A Tribute to my Mother-In-Law 'Big Jean' or 'Nana'

Nana's Eggplant Parmesan

1   eggplant, peeled and sliced between ½ - ¼ inch slices longways
3   eggs, whisked in a pie dish or shallow bowl combined with 2 cups freshly grated
        Pecorino Romano cheese to form a batter
Salt and fresh pepper
Regular olive oil for frying
Sliced block Mozzarella cut into ¼ inch slices, Polly-O or your favorite brand
2   sheet trays, 1 lined with paper towels and the other lined with parchment paper
1   9x13 Pyrex or ceramic baking dish

1 recipe Nana's homemade tomato sauce, (gravy).

Season the eggplant slices, both sides, with salt and fresh pepper and pile up on the sheet pan lined with or parchment paper. Next, dip the seasoned eggplant slices, both sides in the egg and cheese batter to coat nicely on both sides. See below, have the pan with oil hot ready and place the battered eggplant slices directly into the hot pan, a few at a time, so it gets a bit tricky because you can only batter the eggplant slices as you are frying them, lots of hand washing going on.

Add about ¼ inch of regular olive oil to a large sauté pan over medium heat for a few minutes. Test to see if the oil is hot by dipping one end of a coated slice of eggplant until it sizzles lightly. If hot, add the eggplant slices to the pan, do not overcrowd, and cook till golden brown on both sides. Place cooked slices of eggplant on the tray lined with paper towels to absorb excess oil.

Spoon enough tomato sauce to coat the bottom of the baking pan and layer with golden brown eggplant slices. Spoon some additional tomato sauce on top of each slice of eggplant, just a small amount of sauce. The eggplant should not be swimming in the sauce. Remember the sauce is just a flavoring addition as the eggplant is the star of the show and should not be overwhelmed. Next place one slice of mozzarella on each piece of eggplant. Repeat the entire the process with another layer of eggplant, sauce, and mozzarella to have two complete layers.

Bake uncovered in a preheated 400-degree oven until the sauce gets bubbly and the mozzarella is completely melted, and the edges start to get a bit brown. Remove from the oven and serve with some additional grated Pecorino Romano cheese.

Nana's Meat Sauce
(If it has meat in it, we call it Gravy!)

¼	cup regular olive oil
1	large onion cut into ¼ inch slices, rounds, like you are making onion rings
1	large garlic clove, smashed flat
2	pounds total beef short ribs, pork tenderloin/pork neck bones
1	pound Italian sausage links
1	small can tomato paste
¾	cup dry white wine
2	35-ounce cans Italian plum tomatoes, crushed in a food mill which will also remove the seeds
2	teaspoons sugar
1	recipe of Nana's veal meatballs fully prepared

A few fresh basil leaves

Add the olive oil to a large sauce pot and place over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook until tender and just starting to get a bit of color on the edges. It is important not to burn the onion and or garlic.

Once the onion and garlic are done, remove to a small plate. Now add in the raw meat, beef short ribs, pork tenderloin/pork neck bones and sausage. Brown on all sides then remove from the pot and place in a bowl.

Add the dry white wine to deglaze the pan and cook down until 80% evaporated. Next add the tomato paste and cook while stirring until it turns into a rich paste coating on the bottom of the pot. It is important not to burn the paste.

Next add the crushed canned tomatoes, basil leaves, and the sugar and bring to a simmer (I never add sugar to my family's recipe and always advise against it but this is Nana's recipes and you never argue with Nana if you know what's good for you. Everyone loved Nan's sauce including me.

Add back the browned meat, except the meatballs, stir, and adjust heat so that the sauce simmers slowly. Stir every few minutes to make sure nothing is sticking to the bottom of the pot. Adjust heat as needed and add a bit of water if the sauce gets too thick. Continue to simmer, stirring occasionally, for about 2 hours, adding water if needed, until the sauce has developed into a rich red brick color. After about 2 hours add in the meatballs and allow to simmer for the last 30 minutes to one-hour cooking time. Be careful not to break the meatballs while stirring.

When the sauce is done remove all the meat to a serving bowl. Ladle a small amount of the finished sauce over pasta and serve some additional sauce on the side along with the bowl of meat and of course, a large bowl of grated Pecorino Romano cheese for those who love cheese like Nana. There is nothing better than long cooked sauce or what we call Sunday gravy with macaroni and the meat that was the base flavor of the sauce/gravy.

The onion and garlic on the small plate was available for whomever wants to snack on it.

Veal Meatballs – Nana's Cheese Balls!

1   pound ground veal
2   eggs
2   cups freshly grated Pecorino Romano cheese
Salt and fresh ground pepper
Regular olive oil for sautéing

Combine all the ingredients in a glass or stainless bowl. The best way to mix is with your hands. You can use rubber gloves to make clean-up easier. Form the meatballs by hand or with a small ice cream scoop and then roll them to shape into a nice small smooth round ball.

Add about ¼ inch of regular olive oil to a small to medium frying pan and heat over medium heat for a few minutes. Test the oil by dipping one meatball in and if it sizzles it is hot enough to start adding more. Do not crowd the pan and fry in batches until they are nicely browned on all sides.

When frying is completed place the meatballs on a plate to catch any residual juices. The meatballs will eventually be added to the sauce recipe below to finish cooking.