

Delicious Dysfunction  
Gran's Noodles 'n Cheese

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300 words

There's a certain comfort in predictable dysfunction. No matter the holiday, the same arguments are there - just in a different sweater. For my family, it manifests in Gran's Noodles 'n Cheese.

It all starts about two weeks ahead of the given holiday. Grandma calls to discuss the menu. We vacillate between protein options and puzzle over the ideal dip for the hors d'oeuvres, and then Gran says with a put-upon sigh, "I suppose I'll have to make mac 'n cheese." I remind her that that goes without saying, and even though we both know that she is going to make the dish, we argue about whether or not it would be better to have a hot vegetable before she acquiesces.

At dinner, when Dad asks for Auntie to pass the mac n cheese, Grampa, starts in, "How can you call that mac 'n cheese. It's noodles 'n cheese. You don't know nothin!" Dad will then refute, citing that it doesn't matter what it's called since everyone knows what he means, and the bickering begins.

Brother waited 36 years before telling Gran that he doesn't like Swiss cheese. Thus began the dark years when Gran would use colby. To set things right, I had to explain that since I was driving the farthest, Brother shouldn't get to dictate the cheese.

Toward the end of the feast, Mom always tells Gran that Gran almost had it right this time, but she'll need to try again. This backhanded compliment is the only way Mom has ever shown love for Gran.

The gloves come out when it's time to divvy up the leftovers. Since having children, Gran has granted me the largest portion, nevermind that I share not a spoonful with any of them. It's just my way of continuing the tradition of dysfunction.

Gran's Noodles n Cheese (taken straight from the woman's recipe card)

- A bag of egg noodles - not the wide ones
  - Some shredded cheese: Swiss and whatever you've got leftover in the fridge (This should come out to about 16-24 ounces.)
  - Whole milk or cream (around 2 cups)
  - Toast, cut up into little croutons, use good bread. (Usually 2-3 pieces)
  - Butter
1. Cook the noodles and drain.
  2. In a big, glass baking dish (the deep, round kind), layer the noodles and cheese.
  3. Heat up the milk/cream in the microwave until it's near boiling, then dump it in the dish. It should come halfway or a little better. Need more? Add more.
  4. Melt some butter and soak the cut up toast in it for a few seconds before dumping the toast on top of the noodles and cheese. Drizzle the rest of the butter on top.
  5. Bake it till it's done. (350° for about 40 minutes, covered. Then another ten uncovered to retoast the toast.