garlic, thyme, and reserved flour mixture, and cook, stirring 1 minute. Stir in tomato paste, beer and broth and cook, stirring, until mixture thickens. Pour over shanks, cover, and cook on Low for 10-12 hours, or on High for 5-6 hours until meat falls off the bone. *Adapted from Judith Finlayson*

Chicken with 40 Cloves of Garlic

2 T. butter
40 cloves garlic (about 4 heads)
4 pounds chicken pieces, breasts with skin, legs and thighs with skin removed
2 onions, minced
4 stalks celery, peeled and diced
1 t. dried tarragon leaves [or 1 t. dried thyme]
1 t. salt; ½ t. cracked pepper; ¼ t. freshly grated nutmeg
½ cup dry white wine or vermouth

In a skillet, melt butter over medium-low heat and add garlic, stirring often until it turns golden. With a slotted spoon, transfer garlic to a slow cooker. Turn up heat to medium. Add chicken in batches, and brown. Transfer to the slow cooker.

Add onions and celery to the pan and cook, stirring until softened. Add tarragon, salt, pepper and nutmeg and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add vermouth or wine and bring to a boil.

Pour over chicken. Cover and cook on Low for 5-6 hours or on High for 2 1/2 -3 hours, until juices run clear when chicken is pierced with a fork.

Source: Judith Finlayson

Roasted Marrow Bones...For the Adventurous!

8 to 12 center-cut beef or veal marrow bones, 3" long, 3-4 pounds, total
1 cup roughly chopped fresh parsley
2 shallots, thinly sliced
2 t. capers
1 ½ T. extra virgin olive oil
2 t. fresh lemon juice
Coarse sea salt to taste
At least 4 ½ inch-thick slices of rustic bread, toasted

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Put bones, cut side up on a foil-lined roasting pan or baking sheet. Cook until marrow is soft and has begun to separate from the bone, about 15 minutes (stop before marrow begins to drizzle out).

Meanwhile, combine parsley, shallots and capers in a small bowl. Just before bones are ready, whisk together olive oil and lemon juice and drizzle dressing over parsley mixture until leaves are just roasted. Put roasted bones, parsley salad, salt and toast on large plates. To serve, scoop out marrow, spread on toast, sprinkle with salt and top with parsley salad.

Source: Mark Bittman, adapted from Fergus Henderson



White Bean Soup

1 pound dried white beans
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
4 leeks, washed, chopped (1 ½ cups)
4-5 cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 large carrots, chopped (1 cup)
2 stalks celery, chopped (2/3 cup)

1 ½ pound smoked ham shank,
1 quart chicken broth
Filtered water, to add as needed
1 t. dried sage
3 bay leaves
Chopped parsley, garnish

Remove excess fat from ham shank. Soak beans overnight to generously cover. Drain beans. Put in a large pot. Add remaining ingredients except parsley. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally until beans are tender, about 2 hours.

Discard bay leaf. Remove ham hocks; cut off meat into small pieces, put back into soup.

Place 4 cups of bean mixture, in 2 batches, in a food processor or blender. Puree until smooth. Stir back into soup. Sprinkle with parsley, if desired.

Adapted from cooks.com

Scotch Broth, Epicurious.com

A leg of lamb, cracked, with meat on it
2 or 3 medium onions, whole
6 stalks of celery, diced
6 carrots, diced
1 garlic clove

½ cup pearl barley
Salt
Freshly ground pepper
Parsley
Some celery leaves

Wash barley and soak overnight. Put in kettle and add other ingredients. Cover with water. Cook slowly at least four hours. Soup should cook down until quite thick. Refrigerate for at least four hours. [You can skim fat.] Add water when reheating to serve. Correct seasoning at that time and remove meat bone and celery leaves before serving.

Source: Epicurious. Com

Reading Resources:

Jennifer McLagan, *Bones: Recipes, History, and Lore* (2005).

This is an inspiring commentary on bones, complete with recipes and guides to cuts of meat by animal type. Since most recipes are time-consuming and complex and since my purpose is to make cooking with bones simple and effortless, I did not use any of them here. Nevertheless, *Bones* is a fine, specialized addition to any book shelf.

Shopping Resources:

www.eatwild.com for grass-fed animal products by state

www.apppa.org for poultry raised by traditional methods, on green grass and traditional grains, by state

www.flyingpigsfarm.com a source for fresh and cured premium pork and nitrite-free bacon

www.localhavest.org to find organic, sustainably-grown food sources close to where you live.