HAVE A LEEK

The South Fork Fish and Hunt Camp recently celebrated their 25th Anniversary, and a very festive evening it was. T-Shirts were distributed to commemorate the event, libations flowed generously of course, and there were speeches, frequently interrupted by what the attendees felt were humorous asides. Anyone could mumble some random thought and the spectators deemed it hilarious. The highlight, though, was a wild potluck dinner. Each of the fifteen members brought a generous dish, and each dish was mandated to be naturally wild. There were sides of salmon from Lake Ontario, rainbow trout from the spring run into Northern Lake Superior, pickerel and perch. There was red meat, too. Mooseburgers and venison stew, a goose, even bear meatballs.

Vegetables were not plentiful, but there was fiddlehead soup as well as morels, a delicate mushroom found in the spring woodlands. The finest and tastiest vegetable morsels were two jars of pickled leeks. Now leeks grow wild in our part of the country, and are available to the wild forager starting about the time when fiddleheads are harvested, and trout lilies and the parasol-like mayapples make their appearance. They are not at all similar to the huge bamboo-like leeks that one harvests from the vegetable garden. The wild leek is a small unobtrusive plant, looking somewhat similar to lily-of-the-valley, which when dug up has a delicate pale bulb, about the size of a small radish. Leeks are a favourite of deer, so it's a race to see who can get to them first. If the deer are first, I would ask them not to breathe in my face. The bulb, when pickled, has a savory slightly garlicky flavour.

The famous wild food expert Euell Gibbons, in *Stalking the Wild Asparagus,* describes a salad dressing consisting of 1/3 cup cider vinegar, 1 teaspoon of salt , two teaspoons of sugar, ½ cup chopped watercress and 2 or 3 bulbs of wild leeks, cut in small pieces. Stick in the blender, and when blended add a cup of salad oil and blend again. Euell claims your guests will "beg for your secret". If you can't find wild leeks yourself, Vicki sells them for five bucks a bunch.

Jocko Simmonds, a part time carpenter and full time drinker was the South Fork creator of the pickled leek. For five years in a row, his entry had won the all-round pickle category in the fall fair, an accomplishment of no small measure as he was competing against dozens of superlative and experienced farm picklers. Many at the South Fork anniversary dinner requested the recipe from Jocko, and without hesitation Jocko revealed his secrets. After all, the guys shared their fishing and hunting secrets with one another, at least most of them did. Jocko used more than vinegar, salt and water in his pickling recipe, and it was the additional elements which made his pickled

leeks so uniquely tasty.

One of the newer members of the South Fork Club , John Lane, was a retired stock trader from Toronto. Perhaps because of the highly competitive nature of his trade, John was not as forthright as the other members. He tended to keep his secrets to himself while eagerly eliciting information from others. It was an issue, it bothered some of the South Fork members, but they were a forgiving and gregarious group so it was overlooked. His behaviour was deemed standard operating procedure for a stock trader.

At the ensuing fall fair, there was an new pickled leek entry. It came in a fancy be-ribboned pale blue jar. The container should not influence the decision of the judges, and probably this one didn't. Still, it could be that the judges recognized the prosaic container of five time winner Jocko, and with the taste of both entries being virtually indistinguishable, they awarded first place to the newcomer. The new entry came from none other than John Lane who had carefully noted the recipe at the anniversary dinner. Apparently, he had harvested the wild leeks while stream fishing for spring rainbows in a location overheard at one of the South Fork meetings.

No one in the fishing club was happy about the