INGREDIENTS:

1 tablespoon + 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided

1 small/medium sweet yellow onion, diced small

1 clove garlic, peeled and minced finely

1/4 cup all-purpose flour

2 cups low-sodium vegetable stock (chicken stock may be substituted)

2 cups fat-free half-and-half

2 cups broccoli florets + stems, diced into bite-size pieces

2 large carrots, trimmed, peeled, and sliced into very thin rounds, about 1/16th-inch

3/4 teaspoon salt, or to taste

3/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, or to taste

1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika or regular paprika, optional and to taste

1/2 teaspoon dry mustard powder, optional and to taste

1 pinch cayenne pepper, optional and to taste (doesn’t make soup spicy and serves to enhance flavor)

8 ounces grated extra-sharp cheddar cheese with a small amount reserved for garnishing bowls

DIRECTIONS:

In a small saucepan, add 1 tablespoon butter, the diced onion, and sauté over medium heat until the onion is translucent and barely browned, about 4 minutes. Stir intermittently.

Add the garlic and cook about 30 seconds, stirring constantly so it doesn’t burn. Remove from heat and set pan aside.

In a large heavy-bottom pot add 4 tablespoons butter, flour, and cook over medium heat for about 3 to 5 minutes, whisking constantly, until flour is thickened.

Slowly add the vegetable stock, whisking constantly.

Slowly add the half-and-half, whisking constantly.

Allow mixture to simmer over low heat until it has reduced and thickened some. Whisk intermittently to re-incorporate the ‘skin’ that inevitably forms, this is normal.

While mixture is simmering, chop the broccoli and carrots. After simmering 10 minutes, add the broccoli, carrots, and the onion and garlic you previously set aside.

Add the salt, pepper, optional paprika, optional dry mustard powder, and optional cayenne. Stir to combine.

Allow soup to simmer until it has reduced and thickened some. Whisk intermittently to re-incorporate the ‘skin’ that inevitably forms, this is normal.

While soup simmers, grate the cheese. After simmering about 10 minutes, add most of the cheese, reserving a small amount for garnishing bowls. Stir in the cheese until melted and incorporated fully, less than 1 minute.

Transfer soup to bowls, garnish with reserved cheese, and serve immediately.