***Editor's note:*** *The following Wok & Roll column will be Peter Kwong's last for the Inter-County Leader. Those interested in continuing to publish his columns may contact the newspaper at editor@leadericcpa.com or Peter Kwong at* *phkwong1668@gmail.com**.*

*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic) Inter-County Leader*

**The perfect side for your New Year’s dinner at home**

My goodness, Halloween has come and gone, so has Thanksgiving, and next Christmas will pass us by. Hopefully we won’t be listening to “I’ll be Home for Christmas” for a long, long while. (Well, but what is a long, long while?)

Looking at the lake view outside my window from my working desk, the four seasons just present to me the most magnificent view all year-round. Also, looking at our “bird sanctuary” with all the bird feeders in our back porch, I kind of know just what season we are in. The hummingbirds are long gone now, but the woodpeckers, blue jays and goldfinches still hang around; and so do those pesky squirrels. Oh, how I love the Northwoods; I keep wondering why we didn’t move here sooner.

With the virus still hanging around, we have no choice but to stay home, not going anywhere or doing anything. So, what to do when you are home all by your lonesome self? Well, in my case, I am fortunate enough to keep myself busy writing my next book — “The Cocoon Bride” — and creating new recipes for my new classes, whenever they will start again.

It was quite challenging for our Thanksgiving dinner as our kids (they’re all over 30, but to me, they will always be our “kids”) became vegetarians a few years back. It is frustrating for a chef who loves meat and potatoes, but it is also a challenge to be creative. So, I have created recipes that are healthy and delicious. Somehow, the thought of giving up the bite of a juicy steak would never occur to me. Well, not for a while, as long as I still have my teeth.

Recently, I came across a recipe for garlic mashed potatoes that I would love to share with you all. Through the years or trying different mashed potato recipes, I am still not quite happy with the one that fits my taste buds. And that’s the art of cooking — don’t just follow someone’s recipe (even though it is Grandma’s, who was using the same recipe passed down by her great-grandma). Time changes, and taste changes; however, use the same recipe and modify it somehow and create your own; and make Grandma (and her grandmas) proud.

I could never forget my mom’s fluffy mashed potatoes every Thanksgiving — nice, rich, creamy, just heavenly! It was great until I tried my neighbor’s garlic mashed potatoes after Mom passed away. It was good, but somehow didn’t meet my expectations at all. It was like going to a fancy Italian restaurant and ordering garlic toast, and expecting something special. But then when they show up with a basket of toasted bread sprinkled with garlic powder and paprika, one could only scream; and the restaurant would dare to charge you $4.95 for four pieces of tainted bread; would you scream too? Ha-ha.

Well, let’s talk about garlic mashed potatoes here. I’ve tried it in many family dinners and it seemed to be a hit. I judge the success of my dishes by looking at the plates of my guests, just like the old days when I was in the restaurant business.

If the plate is clean and empty, you are doing a good job. If the guest barely touches the food, then you have a problem. When I was in the business, I would go to the guest’s table directly and ask what was the problem with the food; and would fix the problem right there. It would be a relief to hear, “Oh, I had a big lunch, and can’t eat another bite.”

Now, back to my garlic mashed potatoes recipe, which my family loves. Here is my secret:

Cook two scrubbed potatoes for each person in a large pot. Some recommend the potatoes peeled, but I don’t. Add salt to taste. When the potatoes are cooked and soft, drain and set aside.

In a large pan, add your chopped garlic (a whole bulb, 6 to 8 cloves) with a stick of butter, then add the mashed potatoes.

In slow heat, mix well, and add Pete’s Seasoning Salt\* for flavor. That’s it.

I’ve read that you should add cream or milk to the mix. And of course, you can. But my recommendation is to add sour cream instead to create a creamier profile.

So, have a great and tasty new year. Love y’all.

*\* Pete’s seasoning salt — 2 parts salt, 1 part garlic powder, 1 part Italian parsley. Mix well.*