

# Over dinner, she nibbled, quibbled, spooned and swooned

For the first column on dining in the formal dining room at Prestonwood Country Club, my husband, James Powers, and I were joined by Cary pediatrician Dr. Virgil Steele and his wife, Anne.

Before dinner, we enjoyed conversation and the pleasantly aromatic scent of a McCallan Scotch. Dr. Steele pointed out that the aroma came from a single-malt, pure Scotch aged 10-12 years in an old cask previously used for aging sherry.

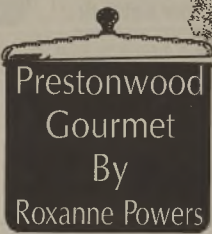
So pleasant was the conversation that I began and ended the evening with social blunders, and threw some more in, between courses, for good measure!

First I caught myself nibbling on Mrs. Steele's bread. How I managed this feat, I'll never know, especially since I first buttered it, which required some awkward maneuvering of the strategically placed butter knife. Mrs. Steele pretended not to notice, but somehow it escaped no one's attention when I ceremoniously switched our bread plates in an attempt to put things right again.

Fortunately, Mrs. Steele didn't slap my hand and formal dining room manager Edward Simpkins didn't rush over to escort me out of the establishment or offer to revoke our membership. Dr. Steele did wink, and acknowledged that the move seemed to make me feel better, then graciously moved to another topic. (I suppose this pediatrician must have felt grateful to be able to call on his skills in dealing with wayward, if well-intentioned children.)

When the first course arrived, I didn't once drool on our guests' grilled blue crab cakes, though I did greatly admire the artistry with which the dish was presented on a plate painted with a lemon-dill and white wine sauce.

James and I were a bit disappointed in our snails. Our palates



appreciate the flavor of rosemary only in tiny doses and, in addition, we couldn't help but naughtily wonder what the snails would have to do to earn the title of escargot. (Mr. Simpkins later informed me that it is only a matter of preference.)

I regret to inform you that with the arrival of the second course, my dining room etiquette again took a slide. Imagine, if you will, the beautiful chilled gazpacho before me. It is perfectly chilled; the tomatoes look so colorful and the celery so crisp, I can hardly wait to taste it. (I place the spoon in my mouth...and get the feeling that I've borrowed someone's baby spoon. I look to the right of my plate and sure enough there's my soup spoon minus its neighbor, the sorbet spoon! For a moment I contemplated cleaning it off with my napkin and discreetly easing it back into its rightful position, but instead I opted to boldly turn it upside down and leave it on the second course plate, thus removing any doubt from the waiter's mind that I knew that I had committed this faux pas, and there, he could forego the pleasure of hiding behind the drapes and snickering into his hands.

Course three arrives. This seems simple enough. Mrs. Steele and my husband have the Caesar salad

prepared tableside; Dr. Steele has the Mediterranean chickpea and spinach soup, and I have a beautiful salad of curly spinach, surrounded by a crescent of sliced new potatoes, all of which is topped with a refreshing hot bacon dressing made with balsamic vinegar and a hint of citrus zest.

We all enjoyed this course so much that the waiter had some difficulty wresting the dishes from our grasp. He did manage to accomplish this, however, and even replaced them with a palate cleansing sorbet; and, I might add, a replacement sorbet spoon which was discreetly provided without so much as a smirk.

I confess that throughout the evening, I was concerned that I might begin choking on something stupid like a flake of black pepper, causing Mrs. Steele to find it necessary to use her emergency room skills. That of course wouldn't exactly be conducive to a good evening for her.

However, we made it through the first three courses drama-free, and were able to relax and enjoy some exceptional entrees. Both Dr. and Mrs. Steele had the sauteed shrimp served on a plate painted with a Thai-coconut cream sauce and mango coulis (an all-natural pureed fruit), jasmine rice (a slightly sweet

rice known as the caviar of rices) and sauteed snow peas.

James had the char-grilled Texas ribeye steak with a red-eye demi-glace. This sauce is prepared with half Jack Daniels, and half-reduced brown sauce, and in spite of the hint of aggression in its name, is so delightfully unimposing that even I could be tempted into becoming a beef convert. This generously sized steak is served with baked potato croquettes (which James described as "later tots") and sauteed string beans.

I'm proud to report that, in trying to restrain myself from going off a

diet, I was able to keep temptation at bay and ordered the slow-roasted chicken with garlic-scented mashed potatoes, sauteed spinach and sweet peppers.

For dessert, Mrs. Steele had the pear torte which is made with a crust of ground macadamia nuts, filled with Bartlett pears and topped with an apricot glaze.

Dr. Steele had the chocolate soufflé, which is prepared with Belgian chocolate and topped with a chocolate sauce anglaise.

James had the Preston pie, a deep bottom chocolate graham crust filled with chocolate ganache,

chocolate mousse, and whipped cream drizzled in chocolate.

I had the brambleberry shortbread, which is two wedges of lemon shortbread topped with brambleberries (defined as any berries grown on a bush, such as blackberries, raspberries and blueberries). The dish was surrounded by a modest (and therefore, "diet friendly") amount of whipped cream.

Dieting never tasted so good as did on this night at Prestonwood. So good, in fact, that I'll be tempted to take on even more calories in future columns.

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## Officer completes training on collisions at crossings

A Morrisville police officer has completed a training class covering the investigation of collisions at grade crossings.

E.J. Hanks was among 36 highway patrol, law enforcement officers, and fire and rescue personnel attending the three-day session, which was sponsored by the Governor's Highway Safety Program and North Carolina Operation Lifesaver, Inc.

Classes at the State Highway Patrol Training Center in Raleigh were conducted by Norfolk

Southern and CSX Transportation police officers, as well as other instructors from North Carolina, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Operation Lifesaver, Inc., is an information and education program to help prevent and reduce crashes, injuries and fatalities as well as improve driver performance at public and private rail-highway grade crossings. The training classes are supported by a \$27,000 grant from the Governor's Highway Safety Program.



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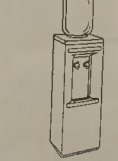
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