

MIKE FOOD STORY

I'm having a dinner party and you're invited!

By Mike Nistler

I was looking through recipe books to get inspiration for this issue's "In the Kitchen" when I came across a cookbook given to me a few years back. It's titled "Recipes & Remembrances" and was published by the Kimball Area Historical Society. Kimball was my hometown, sort of. I grew up on a farm about six miles north of Kimball in Maine Prairie Township, just a stone's skip from Pearl Lake, or Marty.

I started paging through the book and found not only found mouth-watering recipes, but oodles of familiar names from my past and present. And those names sure did conjure up a few memories.

That gave me an idea. What if I were to go through and pick out some of my favorite foods, made by some of my favorite people, and intertwined their recipes with my stories?

It would be a like a dinner party with great food and great conversation.

So, without further adieu, let's get the party started.

All great meals start with appetizers and for that, we're going to rely on Margaret Arnold, (see recipes below) the wife of one of my high school buddies, John Arnold. John and Margaret live in Kimball, where John is a second-generation owner of the implement dealer in town. Margaret works as a public relations consultant. Margaret, who grew up in the Twin Cities grew up with a mother who was a dietician and home economist.

"My mother was always involving her daughters in preparing meals, baking and canning," Margaret said. "She likes the science behind food and was a wise and patient teacher. Her goal was to involve us in filling the cookie tins, canning jars, the pantry and the deep freezer."

While we enjoy Margaret's Avocado Bean Dip, I'll regale my guests with the story of John and his brother, Joe, who was in my graduating class. John was a year younger than Joe and me, but we did our share of hanging out at their house in Kimball. I thought the Arnolds were pretty cool. Dad Eugene ran Arnold's Implement at the time and Mother Mariella was an intelligent, articulate woman who did some substitute teaching and loved to converse with us when we visited their house. It made me feel so grown up. Oh, and when we visited the Arnold house to play games and hang out, we got to eat a real treat in the mid '70s — frozen pizza! It was a delicacy we didn't have "down on the farm."

I'm getting thirsty from all this talking, so it's time to grab a beverage. Again, we'll keep Margaret busy and have her whip up a batch of her Rhubarb Slush.

For our next course, we'll dig in to a wonderful Cabbage Salad prepared by Allie Mae Lang, the mom of my classmate, Kevin Lang.

As with the Arnolds, I hung around at the Lang house a bit. Allie Mae and her husband, Dave, who is now deceased, were always welcoming. In fact, Dave Lang got me started saving money when he sold me a combination savings plan/life insurance policy as soon as I graduated. I still remember investing \$25 a month in the plan. It was a good investment and a good lesson to learn so early. Thanks, Dave, and you, too Allie Mae, for raising a son like Kevin who not only was our class president, but one of the "classiest" guys you'd ever hope to meet.

Speaking of good guys, my friend Bob Greeley is represented here thanks to his sister, Mary (Greeley) Bartz, who stirs up a mean pot of Wild Rice Soup, not to mention just about anything involving beef.

Mary lives and works in Sleepy Eye today and was a classmate of my sister, Deb (Nistler) Scheibel, KHS class of 1970something. Mary ultimately became director of the Betty Crocker Kitchens for General Mills and eventually, Pillsbury. She joined the beef industry in the fall of 2004 as director of food communications for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA).

Mary's brother, Bob, was a year behind me in school and a valuable member of our high school baseball team. We both went on to study at St. Cloud State University. In fact, Bob and I were roommates my sophomore year of school and remain in touch to this day. Ask Bob anything about growing up in Kimball and his memories of amateur baseball and he will not disappoint. In 20 years, he will be a wonderful historian.

I'm not a big veggie eater, but I feel that I must include one for two reasons. It's healthy, and I want to mention Mariella Arnold one more time (see her recipe for Sweet Vegetable Melange). Mariella was a guiding light for me when I was graduating from KHS and looking forward to beginning a career. She was the one person most responsible for my getting a college education, and thus pursuing a career in journalism and eventually magazine publishing. Thanks again, Mariella.

On to the main dishes. As a kid growing up near Kimball, a big treat was when the entire family loaded into the car and visited the Kimball Drive-In run by Merton Eaton. It was *the* place to go from 1962 to the mid '70s. If you were really lucky, you could feast on a good-old barbecue sandwich. Unfortunately, being beef and hog farmers, my parents weren't into spending money on meat. However, the small vanilla ice cream cones were delicious.

Two long-time Kimball residents, Gloria and Fred Jacobs, provide us with two more great entrees. (Don't worry, this is central Minnesota, we need a lot of meat entrees at this table.) Besides great recipes, Gloria and Fred also provided Kimball with some great offspring, including son Jeff, who was another of my classmates. Jeff was the centerfielder on the team that helped us win a conference championship our senior year, and none of us will ever forget the mammoth home run he hit that helped us beat Annandale that glorious spring day in 1975.

I'd be remiss if I didn't include a recipe from Mary Johnson, who gave me the Kimball cookbook. And, she even signed the inside cover, making it a collector's edition.

And no meal is complete without dessert. For that, we turn to Jean Doran Matua, a classmate and the current editor of the *Tri-County News*, the local paper in Kimball. Jean was one of the smart kids in our class, graduating in the Top 10. Who would have thought that we'd both take paths that led us to careers in journalism?

Look at the time. Gotta run. It's getting late. Hope you all enjoyed my little dinner party and trip down memory lane. Drive safely.

Avocado Bean Dip
Margaret Arnold

1 can dark red kidney beans
1 ripe avocado
1 C. salsa
2 T. Fresh cilantro, finely diced
1 T. fresh lime juice
Corn chips

Drain kidney beans and mash with potato masher or fork. Add peeled and pitted avocado and continue mashing. Add salsa, cilantro and lime juice. Serve with corn chips.

Rhubarb Slush
Margaret Arnold

12 C. rhubarb, chopped
9 C. water
2 C. sugar
6 oz. lemonade frozen concentrate
3 oz. strawberry Jello
Sprite or 7-Up to taste

Bring rhubarb and water to boil. Simmer for 30 minutes. Strain rhubarb and pour juice into bowl. Add sugar, lemonade and Jello. Freeze mixture. When ready to serve, let mixture thaw slightly to a slush and serve with Sprite or 7-Up.

Cabbage Salad
Allie Mae Lang

1 pkg. cabbage mix
2 bunches green onions
¾ C. frozen peas
¼ C. sesame seeds
¼ C. sunflower seeds
1 pkg. crushed Roman noodles

Dressing:

2 T. sugar
½ C. oil
1 pkg. noodle seasoning
¼ tsp. pepper
¼ C. vinegar

Toss together cabbage, onions, peas, seeds and crushed Ramen noodles. Combine sugar, oil, vinegar, pepper and package of seasoning from noodles. Pour over salad and mix well.

Wild Rice Soup
Mary (Greeley) Bartz

½ C. wild rice

2 C. water
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 large onion, chopped
1 C. sliced celery
2 carrots, peeled and chopped
2 tsp. salt
½ tsp. pepper
1/3 C. Wondra flour
4 C. whole milk
2 C. (8 oz.) shredded American cheese
12 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
2 T. dry white wine, if desired

Rinse wild rice. Combine rice and water in 5-quart Dutch oven. Heat to boiling. Remove from heat and let stand covered about one hour. Add garlic, onion, celery, carrots, salt and pepper; cover and cook until mixture boils. Reduce heat and simmer until rice is tender, about 25 minutes (not all liquid may be absorbed). Stir flour and two cups of the milk until smooth. Stir into hot wild rice mixture along with remaining milk. Cook, stirring constantly, over medium-high heat until mixture boils and reaches desired consistency.

Tip: (Make sure the soup consistency is thick enough at this stage. Overcooking after the cheese is added results in curdling.) Stir in cheese, bacon and wine until cheese melts. Makes 8 to 10 servings.

Sweet Vegetable Melange **Mariella Arnold**

2 large onions, sliced (2 Cups)
1 T. olive oil
2 C. sliced carrots
2 sweet potatoes, cubed or sliced (2 Cups)
1 ½ T. brown sugar
1 tsp. cinnamon
¼ C. raisins
½ C. water

In medium casserole dish, sauté onions in oil until soft. Cover with carrots, then sweet potatoes. Mix sugar, cinnamon and raisins and sprinkle over the vegetables. Pour water over vegetable mixture. Cover and bake at 400 degrees for 45 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Makes 8 servings.

Kimball Drive-In's Bar-b-que **Merton Eaton**

4 lbs. hamburger
1 (14 ½ oz.) can tomato soup
1 ½ tsp. chili powder
1 T. salt
½ C. chopped onions
1 (14 ½ oz) can chicken gumbo soup
1 C. ketchup

Brown hamburger and onions. Drain. Stir in tomato and gumbo soups, chili powder, salt and ketchup. Simmer until heated through. Keeps several days in refrigerator. Freezes nicely. For a spicier version, add ½ teaspoon pepper, ¼ teaspoon cumin, ½ teaspoon garlic powder and another teaspoon chili powder.

Fred's Bean Bake **Fred Jacobs**

1 C. chopped onion
12 slices bacon, cut in 1-inch pieces
1 (16 oz.) can garbanzo beans, drained
1 (16 oz.) can green lima beans, drained
1 (16 oz.) can pork and beans with tomato sauce
1 (15 oz.) can red kidney beans, drained
1 (15 oz.) can black beans, drained
1 C. brown sugar
1 C. ketchup
½ C. vinegar

In skillet, cook onion and bacon until bacon is crisp and onion is tender but not brown. Drain. Combine all ingredients in a 3-quart casserole. Bake covered in 375 degree oven for 1 hour. Uncover and bake about 10 minutes more or until desired consistency. Makes 12 servings. Freezes well.

Cheese 'N Tater Beef Casserole

Gloria Jacobs

1 pkg. hash brown potatoes
1 tsp. salt
1 ½ C. boiling water
1 ½ lbs. ground beef
½ cup chopped onion or 2 T. minced onion
1 tsp salt
¼ tsp. pepper
2 C. (17 oz.) can while kernel corn, drained
1 can tomato soup
1 C. shredded cheddar or American cheese

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In large bowl, combine potatoes, salt, water; stir well. Cover, let stand 10 minutes. In large skilled, brown ground beef and onion. Drain if necessary. Stir in salt, pepper, corn and soup; pour mixture into ungreased 2-quart casserole. Stir cheese into potatoes; spoon over meat mixture. Bake 30 to 40 minutes or until lightly browned. Refrigerate any leftovers. Makes 8 servings.

Favorite Meat Loaf

Mary (George) Johnson

1 lb. ground chuck
8 saltine crackers, crushed
1 egg
¼ C. evaporated milk
1 small onion finely chopped
¼ tsp. paprika
¼ tsp. celery salt
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. pepper
1/8 tsp. garlic powder
1 small can tomato sauce

Mix all ingredients together well. Form loaf and place in meat loaf pan. Bakes at 300 degrees for 1 ¼ hours. Last ½ hour top with tomato sauce. To double, increase baking time to 1 ¾ hours to 2 hours. This meat loaf will slice and hold together better than most.

Rhubarb Crunch

Jean Doran Matua

1 C. flour, sifted
5 T. powdered sugar
½ C. butter
2 eggs
2 C. rhubarb, cut up and unsweetened
1 ½ C. sugar
¼ C. flour
¾ tsp baking powder
Salt to taste

Mix flour, powdered sugar and butter and pat into 8-by-9-inch square pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes until golden brown. Beat eggs until fluffy; add sugar, flour, baking powder and salt which have been sifted together. Add rhubarb and pour over the crust. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes.