

“It takes as much energy to wish as it does to plan.”

- ELEANOR ROOSEVELT



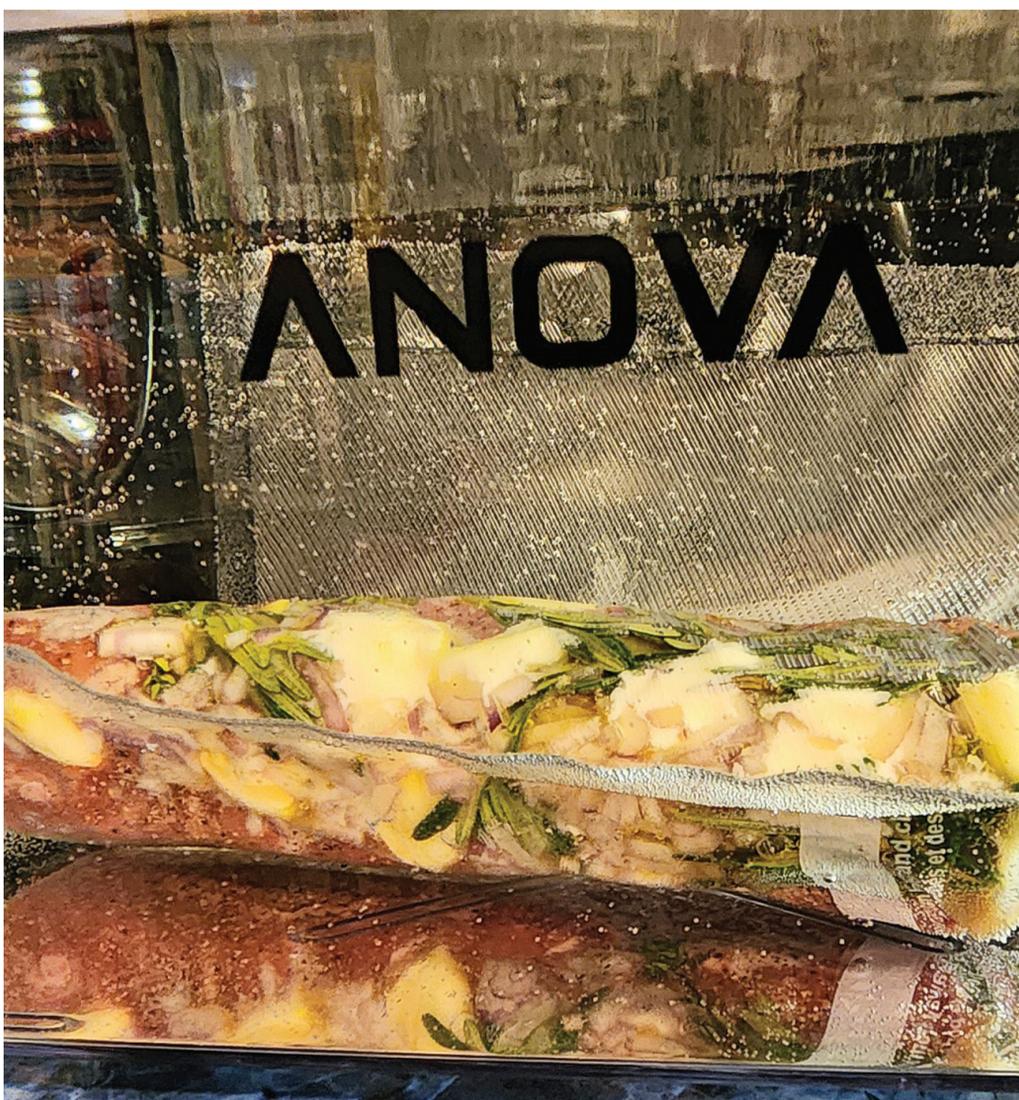
## BITE by BITE

Conquering My Culinary Bucket List One Dish at a Time

By Emily Banks Wooten

“Plan your work for today and every day, then work your plan.”

- MARGARET THATCHER



# ‘You can if you plan’

## Daddy’s words of wisdom still ring true

**T**ime management has never been my forte.

But in all fairness, I’ve made tremendous strides over the last two decades. Just ask those closest to me. Of course, marriage and motherhood had a big hand in that ... and maturity.

Throughout my childhood everyone thought I resembled my Daddy. And I did. As time passes, however, I find that when I offhandedly catch my reflection, I do a double-take because I see my Mother ... if she was carrying an additional 60 or so pounds.

Genetics are funny that way. While I may look more like Mother as I age (and take on more of her mannerisms) I have my Daddy’s personality traits and tendencies to a T. And it makes sense. We’re both Virgos. If you have a little knowledge about astrology, that should explain a lot. We Virgos are known for being hard-working, intelligent, analytical, reliable, loyal and perfectionists. But on the flip side of the coin, we’re also known for being judgmental, critical, picky and control freaks. We’re also systematic, methodical and like routine – which brings me to my point today.

No matter what challenge I may have faced throughout my childhood, adolescence and young adulthood or what Sisyphean task obstructed my path, Daddy always had little nuggets of wisdom. And while some were irritating, such as “If wishes were horses, we’d all take a ride,” there was usually a lesson to learn or a kernel of truth on which to chew.

I’m not sure if it was the Arctic cold front or the subsequent heavy rainfall and flooding, but one day recently I took a self-imposed bad weather day and got busy in my kitchen cooking and meal-prepping and it was amazing what all I accomplished. And I couldn’t help



but chuckle. Even though he’s been gone for 22 years, I could hear my Daddy saying, “You can if you plan.”

I don’t know if you remember a month or six weeks ago when I wrote about some recipes for freezer marinades that I’d found where you mix up a flavorful little marinade in a freezer bag, add the protein of your choice and toss it in the freezer. Later, when you’re ready, you thaw it out and then ta-da, you’re already halfway there to a good, hot weeknight meal. Anyway, I’d never made the avocado-butter milk marinated chicken thighs so I pulled them

out a couple days prior to this day off so they could thaw in the fridge. With a couple of sides – black beans and cilantro rice – that was going to be our supper that evening. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

For Christmas, I asked Santa aka Hubby for a sous vide cooking device. What is sous vide cooking, you may be wondering? Basically, it’s the process of sealing food in a vacuum-sealed bag and then cooking it in temperature-controlled water. French for “under vacuum,” you seal your protein with marinade, sauce, herbs or spices and place it in a large pot of water that remains at

a constant temperature. We’ll save the details for another day. You and I both know that at some point, I’ll write a column about it. Anyway, Santa came through and while I was excited to use it, I was a little intimidated too. I finally got up the nerve for the maiden voyage and did a pork tenderloin that I vacuum-sealed along with fresh rosemary, fresh thyme, garlic, shallots, butter and olive oil. It turned out good and I’ll tell you more about that later. Anyway, there were two tenderloins in the package and I was only doing one. Whereas I’d ordinarily put the second one in the freezer,

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”

- ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I instead put it in the fridge, thinking that would prompt me to use it sooner rather than forgetting about it in the freezer. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

Many years ago I picked up a handy little tip from Ina Garten, star of “The Barefoot Contessa” on Food Network. Get a package of split chicken breasts (bone in, skin on) and place them skin side up on a sheet pan. Rub them with olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper and roast for approximately 50 minutes in a preheated 350-degree oven, until done. When the chicken is cool enough to handle, discard the skin and bones and shred the meat. Now that you’ve got this big mess of shredded chicken, you can use it any way you’d like – chicken and dumplings, chicken noodle soup, chicken spaghetti, King Ranch chicken, chicken enchiladas, and the list goes on and on.

Knowing it would take the longest, I put the split chicken breasts in the oven first and then grabbed the extra pork tenderloin out of the fridge. Having conducted a little more research since my first attempt at sous vide, I knew I could sous vide it and leave it in the vacuum-sealed bag and it would last up to a week in the fridge. I also knew that if I came home from work late and tired, I could pull the tenderloin out of the bag, brown it on all sides for a few minutes on the stovetop and have a delicious meal in no time and with little effort. So now with the chicken in the oven and the tenderloin vacuum-sealed and in its water bath, I was on to the next thing.

I pulled a tube of breakfast sausage out the fridge and browned and crumbled it.

After draining it on a paper towel-lined plate, I added it to a large mixing bowl in which I’d beaten a dozen eggs. I poured this in a 9x13 baking dish and baked it at 350 for 20-25 minutes. After it cooled, I used a drinking glass to cut the sausage/egg mixture into rounds which I then placed in between multi-grain sandwich thins, along with a slice of pepper jack cheese. I wrapped the breakfast sandwiches in foil and stuck them in the fridge. With the remaining sausage/egg mixture that was left after cutting out the rounds, I crumbled it with a fork, placed it in several tortillas along with some shredded pepper jack cheese, wrapped these breakfast tacos in foil and stuck them in the fridge. The sandwiches and the tacos would be easy enough for any of us to pull out, unwrap, stick in the microwave for a little bit and then be on our way with a hot, quick breakfast.

By this time, my split chicken breasts were out of the oven and cooling so I could shred them. My plan was to use some of it to make a big pan of chicken enchiladas and some of it to make Ina Garten’s Mexican Chicken Soup, a recipe we all love from way back. I was pretty excited. I’d only been going at it for four hours and I had accomplished a lot. I’d soon have a heaping pile of shredded chicken, a sous vide pork tenderloin just waiting to be browned, numerous breakfast sandwiches and breakfast tacos and my avocado-butter milk marinated chicken thighs thawed out to roast for supper that evening.

I was feeling quite accomplished. And that’s when I thought of Daddy. He was right. You can if you plan. ■