

## GILL ARNO'S FISH AND CHIPS FOR RICHARD GARET - March 19th 2021

Dear Richard,

weird times, aye! During this whole year's lockdown I have been thinking about writing letters to my friends (rather than electronically delivered messages) - well, so far I haven't. So I thought about turning my "surrogate" pre-concert dinner recipe into a letter of sorts.

I hug you, and wish you a great gig at the phabulous (!! ) EI Fest/March 2021.

It's been a year or two ago now since my favorite fish and chips joint in Brooklyn shut its door for good. It was like a British space-time bubble on Atlantic Avenue - you'd walk into the dimly lit pub, look at the walls covered in memorabilia and wonder if here "God save the queen" referred to Her Majesty, or to The Sex Pistols.... until after the first pint you would begin to understand it referred to both at the same time. Eventually you would be teletransported across the Ocean just thanks to the place's atmosphere. I have to say that for once the pandemic has nothing to do with the closing, but still it was for me a quite sad event. The good news is that it motivated me to find out the best fish and chips recipe, which I have just so slightly modified in order to suit my not-quite-patriotic leanings.

Yesterday I enlisted my daughter Vera for help and we figured out this whole thing together, which makes the cooking (and dancing) in the kitchen much more fun.

So — first things first — a good music playlist is necessary for good results. Something to sound a little greasy and a little smokey, which is how I like my F'n'C joint's vibe. I am not going to suggest a playlist now, but in case you were curious I will list some of the characters we've brought to the party: Specials, Ruts, Crass, Stranglers, Vibrators, Joe Jackson, The Clash, etc.... and yes, of course the Sex Pistols. You get the mindset that we were going for. Ah, not forgetting Aswad and Stiff Little

Fingers, for some geographical-historical fairness.

Then, you will need to put in your freezer a can of beer and a substantial cup of all-purpose flour. The colder the better, so perhaps you'd do this even earlier in the day, or perhaps just before sorting out your playlist. What we are looking for is the best possible batter: thick and creamy, which is half the point here. And here comes my first apostasy - instead of a classic ale, I go for a good German pilsner, which I personally prefer. While you're at the freezer, pull out all the ice you have in there, and drop it all in a large pot with cold water. You will add to that the peeled and cut potatoes. If I remember correctly, the Brit chips are cut kinda chunky, but not always. What is your preference? You just do that.



Time to start working on the tartar sauce, which is the other half-point in this whole fish and chips undertaking. Tartar sauce is simply mayonnaise sauce with a little extra lemon juice and various herbs. My favorite tartar has very finely chopped chives, scallions, parsley, capers and pickles. I prefer a mix of sweet pickles with dill and crunchy cornichons. Vera and I decided to try and make our own mayo - quite a messy affair, but it was really worth it. Making mayonnaise at home seems deceptively simple, but the preparation could easily go somewhat wrong. I am not sure about the English term for a failed mayonnaise; in Italian it is said to "go crazy" (impazzire): instead of emulsifying the egg and oil end up separated, which I guess is the reason why everyone tends to use supermarket surrogates, including myself and probably most fish and chips joints. I will give you the recipe, just in case. You will need two egg yolks, half a lemon's juice and

about 8 ounces of good, light oil. I think sunflower or grapeseed are the most commonly used, but we didn't have those in the pantry so we used olive oil, which added a subtly bitter flavor, which I think worked quite well.

In a bowl start working the egg yolks and the salt with a whisk or a fork. Then you start adding oil, drop by drop. The secret for mayo success is patience. Especially at first, you must be very fast with the whipping, and very slow with adding the oil. Literally, drop by drop. When your mayonnaise starts to become creamy, you add a little bit of lemon juice. You keep going like this until the sauce has reached the perfect balance of taste and density. Keep in mind that you will dip the fried fish and the chips in the tartar sauce, so you want your mayo base to be a little more thin than usual. Again, just follow your taste and intuition.

Finally, you add the herbs. Yesterday we made two tartar sauce versions, both quite delicious - the one described above, plus a version that instead of the usual herbs and pickles had just some herbes de provence, mortar-ground to dust.

At this point you can pull the potatoes from the pot and thoroughly dry them.

Put the frying oil in the pan, and start heating it up. Obviously the best is a deep pot, and a steel basket is very useful if not necessary for the fries.

Time to think about your batter. Put into a deep bowl the flour with a teaspoon of salt and a teaspoon of baking powder, then add some beer and start whisking. Keep adding beer and whisking until the batter is of a perfect consistency - you want it to coat the fish pieces very generously, so keep it thick! Perfect batter thickness makes up a large part of the difference between great fish and chips and any so-so version of it, in my not-so-humble opinion.



Now light up the oven, which will be needed to keep your fries warm while you fry the fish. Fry them in small batches for a couple of minutes, and just before they start to turn golden, remove them from the oil and let them sit until they cool off to room temperature. Then you dip them in the frying pot again (again, in small batches), until they have reached the perfect crispiness and golden-brown hue. Finally put them in the oven, before getting to the most satisfying part of this preparation - frying the fish.

I prefer cod, because I like the pieces quite thick: the result is a tender inside, enveloped by a crunchy batter crust. Haddock is also commonly used, and you know what? you could fry a variety of things with this batter - shrimps, squid rings, sliced peppers, egg-plant, cauliflower... you name it. I think that anything you'd fry in this batter will be absolutely delish.

Now you cut the fish in big pieces (about two by five inches), carefully blot them, dredge them in flour, and put them in a dish. For the chips we used a frying basket, but not for the fish. One by one, we dipped the cod pieces in the batter and then carefully immersed them in the hot oil. Be careful to have



the pieces coated very thickly. And watch your finger tips while you do this! Then you let them drain on paper towels, and there you go! All's ready for your own (non-virtual) feast!