

JAMES BEARD

By Carl Gohs

PROMPTLY AT 10 a.m. on June 18 in Seaside (Oregon) High School the cooking class was called to order. The sixteen men and women students had come by air or car or both from San Francisco, New York, Seattle, Portland and points between.

Seated at a long row of plastic-topped dining tables each student glanced expectantly at a sheet of papers that were the menu and recipes for that day. The teacher, master, judge and critic was James A. Beard of New York.

Syndicated columnist, eminent food authority, author of a dozen books on food and cookery, Beard commented briefly on the menu, dictated notes and assigned teams of three to four persons to tackle various stages of each of the five courses composing the menu for the day.

Beard had announced that on this first day they would concentrate on crepes, the thin French pancakes, and the great variety of ways in which they can be presented — first, main and dessert course crepes, with sometimes more than one version of each. Don't expect balanced meals, Beard told them, adding that he hoped no one had come expecting to lose weight.

Beard then moved around the room assigning cooking stations to each team. He moves with great ease for his size — tall, large boned and well padded. He seems to be everywhere at once, answering questions and giving directions with few and well-chosen words, always precisely yet genial.

The casually knotted bow tie he always wears is on that day of handsome Thai silk in bright orange and red; he is swathed chest to ankles in a non-onsense apron of hot orange, red and pink — also Thai silk; his size 14-D shoes are blue canvas with thick crepe soles.

The noise level in the room rises along with the increase in activity; assistants pass out cartons of eggs, butter and milk; bowls, skillets, pots, mixers come out of cupboards; the buzzing of voices and whirring of mixers levels off at a low roar; a momentum has been established that will continue without let up for the next two hours. It is 10:15, a short fifteen minutes since commencement of class.

James Beard was born in Portland and spent most of his first twenty years in Oregon. The Beard family spent many summers during those years at Gearhart just north of Seaside. Each year when time allows he returns to the Oregon Coast for a visit of anywhere from a week to a month.

In the years since leaving Oregon, Beard has risen in the world of food to a position of near pre-eminence. He is consultant to manufacturers, processors, restaurants and airlines. His famed cooking school which he conducts in his Greenwich Village town house in New York, is booked a year to two years in advance.

He travels the length and breadth of the United States lecturing on food and demonstrating cooking techniques. He travels to Europe two to three times a year, consulting, judging. He is as respected in Europe and America for his knowledge of wines as much as for food.

His appetite for food and knowledge of it is matched by his appetite for work, as I was to discover during the three, week-long cooking classes he conducted at the beach this summer. Beard has been a friend for some time, and about two years ago he manifested a desire to conduct a series of summer classes on the West Coast.

The classes he envisioned would be of the scope of his New York classes — intense, comprehensive classes in French and European cooking such as might be encompassed in a week of daily sessions. We discussed this via telephone and letters until last December, when plans took a serious, concrete form.



A few weeks of searching turned up the class kitchen in the Seaside High School home economics department. Not only was the classroom ideal, but the enthusiasm of the school, the school district head and especially that of the class teacher were gratifying beyond words. Early this year Beard completed arrangements with the school district for lease of the space following the end of the school year. The next problem was students.

Early in January a small item in Jean Henniger's column in the Sunday Oregonian mentioned the forthcoming classes. Beard's phone in New York, my phone in Portland, and the phones of many of Beard's friends in Portland immediately started jangling. Within six weeks forty-eight persons had signed for the three classes and as many more were on a waiting list. Beard came out in late April for preliminary arrangements, and we were on our way.

I had sat on occasionally on the fringes of Beard's New York classes, and so had some idea of the routine. On Beard's instructions I scoured out markets and delicatessens in Astoria, Seaside and Portland, checking availability of food and ability to respond to special orders.

French cuisine requires a mass of implements which one could not expect to find in an American high school classroom. Beard had shipped from San Francisco and New York more than a dozen large crates of tools, knives, pots, pans and small appliances.

The first morning of class — indeed the first week — is blurred in my mind. Despite careful planning there were last minute crises. Consider — the first week we were two classes each day — one from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and a second from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Each day each class prepared a five- to eight-course meal. Very often we might have as many as two or three variations of a single course. The quantity of food prepared had to be adequate to feed twenty persons, including Beard, assistants and students.

Everything was purchased from scratch in class, of fresh ingredients purchased that day. We bought eggs ten dozens at a time, whipping cream by quarts and butter (sweet butter, unsalted) by the case. This last was available only in Portland.

The crises seemed to come tumbling in bundles, never gently, one at a time. Mostly they were crises of timing; the inflexible class scheduling and the need for fresh ingredients each day.

Thirty minutes before class time on the first morning, as I was completing the buying for that day, I discovered to my horror that there was not a drop of whipping cream to be had in Seaside. It was the height of the strawberry season. I am confident the day before every family in Seaside and every family visiting Seaside had had strawberry shortcake with whipped cream. We needed a quart of whipping cream — now.

For some minutes I indulged in a wild fantasy of pursuing, wild-eyed, an equally wild-eyed and bawling cow across field and pasture. Fortunately a local creamery came to our rescue.

Another time it was raisins; then parsley; then onions; and so it went.

On the whole our market in Seaside, fish market and bakery in Astoria, and a roadside market between

AT SEASIDE

Gearhart and Warrenton, performed admirably — sometimes heroically, as did those members of the Seaside High School staff who assisted.

Returning to class that first day shortly after noon I was not even mildly surprised to see it operating like a smooth and carefully tended machine. Beard still moved swiftly from team to team, seemingly inflexible. The many dishes began to appear in their completed form: the long row of tables was set with twenty places; anticipation was high.

The first course was crepes, stacked as in a many-layered cake. This was filled, layer on layer, with sautéed and lightly seasoned minced mushrooms, in French — duxelles.

Next came crepes rolled with fresh crab in a curry sauce. This was followed by great, fragrant baklava dishes of an Italian version of stuffed crepes, rather like a cannelloni, with a rich tomato sauce over crepes rolled with Italian sausages, ricotta and grated parmesan cheese, then baked. Dessert was crepes, again stacked like the duxelles crepes and cut in little wedges, but filled with layers of a rich chocolate sauce made with heavy cream and cognac, then topped with whipped cream and shaved bitter-sweet chocolate.

This was not to be the last. The chocolate crepes were followed by Crepes Directorate, a dish of bananas, baked and cut it half, seasoned with lemon and kirsch, then rolled in a crepe, sauced with a caramelized butter and orange sauce and flamed with kirsch. Truly, Beard's earlier words — "Do not expect to lose weight in this class" — were accurate with a vengeance.

Space here does not permit a list of the menus for the three classes, much less the recipes, but here are two that are relatively simple:

CHICKEN IN LETTUCE LEAVES

To Serve 6 to 8

- 2 cups finely chopped onion.
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup finely chopped green pepper.
- 6 tablespoons butter.
- 14 ounce can green chili peppers, chopped.
- 6 to 12 tablespoons finely chopped hot pepper.
- 2 tablespoons chopped basil or
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons dried basil.
- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste.
- 4 cups finely diced cooked chicken or turkey.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper.
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup cognac or brandy.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chicken broth, if needed.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped parsley.
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup toasted, shaved almonds.
- Crisp iceberg lettuce leaves, washed and carefully dried.

Saute onion and green pepper in butter until just simmered.

Add hot pepper and chicken, toss well, cover and simmer for 4 to 5 minutes. Add basil, salt, pepper, cognac or brandy, and broth, if needed. Taste for seasoning. Arrange on a heated plate and garnish with parsley and almonds. Serve the lettuce leaves icy cold. Each person spoons some of the mixture onto a lettuce leaf and rolls it up.

SAUERKRAUT SALAD

Wash a package of sauerkraut very well. Drain thoroughly. Toss with a French dressing of oil, vinegar, salt, pepper and a touch of Dijon mustard; a little onion, and chopped fresh dill or dill weed.

This is an excellent accompaniment for anything from baked or poached fish, served hot or cold, to picnic hot dogs.

Carl Gohs is a Portland writer. This has been the Oregonian.