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WRITTEN BY JOHN SCHOPP

*it*

has been said that "A man's home is his castle." It has also been said that "A chef's kitchen is his home." According to Webster, a Chef is the head of the kitchen, overseeing and ultimately responsible for all food preparation for a specific property or group of properties. O.k. this is where I stretch a little but, if the world is "your oyster", and I am a Chef then by default...I must be KING of the WORLD!

I realize that my argument may be laden with logical fallacy, but that is easily negated by my chef mindset! WOW, what a HUGE responsibility. It is a burden I have carried for almost 22 years. This KING notion is supported and perpetuated by my loving wife, so it is not all my ego's fault. In fact, my wife crafted a lovely crown for my 44th birthday that boldly states "I am KING of everything!"

I have grown up in kitchens, literally living in one kitchen or another for most of the waking hours of my life. I have learned to see that world as my home and the people that share the space with me as my family. My real family has always made sacrifices for my work. They have grown accustomed to the rarity of holiday or weekend plans, my getting home from work three to seven hours later than I expected and a continued grumble from me as to what ache hurts worse. What a baby, you say? Need I remind you again of my KING status?

My 'real' home is a refuge for me. It is the place that I dream about during the long hours of the work week. It is the place that my spirit is constantly battling to get back to. It is where I recharge my will, as well as focus my thoughts. When I think of the comforts of home & look past all the stuff that fills a dwelling, I find that (for me) the feeling of home comes from the passion, love and nurturing of the female spirit. It started with the unconditional love and sense of safety that my mother provided.

For all of my egotistic bantering, shameless shenanigans and culinary exploits one thing is absolutely clear! I would NEVER be where (or whom) I am today if were not for the female spirit providing unconditional support, friendship and nurturing love. I receive it continuously from my beautiful wife, Karen. The mere magic from her glance and smile can give me the courage and strength to battle the roughest seas. I realize daily that I am fortunate to have married my true soul mate. But marriage is just a small part of this truly remarkable story. A much larger part of that story consist of the notion that a successful union consists of more give than take, more understanding than contempt, more listening than talking (from both parties involved).

more...

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Chef John and his Karen

Recipe for a happy healthy long relationship:

*Ingredients*

*Honesty  
Respect  
Communication  
Laughter  
Reality mixed with dreams  
Never go to bed mad  
Try to give more than you take*

*Just mix all ingredients & serve daily ;)*

*- Chef John*

Cook with courage, passion and purpose...the rest will follow.

Love,  
*Chef John*

## Bananas Foster

**4 bananas (peeled and sliced lengthwise)**  
**4 ounces of cold butter**  
**1 cup dark brown sugar**  
**½ lemon (juice)**  
**½ orange (juice)**  
**2 ounces Kentucky Bourbon**  
**1 teaspoon of cinnamon (for a firefly show)**

Add butter and brown sugar to warm saute pan. Add bananas when mixture starts to bubble. Squeeze lemon and orange on top of bananas. Flambee Bourbon. Sprinkle cinnamon with a fork over flames (for a colorful firefly show) and watch out for kitchen curtains!!!! ;)

the story begins in the 1977, the year I first met Karen. We were both in 5th grade and happened to sit next to each other in homeroom (which we shared throughout the remainder of our school years). We became friends, but ran in different circles at school, never really looking at each other as a potential partner for life. Our friendship strengthened through our high school years, as we both were members of the same church and heavily involved in the youth programs. I also need to mention that we share the exact same birthday...March 7, 1966. With all of this "cosmic" coincidence it still took a restaurant to bring us together. The week of my 16th birthday, I got my first real job. It was an entry level cook position at a local restaurant. Just so happens that Karen was a waitress at said restaurant (to this day I do not hold that against her).

The courtship progressed something like this:

(Me) "Wanna go out sometime?"

(Karen) "I'm seeing someone."

(Me) "You could see me..."

(Karen) "Can I get a twice baked potato?"

At the time, Karen was dating a guy that was way more popular than me, had a convertible BMW and was president of the art club (Karen was vice-president). "What did I have besides access to the coveted twice baked potatoes?" I thought to myself. The answer that came from my 16 year old mind was not very confident. If I were going to truly catch this girl's eye, I would have to steal her from this pretentious, well to do, jerk. (John makes an audible Viking Ahrrrgggg!) My planned and coordinated offensive involved me cooking dinner for her. I would cook her very favorite meal, and she would have no choice but to see my "brilliance" and eventually marry me and bear me strong children. (Ahrrrggggg!)

Each day I showed up to either school or work with one dozen red roses and would ask if I could cook dinner for her sometime. Twelve days & 144 roses later I got my chance. The meal she requested consisted of crab rangoons, sweet and sour chicken, fried rice, no vegetable and banana fosters with cinnamon coffee. YES! She would tell the story something like this "He was bending over, cleaning the underside of the dish machine & I thought hmmm..." Hmmm is right, as my budding chef ego thought to itself...it is on!

We finished out high school and Karen sacrificed her college plans so that she could attend the University of Kentucky with me. We graduated college, continued careers and "strong children" were bore. We have experienced all that life has to offer, together. We have seen good times and worked through not so good times. We have grown up together and we will grow old together. She inspires my very essence and is the only force that can truly calm my sometimes unsettled spirit. Each day I find a new reason to love and admire her more than the day before.

Reason number 1,392: **To this day, she eats corn on the cob in random bites. rank and file rows & doesn't think twice about it.**

Great cooking is one part great ingredients, one part great technique, one part inspiration and the confidence to put it all together. I am fortunate to have the inspiration part locked up.



John Schopp, owner of Center Stage Catering and Edible Vibe, is a new writer for Bella. (Mainly because we are his biggest fans, and believe he can do no wrong.) He and his beautiful family live (outside the box) in Rocky Mount, where rockstar catering is created, and the edible vibes are delectable! [www.centerstagefood.com](http://www.centerstagefood.com)