

The characters in his stories are often based on ones he heard in Cape Verdean folktales. There's Nhalobo, a trickster-wolf character, a lazybones who tries to get other people (or animals) to do his work for him. Then there's the spider named Ananzi, whose waist got so thin because he wanted to eat every meal in every house he passed (how that made his waist thin is another story).

There are also characters like Shidoo, who's always telling people what they should do, and Brother Yawta, who's always saying "you oughtta." They may come more from Len's own creativity than from Cape Verde lore. Wherever they come from, his audiences love hearing about them.

Because he remembers his own food experience as a child so fondly, Len knows that kids don't dislike healthy food—they're just not familiar with it. Their parents, often both holding jobs, don't have the time for preparation, or it's not a priority. Some of the kids in the Edgewood

Highland class who had trouble naming a vegetable may rarely see a green one on the table at home.

Len says, "I grew up on a farm. I knew where the food came from. My chores were weeding and picking. I knew what grew underground and what grew above the ground. Kids today think that food comes from a supermarket."

Obesity troubles him. "Kids' diets are so bad, so heavy on sugars, their livers are aging prematurely."

Another priority: reading. On this day at Edgewood Highland, Len's wearing a T-shirt with the word READ on the front. At the end of his program, he points to all the books in the library, and says, "So many of my stories I found in books. If you read these beautiful books in this library, you'll find more stories, wonderful stories, and you can tell them to your friends."

And maybe some of those storytellers will ask for greens for dinner tonight. *eR*

RECIPE

JAGACIDA (RICE & BEANS)

From Len Cabral

This traditional Cape Verdean recipe for "Jag" is one of Len's favorite dishes to cook at home.

1 Tbsp unsalted butter
1 medium yellow onion, peeled and diced
1½ tsp ground cumin
1½ tsp paprika
Kosher salt
3 cups water
1½ cups converted rice (Uncle Ben's)
1 (15.5 ounce) can red or white kidney beans
(or beans of your choice)
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
¼ cup flat-leaf parsley, washed, dried and chopped

In medium saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Add onion; cook and stir about 5 minutes until onion is soft and translucent. Add cumin, paprika and ½ teaspoon salt and sauté with onion for 2–3 minutes.

Add water and bring to a boil. Add rice and use fork to combine. Cover pan and reduce heat to low simmer. After 10 minutes, add beans and use fork to lightly combine. Simmer approximately 10 more minutes, until rice is cooked. Check seasoning, adding salt and pepper to taste.

Fluff with fork. Sprinkle with flat-leaf parsley and serve. Serves 6.

See Len's recipe for Galinha Guesada at ediblerhody.com

John Schenck recently moved to Rhode Island from Manhattan. John's poetry blog, TheMillennialPedestrian.com, posts a new poem regularly. His daughter, Liz Phillips, writes for *edible MEMPHIS*.

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