



Making Great Memories

Maybe I'm a bit eccentric. When I started keeping empty bottles of wine at the restaurant, a few people had raised eyebrows, and a handful of intrepid souls actually asked, “Clive, what are you doing with so many empty bottles?” The people who had to clean the restaurant and dust all the surfaces each day had very strong opinions about my sanity: They thought I was crazy!

Our passion was to win Wine Spectator magazine’s Grand Award, so I traveled to France and California many times each year to find the best vineyards and the best vintages for each one. We were invested heart, body, and soul in finding the best bottles of wine for our guests. With the enormous investment of time and attention in finding wines, it seems that full bottles would be our focus, but they weren’t. To me, full bottles are full of potential, but they are incomplete. They have a future, but they don’t tell a story yet. An empty bottle, though, tells a story about a fabulous dinner, a joyful celebration, or a night that marked a turning point in someone’s life.

Empty bottles tell stories and bring back memories of good times with people. Each of the events I've held in our restaurant, in catering, and at my home was designed to create "empty bottle moments" and memories for those who came. For that to happen, we invested a lot of time coming up with creative twists so that every person would remark, "Wow! That's fantastic!" These were the signature moments for me in the restaurant business and with our guests, many of whom became my friends. We built lasting relationships with foundations and organizations, and we hosted dinners to help them raise money. All the work, though, was worthwhile, because I heard stories of lives that were forever changed. Jeff Pinkerton, a friend who worked with me on special events, often reminded me when we were both very tired, "Remember, Clive. It's for the children."

The empty bottles were meaningful to me, but they were even more meaningful to our guests. I grouped empty bottles from particular events, like the 50's night, Poodle Skirts and Flattops, or the Château Margaux dinner. The guests who had come to those events would see the bottles the next time they came to the restaurant, and they remembered the fun they had with us. The bottles also served as a reminder to wait staff of our passion and dedication to serve people so well that they'd never forget dining with us.

*"We make a living by what we get;
we make a life by what we give."*

Sir Winston Churchill

Memories are important to all of us. Of course, some are painful, but we shouldn't let these haunt us. We need to take more time to think about the pleasant, wonderful times we've had with family and friends. God told the children of Israel to set up piles of stones to remind them where they'd come from and where he was leading them. We didn't want to

have piles of rocks in Charley's to remind people of significant events in their lives. Instead, we used empty bottles.

Sir Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give." Empty bottles remind us of the joy in giving our hearts to others. The real meaning of life is pouring ourselves out for those we love, not in hoarding our time and our possessions for ourselves. If we try to hold things too closely, we miss life's most important moments and neglect the people who need our love. If, though, we gladly give our hearts to others, we'll share wonderful memories together. (I bet you're thinking of some right now.) Don't be in a hurry to get "one more thing" done. Slow down, enjoy people, pour your heart into them, and savor every moment—and your life will have hundreds of empty bottles, all full of wonderful memories.

When you look around your home at all the things you possess, you may realize your home is more of a full bottle of potential than an empty bottle of memories. Most of us don't really need all the stuff we've collected. We can give some of it away, perhaps anonymously, to people who really need it. Giving generously—of our time, talents, and treasure—is another way to pour out our lives and create memories we'll cherish for years. We gain much more by pouring out than by holding tightly to what we have.

I believe God delights in creating empty bottle moments for us. He gives us so many good things to enjoy and people to love. Sure, we have difficulties, but these make us appreciate God's goodness even more. God invites us to trust him to make our lives rich and full. He tells us, "Test me in this and see if I don't open up heaven itself to you and pour out blessings beyond your wildest dreams."

In these pages, I want to highlight some of the most memorable times we enjoyed. I'll share the story and give you some recipes for you to try with your family and friends, but I suggest you add your own creativity to each dish and dinner. Don't try to recreate exactly what we did—instead, create your own memorable moments.

Election Night with Mr. Bush

Tuesday, November 8, 1988 was Election Day, and candidate George Bush hoped to become the 41st president of the United States. Some of his friends in Houston, Dr. Charles and Sally Neblett, hosted a gathering in their home to watch the returns that night. The Nebletts were frequent guests at our restaurant, and they asked us to cater the dinner. For the menu, I thought it would be appropriate to prepare dishes from the states Mr. Bush would almost certainly win. The Secret Service came to the restaurant to check us out. When they were satisfied we weren't terrorists or any other kind of threat to national security, we did all of our advanced preparation.



Clive presenting the congratulatory dessert to President Bush and his wife

We arrived early at the Neblett's house to finish our preparation. Soon, the Bushes and a host of their top supporters arrived. At the time, there were only three major networks, and all the televisions in the house were tuned to those stations. Dignitaries and friends watched the news and talked about the vote, but I didn't recognize most of them because I'd only been in America a few years.

Mr. Bush sat at a piano in the living room most of the evening watching a television. At one point, I walked by him, and he called me over. Someone had told him about me, and he said, "Clive, you're an interesting person. You're Jewish from South Africa.

You studied in London and toured Europe, and you've lived in New York and Miami." For about 15 minutes, he told me about his travels and people he had met from each of the countries where I'd lived, and he added a few insights about the politics of those nations. He particularly noted the unrest over apartheid in South Africa. He told me, "Your homeland is troubled, Clive."

It was amazing. The eyes of the entire world were on him that night, but he took time to talk with me about my life.

Late that night, a man from the party came into the kitchen in a rush and told me, "The networks are just about to declare Mr. Bush the winner. Do you have anything we can give him to celebrate?"

I put three candles—red, white, and blue—in a piece of chocolate cake, and as the news anchor officially declared that he had enough electoral votes to win, I presented the cake to him with the inscription: "Congratulations, Mr. President."

A few minutes later, several photographers were taking pictures. Mr. Bush stopped them and called me over to his side. He said, "I want a picture with Clive. He was the first one to call me 'Mr. President,' and I want the picture for the White House."

THE MENU

Crabmeat and Shrimp Flan

Tortilla Soup

Blackened Texas Sirloin

Chocolate Marquís

Crabmeat and Shrimp Flan

Serves 4

2 **eggs**

1 **egg yolk**

1 cup of **half and half**

A pinch of **curry powder**

A pinch of **garlic powder**

2 ounces of **crabmeat**

4 medium (21 count) **shrimp**, shelled and cut in half

2 tablespoons of **cooked corn**

1 tablespoon of **butter**

Sea salt and **white pepper**

Whisk the eggs and yolk with garlic and curry powder. Add salt, white pepper and half and half. Mix well. Butter four 4-ounce ovenproof bowls. Place ½ ounce of crabmeat, 2 pieces of shrimp, and ½ teaspoon of corn in each bowl. Fill each bowl with the cream mixture. Place the bowls in a water bath (a roasting pan with 1 inch of water in the bottom).

Bake at 350 for 10–20 minutes.

Allow the bowls to cool for 5 minutes before serving. (You can make this dish a day in advance and reheat it in the microwave.)

Sauce

6 **peppercorns**

The zest and juice from 1 **orange**

2 ounces of **heavy cream**

2 tablespoons of **butter**

Reduce the peppercorns, the orange zest, and the juice over medium heat until 1 tablespoon is left. Add the heavy cream, and bring it to a boil. Remove it from the stove and whisk in the butter.

Strain the sauce. (If you prefer, use a sweet pepper purée instead of orange butter.)

Turn each flan out on a serving plate, and spoon half a teaspoon of sauce on each plate. Garnish with extra crabmeat or corn.

Tortilla Soup

Serves 6

3 tablespoons of **olive oil**

2 **corn tortillas**, chopped

1 tablespoon of **corn oil**

1 tablespoon of **cumin powder**

½ teaspoon of **chili powder**

2 medium **onions**, finely chopped or puréed

2 **chipotle peppers**, finely chopped

2 medium **tomatoes**, puréed

1 8-ounce can of **chopped tomatoes**

2 tablespoons of **tomato paste**

3 cloves of **garlic**, chopped

4 tablespoons of chopped **cilantro**

2 **bay leaves**

2 quarts of **chicken broth**

Garnishes

4 **corn tortillas**, cut in ½ inch strips and fried in corn oil

8 ounce **chicken breast**, grilled or poached in broth and sliced into ¼ strips

1 cup of **Monterey Jack cheese**

1 medium **avocado** in small cubes

Sour cream

Heat the oil in a soup pot. When it's medium hot, add the chopped tortillas, garlic, chili powder, and cumin, and cook for 2 minutes, stirring to prevent burning.

Add onions, peppers, tomatoes, tomato paste, bay leaf, and cilantro, and bring it to a boil. Cook over medium heat, stirring until it boils. Adjust the seasoning.

Add the broth, reduce the heat, and simmer for 20–30 minutes. Add extra broth if the mixture becomes too thick.

At this point, you can strain the mixture, or you can serve it chunky without straining it. Serve in bowls. Add garnish on top, or allow your guests to choose their own.

Blackened Texas Sirloin

Serves 6

2 pounds of **New York strip sirloin**, whole
1 tablespoon of **oregano**
½ tablespoon of **cayenne pepper**
1 tablespoon of **paprika**
1 tablespoon of **garlic powder**
1 tablespoon of **crushed black pepper**
1 tablespoon of **onion powder**
1 tablespoon of **white pepper**
1 tablespoon of **salt**
1 ounce of melted **butter**



Mix all the spices together. Brush the sirloin with melted butter, and rub each side with the spice mixture. Let the steaks stand at room temperature for 30 minutes.

Heat the grill. When you're ready to cook, place the steaks on the grill over medium heat. (For more about grilling, see "Grilling and Chilling.")

Cook for 12–15 minutes (for medium-rare) turning regularly. Cook for the last 5 minutes on low/medium heat.

Remove the steaks from the heat and allow them to rest for 5 minutes.

Cut the steak into 2-ounce pieces and serve.

For sides, I recommend corn relish, cucumber salad, roasted sweet red peppers, or grilled sweet potatoes.

Chocolate Marquis

Serves 8

3 pounds of **bittersweet chocolate**
2 tablespoons of **Grand Marnier**
2 ounces of **espresso**
6 **egg yolks**
6 **egg whites**
1 pint of **heavy cream**

Melt the chocolate with Grand Marnier and coffee over a double boiler. (Be careful not to get any water in the mixture. That would be a major oops!) Add the yolks 1 at a time, beating well, then remove from the double boiler.

Whip the egg whites until they form soft peaks, and then fold the whites into the mixture.

Lightly whip the cream and fold it in.

Pour the mixture into a plastic-lined loaf pan and chill overnight.

Slice (½-inch wide) with a knife run under hot water for each slice, and serve over a crème anglaise with dots of raspberry sauce.

