

Lasagna: Sustenance in a Crazy World

by Russ VanWagner

Sometimes I wonder if life has become too complicated. Other times I know it has. It seems like we are being buried with what alone seems like a small detail, but taken in a cumulative way, overwhelm us in an MTV kind of flashing micro-second data overload. In the book *The Tao Of Pooh*, we get to look in on a conversation between Christopher Robin, Rabbit, and Pooh. Christopher Robin asked Rabbit what he thought about the first thing in the morning. Rabbit replied that he liked to think about all the things that he had to do that day, and how he was going to do them, who he had to talk to, the things left over from yesterday, and the things that need to get done tomorrow. Then Christopher Robin asked Pooh what he liked to think about in the morning. Pooh replied, "I usually think, 'What's for breakfast?'"

I have read that book at least three times, and probably three or four like it. I don't know how many times I have tried to reorganize my life to simplify things. Without even thinking about it, I could name three jobs that I quit because it just got too important. But it really doesn't make a difference. It's kind of like doing my dishes. I have the worst habit when it comes to dish washing; I can go weeks without doing dishes. (Mostly because I own over twenty coffee cups.) And I make a New Weeks resolution to do my dishes after every meal. And for a while I do really well, then one night after I have all the dishes washed, dried, and put away, I decide to make a little snack. Say, some popcorn. And I say to myself, well it's just one bowl, I'll wash it tomorrow. And the next thing I know, I'm back to my bad ways. I have to wash a spoon to stir my coffee.

And this is how it is with my larger life; I take on a small task at work, I pick up an extra couple of hours at my part time job, I buy four books that I have always wanted to read, and I volunteer to help a friend move. Next thing I know, I'm rushing from one thing to the next, trying to keep appointments and commitments.

A few days ago I was standing at a bus stop, going from a full day at one job to a full day at the next, freezing to death. It's funny how my clarity of thought is inversely proportionate to my body's core temperature. As hypothermia sets in and the peripheral systems of my body begin to shut down, my mind becomes lucid with a thought pattern that is a cross between Lennon/McCartney and Einstein. The universe, my life, and the metaphysics of existence all begin a tight orbit in my brain. Things become clear and within my grasp. Like a puzzle, all the pieces fall into place and come together in a picture of the White Album.

And just before the bus arrives, I am sure that my life has become way too complicated. I need to do something to slow down, to take a little comfort, to relax.



Ross VanWagner

Then I get on the bus and begin to thaw out. As the various low priority body functions come on line, a voice appears uninvited. "But Russ," it says, "You need to do all the things you do. There is a reason you took all this on, you are responsible. It all depends on you."

And in many ways the voice is right. I can't afford to give up either of my jobs, nor could I ever give up reading and learning, and part of having friends is being there to do things with and for them.

But a person needs to take refuge somewhere. Certainly there is something that I can keep sacred and keep for my own comfort and support. A safe port.

That safe port does exist, and it has a name.

Lasagna.

SAUCE:

4 Cups Canned Diced Tomatoes

1/4 Cup Olive Oil

2 TBS Oregano

2 TBS Basil

3 TBS Minced Garlic

2 TBS Black Pepper

1 TBS Red Pepper

1 TSP Salt

1 TBS Celery Seed

1/2 Cup Chopped Red Onion

PROTEINS:

1/2 Cup Sunflower Kernel

1/2 LB Crumbled Tofu

1 LB Course Ground Beef

CHEESES:

1 Pint Large Curd Cottage Cheese, whey rinsed off.

2 Large Eggs, Whipped

2 LBS Shredded Mozzarella

1/2 Cup Shredded Parmesan

PASTA:

15 dry Lasagna Noodles

Mix the ingredients for the sauce together and set aside. Fry the beef, drain off excess grease. Add the proteins to the sauce. Begin to boil the noodles until they are done. Rinse the whey off of the cottage cheese (this can be done in colander). Mix the dry curds with the eggs and if you want, add some oregano and parsley. Shred the other cheeses. When the noodles are done, you can begin assembly of the lasagna. This recipe is for a 9 by 13 by 3 inch pan.

Spread sauce on the bottom of the pan, just enough to cover it. Divide what is left into four equal parts. Now lay down 5 noodles in a pattern that will cover the sauce. Spread one of the parts of sauce. Spread out the cottage cheese mixture. Another part of the sauce. A layer of noodles. Another layer of sauce. Now spread out the mozzarella cheese. Part number three of the sauce. Last layer of noodles. One final layer of sauce. And top it off with a generous sprinkling of parmesan.

Bake in an oven at 300 degrees for about thirty to forty-five minutes.

Really, what more needs to be said? I could eat lasagna at every meal. The sauce, the cheeses, the pasta. Ahh, the pasta. There is something maternal about pasta. It's warm, soft, safe, and sustaining. Lasagna will comfort you when the universe assails you. Lasagna will never doubt your abilities. Lasagna will always believe in you. Lasagna is your friend. It's more than your friend.

Lasagna is your mother. That safe port in the storm of life. The place you can always be sure to get that unconditional support.

I think that it's true for everybody, at one time or another, or perhaps, many times, we feel overwhelmed. All we want to do is shake our fist at the sky and shout, "ENOUGH!!" But the pressures of trying to get by in this post baby-boom world are pretty heavy. And just in case what we each have going on in our own little lives isn't enough, there is the rest of the world. The war in Bosnia, earthquakes in California, guns in high schools, AIDS, nuclear proliferation, global warming, and a bizillion other things that my editor doesn't have space to mention. Let's face it, sometimes life is just way too complicated. And when you are feeling like you just can't take it anymore, like one more thing is going to push you over the edge... when you begin to feel a real affinity with those disgruntled postal workers.

Take a word of advice. First, put down that uzi. Next, put some water on to boil and start making that sauce.

Remember;

Eat early, eat often.

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