

Swede's birthday featured "toasted cheese sandwiches" and a favorite family dish: a chowder made with red-skinned potatoes and northern pike.

"Seasoned with vinegar and pepper this was our king of soups; a person didn't even want to put crackers in it," says Reuben. Even though Mr. Land had made only a regular batch, and surprise visitor Lurvy (the salesman) had downed five bowlsful, "the pot was replenished as though from a well."

"Make of it what you will," Reuben says.

Red Potato Chowder with Northern Pike

Makes 6 servings

(Or as many as needed, if you're Jeremiah Land)

1 ½ pounds filleted and deboned northern pike (or cod or other flaky whitefish), cut into 1-inch pieces

Salt and pepper to taste (or Old Bay seasoning)

4 slices bacon, chopped

1 ½ cups chopped yellow onions

1 cup chopped celery

1 teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon black pepper

1 tablespoon minced garlic

¼ cup flour

2 tablespoons sherry or dry white wine

2 tablespoons cider vinegar

1 ½ pounds red-skinned potatoes, peeled (or not) and cut into ½-inch dice

3 cups fish stock or canned chicken broth

1 ½ cups half-and-half cream (or cream plus milk)

3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

Season the pike with salt and pepper.

In a medium, heavy stockpot, cook bacon over medium-high heat until just crisp and fat is rendered, about 4 minutes. Add onions, celery, salt and black pepper and cook until soft, about 3 minutes. Add garlic and cook, stirring, 30 seconds. Add flour and cook, stirring constantly, until flour turns the color of peanut butter, about 4 minutes. Add sherry and vinegar and cook 2 minutes. Add potatoes and stock, bring to a simmer and simmer 10 minutes. Add half-and-half and bring to a boil. Add pike, lower heat and simmer until fish flakes, about 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in parsley and serve hot in soup bowls.

Serve with shredded cheese, if desired, and crusty bread.