

Hearths & Crafts

On Top of Spaghetti

by Dr. Richard Craft

All sprinkled with cheese, is a juicy big meatball all covered with sauce. The very sight of that delicious dish is enough to set my mouth watering. For me, the ideal meatball has been a secret Holy Grail for years and the reason why I'll attend spaghetti dinners, no matter what the cause.

I've recently attended two such affairs, one to raise funds for the Fourth of July celebration and the other to raise funds to assist the *Chamber Singers* in the *Ellenville High School*. In the first occasion, chef Joe Verdino showed his expertise with his secret recipe for meat sauce. To me this is the epitome of meat sauces and rates a clear 10.

The menu at the second affair was different from the first in that the salad was better and they had meatballs along with the spaghetti sauce and a musical concert to boot. Even though the meatballs were probably frozen, that sets okay with me because they rate high on my chart for juiciness, cohesiveness, and flavor. Now, of course, not every frozen meatball is perfect, but they ain't bad either. Desserts included brownies, cake, and Italian ices at the meat sauce dinner, and a variety of premium ice creams at the meatball dinner. This was a toss up so far as ratings are concerned – it's hard to beat ice cream.

Putting on a spaghetti dinner is no small feat. You need a chef or two for the cooking, people to canvass for prizes, people to shop for supplies, salad makers, table setters, servers etc.

If you are lucky, and the public responds, an organization can make between \$1-2000, which isn't bad for a night's work. In fact, it's quite a bargain for the diners since seconds are usually on the house.

For me, the search continues for the meatball that will blend with my palate for a score of 10. I've ordered spaghetti and meatballs from diners to high-class Italian restaurants, and I'm usually disappointed. They are either too dry or too soggy. They either sit there burned brown and hard on the outside or disintegrate once you put your fork into them. They either taste like soggy bread or straight hamburger.

For me, the ideal meatball should taste Italian with the proper spices. The ideal meatball shouldn't be smaller than a golf ball or larger than a softball. They must be moist and smooth so they can be chewed slowly, exploring every nuance of the chef's historical perspective, and not so dry that they stick in your throat as they struggle to reach the bottom.

Is that too much to ask?

A meatball is made with love, remembering Grandma Lucia's secret ingredient or secret procedure that gave the recipe the edge over all the rest. Some add a pork chop to the sauce, some add a boiled potato to the sauce, all of which adds flavor to the featured item of the evening, the meatball.

Meanwhile, attend all the spaghetti dinners you can. They are usually hosted by a struggling service organization with limited funds. They are asking for your help and deserve your support. Just let me know when and where, and, if possible, I'll be there.

In addition to the food, they are usually a lot of fun and a lot of people benefit.

If during your sojourn through bowls of spaghetti you find a meatball with an 8-10 rating, please let me know so I can either get the recipe or attend their next dinner.

Will my searching ever end? Is this an illusive pursuit or dream? Am I asking for the impossible? Am I just chasing my tail or is there the meatball of my dreams out there – somewhere – just waiting to be discovered and covered with fame and sauce? ☆

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