



CORRECT LINE COOKING

Function Fantasies

There are times in one's life—or in my life, anyway—when one sits, stands or lies and wonders how on earth and by what peculiar paths one actually ended up at a particular place, or with a particular person. The other day I found myself at the ACT Young Achievers Award, a function designed to recognise “the achievement of young Australians” and to help “each of us in society—young and old—to perhaps see the greatness in ourselves and be inspired to discover what is beyond ‘doing our best’”. I was very much hoping one particular person would win, but my main reaction was to wonder if I had died and been reincarnated as a Young Liberal for my myriad sins. Such was the general ambience of the evening, beyond the welcoming embrace of my friend's table.

However, as regular readers of this column would have noticed, philosophical and spiritual reflections are not its mainstay. After all, cooking is a material practice, a bit like sewing. Accordingly, I will now present a series of practical guidelines by which one can make almost any formal evening a total buzz. These can be employed at wedding functions, award nights, dinner parties and so on. Because I was at a genuinely interesting table at the aforemen-

tioned night I did not have to resort to these desperate measures, but this was very much an exception. The general rule is that whenever you are put on a table of people you don't know, at least 80% of them will be accountants, and the other 20% will be Rugby League supporters with an unquenchable desire to discuss Mal Meninga's physical attributes all night.

1. Develop your fantasies

First and foremost, you must dispense with the truth. You may have a very interesting job doing something incredibly worthwhile, but if you are so fortunate, why reduce it to a few fatuous clichés? My advice is to fabricate (a much nicer word than lying). Fabrication is not necessarily a bad thing, so long as it doesn't affect anyone's wellbeing. Make up a job, or pretend that you just won Tattsлото. Kidnapping attempts aside, the evening will pass much more enjoyable as you plot your world trip, describe the new Harley you are picking up tomorrow, or how your book on theoretical physics is going. Name-droppers perform a primitive version of this game, as I was saying to His Holiness the other day. Remember, you are unlikely to meet the people on the table again, and they'll feel happy tomorrow as they tackle the trial balance, thinking about their new friend the scientist.

2. “Run that one past me again”

I would never recommend full-scale argument as a pleasurable activity, despite occasionally having found myself in the midst of one. There are, however, less aggressive conversational strategies which can make the hours fly past like minutes—although if used unwisely they can backfire and make them feel like decades. One of my favourites is to not quite understand what the other person means all the time, or to artfully miss the glaringly obvious. People, and particularly men talking to women, love to explain things over and over again, and you may as well be in control of this process. Try taking up the position of a child who stumps her parents by asking too many ‘whys’—although normally I

prefer to stick to less philosophical questions such as “what does a trial balance actually do?” or “what did you say profit was again?” No doubt some women would say this is pandering to the male ego, but if someone has a mind like a ledger, you might as well make an entry on the credit side. I haven't actually tried it with a female accountant to date. My next point may ensure that by the end of the evening you really can't remember what profit means.

3. Treat the food with caution

The food at the Young Achievers Award was better than that served at most large functions. Generally, function food has to be bland and safe to avoid offending anyone, due to the limited or non-existent choice. (Does this say something profound about the free market economy and/or monopoly capital? No, but it says a lot about bland chicken.) My usual strategy is to eat virtually nothing and drink more—which is dangerous if you are pretending to be a physicist. Once you begin to believe that you are a physicist it's probably time to save a few neurones and stop drinking.

The recipe below will be no surprise to some. Somehow it seems to be the antithesis of function food in that it is fresh, tasty and casual. I hereby enter it in the Alltime Great Recipe Hall of Fame Awards, coming soon to a function centre near you. I will be going as an accountant who runs a brain surgery clinic and breeds Angora goats for export to Japan. Or maybe I'll just get drunk.

Pesto

Boil water. (Can you run that one past me again?) While your pasta is cooking, take the leaves of a bunch of basil, two cloves of garlic, some parsley, oil and melted butter; and a small handful of pinenuts. Blend together until not quite smooth, and mix in with pasta when cooked (al dente for preference). Can be kept in the fridge, but is better made fresh each time.

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