

A Casserole for Our Dinner

Laura has gone to take care of our grandson, Kinnikinnick, at his home today, while our daughter and her husband work. It's up to me to fix dinner. late this afternoon, here at home. Absorbed in writing and practicing songs, I let the day slip away until I don't have time to shop for anything for dinner. I abandon all my plans and prepare a casserole from what we already have in the house.

I set one cup of brown rice to cook in two cups of water. I chop 1/2 cup of almonds, then turn the heat under the rice down until it boils gently, covered. I grate a cup of medium-sharp, white cheddar cheese.

I start an essay in my thoughts about cooking with what's in the house that I hope will blend words as carefully as I blend ingredients to cook.

I search the refrigerator. I chop kale into half-inch pieces and broccoli into small pieces. I add edible-pod peas cut into half-inch lengths. Green beans would do, chopped into small pieces or carrots, chopped and partially-cooked before I stir them into the casserole so they are tender when the casserole finishes cooking.

This casserole is variable according to what we have, and I quickly find that we have ingredients that will fit my idea of good tasting and healthy food. I take into account the food preferences of all who will eat of this dish.

I peel and slice organic garlic from Brian's garden. There are many good reasons our daughter, Amanda, married him, but this fine organic garlic is reason enough. All three of them, Amanda, Brian, and Kinnikinnick will join us for dinner the second night we serve this casserole. There are tasks at our house that a tall person does more easily than a shorter person, so they will arrive early enough that Brian can do several small jobs for us. Brian and Amanda give us vegetables from their garden, some of which we freeze for winter use. We feed them sometimes, and we take care of Kinnikinnick sometimes. It all balances well.

The rice is done. I spoon it out, still hot, into a large bowl, dump the chopped broccoli, kale, almonds and the grated cheese in with the rice and stir rapidly so the cheese doesn't melt together in one place. I add three heaping tablespoons of nutritional yeast, two tablespoons of soy sauce, four tablespoons of water, stir, and press the mixture into a casserole

dish. Laura doesn't like garlic in this dish, but the rest of the family does, so I distribute garlic through half the casserole by pushing slices of garlic into the warm mixture, mark that half, put on the cover and put the dish in the oven, which I have heated to 350 degrees, and set the timer for twenty-five minutes.

I wash everything I've used for food preparation and clean the kitchen, which will be as orderly as when we take care of Kinnikinnick here, and Laura and I share the task of food preparation and clean-up work. I make notes for my essay about cooking the casserole, blend words together and set them to simmer on a back burner in my thoughts. They will flavor well during their slow simmer until I find time to keyboard them into final form.

The sound of noisy tappets in the car Laura drives alerts me that she is home in time to relax for a while before dinner. The oven timer rings soon after she comes in, and I take the casserole from the oven and place it on a hot pad in the center of our kitchen table.

When we are ready, we sit across from each other, express gratitude for the good food we are about to eat and for the beautiful day we are living, then begin to eat. We talk about the history of this casserole, something I brought to our marriage. I don't remember where I got the idea for this dish, and it doesn't matter. It smells wonderful, tastes good, is good food and feeds conversation about our family, about memories that go back into warm past times.

We finish eating and talking, then gather dishes from the table. I cover the casserole dish and put it in the refrigerator.

Canada geese fly over our house and honk noisily as we wash dinner dishes. Mallard ducks add their raucous sounds to the afternoon. Somewhere close, children laugh as they play. The sun drops toward the pine trees west of us. We approach evening. Laura reads further in the book she studies. I keyboard the essay I started earlier in my thoughts, about cooking dinner from what is in the house, into my computer and start revising it. Dusk enfolds this part of the world.