Bleach Ball

The tupperware party of the ’90s: How to cook virally correct

August 1, 1996 By David France and Sandy Langley

In which our authors met with Frank Abdale, the food services coordinator at Gay Men’s Health Crisis, learned a thing or two about cooking for people with HIV and decided to throw a party. Together with their husbands (and Baby Tyler, too), they entertained two members of a support group for women with HIV: The discerning, glamorous and ravenous Karen and Kim. When it was all over, our authors pulled over on the Information Superhighway and kvetched online about the goings on.

I feel like such a schmuck! I didn’t do a damn thing all night and just danced around the living room with the baby and a beer (or two) entertaining our guests while you did all the cooking, and the serving, and the clearing!

Oh, you were charming, really! You didn’t strip naked. You didn’t wear household bric-a-brac as hats. The thing with the cat and the bathing suit, though, was hilarious.

Now you’re making things up. How do you think the dinner went, otherwise?

You mean, aside from the fact that nobody croaked? Kim and Karen seemed to like everything. You have to admit, it was weird that all the girls were positive, and all the boys were negative.

We don’t know if anyone caught anything -- maybe Kim and Karen spent the night in the ER because too much bleach ended up on your clothes and not enough on the cutting board.

That was an AIDS tragedy, wasn’t it? Right down the front of that natty brown sweater my husband gave me for my birthday. I was heartbroken. But even with the attendant sartorial risks, I was surprised that none of you women follow the bleach rules. Frank advocated soaking anything you intend to eat raw in bottled or boiled water with a capful of bleach -- ordinary kitchen bleach. And he was right: Just let the food air out for five minutes, and the smell and taste just evaporate! You didn’t notice it on the salad at all, did you?

Well, no. I wouldn’t even have known the food -- or your shirt -- had been bleached if you hadn’t stripped to the waist and shrieked, “It’s melting! It’s melting!”

Why don’t you bleach, honey?

It’s like Kim said: It’s a quality-of-life issue. Remember? She said, “I reduce some of my risks some of the time.” Goes for all of us. If you have to be paranoid about every little thing, what’s the point? But something Frank said has really made me rethink how much risk I take. “Being HIV positive is like being in Mexico.” In Mexico, I wouldn’t dare eat unpeeled fruit or vegetables that had only been rinsed in tap water.

At least everybody at dinner uses filtered or boiled drinking water.

And even after that, you’re supposed to put it in a sterilized pitcher, which is something I didn’t know until we spoke to Frank.

He was so nice, wasn’t he? You know what I learned? I didn’t know that most bottled water was no better than tap.

Evian, too. My doctor told me you can just call the 800 number on any water bottle and find out if the bottler uses a one-micron filter. You know, after dinner, Karen went home and e-mailed me the rules she and her husband use, starting with Poland Spring for everything. Another rule of hers is: Cook meat until there’s no pink left. None. That’s a point Frank made, too.

I was a little worried about that with his recipe -- two hours seemed like a lot of time for the chicken breasts in the cacciatore. But it came out pretty moist, don’t you think?

It was delicious! The chicken was in the oven for two hours?

More, even -- because my husband got there so late, the cad (that’s another story, girlfriend!). You didn’t notice? You were having a quality-of-life moment in the other room. I kept hearing you and Karen guffawing. (Did I tell you my husband does a wicked imitation of Karen’s Sta-en Oylend accent?)

Frank said it was a high-protein meal, but to me it just tasted like succulent baked chicken.

I love that about nutrition. He’s so clever.

And your husband was so sweet to run out for decaf. When he made the coffee, did he use the Poland Spring or did he try to kill us with the stuff out of the tap?

Girleen! If my husband had tried to assassinate you, do you think he would ever have unhanded that beautiful child of yours? Weren’t they adorable together, supine on the floor and playing the “hands up!” game?

Mmm. As I was watching them play, I was thinking about how much I truly enjoyed all of you and my life at that moment. That’s what was going through my mind when we were laying on the couch, and I said, I couldn’t imagine life any differently -- if I didn’t have Tyler, or if Tyler hadn’t been negative. Am I making any sense?

It’s a quality-of-life thing?

Yessiree.

FRANK ABDALE’S CHICKEN FEAST

Serves: 10
Salient characteristics: High in protein, middle-level fat, easy to cook for a crowd, or for later leftovers.
Nutrition per person (excluding dessert): Calories: 1,014; Total fat, 25 g.; saturated fats, 4 g.; carbohydrates, 122 g.; protein, 71 g.; cholesterol, 131 mg.
Preparation time: 50 minutes
Cooking time: 2 hours
Dish difficulty scale: On a scale of four, one-and-a-half drops of sweat.

Frank Abdale, author of the forthcoming cookbook Love Is the First Ingredient *(Chitra Publications/Montrose, PA), is the food services coordinator at Gay Men’s Health Crisis in New York City, as well as a consultant to New York City’s Friends In Deed and God’s Love We Deliver. He heads “Cooking for One” workshops for people with HIV and cancer at Cabrini, Body Positive, Gilda’s Club, and other groups. He is Dish’s first cooking guru, and author of this succulent menu.*

Frank’s Chicken Cacciatore

INFO: 6 oz. serving. Calories: 310; fat: 6 g.; saturated fats: 2 g.; carbohydrates 10 g.; protein, 50 g.; cholesterol, 131 mg.

3 whole chickens quartered (about 10 lbs; or 4.5 lbs boneless, skinless breasts)
2 28-oz. cans crushed tomatoes
1 3.5 oz. can black olives (or other olives)
1 tbs. garlic, chopped fine
1 large onion, diced fine
2 tbs. oregano
1 bay leaf
1 dash of thyme
1 tsp. black pepper

1. Combine all the ingredients except chicken.

2. Cover chicken with tomato mixture (immediately wash hands and use a bleach solution to clean your cutting board for future safety).

3. Bake covered for 2 hours at 350?. (Says Frank: “You can’t cook it too long -- you want to make sure this stuff is cooked. No pink, period. One thing about food and HIV, there’s a huge spectrum of opinion on everything. Except this.”)

4. Drain chicken fat and serve.

Penne Pasta

INFO: 5 oz. serving. Calories: 545; fat: 5 g.; saturated fats, 0 g.; carbohydrates, 105 g.; protein, 18 g.; cholesterol, 0 g.

2 lbs. DeCecco Penne (or some other high-quality brand -- a few pennies more, Frank says, and you get “better flavor and texture.”)

1. Cook according to the directions on the box.

2. Drain and toss with (extra-virgin) olive oil, fresh ground pepper

3. Serve with chicken sauce on the side or on top.

Steamed Broccoli

INFO: 4 oz. serving. High in beta-carotene and antioxidants. (“And also in color,” remarked an insightful Frank -- “red and green are pretty together.”) Calories: 32; fat: 0 g.; carbohydrates: 6 g.; protein: 3 g.; cholesterol: 0 g.

2 heads of broccoli
1 red pepper, cut into 1/2" cubes
Juice from two lemons
Salt

1. Cut broccoli into florets.

2. Cook with red peppers in boiling water for 5-7 minutes.

3. Drain, sprinkle with salt and toss in lemon juice.

Option: Microwave for 5 minutes instead of boiling.

Salad

INFO: 1 cup serving. High in vitamins and minerals. Calories: 8; fat: 0 g; carbohydrates: 1 g.; proteins: 0 g.; cholesterol, 0 g.

1 head Boston lettuce
1 head red leaf lettuce
1 Belgian endive cut into thirds
1 small head of radicchio (or 1 cup shredded red cabbage)

1. Clean sink well and fill with filtered or boiled water and 1 tsp. bleach or food-grade hydrogen peroxide.

2. Tear or cut greens into bite-size pieces and plunge into water.

3. Agitate well and let the greens sit for five minutes.

4. Scoop into a (bleached or sterilized) salad spinner and dry well.

Note: This is a ton of greens. For leftovers, dry thoroughly and wrap well in paper towels and then plastic food storage bag. Refrigerate.

Mustard Thyme Vinaigrette

INFO: 1 tbs. serving. Calories: 119; Fat: 14 g.; Saturated fat: 2 g.; carbohydrates, 0 g.; protein: 0 g.; cholesterol: 0 mg.

1/2 cup olive oil
1/8 cup red wine or balsamic vinegar
1 tsp. thyme
Dash salt and pepper
1 tbs. Dijon mustard

1. Combine all the ingredients in a small jar and shake well.

2. Refrigerate and serve on the side.

Option: We used a white balsamic vinegar, and it was tasty! For protein and texture, add the dressing to one 16-oz. can white beans that have been well rinsed (filtered water, remember) and dried.

Carrot Cake with Cream Cheese Icing

A good way to sneak in “a higher-value protein,” per Frank: Whole wheat and nuts, dairy. Plus carrots are full of beta carotene! Calories: Hoo, boy -- read on, if you dare!

INFO: 5 oz. serving. Calories: 618; fat: 37 g.; saturated fat: 6 g.; carbohydrates, 66 g.; protein: 6 g.; cholesterol: 77 mg.

Buy it. (Purchase this from a health food store and score big points with the food police. And, hey, you might even like it.)

DISH will try any recipe that is forwarded to us (within reason, of course) and will publish the truly tasty ones (if our nutritionists allow us). Please forward your favorite meals (in written form) to: PozMere@aol.com or NegHombre@aol.com. Include preparation hints, nutritional stats, appropriate wine selections, and return address!

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