Heather Williams

Culinary 111

October 31, 2011

Dinner on Me Project

On October 15, 2011, I served my four course dinner to my family. The attendees were my husband Douglas, my mother Deborah, my nanny Tammy, my aunt Yvette, my cousins Aimee & Laurene and Aimee’s boyfriend Jesse. It was nice to get together with my family and they were very excited for me to be cooking a meal for them for the first time since I had started culinary school!

Thursday, my husband took off work, and since we had fall break, we took off to the grocery store. We made a shopping list. Since I was heading to Belle Chasse to cook, I first broke down my list into things I had at home, things I had the house in Belle Chasse, and things I had to purchase at the store. Then I also broke the list down into different sections of the store. Fresh produce, spices, baking supplies, dairy products, meats and more! It took us about an hour to get all of the items on our list except one. I had to stop by Whole Foods in Metairie on Friday to purchase the baby carrots.

Friday afternoon we headed down to Belle Chasse. Once I got everything unloaded from the car, I began to put my cooking items into comfortable places for me to be able to reach while I cook. I got my mise en place together for my vinaigrette. I prepared my vinaigrette then refrigerated it. When I tried to rewarm it over a double boiler on Saturday, it separated. Because it is supposed to served as warm salad dressing, I should have made it right before it was served. I also made my pastry cream and put this into the fridge for later. My mom said it reminded her of the way my grandmother used to make her pudding! I then made a pot if rice for my rice dressing. I did my mise en place for my rice dressing and made this also because I wanted it to sit overnight so the flavors would soak into the rice. I had trouble getting my roux to darken and it wasn’t thick enough. I added more flour but when it had cooked down and I added everything to the rice dressing, it still had a mild flour taste from the roux there.

I woke up early Saturday morning and was ready to cook! I began the day making the parmesan cheese bowls. Everyone was already saying the house smelled good, and all I was frying was cheese! From sitting all day, they were just not as crunchy as they could have been it I would have made them and served immediately. Next time I will make them and serve right away. I quartered my strawberries and got them soaking in the fridge. After I finished this, I began mise en place for the soup. This took a while. I had a lot of things to chop, and the onions made everyone cry. I ended up cooking the onions down for 1 hour 15 minutes to get the carmelization on them just right. I added all the liquids and cooked it down for about 30 minutes. I found the timing in the recipe was very off. I also made my Chantilly crème for my dessert because it can only be in the fridge a few hours. While my soup was simmering, I began to debone my hens. Having never done this before, I had already watched about 10 you tube videos on how. I pulled out my trusty phone and pulled out the video that I thought showed me the best way. I began deboning the first hen by taking out the wishbone. Then I slide my finger down its back to separate the breast meat from the breast bone. Then I cut the joints that connected the breast bones to the wing of the hen on both sides. I then turned around the hen and cut the bone near the top of each drumstick. Then I was able to pull the breastbone out and also trim out the ribcage. I always made a whole in the skin while getting out the ribcage but I think for the first time and teaching myself I did ok. I made my herb butter rub and then stuffed then hens. I then rubbed on the butter rub and tied together the bottoms on the drumsticks on each bird. I put these on the side until I was ready to cook them. I took out my puff pastry and docked them and baked them for dessert so they could cool. I had never done that before but it did not work. I think I may have done something incorrectly but my pastry puffed up huge and when I tried assembling dessert the puff pastry sheets kept sliding off each other. I got the baby carrots all peeled and trimmed and ready to be cooked for dinner course. It was time to get my hens in the oven. While these were cooking, I then made the sugar glaze for the dessert. I think it was a bit too runny. When the hens were finished I took them out.

Time was now 6pm. I got everyone to the table and showed them their men for the evening. I put the French onion soup in the bowls with a bread disk and gruyere cheese under the broiler in the oven and got them toasty for the guest and then served them. While they were eating their first course, I began plating salad. I swapped out course for the guest when everyone was done. When salad hit the table I began cooking the carrots as they were best warm. I cut the hens in ½ and served them with the pan gravy and carrots. I tried to remove the soup bowls, but my guest loved this course and some didn’t want to let go of the bowls! While dinner was being eaten, I assembled the dessert and took a deep breath, it was almost over!! I removed the dinner plated and served dessert. I finally sat down with my family for them to enjoy their last dinner course. They were laughing and telling jokes. It was so good to have us all together over a good meal. They said it was like eating in a high class restaurant. They served wine with dinner and all. I set up the table in fall colors and used my grandmother’s china.

I learned a lot from this experience. I learned not to freak out so much. I panicked all day that dinner wasn’t going to be served on time to my guest, and it was, and exactly at 6pm, when I promised. I also learned it is much harder to cook in someone else’s home when you are not used to their stove or oven. The difference those threw me for a loop a time or two. My family really enjoyed dinner and can’t wait to do it again!