

NAPABAYAAN SA KUSINA

EATING ACROSS AMERICA

by Bibot Santayana

Visiting family in the States is always a pleasure. Last summer, the main purpose of our visit was, of course, to see Carlo whom we had not seen since November 01, 1999. But half of the time that we spent in the US, we were with the rest of the family, meaning everybody down the line from Ching's children to Malu. While we visited with Alfie and Helena, the only ones we missed were the rest of the Jun and Nonon Flores family, they being way out in Chicago. We had a great time and, as usual, they brought us to fine restaurants and cooked their *pambato* dishes. That's not surprising as we Laicos are "good *chowun*" as Lola Luz would say. This is what I will talk about -- the fabulous food we were served and the gorgeous kitchens that I got to see.

Mariel and I arrived in Seattle in April and right after we checked through customs, there was Nini with the biggest smile and the warmest hugs. Nini toured us around Tacoma and Seattle which gave us a chance to visit the charming homes of Gumby and Marnie. One very interesting place she showed us was the Pike Place Market in Seattle. It had lots of fresh produce, the most colorful flowers and a wide variety of seafood. One seafood shop had very entertaining fishmongers who would pass the fish like a football, catching everyone's attention. They had the ugliest fish on display, an enormous monkfish, which they had fixed in such a way that the mouth would snap when someone takes a closer look. After watching their little show, we left with our dinner in tow -- a huge cut of fresh salmon.

NINI'S KITCHEN

Back in Morton, Nini set about preparing the salmon in her cheerful open kitchen. Nini's kitchen is newly refurbished with cabinets done in a subtle rosy peach color and halogen lights that can make the most harried cook look like a queen. She had her old kitchen dismantled and brought down to the lower level of the house. She's the only one with 2 kitchens, both clean kitchens; "dirty kitchen" is not found in her vocabulary. In the new kitchen, I was most impressed with her range. The surface was like white glass which would glow red hot when turned on. No problems in cleaning out drippings that get in between coils or gas burners. Remove a portion of the top and attach a grill and it's an indoor barbecue. Just before the salmon was ready, Carlo arrived (from Portland) and we all sat down to a most delicious dinner. Nini cooked the salmon in a light soy sauce, some ginger and green onions. It looked very simple but the combination of flavors was excellent, so that not one flavor overpowered another. At one other time, she served a perfectly grilled steak. That's when I saw how her range can be an indoor grill. The steak was grilled just so that the juices were locked in and the seasoning brought out the flavor of the meat itself. No need for expensive Black Angus beef.

IN NEW YORK, MITOS BROUGHT US TO Carnegie Deli for the famous Pastrami Sandwiches. There's nothing like it. It's hundreds of pastrami slices between rye bread, enough to sustain you through one week of walking in Manhattan. She also brought us to

a new restaurant named Union Pacific for haute cuisine. Mito and Randy are the gourmets in the family. Being so close to New York, they can indulge in this luxury and try a couple of restaurants whenever they are in New York. In Union Pacific, we started with an appetizer of *foie gras*, followed by asparagus with porcini mushrooms, grilled sirloin with lemon grass and horseradish dressing and

fresh greens on the side, capped with creme brulee with grapefruit sorbet for dessert. Unforgettable! But equally delicious was the dinner that Mito fixed at home the night before we left for San Francisco.

THE GOURMET'S KITCHEN

Mito's kitchen is a gourmet cook's dream. Her pantry is so well-stocked. It's the only kitchen I know of with 4 different kinds of salt, 6 kinds of vinegar, several bottles of cooking wine, and herbs and spices that I would not know how to use. Thank goodness she didn't make me cook otherwise I would have ended up with "confusion cuisine" instead of "fusion cuisine". She even has a marble slab for preparing chocolates, which I presume, Jeff the chocoholic puts to good use. She recently upgraded her range and dishwasher. Her range is state of the art. One time I was going to heat up the oven for a few minutes to hold the food and keep it warm until serving time. I thought I had an ingenious idea. And then Mito told me that it wasn't necessary and showed me the holding section of her range. Was I impressed!

On our last night in New Jersey, Mito served a fantastic dinner for some guests and us. She cooked filet mignon, steak marinated in a tamarind/plum sauce, baked salmon with fresh dill, grilled peppers, steamed asparagus, calamari salad, and key lime pie, assorted cheeses and breads, including a delicious olive bread. It was a fantastic dinner, but what was amazing was how she prepared it with no fuss. I never saw her running around in the kitchen.

KUSINA NI AURORA

Rory's kitchen is one part of her house that she's very happy to be in. Rory loves to cook and while we stayed with her she was so enthusiastic about cooking because there were two other people to enjoy it. Her kitchen has an exhaust feature which comes up in front of the range or disappears under the counter at the touch of a button. You hear the James Bond theme in your mind as it does that. She also has a faucet with instant boiling water which saves a lot of time. Her kitchen's colors are very similar to Nini's, but she was very quick to point out that Nini was the one who copied her color scheme.

Out of Rory's kitchen came a variety of specialties for breakfast, lunch and dinner. To give you an idea: man-sized Spanish omelets, eggs Benedict, chicken almonidine, giant scallops grilled in that ubiquitous George Foreman grill, roast leg of lamb, lentil soup, salads created with the most imaginative combinations, tiramisu, profiterole clusters topped with ice cream and chocolate syrup. Bill was Rory's assistant when it came to grilling any



Nini's kitchen

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