

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Column #8



THE HOUSELESS CHEF'S GOURMET HOLIDAY CHRISTMAS RICE

By Wanda Sue Parrott

WONDERING what to serve guests over the holidays? Try these tips from the “houseless” cook previously introduced as Ernie in this column. Before proceeding, I’ll serve this caveat.

Reader, beware! If this were a restaurant column, rather than weekly update about homelessness on the Monterey Peninsula, I’d give a rave review. Here’s why.

After sleeping under a tree and claiming he was warm and comfortable under a waterproof sleeping bag, Ernie singlehandedly prepared a day-after-Thanksgiving feast for 25 homeless guests at Laguna Grande Park in Seaside.

He served two turkeys donated by local churches. Rolls, rice, beans, and vegetables were from the Food Bank and mince pie and a pre-cooked turkey were donated by anonymous friends.

Ernie baked his hens in a friend’s oven instead of trying to roast the big birds over a fire due to a rain forecast. As observer, I found Ernie’s rice obviously prepared by a seasoned culinary artist who said:

“Just because you’re houseless doesn’t mean you can’t be healthy. I can get better food out of a dumpster than from McDonald’s. We have blueberries, pineapple, watermelon, yogurt, steak, sausages. I can make something out of nothing. Cooking is like a science to me.”

His mother let Ernie start cooking at seven. “When I was 20, I worked at Quail Lodge and developed a fine palate for eating—caviar, filet mignon, abalone and Caesar salad made at the table.”

He started his food-industry career as a pantry cook, then “moved to the front of the house because there was more money to be made as a server.”

Ernie eventually went from Quail Lodge to the Highlands Inn and Casanova’s in Carmel. “All were upscale restaurants,” he said. “I left to work at Carmel Bistro, where I was assistant manager, and my last job—I was cooking at CSUMB—ended because the chef was very competitive, but the students loved me.”

Ernie admitted, “I did a lot of meth ten years ago. It’s a powder you snort or shoot up to feel like you have a lot of energy, but when you come down it feels like you’ve lost your soul. I would never do it again. I was working then. People think you can’t work on meth and cope, but. . . I call it chasing the devil. I can be happy and houseless. I choose to focus on the positive, the solution instead of the problem.”

Ernie recommended pepper for good digestion and cilantro to filter the kidneys. “I make gut water to lose weight by mixing in lemon, ginger, cucumber, mint, cilantro and chia seeds. Americans eat their salad the wrong way. They should eat it at the end of the meal after dessert because it is roughage and helps the digestion.”

Ernie smokes organic cigarettes and “weed at night, when it’s right, when I go to sleep to get my peace. The closer I get to God, the more the devil tries to come in.”

Try Ernie's recipe at your own risk. You might like it. I served it to 50 people as Christmas potluck fare. Not a grain was left!

HOLIDAY SPANISH RICE

(Adjust to suit your needs by multiplying or subtracting ingredients according to this formula:

1 cup dry rice requires 2 cups of liquid and will serve 5–10 people when cooked.)

1. Pour enough cooking oil in a kettle or pot to cover the bottom and stir in 1 cup of dry rice.
2. Continue stirring as mixture heats, until rice turns milky white.
3. Add 1 cup of water and 1 cup of chicken broth. Bring to a boil.
4. Stir in 1 can of tomato sauce or diced tomatoes with chilis.
5. Add onion, garlic, cilantro, chili powder, salt and pepper and other spices to taste.
6. Lower heat to medium, cover pan and let cook until rice is soft.
7. (Optional) Stir in 1 can of corn or beans. Serve hot.

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Wanda Sue Parrott is author of *The Boondogger's Bible—How to Fight Like City Hall to Win!* Proceeds from book sales benefit homeless women of Monterey Peninsula. Details from amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com.