

# Packing in the Pasta

BY ALYSSA ROSENZWEIG

“Dad, it won’t fit in the pan!” I cry as I shove more pasta into the extra-deep 3.5-inch springform pan we bought to prevent this problem. “I promise you, there is no more room!”

From the clatter and cluttered counters in the kitchen, it is obvious we are making *Timballo di Capellini*, Seven-Layer Pasta Pie. My dad finishes wiping remnants and juices from our oak cutting board before strolling over to address the problem. (*Clean as you cook*, he always preaches, so the delay does not strike me as a move of exasperation after a long day in the kitchen.) His hands join mine in a sticky blanket of buttered angel-hair pasta and tomato béchamel sauce, massaging and coaxing the last bit of pasta to congregate with the rest of the pie, which will be sheathed in parmesan cheese and baked until bubbly, brown and fragrant.

Seven-Layer Pasta Pie has always been our special recipe, called upon for special occasions or special guests. I guess you could call it our “specialty.” I have moved five times in my life, and my dad and I have made it in every house. Even during the six-month stay in Minnesota, there was a weekend when the duplex was filled with the aroma of pasta pie. It is almost as if a house isn’t christened our home until the

walls have absorbed its smell and the furniture has been reminded of it. (As much as I scour my hands with lemon juice, my dad still claims, *Having garlic soaked into your hands for a week is one of life’s greatest pleasures.*)

My dad and I dance a dance in the kitchen that is so natural it would appear choreographed to an observer. I hand him the paring knife before he reaches for it; he reminds me the grated carrots go in before the crushed garlic, knowing I would otherwise be scuffling through the cookbook.

*Italian Family Cooking: Like Mama Used to Make*. There are over 200 recipes, but we only use one. (*Sorry, Mama*, my dad joked one day.) Lay the book flat and the spine yields the pasta pie recipe. The book’s edges are crinkled from wet hands. Drips of béchamel sauce and drops of melted butter spatter the pages.

Our pasta pie is like the standard layered cake, but instead of frosting between layers, there is alternating sliced zucchini and squash, sautéed sausage and chicken. Instead of cake, there is pure angel-hair pasta tangled in a 100-percent-from-scratch tomato sauce. (*Please fit in, please fit in*, we silently plead as we assemble the ingredients.) The pie is so dense most people are full after a tiny piece. And there is no need for side dishes: all the components of a meal are already there.

Now we have made it through a morning of searching for the freshest ingredients, three pages of cookbook directions and nearly five hours in the kitchen. Why can’t it all fit in? Maybe it was the extra-spicy Italian sausage my dad insisted on buying at the market. (*You know how much I love my Italian sausage, Lyssa.*) Or could the chicken be to blame, chopped up into “bite-sized” chunks that would satisfy a T-Rex? (*It’ll shrink down once we sauté it. You’ll see.*) Either way, the pan is bulging and overflowing. Each extra pinch and ounce “for good measure” adds up.

There is nothing we can do about it. This always happens, yet we still act surprised and are determined to condense it all to prevent the inevitable leftovers — which aren’t technically leftovers if they never make it into the meal in the first place. But that’s another argument. Until next time, we will be scouring the Internet for a 4-inch deep springform pan. ■

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