

So, what exactly is normal these days? The early morning pundits and the late night comic warn us that the chaos in the White House is not normal. Perhaps they are afraid that we will somehow or other get used to the chaos, even comfortable with it. It will become our new normal.

I think that we've all had times when we were trying to find normalcy. When I moved from Switzerland to California, it was a huge leap. Nothing was normal. Not the weather, not the traffic, heck not even the language. For the first time in a long time, the checkout at the grocery store required English – a cheery hello and thank you. After almost two decades, the more formal “bonjour, Madame” and “merci – bonne journée” had become automatic. These simple words are part of polite, everyday life. And being polite is normal.

By the time I landed in New Hampshire, I'd pretty much mastered greetings and goodbyes in English. However, I did re-discover how cold winter could get. In addition, after a long time away, I was living close to family again. Just like that, boots, shoveling, cold and lots more time with family became part of my normal routine. Managing the ups and downs of self-employment became normal. The flexibility to ski or kayak in the middle of the week became normal. Who knew? Living a balanced life is normal.

Five years ago, my dad became very ill so I moved into my parent's house to help out. Now believe me when I say, “I don't know nothin' 'bout takin' care of no people.” That said, I could drive Dad to doctors' appointments and call 911. I also make a mean pot roast. Meanwhile, Mom moved into assisted living. Very little about 2012 and 2013 was normal. I'd say nothing was normal that year, except for helping people I love. That is normal.

By the summer of 2013, Daddy-o was beginning to feel better. I moved back home and he came along with me. Mom stayed in assisted living where she was well cared for and doted on by the staff. We couldn't see the light but we were pretty confident that we were in the tunnel. We were good; we would find our new normal.

For me, this new version of life required a lot of juggling. I had writing assignments to find and finish as well as a part time job, taking care of one parent and daily visits with another. There were still lots of trips to the doctors and a few to the emergency room. This new life, this new normal was filled with compromises. For instance, I was tempted to insert an adjective above as in ... taking care of one aging parent ... However, my now nonagenarian father prefers that I don't harp on his age. Compromise is normal; so are love, laughter and patience.

Well, here it is, it's summer. It's hot; it's humid. It's New Hampshire; it's normal. As the day wears on, clouds thicken. Tempers may flare as the humidity gets more oppressive. Then boom! At the end of a steamy summer day, a thunderstorm is normal in New Hampshire. Sometimes a good thundershower clears the air. Sometimes it doesn't; sometimes it takes another shower or a little more space and time. Either way, it's normal. The list of normal stuff is long. Along with all of the above and more, there's integrity, forgiveness and courage. Being normal is not always the same as being easy.

Wishing you a normal summer and bon appétit!



Like what you read? Like to cook? For recipes, menus, tips and more subscribe to my blog

Susan Nye – Around the Table at www.susannye.wordpress.com

© Susan Nye, 2017



Grilled Romaine Salad

Grilling the lettuce adds a wonderful smoky taste that is enhanced with a touch of chipotle in the vinaigrette.

Enjoy!

Serves 8

2 heads romaine lettuce, trimmed and quartered lengthwise

Olive oil

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

1 avocado, peeled and sliced

About 1 cup peeled and chopped cucumber

Thinly sliced red onion ([pickled](#) if you have the time)

1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted

2-3 ounces feta, crumbled

Preheat the grill to medium-high. Drizzle the romaine wedges with a little olive oil and season with salt and pepper.

Place the romaine pieces, cut side down, on the grill. Grill the wedges for about 2 minutes, turning so that all sides are charred.

Transfer the wedges to a serving platter or individual plates, garnish with avocado slices, cucumber and red onion. Sprinkle with toasted pine nuts and crumbled feta, drizzle with Creamy Vinaigrette and serve.

For a one dish supper, add grilled [shrimp](#), [chicken](#) or [steak](#).

Creamy Vinaigrette

Makes about 1 cup

2 tablespoons fresh lime juice

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

2 tablespoons mayonnaise

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

2 teaspoons anchovy paste

3 cloves garlic

1 (about 1/8-inch thick) slice red onion, roughly chopped

1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

1/4 teaspoon (or to taste) pureed chipotle in adobo sauce

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

1 cup (or to taste) extra virgin olive oil



Put the lime juice, vinegar, mayonnaise, mustard, anchovy paste, garlic, onion, Worcestershire sauce and chipotle in adobo in a mini food processor or blender and season with salt and pepper. Process until smooth. With the motor running, slowly add the olive oil and process until thick and creamy.

Transfer the vinaigrette to a storage container with a tight fitting lid and store in the refrigerator. When ready to serve, give the container a good long, vigorous shake to recombine the ingredients.