



FOUR TALES, à la carte

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LOUIS SZATHMARY

1986

FRIENDS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARIES

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FOUR FIVE THREE

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Printed in the United States of America.

In five cookbooks and more than a decade of weekly newspaper columns, the recipes I have published number well into the thousands. To select my favorites is difficult. To explain my selections is even harder. It's something like asking a mother or father, "Which of your children do you like the most?"

Nevertheless, and with reservation, I shall designate four of my recipes and how they evolved.

The first was born under stress of emergency. It was a difficult birth. As a newcomer to this country in the early 1950s, I worked as a cook in the New York test kitchen and executive dining room of the Mutual Broadcasting Company.

I was well paid for the little work I had to do; in fact, I was overpaid. As an immigrant, I was hungry for more work; I wanted to get ahead, I wanted to earn more money. My boss, Tom O'Neill, who headed the Mutual communications empire, was willing to help me. He recommended my culinary services for evenings and weekends to his friends and associates in the New York area.

One of my extracurricular clients was the wife of a well-known Hollywood film mogul. Austrian-born, she and her charming

Viennese mother lived in New York and gave frequent dinner parties. One evening, having been called for a last-minute dinner, I arrived with all the ingredients for the meal, and began working on it. The hostess came into the kitchen and asked me to make some changes in the previously planned menu. "Boil the lobsters immediately," she ordered, "cut them into chunks, and serve them as a salad with freshly made mayonnaise." It seems there were lobsters for four, but an unexpected fifth guest was coming.

The change posed no problem for me. I cut back on the boiling time for the lobsters, removed them piping hot and vivid red, and chilled them in a big tub of crushed ice. Meanwhile, I made the mayonnaise. Testing it, I was horrified. The imported olive oil I had used was rancid! Frantic, I checked the kitchen, the pantry, the store room. There was no other oil in the house. There were no food shops nearby, and dinner time was almost upon us.

In my panic, I remembered a sauce my mother used to make when I was a child in Hungary. We used it instead of mayonnaise; it was similar, but lighter, I had never made it, but I did recall that it contained raw egg, lemon juice, mustard and spices, all of which were folded into sour cream. It took a minute or two to make the sauce.



The lobster salad, with the last-minute substitute sauce, was a great success. Sophisticated Austrians such as the hostess and her guests love Hungarian food—chicken paprikash, veal paprikash, layered potatoes, and dozens of other dishes for which sour cream is a must. Sour cream is the second most-used ingredient in Hungarian food, after paprika.

The guests praised the sauce, saying how much lighter, silkier, and smoother it was than mayonnaise. From then on, the hostess always preferred that sauce. She named it *Sauce Louis*. Here is the recipe for *Sauce Louis*, as published in THE BAKERY RESTAURANT COOKBOOK, and as we serve it in The Bakery.

## SAUCE LOUIS

Two eggs

Three tablespoons prepared mustard

Three tablespoons sugar

One-half teaspoon salt

One-eighth teaspoon white pepper

Juice of one lemon

One teaspoon vinegar

Two cups sour cream

In a medium-sized bowl, using a wire whip, blend together the eggs, mustard, sugar, salt, pepper, lemon juice, and vinegar. Slowly fold in the sour cream. Makes 2½ cups. Keep refrigerated. Serve with fish and cold meats.

**CHEF'S SECRET:** This is probably the simplest and quickest, but most elegant, sauce. It can be made in twenty seconds without even coming near the stove.

It is important that all ingredients, except the sour cream, be mixed together vigorously by hand with a wire whip, or mixed in an electric mixer at the highest speed. On the other hand, the sour cream must be gently folded into the sauce with a rubber spatula or scraper; fold the mixture over the sour cream, then fold some sour cream under the mixture. If the commercial sour cream is beaten, it will become runny and will separate, and you will not get the desired silky texture and consistency.

You can make this sauce using sour half-and-half or yogurt, but not every brand of yogurt will give exactly the same result.

**A**nother of my favorite recipes arose, not from a missing ingredient such as olive oil, but from childhood memories.

For some eight years I had a weekly radio show called "Kitchen Clinic." It was broadcast on WIVS, an AM-FM station in the Chi-

cago area. The program started modestly as a half-hour show. Within a year it was increased to an hour, and soon after to two hours, every Tuesday morning, year after year. My frequent travels did not interfere with my broadcasts. By special arrangement, I could be on the air in Chicago from Paris, Rome, Madrid, and even from Cuzco, in Peru. Listeners to "Kitchen Clinic" also could reach me by dialing a local number, whether in Atlanta, San Francisco, or even London. I made many friends during these broadcasts, and received lots of requests for recipes.

One such request was from a woman who said she often dreamed about a dish she had last enjoyed as a five-year-old in her native Hungary. She told of the time when she and her parents made an unexpected visit to her grandmother in Budapest. About fifteen minutes after their arrival, Grandma produced a hot, fragrant, tasty dessert; she just could not forget it. Other than raisins, she didn't know any of the ingredients, but it was sweet, and very good, and could I by any chance send her the recipe?

Within a few days, her recipe was in the mail. It was quite easy. I, too, as a child, had once visited, along with my mother, my grandmother in Budapest. It was a sur-

prise visit, but my grandmother, also within a few minutes, brought out a fragrant warm dessert with raisins in it. And it was ever so good. It was simple to make because she had all the ingredients at home all year-round. These same ingredients are readily available, not only in Hungary, but in the United States, all over and all year-round. Whether you are a grandmother, a mother, or even a youngster, you should try this recipe. People will remember it, even dream about it. The Hungarian name for this dessert translates into *Emperor's Trifle*.

## EMPEROR'S TRIFLE

One-half cup raisins  
One & three-quarters cups sifted flour  
Three cups milk  
Four eggs, separated  
Three or four tablespoons  
confectioners' sugar  
Grated zest (yellow rind only)  
of one lemon

One-quarter cup melted butter

Pinch of salt

One-half cup butter mixed with

One-half cup shortening for frying

Confectioners' sugar

Soak raisins in hot water for thirty minutes, then pat dry.

In a bowl, stir flour and milk together with a wire whisk. Add egg yolks, 2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar, grated lemon zest, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup melted butter. Mix until smooth.

Beat egg whites with a pinch of salt until very stiff and shiny. Don't overbeat. Fold into batter.

Heat half of butter and shortening mixture in a frying pan. When very hot, pour in half the batter and start to cook it as you would a large pancake. Keep lifting edges with two forks, letting runny batter seep under edges. When completely set, tear pancake into four quarters with two forks, turn each quarter, and cook on other side. Remove from pan. Add remaining butter and shortening to pan, heat it, and repeat procedure with remaining batter.

Tear all pancake quarters into pieces the size of a quarter or smaller. Mix with raisins and heat quickly in pan, turning constantly. Pile onto a serving platter and dust with remaining confectioners' sugar. Serve with a fresh fruit sauce, such as:

### Fresh Plum Sauce

Pit 1 pound Italian plums. Cut each pitted plum into 4 or more pieces. In a saucepan, bring 4 cups of water to a boil with 2 tablespoons sugar, the juice of  $\frac{1}{2}$  lemon, and a 1-by-2-inch piece of lemon rind, 2 or 3 whole cloves, and a 2-inch piece of cinnamon bark. As soon as mixture boils, add cut up plums. Stir and bring to a boil again. Remove from heat, cover, and let stand at least 10 minutes. Remove lemon rind, cloves, and cinnamon bark. Serve warm sauce in a sauceboat and let guests serve themselves by spooning sauce over pastry.

One morning, as I was starting my routine in the executive dining room of the Mutual Broadcasting System (at the time it was on Broadway, across the street from the Old Met), an elderly man came in. He was unshaven; he had a puffy face with bags under his eyes; his hands trembled; his clothes were unkempt. Could he, he asked, please have a cup of coffee. He had smelled the aroma from outside. He was dying for a hot cup of coffee. He just had to come in and ask for some.

I felt real pity and gave him the coffee. He offered me a quarter as a tip—this was at a time when you could buy coffee at the corner drug store for a dime. "Keep it, Laddy-O," I told him, "and if you feel like another cup, come again."



This was mid-Manhattan some thirty or forty years ago. Streets were narrow and delivery trucks unloading in the morning caused hour-long traffic jams. Mutual, as well as other offices in the area, often used foot messengers to deliver film, manuscripts, and other documents. One of the messenger services was called Youth Unlimited. It had a staff of retired people to make deliveries.

I assumed that the elderly coffee “customer,” who had become a regular, was one of these messengers. He kept insisting that he would like to give me something for being nice to him, something that would please me. I was trying, at the time, to be as “American” as I possibly could, a “smart-aleck.” So I told the old man, “O.K., next time you come, bring me an autographed photo of yourself, but right now I’m busy, so please leave me alone.”

The next morning, there it was—a large envelope. Inside was a picture with these words written on it: “To Chef Louis, gratefully for all the fine coffee—Lawrence Tibbett.”

Tears came to my eyes. This was my bum, the unshaven man with the puffy face. This was 1954, when one of the greatest of American opera singers had been trying to make a comeback as a radio disc jockey. The

comeback failed. You can imagine my sadness. Lawrence Tibbett had been one of my heroes. As a child I saved my pocket money for months to buy a Lawrence Tibbett record. I still have as a treasured memento a hat that my coffee “customer” gave me. It had been given to him by the great Caruso when they sang together.

Then, one day, he came in looking very tired, with a hangover, shaking more than usual. I wanted to give him his coffee. “Chef Louis, I’m dying for a cup of soup,” he said. “I haven’t had any soup for years. I live on sandwiches and booze. But I’m feeling sick. Could you please give me a little soup?”

“Give me ten minutes,” I said.

A faint smile lighted his face. “I think you misunderstood me,” he said. “I don’t want canned soup. I want the soup my mother used to cook for me.”

“I know, I know,” I replied. “Just sit and watch.” And that’s when I made my *Ten-Minute Chicken Soup*. Here’s the recipe. If it’s your first try at it, it may take twelve or even fifteen minutes, but you can be sure that no one will believe that you didn’t toil over it for hours. The recipe provides eight servings, but on that one occasion, Lawrence Tibbett ate almost all of it.



## TEN-MINUTE CHICKEN SOUP

Two whole chicken breasts,  
or four halved chicken breasts,  
total weight twenty to  
twenty-four ounces  
Two ten-ounce cans chicken broth,  
plus six cans water  
Two chicken bouillon cubes  
One teaspoon Chef's Salt  
(see Appendix)  
Two stalks celery  
One carrot  
One scallion (or one-quarter  
onion sliced thin)  
Two tablespoons butter  
One teaspoon sugar  
One-half cup instant rice

Remove the skin and bones from the chicken breasts. Put skin and bones in a small pot with 1 cup water and start cooking them on low heat. Reserve the meat.

In a soup pot, heat the chicken broth, water, bouillon cubes, and Chef's Salt over medium heat.

Cut the chicken breasts into matchstick-sized pieces, across the grain of the flesh.

Chop the celery, carrot, and scallion into pieces of approximately the same size as the chicken pieces.

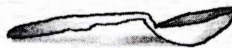
Heat the butter with the sugar in a heavy frying pan or sauté pan with a lid. When it is very hot, add the chicken and vegetables. Stir it for a minute over high heat, then carefully add 2 cups of the chicken broth. Cover and cook vigorously for 10 minutes.

Add precooked rice prepared according to package directions.

Strain the stock from the skin and bones and add to the soup. Correct seasoning and serve. (Serves eight.)

**CHEF'S SECRET:** This is a kind of emergency soup. When I demonstrate it on television, it takes me nine minutes from beginning to end, starting with the raw materials and serving the hot soup for four people in the ninth minute. Of course, it takes longer for eight servings—fifteen minutes, so figure thirty minutes when you try it for the first time.

Instead of cutting the vegetables into matchstick size, you can grate them through the largest hole of a grater. Instead of rice you can add fine noodles, which will cook in three to four minutes.



I was a houseguest for Thanksgiving at the home of a dear friend of mine in Euclid, Ohio. This was about a quarter of a century ago. The hostess was a beautiful woman for whom there had been great expectations on Broadway prior to her marriage to my friend.

When I arrived, I realized that my friend had told his wife about my culinary interests. She asked if I would whip up something unusual for the Thanksgiving dinner. I looked around in the cupboard, saw what was available, and came up with a dish to accompany capon, roast chicken, venison, or any game bird, but which also makes a great dessert when joined with ice cream. I named it *Prunes Frederick*, in honor of my Ohio friend.

#### PRUNES FREDERICK

One tablespoon butter

One pound pitted prunes

One cup (three and one-half to four ounces) pecan halves

One cup brown sugar

One cup water

One lemon, thinly sliced

One-fourth to one-third cup bourbon

Preheat oven to 350°F. Coat a pie dish with the butter.

Stuff the pitted prunes with the pecans and place in the dish. If you have any pecan pieces left, chop them coarsely and sprinkle over the prunes.

In a small saucepan, bring to a boil the brown sugar, water, and sliced lemon. Boil for a minute or so; then strain the syrup over the prunes.

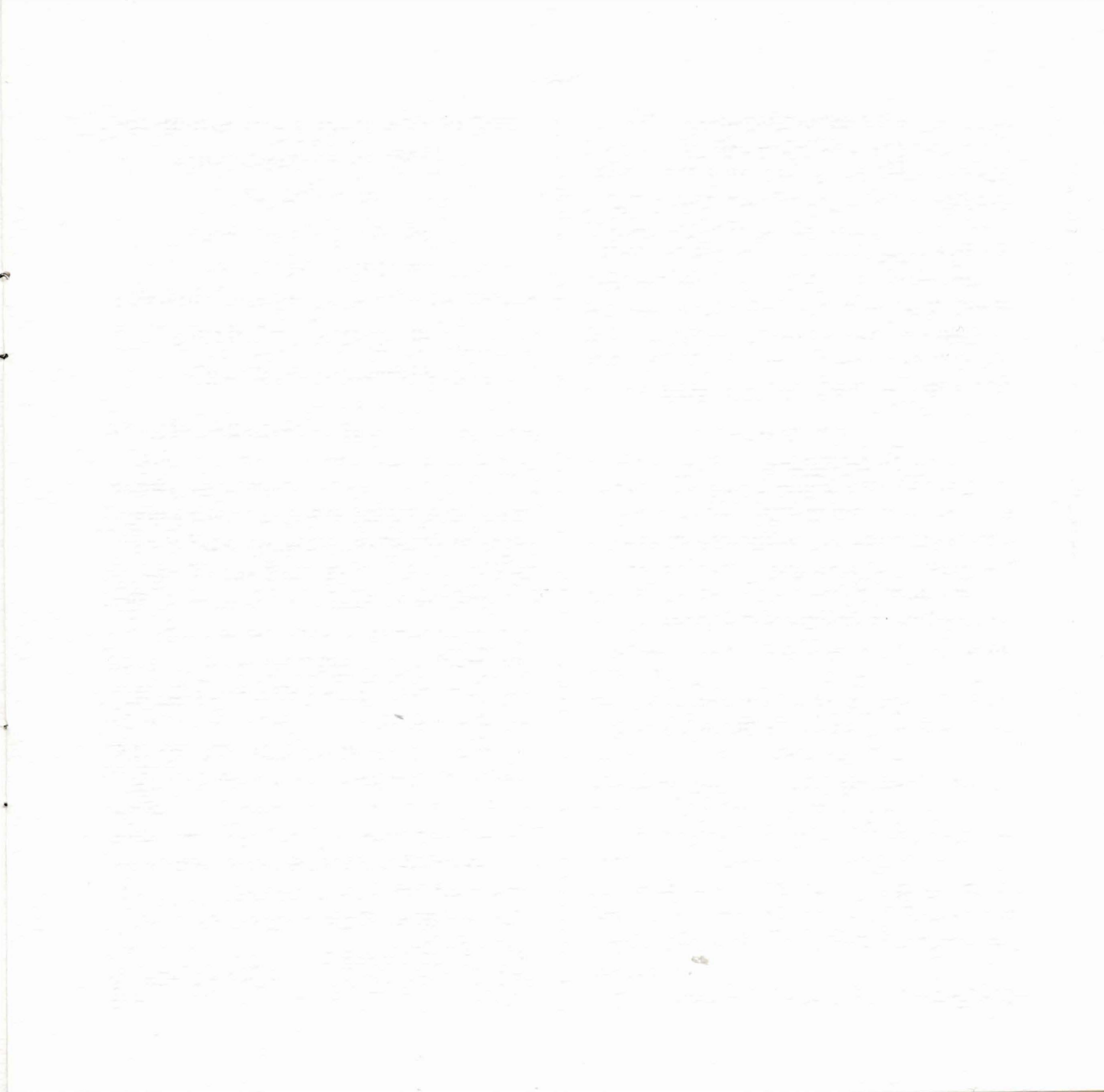
Bake the prunes for about 20 minutes; then cover with the lemon slices. Bake for another 10 minutes.

Remove. Bring to the table. Warm the bourbon in a small saucepan, ignite it, and pour over the prunes. Let it burn until all flame dies.

Serve the prunes with some of the remaining thick syrup but without the lemon slices. Serve it as a side dish with any poultry or game, or serve it as a dessert with a scoop of vanilla ice cream on each serving. (Serves eight.)

CHEF'S SECRET: A tablespoon of butter may seem like too much for coating the pie dish, but you will need it. As soon as you pour the boiling liquid over the prunes, some of the butter will melt and will cover the surface of the liquid, preventing or slowing down evaporation of the syrup.

The lemon will give the dish a pleasant, slightly tart taste; but if you don't like this taste, simply peel the lemon before slicing and add just a small piece of the rind.





## APPENDIX

It's been said that a scholarly treatise without at least one appendix is like food without salt.

Granted, this is a work of somewhat limited scholarly quality. Nevertheless, as one who has spent much of his life in the kitchen, I do feel that an appendix to my four favorite recipes is appropriate. Actually, the appendix is, itself, my most-used recipe: It's for *Chef's Salt*.

*Chef's Salt* is not new. It was supposedly invented, just as gunpowder was, by the Chinese thousands of years ago. Then it was reinvented, also like gunpowder, hundreds of years ago in Europe. We don't know exactly who first came up with *Chef's Salt* in Europe, or when, but we do know that chefs, for centuries, have been making their own basic spice mixtures. They began with salt, adding four or more spices and herbs, always in the same proportions, so that whatever they cooked would retain the same characteristics and highlights of taste.

You can add my *Chef's Salt* to just about anything you cook (except fruits and pastries) and it will strengthen the original taste and character. For example, beef will be beefier; lamb will be lambier; poultry will be more poultry-like; the flavor in pork will be more robust. Vegetables, soups, rice, and pasta will present more character than with plain salt alone.

If you think I'm overstating, prove it to yourself. It will cost only a few pennies to make one cup of *Chef's Salt*, and you can use it wherever you would use salt. Don't tell your family, or any of your guests—wait for the comments. You'll probably never again use salt without adding the black and white pepper, paprika, and garlic salt—in the proportions shown here.

### *Chef's Salt*

One cup salt

One tablespoon Spanish or  
Hungarian paprika

One teaspoon freshly ground  
black pepper

One-quarter teaspoon  
ground white pepper

One-quarter teaspoon garlic salt

This booklet recognizes  
**Chef LOUIS SZATHMARY**  
in his role as principal speaker at the  
annual dinner meeting of the  
**Friends of the University of Iowa Libraries**  
April 18, 1986

The cover illustration is from a woodcut by Lázló Imets.

Design by Norman Sage

Typography in co-operation with Judith Pendleton

