

## **Christmas Pudding Calamity**

**by  
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For some thirty years now I've brought my little bit of Britain to Canada for Christmas. I make my own Christmas puddings. "Plum pudding" to be precise – although why it's called that when it contains no plums is beyond me.

It's a ritual that plays out on an early weekend in October every fall: my over-sized wooden bowl brimming with batter; liberal quantities of alcohol used to soften the flour, soak the fruit and souse the cook; double-boilers bubbling on the stove, steaming each pudding to perfection; and the row of sterilized containers waiting to take care of their annual charge, almost three months of gentle maturation before the festive unveiling. For the whole weekend the kitchen air is laden with the premature aromas of Christmas.

This particular year I asked my wife to get the ingredients during the week: a rich selection of dried fruits, eggs, sugar, flour, spices, the always hard-to-find suet (the ground fat from beef cattle that, as vegetarians, we pretend comes from a four-legged plant), and lots of Guinness and whisky. You can get drunk *smelling* my Christmas pudding!

Now it was Friday night and time to start the production process. It had been anticipation all week, digging out the dog-eared recipe card, making the list for shopping, pre-measuring all the ingredients to maximize the overnight soaking time. I collected and mixed my dry ingredients with loving care. I had only the suet left to measure and add; it had required a special last minute trip to the butcher, not familiar terrain for us vegetarians.

On my way to the fridge to fetch it the phone rang and, being a typical 21<sup>st</sup> century multi-tasker, I answered on my way by and continued on my trek. I rummaged through the fridge and found the white and blue bag of fine-ground suet while listening to my teenage daughter plead her carefully crafted case for an extended curfew. I courageously wrestled her to the ceiling in the ensuing negotiation – I believe my starting point was 11:00, hers was 2:00 am and we ended up at 1:30. I headed back from the fridge, dropping off the phone on the way.

I casually tossed the suet in the bowl, blended the lot with my hands, beat in the eggs and moved quickly to my favourite part – adding the alcohol. I started with a glass of scotch. (That's literally what my recipe says, "a glass of scotch". Is that a shot glass? A 12oz glass? A tumbler? I usually go for a well-filled tumbler, favouring tempered generosity over total gluttony.) I then added one and half bottles of Guinness leaving, of course, half a bottle for the cook's consumption. The whole lot then went under a tea towel and, with

a liberal stir every few hours, was left to soak overnight, plumping up the dried fruit and launching the weekend's aroma-laden process.

Later that evening I had cause to visit the fridge again. Imagine my surprise when I saw sitting on the top shelf, staring resentfully back at me like a dog accidentally left at the beach, an unopened, untouched, unused, full bag of suet. It's probably the only time in my life I've done a double-take with a bag of suet.

Mind whirling I sought the simple and rational answer: "Why did you buy two bags of suet my love?" I calmly asked my wife.

"I didn't," came back the reply.

"Then why is there still a bag in the fridge?" I said quizzically, hoping to share the burden of explanation.

"No idea" she said.

Curious, I advanced on the recently mixed, slowly brewing pudding batter. As I lifted the corner of the tea towel from the wooden bowl a distinct whiff of sweaty socks wafted upwards and stuck in my nostrils. This was unexpected. Where were the sweet aromas of cinnamon, nutmeg and mace? Why was there not that heady scent of alcohol mixed with fruit? What was going on with my Christmas pudding?

It was at that moment my wife spoke up again.

"I did get one other thing at the store" she said. "I was surprised to see it at the butcher's, but we need it anyway. I bought some grated parmesan."

"Was it in a white and blue bag?" I asked.

"Yes" she said, "Why do you ask?"

"Because I just put it in the Christmas pudding!"