

Becca's First Roux

Written and Illustrated

by

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Author's Purpose

To educate young children about Creole culture in Southern Louisiana.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this story to Danny, my late godfather.

He was such a great father figure in my life.

We always had loads of fun in the kitchen together.



Becca's First Roux

It was there, right there in the room with the mustard paint starting to peel off the walls, that I found a love for cooking. They say that the kitchen is the heart of the home. For me, it's the feeling, the feeling you get when that smell hits you; onions, bell pepper, and green onions, sautéing in a skillet. Yum! It smells like home.

One of the very first things that I helped Danny cook was the base of a gumbo, this is called a roux. I anxiously sat on the old, creaking kitchen stool, that was passed down from generations, as he scampered around the kitchen trying to gather all of the ingredients.

“It’s very simple, first thing’s first, we need to melt some of dat ole butter into the iron skillet,” he said as he starts to unwrap multiple sticks of butter.

Once I hear the gas burner flick on, I know that it’s time to begin! Danny reminds me of how we need to be careful when cooking to make sure we do not burn our hands. I sit on the stool and watch him place the butter into the skillet. When I start to hear the sizzle, I begin to stir the big, golden sticks of butter hoping it will help them to melt faster. After the butter is all melted, Danny explains, “Naw, you have to be sure you’re not putting too much flour in this, cher’. The only way to make a perfect roux is to be sure it is the right ratio– exactly half butter and half flour.” So, he shows me how to slowly mix in flour until we get the perfect consistency.

Once the flour is mixed in well, Danny tells me, “Naw we just sit here and stir until we see the roux turning into a nice dark brown color. I’ll be right here if you need, I will just be working on some dishes.” I replied, “Hmmm... seems easy enough!”

But little did I know, just how boring it would be! I had to keep switching hands because my arms were starting to get tired but then I got distracted by the puppy, Snoopy, running across the kitchen floor.

This is when disaster strikes, while I am petting Snoopy's soft fur, I smell it... BURNING! Oh no! It's turning black and sticking to the pan. Before I know it, the smoke detector goes off. Danny turns it off and just laughs,

"Becky, I told you not to stop stirring that roux, girl."

"Sorry, Snoopy distracted me!" I reply while laughing along with him.

"I'll go get us some more butter, but this time we can't burn it. Okay Bec?" says Danny.

"Okay, I promise," I laugh.

So, we decide to begin again. Slowly, we repeat the process with melting the butter and adding in the flour. This time, Danny stands next to me to make sure I continue to stir. As we are standing there stirring, he starts to show me the stages of color the roux goes through while it continues to stay on the heat.

First comes the light stage when the flour is first mixed in. Then, if you continue to stir it will become just a little darker which is called the blonde stage. He says that this is his favorite stage to use in shrimp etouffee. After this, comes the peanut butter stage, this is the best to use for a Sauce Piquant. Then comes the

color that we are trying to reach, the dark stage. He swears that this stage makes the best gumbo gravy.

Finally, we reach the dark stage, and it is time to assemble the gumbo. We throw in what Danny likes to call “the holy trinity,” which is chopped up onions, bell peppers, and green onions.

Next, we add in the diced chicken and sliced sausage. We can’t forget about all the seasonings! We like to add in some Tony’s Chachere’s and table salt. He also likes to add in what he calls “a creole’s secret ingredient” a tablespoon of mustard and hot sauce.

After everything is added in, we fill the stock pot up about halfway full of water. We then leave the pot to boil on the stove for about an hour. Then it will be time to sit around our round dining room table with our loved ones, to say grace and enjoy a traditional southern Louisiana dish served with rice and potato salad.

Bon appetit!

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Vocabulary

Bon appetit – This is a phrase that is used as a salutation to a person who is about to eat.

Cast iron skillet – This is a durable, black pan that can last through high heat and has great heat retention.

Gumbo – Gumbo is a soup that consist of meat or seafood, maybe both at times, and vegetables such as: onions, bell peppers, etc.

Holy trinity – This consists of chopped up onions, bell peppers, and green onions, sometimes even celery.

Potato salad – Potato salad is a side dish that has cold cooked potatoes, hard boiled eggs, mayonnaise, and salt.

Roux – A roux is a mixture of fat (usually butter) and flour that is used to make the base for sauces and stews.

Sauce piquant – Sauce piquant is a spicy stew that is made from a roux, sometimes with tomato paste, and meat. The most popular is with seafood or chicken and sausage.

Shrimp etouffee – Shrimp etouffee is a Cajun stew where shrimp are cooked in roux with vegetables and spices. This is usually served over rice.

Tony's Chachere's – This is a seasoning mixture that contains salt, red pepper, black pepper, chili powder, chili pepper, and garlic powder.

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About the Author

Rebecca Ellen Wennemann grew up on the Westbank of New Orleans, Louisiana. Rebecca always had a passion for working with children, which is why she is working towards earning a degree in Early Childhood Education at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Once she completes her bachelor's degree, she will pursue a master's degree in Special Education. Rebecca believes that every child should have an equal opportunity to achieve their goals and they all need a safe space to learn and grow.

