The Friday Burrito

Hey Hey Mama

Vol. XXVII #13
May 10, 2024

"The success of a production depends on the attention paid to detail."

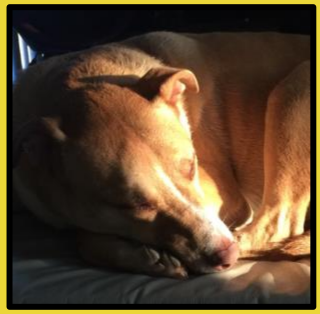
David O. Selznick

"When the market goes to hell, it's more of an opportunity than a problem."

John Fredriksen

"My heroes are the ones who survived doing it wrong, who made mistakes, but recovered from them."

Bono

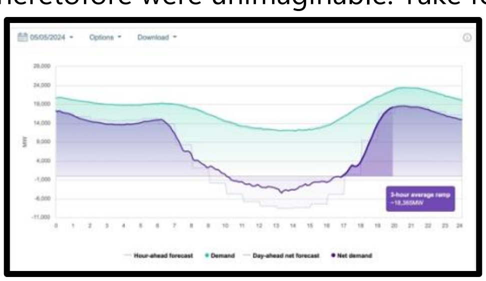


Our beloved 13-year old Halley's Comet eased into the afterworld earlier this week. Her options became obvious … either let her starve and be in pain because she wasn't eating or able to take her medications, or gently put her down. Of course it was a painful choice. However, after seven months or lifting and toting her around because she couldn't walk or stand up, and tending to her needs round the clock, our sacrifice was rewarded in a different way.

Odd, isn't it, that when someone you love depends upon you to endure, your efforts, though taxing, become a calling. It defines your existence even for a short while because the end state is certain although the timing isn't. A rational person would never sign up for that kind of duty. But when the bell rings you are there. Willingly. Kindly. Exhausted at times. Frustrated at moments because you don't know how to help. Nonetheless, you make a sincere effort to be the pillar upon which another's survival rests. God bless our fur baby for all the happiness she gave us. The masthead photo of her, above, is when she was 5-years old.

The Duck Scrapes the Ground

The CAISO net demand curve has of late held many new looks that heretofore were unimaginable. Take for instance the well-established



shape of the curve … the so-called Duck Belly … that each year becomes steeper in the middle as more renewables attach to the grid. Negative net loads have been a daily occurrence. Ye olde duck is scrapping its belly along the ground as you can see above.

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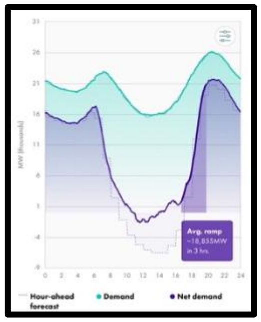
Western States Ticker

CAISO YTD Renewables Curtailment:

As of 4/30/24: 1,899,738 MWh
As of 4/30/23 1,570,570 MWh

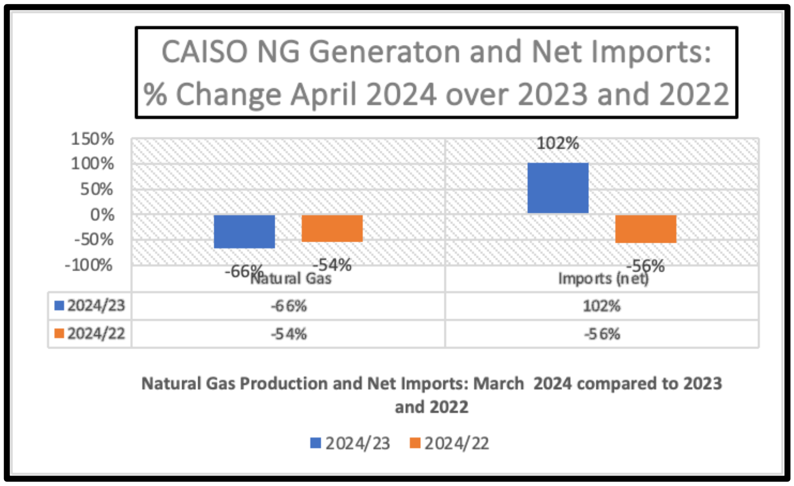
% of solar and wind output curtailed:
YTD as of Apr. 2024 8.64%
YTD as of Apr. 2023 8.17%

I often check the CAISO website on my mobile app and the width compression provides a startling difference in shape, as seen to the right. That ain't no belly, duck or otherwise, more like a canyon. If you see a duck's underside fashioned like that, then run and call the Audubon Society to report a rare new species.



New Highs and Lows

The April supply stack, compared to last year and the year before, showed wide variations. I'm loathe to make broad generalizations. The picture below tells the most recent story whereby



April gas generation is way down but not net imports. I triple checked the numbers to see if there was a data anomaly, but I couldn't find any. April 2023 had a steep decline in net imports but this April the numbers popped back up, albeit lower than 2022 … meaning fewer gross exports, I guess. I'll have to noodle on that some more.

Here are some other observations about year-to-date 2024 compared to last year: Both gross demand and net demand dropped by 3.5% and 8.8%, respectively. Solar generation was up and wind was slightly down by 24.4% and -3%, respectively.

Battery storage real-time discharge hit a new high of 6,758 MW on April 29 at 7:50 p.m. However, be prepared for next month because last Tuesday the 5-minute maximum BESS send out at 8:30 p.m. was 7,196 MW … and that's for the non-hybrid systems only. You can add another 460 MW of hybrid-battery discharge during the same interval to the total (I believe) for a net contribution to the supply stack of 7,656 MW. Don't get too impressed because those send-out numbers swiftly drop off from maximum values during the net peak hours.

Finally, for net demand a new low was recorded last Sunday. The net load at 1:20 p.m. was -4,503 MW. Nary a glitch in the grid. However, both last Sunday and last Tuesday the CAISO renewables curtailments were just shy of 50,000 MWh for each day. That puts those dates

What we believe…

Competition yields lower electricity costs. Stable and transparent rules and regulations promote private investment.

Private investors, rather than utilities, will spend money on new power plants and transmission facilities if they can earn a return that is balanced with the risks.

Private sector investment results in lower average prices without risking consumers' money.

However, when IOUs do the investing, the risks to them are minimal or non-existent because ratepayers effectively cover the utilities' costs.

Overcapacity lowers electricity spot market prices; yet retail rates can still increase in this case due to full cost-of-service regulation.

Markets work best when there are many buyers and sellers.

At-risk money will be put to investment where markets exist that are well regulated and yield credible prices.

And what we should do …

Believe in ourselves.

Actively support the creation of independent, multi-state regional transmission organizations that coordinate policies with respective state utility commissions.

Support rules for resource adequacy that apply uniformly to all load-serving entities.

Enforce competitive solicitations by utilities for purchasing either thermal or renewable power.

among the top 20 all-time leaders although near the back of the pack. Better luck this weekend and next week.

¿Can You Say *Apagones*?

I learned a new Spanish word on Tuesday evening … *apagón* … which means "blackout". Mexico was hit with extreme high temperatures on Tuesday and operating reserves fell below 6%. The grid Continued on the next page

Support choice among retail electricity customers.

Lobby for core/non-core split of retail customers.

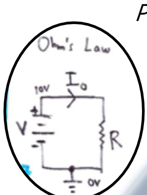
Advocate against policies that limit, through bid mitigation, merchant returns on investment that are comparable to utility returns.

Catch Some Z's

The Elephant in the Room!!

Click here to learn more about Ziad Alaywan

At the expense of making some readers feel uncomfortable, I think it is time to bring up an issue no one seems to want to talk about:



Power prices (known technically as locational marginal prices or LMPs) at the supply nodes have been below zero, as we all know. We also know that under these conditions power suppliers must pay to generate electricity. This phenomenon is unfortunately on the rise in the CAISO market and this year these negative price trends hit a new record. Negative power prices occur when a large and inflexible power generation portfolio is scheduled at a time when there is low electricity demand coupled with congestion.

Negative LMPs have been prevalent this spring during solar hours, even after the CAISO has curtailed 12,722,095 MWh of wind and solar in the 1st Quarter of 2024.

It has been long understood that an LMP-based energy market has multiple benefits including (1) providing a price signal for generation and transmission investment through congestion, which is embedded in the LMP price, and (2) providing a transparent calculation of the marginal cost of producing the next MWh of energy.

The price signal benefits over the last decade of LMP market operation in California have proven to be a fallacy. No transmission project has been approved based on market economics or mitigating congestion costs. All approved CAISO transmission projects were justified based on reliability and public policy. We can debate the causes all day long, but the facts are clear. Transmission upgrades have yet to be justified based on congestion or market economics even with large curtailments and significant congestion.

As to providing transparency on the marginal cost of wholesale energy, I am not sure it is applicable anymore, since during solar hours, all renewable generation without fuel costs has artificially suppressed the marginal cost as reflected in the negative LMPs. This means that the suppliers must pay to generate.

For instance, on March 19, 2024, HE 17, the SP15 demand was about 12,000 MW and 16,000 MW of supply post curtailment resulted in an SP15 hub price of – 6.7$/MWh and – 14.6 $/MWh at SP15 DLAP. This means that suppliers are paying to generate, and load is not paying anything to consume, but rather they are getting paid to consume energy.

Yes—it takes a while to wrap our brains around what this means! Well, don't waste your time figuring this out, because the ratepayer pays the ever-increased retail energy rate no matter how low the LMPs go, and generators are getting paid their power purchase agreement (PA) contract price (unless the generator is merchant or indexed pricing).

We have proven that the LMP price signal for new generation and transmission investment simply does not work as was intended! All generation and transmission additions are state-mandated, or reliability based and LMP plays no, or an insignificant role, period.

So, why all this complexity? My view is that FERC imposed this market structure on California before the state's Senate Bill 100 and the state renewables mandate. Should California revisit the market design? This is the elephant in the room.

operator, CENACE, took emergency action and shed load across sixteen different states including the District Federal starting at 7:30 p.m., just as people wanted to cool their homes. The term *bienestar* literally translates to "well-being", and it refers to a state of being comfortable, healthy, and happy. No one was happy Tuesday night in most of Mexico. *Tan mucho triste*.

The two leading Mexican presidential candidates quickly responded to the mini crisis. Elections will be held this summer. Clearly there has been a lack of foreign investment in Mexico's electricity grid because the current administration has discouraged such from day one during its six-year term that is about to end. The lack of investment in renewables has been especially called out as a leading cause of capacity insufficiency. *El apagón de esta semana será un punto de inflexión crítico en el futuro energético de México.*

Can Data Centers Hamper the Growth of Clean Energy?

Sometimes we reach across the continent to find a sliver of truth in energy stories and a break from the crazy politics of energy in California. Northern Virginia has many new power-hungry data centers that are concentrated around Loudoun County. Data centers tend to cluster together in places that have established networks and access to a plentiful energy supply. The WSJ ran a story last week that reported on the tension growing amongst the electric utilities, angry consumers paying ever higher electricity rates, key customers anxious to tout their green credentials, and state regulators overseeing the proposed infrastructure investments.

The article stated: "*For many utilities, the solution to rising demand is to keep coal-fired power plants burning for longer and add natural-gas power plants to balance big expansions of renewables.*" If the story were in California (as if) instead of Virginia then the friction would be over adding natural-gas power plants. For example, Duke Energy told its regulator that, "*It needs three new gas-fired power plants in the Carolinas. Otherwise, it says it will have to keep coal plants open.*" In another example, Dominion Energy proposed, "*A 1,000-megawatt natural-gas plant, for times of high power demand, in Chesterfield County, where a coal plant closed last year.*"

It is no surprise that companies such Amazon Web Services (AWS), Alphabet, and Microsoft are anxious to slap a green-energy label on their services and products. So, how is this going to play out? The data-center companies are threatening to relocate if they are being blamed for slowing the retirements of existing coal units and adding new gas power plants.

Residential consumers at both Duke and Dominion are increasingly Not-In-My-Backyard about data centers disrupting the quiet Virginia landscape, and the additional transmission lines to serve the incremental load. Additionally, some of these grid enhancements are embedded in rates for all customers, not just the data centers.

Does Clean Energy Mean Lower-Cost Energy?

Absolutely not. When the climate madness first started people touted the miracle of free energy from wind and solar resources. That was an easy ruse to see through from the beginning. You don't hear such drivel nowadays. The capital costs for battery storage and thermal power plant backups keep rates rising.

This week, the WSJ ran a story entitled, "Households Wince at the Rising Price of Going Green" that covered the swell of electricity bills in Europe and the U.S. Per the article: "*Governments that were among the earliest in the world to adopt climate legislation tried to take the sting out of the transition by motivating consumers with subsidies. Now, however, the same capitals are cash-strapped and many are passing the bill to the consumer. Subsidies are being scaled back, taxes tied to carbon emissions are being phased in, and rules requiring expensive renovations are starting to bite.*" Monies for energy subsidies, once a popular item for pols to push, are now being repurposed into defense spending. Especially true in Western Europe as the Ukraine conflict drags on. "*Energy-transition fatigue is setting in. Three-quarters of energy consumers say they have already done as much as they can to be sustainable, according to a survey of 100,000 people over 20 countries by the research arm of accounting firm Ernst & Young.*"

Things In the People's Republic of California

Interview with Michael Peevey on PG&E Asset Divestiture

Michael Peevey is a name well-known in California, but maybe not as much outside of the state, or among public power entities in the West. He is an emeritus president of the CPUC on which he served from 2002 to 2014. He played a significant role in shaping energy policy and regulation in California during his tenure. Peevey's leadership was marked by efforts to promote renewable energy, improve energy efficiency, and address issues related to utility rates, safety, and infrastructure.

Now, ten years after he stepped down from the Commission, his experience with respect to PG&E and it's first attempt to divest a significant portion of its generation portfolio … namely the 4,000 MW of hydro generation assets … provides a timely view on what happened twenty years ago, and the utility's recent proposal launched almost two years ago to establish a subsidiary holding its non-nuclear generation assets and selling a minority interest to a third party or parties. Yesterday, at the CPUC's biweekly business meeting, the full commission voted down PG&E's proposal on the consent agenda. So, in a way the point is now moot, however, it is worthy of investigation to provide a historical background on the strategy.

As Michael and I have done before in previous interviews for the Burrito, I quizzed him to gather his thoughts about the divesture that was going to be part of PG&E's first bankruptcy workout, and how the recent proposal is similar or not with the earlier one. I took copious notes with the understanding that what I wrote below was a summary of what I heard rather than firsthand quotations. Any errors or omissions are mine alone.

The first question I threw at Michael was as follows: "Ten years ago you retired from the CPUC as its President after a 12-year tenure. During that era, you adjudicated over many issues including a proposed PG&E divestiture of its hydro generation plants during the utility's first bankruptcy in 2002. Can you provide a description of what occurred, and how it concluded?"

Michael was quick to cover a wide swath of events that occurred before he joined the CPUC, such as PG&E filing for bankruptcy in April of 2001. For those among us who lived through the epic saga, the case was complex and huge by any measure. SCE was in similar straights to PG&E but didn't take the bankruptcy route. SDG&E, unlike the other two investor-owned utilities, was first to satisfy the conditions that allowed it to uncap customer rates in 2000. Nonetheless, SDG&E also faced huge short-term energy procurement costs, therefore, it sought and received legislative relief that securitized half of its procurement liabilities.

Michael ascended to the Commission by appointment of Governor Gray Davis, and soon thereafter became its president. The energy crisis of 2000/01 eventually calmed down. Yet, the PG&E bankruptcy was a proceeding that extended the thrashing about to find a mutually satisfactory conclusion. Peevey believed that PG&E was eager to remove the hydro generation assets from under state regulation and move the same under FERC regulation which would allow the utility to recover Market Based Rates (MBR) for the hydroelectricity produced. All five of the CPUC Commissioners were against the idea from the get-go. On the other hand, prior to the energy crisis, PG&E was considering auctioning off its hydroelectric assets to raise desperately needed cash. It had amassed properties worth over $1 billion during a century of developing its hydroelectricity empire. Wherever it built a reservoir to store the water that turns the turbines, the company acquired adjacent land. In

2001, when PG&E was scrambling for money, these non-essential lands were attracting interest from loggers and developers covetous of the revenues they could reap from forests and housing sites on parcels long off-limits under PG&E ownership.

The situation stalemated and after two years the principal parties and the bankruptcy judge, Dennis Montali, wanted to reach a settlement.

Montali appointed PG&E's CEO Bob Glynn and Michael to craft a modified proposal. The hydro divestiture was off the table but the lands in and around those mountainous generation facilities were transferred to a new Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council, a nonprofit foundation tasked with recommending future owners for parcels in 21 counties from Shasta in the north to San Luis Obispo in the south. In exchange, PG&E was guaranteed a fixed rate of return on equity at 11.22% for up to nine years, thereby providing financial stability after the chaos that triggered the energy crisis.

In hindsight, Peevey thought the matter was concluded once and for all. Move the clock forward almost twenty years, and he was stunned to learn that the divestiture idea was back for consideration as a fund-raising effort to mitigate the huge investments needed to underground high-voltage transmission lines to avert future wildfires. Frankly, he neither understood the logic of the proposal nor did it make any sense in terms of providing benefits to PG&E's customers. Thankfully, the CPUC disallowed the Pacific Generation LLC spinoff.

My last question for Michael was a bit of a curve ball. It went like this: "How should California's electric utilities honor all of their regulatory and statutory obligations and lower customer rates?" His answer was to the point in that rates cannot go lower while meeting all of the obligations so stated. A radically different regulatory approach to rate making would be required. Something, for example, that sets an annual cap on rate increases to be no greater than the consumer price index. (Ed.–Indeed, that is exactly how my social security benefits are adjusted each year.) It would put enormous pressure on the utilities to reduce costs and possibly lower the quality of service.

So, his is a noteworthy idea but there are no easy or simple answers to control rising electricity rates.[1]

[1] At yesterday's regular CPUC business meeting, the Commissioners approved raising the residential customer monthly fixed charge to $24.15. Customers on low-income assistance programs will be charged $6/month. The claim is that the higher fixed charge will lower average electricity rates by a nickel to 7 cents per kWh.

ENERGYGPS

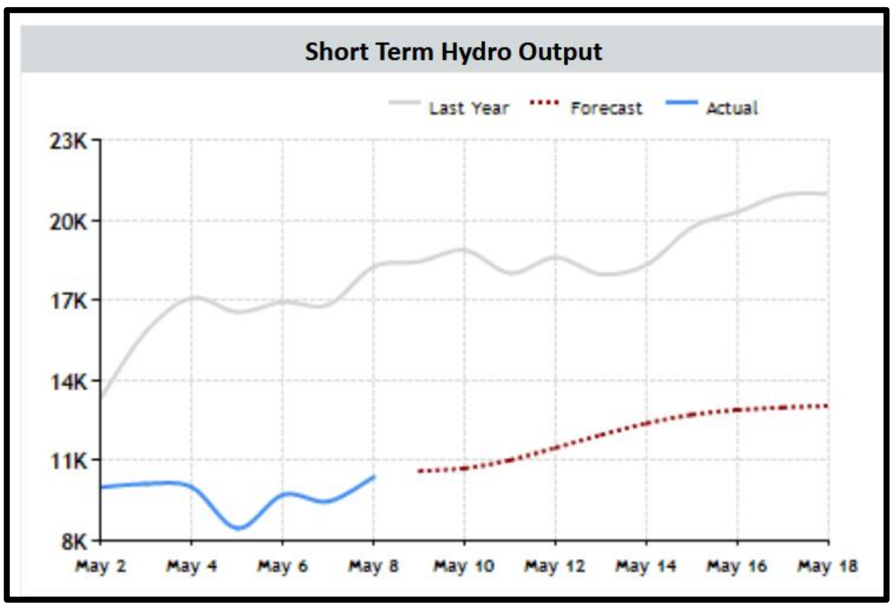
Grand Phunk Salsa a la Energy GPS

The Op Ed below is from the team at EnergyGPS with Tim Belden as the lead author. EnergyGPS covers the hydro landscape for both California and the Pacific Northwest in their West Hydro Sub-Package. To learn more about Energy GPS' offerings please email them at sales@energygps.com.

Ol' Man River He Just keeps Rollin', He Keeps on Rollin' Along

My usual interest in the Pacific Northwest hydro season is even higher this year because of my planned rafting trip this month down the Owyhee River in eastern Oregon. Like many of the smaller tributaries to the Snake River, the Owyhee has a short and volatile runoff. Some years there is sufficient flow to navigate a raft down the canyon well into June and in others the opportunity is gone in early May. I was originally scheduled to launch this week. It would have been a chilly trip with nighttime temperatures falling below freezing and daily highs in the 40s or 50s. Brrrr! Our new launch date is the week of the 20th. The forecast looks much better, with highs next week well into the 80s. In a matter of a week that region has transitioned from winter to spring to summer. Temperatures have gone from 20+ degrees below normal to 20+ degrees above normal.

We are seeing the same trend throughout the Snake and Columbia River basins. River flows, and associated hydro output, will be rising considerably over the next ten days. The figure below depicts the Energy GPS 10-day hydro forecast for the US portion of the Columbia River basin with recent history and a comparison to last year.



Pacific Northwest hydro output will increase by about 4 GW from recent levels to almost 14 GW. The EnergyGPS hydro longer term discussion/forecast, which is part of the Hydro Sub-Package we offer to market participants as part of the West Power Product Offering, details how the production plays out from now through the end of September. The transition to the spring-melt was already well underway at this time last year, with warmer weather triggering a strong May freshet. This is evident in the average megawatts depicted above -- May month-to-date is 7 to 9 GW lower than this time last year. What makes a Pacific Northwest hydro year interesting is you can have the same percentage of normal with totally different outcomes. For example, the 2023/2024 Water Year is currently projected to be 77% of normal for the Jan-July time period. This is almost exactly the same percent of normal as the Jan-Jul period for the 2022/2023 water year. But in May 2023 we saw 131% of normal unregulated (natural flow) runoff which accounted for 45% of the entire runoff between Jan-Jul of 2023.

All of this is to say that the spring runoff in the Pacific Northwest is largely a non-event this year. The short-term bump in hydro output will easily be managed by backing down the natural gas generation that is *currently running in the region. The natural gas plants will run less for a period of time, and when the flows abate, the natural gas plants will come right back online.*

In many years, the spring hydro production has a large impact on oversupply. Fewer hydro MW this spring are providing a small reprieve to the renewable curtailments. Memories are often too short when it comes to appreciating the variability of hydro. This low hydro is unlikely a "new normal", but rather, a part of the routine variability. If you think this winter and spring have been brutal with oversupply in California, drop another 8 GW of hydro into the system for an extended period of time and open up the DC intertie connecting that supply to southern California and we may be shattering the curtailment records next year.

Shout Outs, Murmurs and Recipes

Hardly a shout out, but noteworthy for his contributions as an ALJ at the CPUC, Steven James Kotz passed away last month at age 76. I didn't interact with Steven, but many of my colleagues knew him and respected his work.

Murmurs: I haven't written one of these in a long time. They are based on things I hear from friends and fellow travelers who call or write to me. No facts, just homegrown gabbing. The topic is the western wholesale power markets and the competition between the CAISO's Extended Day Ahead Market (EDAM) and SPP's Markets+. Things move gradually in this industry. Slowly. Snail like. It shouldn't be too difficult to project what will happen while waiting for the pieces to fall into place.

Later today, BPA will hold a customer conference call to discuss significant updates to its Automatic Generation Control (AGC) system and the resulting **two-year** moratorium. That subtle reference to a moratorium is meant to alert prospective generation projects that wish to interconnect with the BPA grid that those same projects will not be allowed to participate in the CAISO's Energy Imbalance Market (EIM) in which BPA currently participates. That said, it further reaffirms BPA stated intention to not join EDAM and instead go with Markets+. The public power entities in the Pacific Northwest are leaning in the direction of Markets+. The investor-owned utilities in the Northwest, Rocky Mountains, and Desert Southwest are hinging their declarations upon what NV Energy does. I recognize that early EDAM supporters are both the Balancing Authority of Northern California (BANC) and the Los Angeles Dept. of Water and Power (LADWP). Neither of those two entities are investor owned, but they are both embedded in the California grid and reap benefits from participating in EDAM.

It seems that lately the NV Energy folks are not attending the Markets+ meetings whereas they have been active in the Pathways initiative that is paving the way for EDAM. That means most likely NV Energy will join EDAM, and so will a host of other investor-owned utilities around the region. Thus, there will be two market platforms with seams issues to be resolved between them. The energy transaction volumes in the two will be different in that one will be large (EDAM), and the other not as large … maybe a 3/4 and 1/4 split, roughly speaking.

There's always a chance that a surprise outcome will arise. But lacking that, the consequences will occupy the balance of this decade.

Hearty Sesame Noodles with Chef [Laura Manz]

"*I am a fan of cold sesame noodles which became the inspiration toward this heartier version. The ingredients can be adjusted to work with available ingredients. Another bonus is that this dish can be served hot, warm, or cold. Proportions serves 6-8 so scale amounts accordingly.*"

In a large bowl, toss together 1 lb. fresh prepared Hokkien egg noodles, ½ thinly sliced cabbage, 3/4 cup finely sliced scallions, 1 Tbsp. of toasted sesame seeds, 1 large julienned carrot, 2 cups shredded cooked chicken and 3 Tbsp. of crushed roasted peanuts. Toss with a sauce prepared with 3 Tbsp. of soy sauce, ½ tsp. of fish sauce, 1 tsp. of hot sesame oil, 2 Tbsp. of rice vinegar, 2 Tbsp. of sesame oil, 1 tsp. of ground white pepper, 1 Tbsp. of fresh grated ginger, 1 grated garlic clove, 2 tsp. of sugar, 2 Tbsp. of creamy peanut butter, 1 Tbsp. of Chinese sesame paste or tahini, 2 tsp. of Sambal Oelek garlic chili paste or equivalent. Adjust seasoning and garnish with additional toasted sesame seeds.

Thanks for sharing, Laura, this week and every edition. I've tried cold sesame noodles twice before, and I'm not a big fan. Actually, I don't find they carry the flavor of the sauce to my satisfaction. But maybe your recipe can change my mind.

In the section below are your stories if you read the meat-eater edition. Have a pleasant Mother's Day and celebrate the women who rear children and pets. It's hard work.

gba

Odds & Ends (_!_)

Birthday Surprise

Last week was my birthday and I didn't feel very well. Waking up that morning, I went downstairs for breakfast hoping my wife would be pleasant and say, "Happy Birthday" and possibly have a present for me. As it turned out, she barely said good morning, let alone "Happy Birthday.

"I thought... Well, that's marriage for you, but the kids will remember.

My kids came into breakfast and didn't say a word. So, when I left for the office, I was feeling pretty low and somewhat despondent. As I walked into my office, my secretary Jane said, "Good morning, boss, happy birthday", it felt a little better that at least someone had remembered. I worked until one o'clock and then Jane knocked on my door and said, "you know, it's such a beautiful day outside, and it's your birthday, let's go out to lunch, just you and me." I said, "Thanks Jane, that's the greatest thing I've heard all day. Let's go!"

We went to lunch, but we didn't go where we normally would go. We dined instead at a little place with a private table. We had two martinis each and I enjoyed the meal tremendously.

On the way back to the office, Jane said, "you know, it's such a beautiful day... We don't need to go back to the office, do we?" I responded, "I guess not. What do you have in mind?" She said, "let's go to my apartment."

After arriving at her apartment Jane turned to me and said, "Boss, if you don't mind, I'm going to step into the bedroom for a moment. I'll be right back."

"Ok." I nervously replied.

She went into the bedroom and, after a couple of minutes, she came out carrying a huge birthday cake... Followed by my wife, kids, and dozens of my friends and co-workers, all singing "Happy Birthday".

And I just sat there...on the couch naked.

Being a Mother

After 21 years of marriage, my wife wanted me to take another woman out to dinner and a movie. She said, "I love you, but I know this other woman loves you and would love to spend some time with you."

The other woman that my wife wanted me to visit was my MOTHER, who has been a widow for 19 years, but the demands of my work and my three children had made it possible to visit her only occasionally.

That night I called to invite her to go out for dinner and a movie.

"What's wrong, are you well," she asked?

My mother is the type of woman who suspects that a late night call or a surprise invitation is a sign of bad news.

"I thought that it would be pleasant to spend some time with you," I responded. "Just the two of us."

She thought about it for a moment, and then said, "I would like that very much."

That Friday after work, as I drove over to pick her up I was a bit nervous. When I arrived at her house, I noticed that she, too, seemed to be nervous about our date. She waited in the door with her coat on. She had curled her hair and was wearing the dress that she had worn to celebrate her last wedding anniversary. She smiled from a face that was as radiant as an angel's.

I told my friends that I was going to go out with my son, and they were impressed," she said, as she got into the car. "They can't wait to hear about our meeting."

We went to a restaurant that, although not elegant, was very nice and cozy. My mother took my arm as if she were the First Lady.

After we sat down, I had to read the menu. Her eyes could only read large print. Halfway through the entries, I lifted my eyes and saw Mom sitting there staring at me. A nostalgic smile was on her lips. "It was I who used to have to read the menu when you were small," she said. "Then it's time that you relax and let me return the favor," I responded.

During the dinner, we had an agreeable conversation, nothing extraordinary but catching up on recent events of each other's life. We talked so much that we missed the movie.

As we arrived at her house later, she said, "I'll go out with you again, but only if you let me invite you." I agreed.

"How was your dinner date?" asked my wife when I got home. "Very nice.

Much more so than I could have imagined," I answered. A few days later, my mother died of a massive heart attack. It happened so suddenly that I didn't have a chance to do anything for her.

Some time later, I received an envelope with a copy of a restaurant receipt from the same place mother and I had dined. An attached note said: "I paid this bill in advance. I wasn't sure that I could be there; but nevertheless, I paid for two plates - one for you and the other for your wife. You will never know what that night meant for me. I love you, son."

At that moment, I understood the importance of saying in time: "I LOVE YOU" and to give our loved ones the time that they deserve. Nothing in life is more important than your family. Give them the time they deserve, because these things cannot be put off till "some other time."