

Blog Column for January 21, 2009

## Back to Basics

There is a wonderfully chaotic scene in the baseball movie *Bull Durham* when the frustrated coach of the Durham Bulls yells at his losing team and throws an armful of bats at the feet of his players while they are in the shower room after another embarrassing loss. (Of course, the scene is deliciously funny – pure eye candy, in fact--with the young, handsome athletes standing there soaking wet and clad only in towels). After first reminding the team of their 8 and 16 record, the head coach screams, “This is a simple game. You throw the ball; you hit the ball; you catch the ball. You got it?”

That’s basic. I can throw a ball, hit a ball and, remarkably, catch a ball (I did play short stop at camp after all) but I’m certainly not very good at it. I don’t know where to position my feet, or how to move my hips or swing my arms. Think about it. The outward simplicity of the game and the basic instructions get you to bat, but what happens then – a hit, a miss, or worse, a strike out. I was never properly trained; I JUST played.

I think the same thing happens in the kitchen. There is an assumption about the simplicity of cooking – it’s something everyone should JUST know – the basics are somehow learned without real training. If you were fortunate, you might have helped stir the pancake batter while standing on a chair at the age of 5? Or, perhaps, you helped spoon your first batch of chocolate chip cookies onto a baking sheet, with simple instructions to space the cookies an inch or so apart because they will spread when baked. These are simple lessons for lifelong practical living – especially if you like dessert!

Since we need to eat, we either get skilled at eating out or bringing in takeout, or we figure out how to cook. For the novice cook, it’s time to JUST play and learn along the way. It’s a simple game – you enter a kitchen, pull food from the fridge, prep it in some way, turn on a stove and start cooking. It’s OK if the knife skills are shaky, the timing from preparation to completion is off, and the final dish is – well, maybe a loss, but, hey, it’s edible. There will be another time at bat. And that’s how it all begins.

Lessons, simple lessons, little nuggets of information that build skills and confidence take one from beginner to pro – or at least to confident cook! My goal in providing these videos is to take you into my kitchen and teach you the basics. This time it’s all about omelets – a humble, inexpensive food that can turn magically elegant at the whim of a cook. The same technique that makes a classic cheese omelet can also be used to create an herb and crème fraîche omelet garnished with caviar.

Remember, if your first try looks more like scrambled eggs – it’s OK – it’s edible! The home run may take more practice. The important thing is to just start playing.

Happy cooking,  
Diane