

Survival Cooking . . .

York student tells how to avoid Kraft Dinner at all costs

By SUJATA BERRY

The Great Hall in the Ontario Science Centre is often envisioned as a sanctuary for scientific exhibitions. Yet visitors may stop dead in their tracks when they come upon this coveted area crammed with food. While this may be a rather pleasant shock, it is in reality all part of the Science Centre's Food exhibition.

The term "Survival Cooking" may conjure images of a campfire with roasting marshmallows, but it is definitely "not bush cooking," according to Yves Deschenes, the brains behind the cooking demonstrations. Deschenes is also a fourth year student at York.

The Survival Cooking demonstration is geared toward university students who would like an alternative to Kraft Dinners but do not know how to cook. The objective is to teach the basic culinary skills required to cook a "nutritious meal on a small budget," said Deschenes. Each demonstration shows how to whip up a salad, an entree and a dessert, and recipes range from an easy tuna casserole to an entire stuffed turkey dinner. Handy tips such as how to clean and core lettuce and brush the dirt off mushrooms (instead of washing them) are offered. The suggestions of substitute ingredients, such as parsley and dill was another helpful feature of the demonstration.

While the demonstration lasts for about 30 minutes, the actual time required to cook the meal may be longer. Most of the vegetables, for example, had been already cut. "The time required (for preparation) varies with what is being prepared and the person's ability to carry out the tasks," Deschenes said, estimating that on the average an additional 10 minutes is required to process the food for cooking. A simple meal might therefore take up to 40 minutes to cook, or longer if no leftover chicken is on hand.

At the end of the demonstration the spectators get to sample the various mouth-watering delights. Each person also receives a recipe handbook to take home for reference in future culinary adventures.

Deschenes is taking a double major in Biology and Psychology.

He conceived the idea for Survival Cooking after he saw his peers "eating meals consisting of Kraft Dinner and other pre-packaged dinners." The Food Exhibition, a project which "snowballed," provided the perfect opportunity to put Deschenes' ideas into action.

The Science Centre was only too pleased to accommodate Deschenes (who also works there part-time as a host), believing that Survival Cooking would attract more students to the Centre. Deschenes hopes to continue working at the Science Centre because he considers it to be an "excellent, informal way of educating."

Deschenes admits that "cooking an entire meal costs more than a Kraft Dinner" but he is quick to point out that the advantages in this case far outweigh the extra cost. For instance, "a box of Kraft Dinner costs approximately 79¢ and it contains one serving of carbohydrates with a lot of pseudo cheese."

On the other hand, most meals in the recipe handbook are designed for up to four servings, though the recipes can be adjusted for one serving by reducing the quantities. Some of the recipes are specifically designed to use up leftovers, further reducing the time and cost of preparation. While there is an initial expenditure to stock the kitchen with the basic cooking necessities (eg. pots, spices), in the long term "the meals cooked at home have better value," noted Deschenes.

Deschenes said he had spent \$30 on the groceries for three meals of four servings each, consisting of a tossed salad, chicken cacciatore, and Vishnu's yogurt surprise. A quick calculation shows that according to the above figures each person can have a three course meal for \$2.50. However, this calculation assumes that the kitchen was already furnished with basic food items such as butter, salt, and mayonnaise. It also assumes that there is some leftover chicken.

Conclusion: for roughly just over three times the cost and twice the time required for a packaged meal one can cook a meal from scratch. The pay-off obviously lies in the quality of the food and in the life lasting skills acquired in the process

of learning to cook.

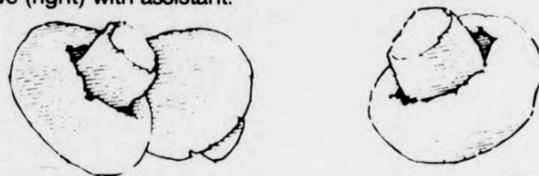
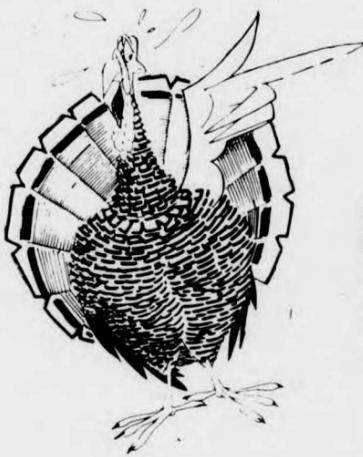
Deschenes tries, however, to be realistic in his goals for the demonstrations. He realizes that "nothing can beat the pre-packaged meals (eg. Kraft Dinner) in the convenience of little time and money," but hopes that the demonstrations will "provide a good start for those students who might be afraid to try cooking." On the other hand he knows it is unrealistic and "silly to think students will cook every day (for 40 minutes) but we (Science Centre) hope that people will try to cook once in a while, even if it is only one course at a time."

The demonstrations are being performed every Friday at 4:00 and 6:30 p.m. until October 17. The demonstrations are free with the \$3.50 admission to the Science Centre. An added plus is that the Charlie Chaplin Festival can be seen following the demonstrations at 7:00 p.m. every Friday (also free with admission).



STEPHEN WISE

SOME CHOCOLATE-COVERED CENTIPEDE LARVAE, PERHAPS? Actually, that's not on the menu at the Ontario Science Centre's Survival Cooking Course led by York student Yves Deschenes, shown above (right) with assistant.



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