

"KALAMARI – A PRIVATE AFFAIR"

This recipe is for those Extreme Women who can juggle everything in their busy daily life, and who, on occasion, takes on a tad bit more than she planned on. But the amazing thing is that she usually succeeds . . . and with flying colours.

Make sure you have plenty of time on your hands because it takes all day to prepare this delicacy, and you must be nearby as it cooks.

First of all, get the crock pot out of the cupboard but don't turn it on yet. Go down into the basement and get ready to rip out the big, bulky, heavy aluminum air conditioning ducting because you're going to reposition it and tuck it up in the joists so no one hits their head on it again. You've read the "How To Book," so dive right in and start tearing it out. Don't try to prepare for this project, either mentally or physically, because the way to reposition it will come to you as you work on it.

Shortly after beginning the project, decide whether you want a Bloody Mary, wine cooler or a cup of reheated 5-hour old coffee, then get back to work. After about 30 minutes, take a breather, because now you have to go upstairs. After the drink you no doubt have to go to the bathroom.

On your way back to the basement grab a wine cooler, after all it's much easier than reheating that old coffee or fixing a drink. Besides, you want to be sober when dinner is ready. Remember that you're fighting the clock with this project because you still have to fix Kalamari for dinner so race back downstairs and continue ripping out the ducting.

With the ducting nearly falling down, the basement joists are clear and the basement floor is a disaster area. Ducting is laying all over the place along with tools, wrenches, piping, extension cords, etc. Now, take a good long look at the dangerous ducting and make sure the dog is out of harms way because now, the only way to reposition the ducting up between the joists is to suspend it in a makeshift hammock. After all, you've now had plenty of time to work this out in your mind as you've been ripping the ducting out.

The way to make the hammock is to use some old heavy duty fishing line that your husband has had balled up for years. Be careful of this stuff however, for you discover that he tied 2,367 pieces of 2 to 4 foot lengths together in order to make it look like one helluva big ball of line. Pound in a few nails on each side of two joists and criss-cross the string from nail to nail, knots and all. You have to do this standing on an 8 foot ladder while suspending the ducting up with your head and shoulders.

Now that you have that heavy ducting suspended from the ceiling with the fishing line, accidentally fall into it as you stumble down the rickety old ladder. As you fall make sure that you clear those darned avocado sprigs. You know the ones. Three years ago your husband thought it would be a great idea to plant a couple seeds in those huge planter pots that weigh 500 pounds each. Since the planters were so big and heavy he put them in the middle of the room for you; in his infinite wisdom he thought he'd put them in a place where you could get around them! That's because he never thought you'd get a wild hair to make Kalamari today!

Pick yourself up, dust off, and stagger over to the unfinished bar that you've been building for two years, and take your first sip of the now semi-warm wine cooler. Ahhh, much better, the stars are nearly gone now. Take another sip because you still have to put the remaining ducting into the 30 foot long fishing line hammock you strung. Good . . . take another sip of the warming cooler and get back to work!

A little while later, thanks to the hammock suspension system, you've got the main part of the ducting up between the joists and you only have to finish the smaller ducting, the ones that go to the other upstairs rooms.

After they are suspended in the hammocks, you realize that two tin snips have been broken, seven cuts are gouged deep across your knuckles, and there are only four sheet metal screws to go. It's time for a break, and time to finish off the very warm wine cooler. Stroke your ego for a moment as you finish the cooler, and stand back to admire your work so far. Oops, don't stumble over the mess on the floor. There now, don't be ashamed of feeling pretty proud of yourself. Just as you're almost finished with the last of the dubious ducting you have a brain flash . . . the damned Kalamari!!! Grab your empty cooler bottle and dash upstairs. Be sure to miss every other tread on the stairway because you're in a really big hurry.

Open another ice cold wine cooler. Ahhhh, that tastes soooo good! Turn on the crock pot and pull out your 'Joy of Cooking' cookbook and quickly find the recipe for Marinara sauce. After a few short minutes and a couple swigs of cooler, give up because you can't remember how to spell Marinara and you're running against the clock.

Slice and dice the half used onion from last night's meal and do the same with a couple of the ones you bought a few weeks ago. Throw all this into the now warming crock pot. Be careful of those mangled knuckles that you put Band-Aids on. Don't get any onion juice in those cuts.

Pour some Greek olive oil into the crock but since hubby keeps it in the refrigerator it's too thick to pour so set the whole can in the crock, on top of the onions. They'll help it melt faster.

Clean and chop some fresh garlic, not too much, just enough for a terrific Marinara sauce, probably 18 to 20 cloves. Put them in the crock neatly around the base of the olive oil can.

Finely chop a couple of tomatoes but don't put them in the crock because they have a lot of acid in them which does a trick on the metal can, and the olive oil still won't pour yet. Grab some basil, tarragon, thyme, and something else that may catch

your fancy, but don't put them in the crock pot yet either cause it'll be harder to clean them off the olive oil can.

Finish your second wine cooler because you don't want it to get warm like the first one. Go back through the cookbook index to the 'm's' then slowly go down the list until you come to a word that you think is Marinara. Scan the recipe and figure out if you're on the right track.

Open the third wine cooler. You deserve it. They go down quicker when you're cooking, just watch any TV chef, they all drink as they cook. Ohhh, Julia Child, eat your heart out.

By now you should be able to get about a tablespoon of olive oil out of the can if you shake it like hell. Clean off the can and put it back in the refrigerator hoping that hubby will make a meal soon and will have to go through the same hassle. After all, fair is fair in love and war.

Run down to the basement pantry and grab a can of tomato paste, a can of tomato sauce, a can of black olives, and a can of water chestnuts (just in case you're in the mood to use them).

Add part of the little can of paste to the crock pot . . . after all what's the difference between paste and sauce besides the thickness. Stir like hell! Throw in a couple cups of water until it looks right. Keep in mind that you've had similar dishes when you've gone out for dinner so make it about the same consistency.

Add about a quarter cup of Italian salad dressing. Oops! Accidentally spill in about another quarter of a cup.

Now that you've stopped laughing and have calmed your dog down, try to remember what your friend Carol always told you to use to take the acid bite out of tomato dishes. What in the hell was it?

Anyway, you'd better add the tomato sauce now, because the Italian dressing really thinned it down, and we all know that there isn't a husband in the world that likes eating thin tomato sauce dishes. Stir gently while you muse over past conversations with Carol—damn what was that ingredient? Browse through the refrigerator for a few minutes, maybe that will trigger your memory. Ah ha! Grab the celery and fresh mushrooms. See you would've forgotten them if you hadn't scanned the refrigerator for that elusive ingredient of Carol's. Besides, you bought the mushrooms just for this meal.

Rinse the squid and make sure there are no hidden chunks of ice stashed inside them, after all, the sauce is still borderline thin and we don't want to push it, do we. Be thankful that Fred, the local fishmonger gave you the pre-cleaned squid. Cut the squid into rings or bite-size pieces and drop them, piece by piece, into the bubbling Marinara sauce, stirring very gently as you go. Reserve the heads with tentacle pieces. Don't mispronounce that because they're the reason this is a 'Private Affair.' More later.

Since you're in a hurry to get back down to finish the ducting before hubby comes home, grab the whole bunch of celery, hose it off, then shake the daylights out of it to remove the excess water. After all, you don't need to add any more liquid, the

sauce is still on the thin side. Now grab hold of the whole bunch and begin whacking at it, cutting it as thin as the meat cleaver permits. When you're about a third of the way through the bunch stand back and scope it out. Yep, it's probably enough for the sauce. Put the chopped celery in the pot and neatly wrap the rest of the bunch back into its original wrapper and tuck it way back in the rear of the refrigerator's vegetable bin. That way you'll know it's there and hubby won't see or use it. Remember how bitchy men get when they find things cut up differently than the way they were taught back at the Gourmet Cooking School?!?!?

Clean the mushrooms really good. Peat moss not only darkens the sauce but it has a tendency to grate between hubby's teeth and we all know what happens then. Hold one of the mushroom caps against the breadboard. With the hand holding the razor sharp chef's knife, poise yourself at a direct right angle to the mushroom cap. Remember how they do it on television? Place yourself strategically in line with the cutting board and on the count of three, slice that mushroom as fast as you can, making each slice uniformly thin, trusting that your fingernails will be hard enough to prevent the blade from removing the tip of your finger! Success!!! It worked and all the caps are cut and look perfect! Beautiful! Before putting them in the crock pot pick out the finger nails. They, like peat moss, tend to get stuck in hubby's teeth. Hubby's are such picky eaters.

Okay, everything seems to have made it into the crock pot right on schedule. Once again, browse through the refrigerator and cupboards. Oh yeah! Carol said to use sugar. Damn, you're out of sugar, but since you got the sauce this far and you can't run to the store just now, because all you're wearing are those skimpy little orange shorts and a tattered halter top, and when hubby comes home it'll be too late. What do you do? Never fret, there's an answer to everything.

What will the hidden ingredient be in this fantastic dish? Keep in mind that every meal has to have a hidden ingredient, after all, that's what makes us all very special Chef's. Well, keep looking in the cupboards. Naw, NutraSweet® sucks! Don't even think about putting it in this beautiful Marinara sauce. There's loads of sugar in cereal but it would take too darn much time to scrape every single flake to get a teaspoon of sugar, so cancel that idea. Ah ha, there it is! Thank you Aunt Jemima! Hey, why not? Syrup is used on a lot of things. Perfect! Now pour about two tablespoons into the crock, and taste. Ahhhhh. Make a note to remember syrup next time you're in the mood to make Kalamari, or any Marinara sauce for that matter.

Now then, you deserve another wine cooler. Give the sauce another quick stir, make sure the temperature is just right, then strut around the kitchen for a couple minutes. That's it, be proud! In the middle of strutting, realize that you want to put the water chestnuts in the sauce. Chop them into small pieces. Of course now you don't have any fingernails so be extremely careful. Grab the sponge and wipe down the counters, sinks and whatever else you splattered on during the making of this spectacular sauce.

Damn! Grit your teeth together, make the jaw muscles really flex their stuff and run like hell for the bathroom. Rip the old Band-Aids off your cut hands (remember the ducting?) then wash your hands as fast and furiously as possible. Contain your screams of pain and dry your hands fast but gently, and spread some ointment on the cuts and nicks. Now, put fresh Band-Aids on the cuts again. Take a deep breath, calm down, relax your jaw muscles, ahh, there you go, that's good, the pain is subsiding. Never, ever forget that tomato and onion juice can do a job on open wounds. Actually you can save yourself a lot of pain and trauma if you wear those big, bulky leather work gloves the next time you make Kalamari.

Ok, now that things have settled down, it's time to report to the basement. You have the rest of the day to finish 4 feet of ducting, and to drink the rest of the wine coolers. Only two more to go.

Finally, wearily, you're done with the ducting job and you're out of wine coolers. Every bone in your body aches, your muscles are tight, your fingers are stiff, your feet throb, and you're wearing more than your fair share of Band-Aids. And thankfully, you've only fallen off the ladder twice and tripped over the avocado planters three times. Of course the power cord whacked one of the year old avocado sprigs in half but heck, it was only seven inches tall anyway, and hubby probably won't ever notice it.

Slowly drag yourself up the rickety old stairs to finish the dinner. The next time you make Kalamari maybe you can replace the old staircase.

So far, about 4 hours have elapsed and as you breeze through the kitchen, of course to get something cool and refreshing, it dawns on you that you need to finish this delightful recipe. Keep in mind that you cannot go beyond the last step unless you have finished the ducting. Okay? Okay.

Since you're out of wine coolers, grab one of hubby's home-brew specials. They taste like crap but they have a kick and that's just what you need right now to keep you going. It's been an exhausting day cooking.

This stage of Kalamari is the most critical. It must be done exactly as specified or it simply will not turn out right. The title of this recipe is what? Look back at the beginning and see for yourself. Right, 'Kalamari - A Private Affair.' I am now going to explain why it's called a 'Private Affair.'

If dear ol' hubby were to watch the next few steps you would not only have to fix him bologna sandwiches tonight, but tomorrow would find you waking to an empty bed. Ah yes, a big, cold, empty bed; no hubby, no lover, just empty.

Kalamari is an ancient Greek dish. No, not a woman, we're talking food, so the bed would not be empty because of another woman. Of course, the next few steps could mistakenly be construed as sexual—this of course depends on the condition of your mind after working your ass off all day, not to mention the effect of drinking all those wine coolers and a home brew on an empty stomach.

Anyway, in Greece, octopus and squid are considered delicacies, but here in America when you fix octopus you're deprived of releasing your masochistic drives because you can't catch a fresh octopus and beat the hell out of it by bashing it against the rocks on the shoreline. It's a Greek tenderizer that you can't buy in a bottle.

Anyway . . . let your mind go wild for a few minutes and reflect on the golden, sun warmed beaches of Glafada, south of Athens. See the sunset filled with colors you'll never see anywhere else in the world, and watch those sexy men in those band-aid size swimsuits diving for super-fresh, ocean delicacies.

Reflect on those epicurean delights you've experienced that even the world's richest people have probably missed. And last but not least, you were doing this while hiding from the world—thank you President Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis! Ah, those were the days! An American refugee family, evacuated out of Izmir, Turkey, flown fifty feet above the Mediterranean to Greece via the wondrous WWII C-47 (Gooney Bird). Remember the rush you got when looking out through where doors once were and feeling you could almost touch the crystal clear blue water. There are only seven of you on board, your four siblings, your mom, the pilot and your dad who is the navigator, whose responsibility it is to fly below radar to remain undetected.

Landing safely at Athens the six of you are stuffed into a Volkswagen Beetle and told to disappear and keep a low profile until further contacted by someone. Someone? Now that's faith when you don't have a clue who will be able to contact you when no one in the world even knows where you'll be hiding . . . especially while crammed into a VW Bug. In looking back, thank heaven none of us were allowed to bring more than what we could carry or it would never have fit in the Bug.

And, no one realized back then that the most ludicrous thing to tell our family was to *keep a low profile*. Mom's idea of a low profile was, 'When in Rome do as the Romans do.' Of course, that usually made good sense, but the Romans were never known to lay low for any reason, and neither was my Mom or her crazy kids. Lay low? That was a direct challenge to a family of crazies!

Touching the icy cold squid pieces brings us back to the present moment. Again, be thankful that Fred gave you cleaned squid because you're really in no shape to clean it now. All the pieces, except the test . . . uh . . . tentacles have been cooking for several hours and the aroma is positively delightful. Nostalgia cooking, it's the only way to go. The memorable bouquet of salt water and ocean waves float through the kitchen . . . along with images of those oh-so-sexy men and their nearly naked bodies. It's heavenly.

Give a gentle stir to the sauce and one by one put the test . . . uh darn . . . the tentacles into the pot and stir gently after every two pieces. As they get hot they slowly start curling and moving, and it strikes a funny bone in you. It's absolutely hilarious. You start giggling after the initial nerve shudder, then the giggles get louder as you start poking at the squiggly little things.

Then the real laughter follows, you know the kind, from way down deep inside. Up from your toes it bellows out as you imagine your hubby walking into the kitchen at that very moment. It gets totally out of control as you imagine how to explain to him the lewd and indecent acts that the test . . . tentacles go through as they get hotter and hotter.

Do you know what's worse than waking to an empty, cold bed? Waking in a straight jacket!

Get control of yourself because you just realized that you only have about an hour before hubby gets home, and you still have to make a delicious Greek salad and bake a loaf of Morgan's Ferocious Focaccia Mediterranean bread. Don't forget all of this has to be timed just right so everything will be ready at the same moment, so get a grip.

Remember that cooking can be great fun, and after hubby gets home there's always plenty of time in which to calm down and act like the happy little homemaker. Until then, reward yourself with a delicious Tanqueray martini on the rocks, and plop in three green olives instead of one . . . you deserve it! Besides, you haven't eaten all day and the olives will hold you over until dinner.

Bon Appetite!

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