Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are
Anthelme Brillat-Savarine (The Physiology of Taste, 1825)

Dear students,
Thank you for these wonderful personal stories, and for your participation in the Literary Feasts. I think that together, this semester, we have indeed learned a lot about what we eat and what we are.

I hope that whenever you are eating or reading about food, the subjects of our discussions will continue to inspire you. Buon appetito! ~SC

Bear in mind that you should conduct yourself in life as at a feast.
~Epictetus (Stoic philosopher, 135 AD)

Grazie mille ….
Many thanks to Hanna Howell and Genevieve Dukes for the editing of this book, and to Sarah Boyd for the cover art.
Table of Contents

Mamie’s Sweet Dough by Sydney Alfonso ........................................... 2
Finding Home: A Culinary Journey by Claire Bovet ............................... 3
Rediscovering Lost Appetites by Sarah Boylan .................................... 5
Apples by James Burke ..................................................................... 7
A Taste of the Caribbean by Phil Camille ........................................... 9
Raw Memory by Galen Carroll .............................................................. 10
Many Names for the Same Thing by Anna Clements .............................. 11
In the Kitchen with My Father by Alexis Coolidge .................................. 12
Summer Days and Salsa by Genevieve Dukes ........................................ 14
The Real Pleasures of Nestlé Tollhouse by Ali Fox ................................. 16
Fish for All by J.P. Garofalo ................................................................. 17
The Art of Técito by Danielle Gladstone ............................................. 19
Rob, Where are Your Shells? by Michael Griffin .................................. 20
A Farm to Table Lifestyle by Sophia Gubernick .................................... 22
La Table: Then & Now by Charlotte Heilbronn .................................... 24
The Oyster, Considered by Hanna Howell ........................................... 26
Stories of a Food-Obsessed Family by Spencer Hurst ............................ 28
Heart Food by Teddy Kuo ................................................................. 29
An Identity Rediscovered at Supper by Michael Longo ............................ 31
Salsa Adventures by Maggie Melberg .................................................. 33
Fresh Food and Dancing Rocks by Alice Pfeifer ................................... 35
The Power of Matzoh Ball Soup by Laura Romig ................................... 37
Our Own Holiday by Julie Seo ............................................................. 38
Catherine’s Cookies by Margaret Souther ............................................ 40
Family and Food by Sarah Steinle ....................................................... 41
Texas Pecan Pie by R. Heath Townsend Jr .......................................... 43
A Transparent Meal by Dana Tripp ....................................................... 44
Italian Culture in Eagle Bay, NY by Jack Viellieu ................................... 46
The Lobster Cookout: Caveman Style by Reeve Waud ............................. 48
**Mamie’s Sweet Dough**  
Sydney Alfonso

*If God had intended us to follow recipes,  
He wouldn’t have given us grandmothers.*  
~Linda Henley

My mom always said that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. I’ve since developed a personal philosophy that every breakfast should therefore begin with a pastry. While I occasionally succumb to oatmeal or egg white omelets after reading health magazines or seeing the tall girl in her tight jeans, somehow I can never seem to shake my baked good addiction.

It’s not that I don’t eat healthy; on the contrary, I am an avid proponent of veggies and exercise but at breakfast the weakness comes out in me. In my quest to discover where this atypical lack of restraint comes from, I realized that I have one especially strong memory that might help explain my fanaticism for early morning pastries.

Every Christmas morning was not a rush towards the tree for presents but rather towards the island in the middle of the kitchen where the antique white platter ceremoniously presented piping hot cinnamon rolls. Even as a little girl, cinnamon rolls came before stockings and gifts. I remember waking up to the smell of melted butter and cinnamon and watching my mom unstick them from the old black round pan. I always got to eat the softest one in the middle. The one that was protected by the surrounding bigger rolls so that it came out perfectly baked with just the right amount of doughy goodness.

My grandma made this dough during my mom’s childhood because it was so basic that you could use it for multiple types of rolls. Her baking was a reflection of who she was as a person—simple, practical and productive. She was a woman for which the word impossible did not exist. After my grandpa died, my grandma who had no education worked her way up the ladder to become a respected office manager for one of America’s biggest baseball teams. She supported the family, launched a career and still made time to bake.

Using my grandma’s recipe, my mom would make a big batch of dough the night of the 23rd. As she would knead it, the reddish birthmark on my mom’s ring finger seeped through the translucent flour. She would let it rise overnight and use it for the dinner rolls for the annual Christmas Eve party and use the left overs for a small batch of cinnamon rolls the next morning. Running a single parent household, especially during the holidays, is not an easy task. In a way, the simplistic dough allowed my mom, like my grandma, to do it all. She was the party planner, the chef and the mom whose love and time went into making homemade cinnamon rolls.

The recipe card has caramelized stains on the front and the black handwriting is fading. It makes me think about the struggles my grandma and mom have gone through and how amidst chaos, they were both able to turn something basic into something special. Eating pastries in the morning reminds me of Christmas, of strength and of love. If my grandma could have given me a recipe for life, I think she would say that it should be simple. Do the best with what you have, make an effort to show people you care and definitely, definitely eat pastries for breakfast.

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**Mamie’s Sweet Dough Recipe**

1/2 cup sugar  
2 tsp grated lemon rind  
1/2 cup vegetable oil  
2 teaspoons salt  
2 packages dry yeast  
2/3 cup milk, scalded, and then cooled  
2/3 cup lukewarm water  
2 eggs, beaten  
5 cups flour

Soften yeast in half the water with a pinch of sugar added. Set aside.

Combine milk, oil, sugar, salt and remaining water. Stir in one cup of flour, then add the eggs and yeast mixture. Mix in the remaining 4 cups of flour; turn out onto floured counter and knead for about 2 minutes until smooth.

Grease a large bowl with oil, then place the dough in the bowl to rise. Let rise for about 45 minutes, or until double in size; punch down and let rise again. Bake at 350 for about 30 min.
Finding Home: A Culinary Journey
Claire Bovet

“If you want to make a friend, go to someone’s house and eat... The people who give you their food give you their hearts.” – Cesar Chavez

The French love holidays, and they also love food. In fact, there are so many national holidays in the month of May that a typical employee in France will only work 12 days of that month, and there is still high demand for the customary two full months off in July and August. Many French holidays incorporate food, such as the galettes des Rois on Epiphany and crêpes at Candlemas. So when the leaves began to fall during my semester abroad, I decided it was the perfect occasion to introduce my French host family to American Thanksgiving.

Poitiers is one of my favorite places in the world and a stunningly beautiful medieval city, but the thought of finding ingredients for a full-blown feast there unnerved me more than a little. My first quest was to secure a turkey, one large enough to feed the growing guest list that now included my host parents, my American friend and her host family, my Finnish housemate, and two other friends from Bordeaux. I began at the market, housed at the top of the town’s steep hill and in the shadow of its beautifully unique Romanesque church. Twice a week, the cobbled square was packed with vendors of saucisses, honey, flowers, fish, and freshly baked bread, a whirl of colors, smells, and spirited voices. I weaved through rows of lovingly shaped goat cheese pyramids, resisting the urge to leave with half a kilo of cool, creamy chabichou, and approached one of the larger poultry stands. I tentatively made my request, and the poulailler responded with incredulity. “A turkey? At this season? Come back in a month!” After inquiring with several other poultry suppliers, one stand finally informed me that they could secure a turkey for the next week.

Flushed with relief and embarrassment, I chose the largest size of bird, thinking that in the States, its equivalent would be a largeish chicken and not a turkey. At home, my family usually chooses the smallest turkey we can find. In France, though, where birds live outside and away from hormones and antibiotics, they are much closer to their natural wild size. I left the market that day thoroughly excited for the French turkey, but little did I know that another ingredient would prove even harder to find.

Cranberries, a New World fruit, have apparently never made their mark on the French. No market stall, supermarket, frozen foods store (yes, the French shop at stores containing entirely frozen food), or boutique shop within 10 kilometers of Poitiers carries cranberries. I trekked around the region by foot, bike, bus, and car in my search for cranberries – fresh, frozen, or canned would do – but with no success. Ironically, I don’t even like cranberry sauce, and never take any at Thanksgiving meals at home. But I felt the need for this very American tradition, not only for its symbolic importance in the first Thanksgiving feast but also its very Americanness. Despite my lack of love for cranberries in general, I wanted their presence at this special meal, a stronger tie to years at home. I continued my hunt for the fruit, which lacks even a name in ‘proper French,’ forcing me to use its Québecois appellation, up to the day before Thanksgiving.

Yet, as the feast day approached, I found my other preparations going surprisingly smoothly. I had never prepared an entire Thanksgiving meal, or even contributed more than a few pies, stuffing, or side dishes to our family’s meals at home. The day before my big Thanksgiving was filled with baking pies, using the wonderfully nutty small pumpkins found in the market, with the help of my lovely housemate Mira. Mira and I bonded instantly over cooking, and the two of us shared every dinner, and many breakfasts and lunches, over the four months of my stay. Her enthusiasm for this project fueled feverish baking, boiling, and chopping over the next 24 hours, but by the time our friends from Bordeaux arrived, most of the kitchen was under control.

A few minor cross-cultural confusions ensued before the meal, most amusingly the reaction of my host mother upon opening her old blue cooler to find the turkey brining the day before the feast. “Mais qu’est-ce que c’est? You’ll drown him!” The French make liberal use of butter to confer moistness, so the idea of soaking a bird in saltwater was a complete shock to Béatrice. In addition, our agreed-upon dining time of 3 pm struck all the French guests as highly unusual, and the other host family in attendance nearly missed the meal because they couldn’t imagine that the meal really would start in mid-afternoon.

When our guests began to arrive, I realized how much I had turned out from our tiny kitchen, with its small electric burners and oven barely large enough for a very small turkey. The bird, perfectly golden, was resting and ready to be carved. Mounds of
stuffing made with fresh baguette and celery waited on the sideboard, next to several pounds’ worth of mashed potatoes. Green beans with almonds, Mira’s wholesome bread, pumpkin pies, and a fresh salad were lined up in their serving dishes. The gravy, made from the best recipe in the world that is my mother’s specialty, simmered gently on the stove. The dining room table radiated Old World elegance, draped in Béatrice’s best lace tablecloth over a linen silencer and graced with amber-colored tapers made in the candleworks that has operated in Poitiers for eight hundred years. Small ornamental pumpkins and a foldable crêpe turkey added a touch of Thanksgiving festivity to the ensemble, but one thing was still missing: the guests.

As we untied aprons and moved to the dining room, my host father surprised us with a Champagne toast: “To food, friends, and family!” On a festive note, everyone took their places as I carved the turkey and brought out the remaining dishes. I held my breath as my French guests took their first bites, remembering the conventional wisdom that American cooking doesn’t suit French tastes. Soon, though, the air was filled with compliments and the sounds of contented eating. Our table, spanning three generations, was united in the triumph of the meal and in many good conversations over the course of the evening. The steaming trays of food were gradually diminishing, glasses of wine were emptied and refilled, and an atmosphere of conviviality descended over us. At that moment, with my dearest friends from around the world and two sets of host parents, I felt more a part of the French family experience than ever. How strange and wonderful, that the most unifying meal so far, when I felt most immersed in French life, was also the most American of all meals.

The evening ended on a perfect note, with a full moon rising over the river Clain, right in our backyard, as we bade farewell to the guests and promises to visit those in Bordeaux very soon. And in the contented aftermath of the meal, no one missed the cranberry sauce for a moment.

At the market, ingredients for the meal: squash, onions, nuts...

Mom’s amazing gravy
This simple, time-tested recipe never fails and makes the most satisfying, crowd-pleasing, delicious gravy in the world.

Drippings from roast
1 C flour
2 C milk
1/2C broth our bouillon
Salt to taste

Pour pan drippings into a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add broth or bouillon and allow to heat but not boil. Using a shaker (or any container with a tight-fitting lid), vigorously shake together 1/2C flour and 1/2C milk over the sink until thoroughly mixed. Whisk into broth mixture. Repeat with remaining flour and another 1/2C milk. Once the mixture begins to thicken but before it clumps, add enough milk to maintain texture. Season to taste and keep warm until ready to serve. Serves 4-6.

A big, happy family after the meal!
Rediscovering Lost Appetites
Sarah Boylan

“Dining with one’s friends and beloved family is certainly one of life’s primal and most innocent delights, one that is both soul-satisfying and eternal.” – Julia Child

Growing up in a suburb of Boston, there was a surprising abundance of fresh food available. From my back porch, I could see Connor’s Farm located down the street and walked there often during the summer to pick up strawberries and other fruits. Despite this access to local and fresh food, my mother did not cook much. Whether it was a frozen chicken pie with a baked potato or a premade dinner from the restaurant down the street, I rarely ate homemade meals with the exception of Thanksgiving and Christmas. I have never blamed my mother for lacking cooking expertise but rather acknowledge and commend her efforts to give me and my brother healthy, well-balanced meals any way she could. As a young girl, my friends would tell me about how their mothers were basically gourmet chefs in comparison. When I would ask my mom why we didn’t have a pantry filled to the brim with spices and raw ingredients, she simply told me that she didn’t inherit her mom’s cooking mastery so she wouldn’t even know what to with stuffed cabinets. The oldest of five, she was in charge of looking after her brothers and sister while her mom prepared their meals. Once her sister Maureen was old enough, she spent a lot of time in the kitchen with their mother, learning how to create the family dishes. I never got to know my grandmother, the possible link to my cooking education, because she developed Alzheimer’s when I was a child; it appeared that my hopes to learn to cook had died with her.

When my mom had to do errands, I would go to Maureen’s house to play with her sons. As a young girl who was excited to hangout with the adults, I always hoped to go over on a night when she was planning to cook her famous lasagna. I can still remember sitting in her small kitchen attempting to help her prepare the dish that I thought was so complicated at the time. In a three-part process, she would first cook the lasagna noodles in a pot so big that I could sit in it, while simultaneously preparing the meat sauce. I would diligently stir the sauce and keep an eye on the boiling water, my aunt as captain and myself as first mate. Once the timer went off and she confirmed that all the ingredients were cooked, we would together stack layers upon layers of noodles, cheese, and sauce in a large, glass baking pan. In the last phase of preparation, she would put the dish in the oven to cook and in no time, the smell of the baking lasagna would fill her small house. I would sit in a chair in the kitchen and imagine the cheese melting and sauce popping inside the oven as it baked to perfection. Once it was served, I always ate with a smile, proud of the work that my aunt and I had done. Maureen would wink at me as our family and friends gave us complements on our perfected recipe. Unfortunately, I didn’t see my aunt very much after I started middle school and again, the connection I had to cooking faded.

I reconnected with my aunt this past summer and went to stay with her in the small beach town of Rockport, MA. As I drove to her house, my mind raced between nerves and excitement, finally settling on memories of the kitchen that we had spent so much time in so long ago. Not having seen her or her three sons for eight years, I started to worry that I had made the wrong choice in coming to stay with her for the summer. When I arrived, I hesitantly rang the doorbell and Maureen quickly opened the door, immediately embracing me in a big hug. Following her were her unbelievably grown up sons, Corey, Myles, and Jami, who seemed to have grown like weeds since I had last seen them. I immediately flashed back to that small kitchen in which I had played school with Corey when he was just 5 years old, the same one that filled my memory with the smell of lasagna.

I spent a lot of time in the kitchen that summer; as the most central part of the house, it was where we ate, talked, danced, and cried. After I had time to settle in, Maureen asked me to help her prepare dinner and once we began cooking together, the sense of nostalgia for those carefree days in her kitchen overwhelmed me. She believed in eating organic and bought her vegetables from a company that brought local, organic Vermont food directly from the farm to the customers. I was ashamed that I had lived in Vermont for two years and had not fully tapped the amazing food resources available to me. As I was searching for a beach chair one day, I discovered the recipe box that she had inherited from her mother. As I later found out, my aunt and grandmother had ordered the box of over 500 recipe cards off a television commercial when she was my age. I took the heavy container off the shelf and examined every single recipe; I could tell which ones were her favorites because the yellow paper had begun to fade on some
and remnants of flour, butter, and other ingredients covered others. Choosing one that looked appetizing, I rummaged through the pantry to find the ingredients and became whisked away in the process – trying to keep the flour off the floor, making sure I didn’t overcook the butter, and using the right amount of lemon juice. The first recipe I chose, blueberry crumble cake, remains my favorite recipe in that box. When my aunt got home from work that day, she immediately knew what I had been baking and wasn’t surprised that I had finally found the recipe box. My aunt, cousins, and I devoured the cake in one sitting; it is one of those treats that won’t last more than a day in the house. Anytime I had a bad day that summer, I would search through the recipe box for the blueberry crumble cake recipe and would eat it till it was gone. After the discovery, I was often found sitting at the kitchen table scouring food magazines and the recipe box in the search of a new tasty concoction to try. As Julia Child said, dining with your friends and family can satisfy the soul. That summer not only did I rediscover my passion for cooking but also the extended family that I had lost so many years before.

### Blueberry Crumble Cake:

**Preparation:** about 20 minutes  
**Baking Time:** 40-45 minutes  
**Oven Temperature:** 375°F  
**Serves:** 12

**Ingredients:**  
2 cups all-purpose flour  
2/3 cup sugar  
3 tsp. baking powder  
1/2 tsp. baking soda  
1 tsp. salt  
2 eggs  
1 cup milk  
1/2 cup butter or margarine, melted  
2 tbsp. lemon juice  
2 cups frozen blueberries  
**Crumb Topping** (recipe follows)

1. Into a large mixing bowl, measure the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Stir well to blend.
2. Into a large measuring cup, combine eggs, milk, butter, and lemon juice.
3. Stir liquid ingredients into dry ingredients until blended.
4. Turn into buttered 13-by-9-inch baking dish. Sprinkle blueberries evenly over the batter.
5. Sprinkle with the topping.

**Crumb topping:** In a small bowl, combine 2/3 cup sugar, 1/2 cup all-purpose flour, 1/2 tsp. cinnamon, 4 tbsp. soft butter or margarine. Stir until mixture is evenly blended and crumbly in appearance.
Apples
James Burke

“When I go by this shrub thus late and hardy, and see its dangling fruit, I respect the tree, and I am grateful for Nature’s bounty, even though I cannot eat it. Here on this rugged and woody hill-side has grown an apple-tree, not planted by man, no relic of a former orchard, but a natural growth, like the pines and oaks. Most fruits which we prize and use depend entirely on our care. Corn and grain, potatoes, peaches, melons, etc., depend altogether on our planting; but the apple emulates man’s independence and enterprise. It is not simply carried, as I have said, but, like him, to some extent, it has migrated to this New World, and is even, here and there, making its way amid the aboriginal trees; just as the ox and dog and horse sometimes run wild and maintain themselves.”

~Wild Apples, Henry David Thoreau

“In Truman Capote’s novel In Cold Blood, what is Nancy Cutter doing when she answers the telephone?” asked the wiry, eighty-year-old Abbot Brian on my first day working in our school’s apple orchard. After wracking my brain for a piece of information lost over a two-year hiatus from reading the novel, I respond that I do not remember. “She is baking an apple pie,” he says with a cheery smile, climbing down the ladder with an apple in his hand.

It has been a long-standing tradition at Delbarton School that students assist Abbot Brian, the retired head of the monastery, in our campus’ fifty-tree orchard during the fall harvest. In my junior year, I heard that no one was helping the Abbot. Having never had him as an English teacher, I only knew Abbot Brian from passing in the hallway. When I asked if I could help him, he sized up my 6’ 1” frame and, after a moment of careful scrutiny, he patted me on the shoulder and said, “You’ll do. Meet me after school at the gate to the orchard.” As I would later realize, I had just started a relationship with one of the most influential men in my life.

Many of my classmates were surprised to learn that I had volunteered to help in the orchard. I think most people would characterize me as very outgoing and gregarious – not the introspective type. I am the youngest of four children and being exposed too my older siblings molded my extroverted personality. But, even though people think of me primarily as social, I also greatly value contemplative time alone. My house has always been the place where friends wanted to come, mostly because of my mother and her cooking. With the door always open, five family members, four pets, and friends constantly in the house, privacy and time alone were hard to come by. This is what made the offer to spend time in the orchard all the more appealing.

In addition to allowing me to have a venue for a quiet and peaceful escape, the prospect of working in the orchard and spending time in a natural setting was also important. My family has had a residence in Landgrove, Vermont for most of my life and, being surrounded by and engaged in the rich landscape, I fostered a love and appreciation for nature. My mother has always kept gardens and crops at our homes and by the time I could walk, she would bring me to the garden and teach me, like my grandfather taught her, the techniques to create and maintain plants, herbs, and other crops. Like most boys, I went through a stage where I would reject her invitations to help her, but after reaching a certain age and maturity I achieved personal pleasure and satisfaction working in the gardens, learning about agriculture, and using what we grew in our meals.

With my rigorous academic schedule and constant travelling and practice commitments of junior tennis, I barely had time to eat dinner, let alone do something for myself. Therefore, the time I spent with Abbot Brian was a chance for me to be outside, to work with my hands, and to have a relaxed opportunity to learn and grow. While working in the orchard, I learned a great deal from Abbot Brian about the process of cultivating apples. I learned that the first two of three sprays protect the insides of the apples and that the brown spots that turn off many apple eaters are in fact just marks made by the rain. He explained to me the importance and the methods of maintaining an organic and sustainable orchard, which has led to some difficulty. The Abbot lost two trees that year because he refused to use pesticides. Without the chemicals, the apples grew fewer and smaller, but the taste could not be matched. He also taught me the correct time to pick the different varieties of apples and how to store them properly in the cool cellar of the monastery in order to allow the sugaring process to finish.

Yet beyond the practical lessons of apple cultivation, Abbot Brian inspired me to grow intellectually. While we were working, Abbot Brian and I talked about topics ranging from spirituality and religion to literature. The Abbot would regularly quote word for word the works of the transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau. He
pointed out the strong parallel between the transcendentalists’ emphasis on self-reliance and perseverance and our school’s Benedictine motto, *Succisa Virescit* or “Cut down, it grows back stronger.” The Abbot talked to me at length about the Rule of St. Benedict, which governs monastic living and places a high value on work, perseverance, and becoming self-sufficient. Using the apples and the picking process as metaphors, he would often connect the themes from these literary works to our own efforts in the orchard and about life in general. The effort to become self-sufficient was extremely important to him, especially with his work in the orchard. The Abbot had always worked by himself but, pushing 80 years old, he needed some help despite his constant, fiery rejections. He had devoted his entire life to following the Benedictine tradition and being unable to work the orchard himself defied the values he had worked his whole life to gain. It was a unique learning opportunity and I took full advantage of my time with Abbot Brian. He was a pivotal influence in turning my academic career in the right direction: because of the values and lessons he instilled in me junior year during our sessions in the orchard, I was able to have one of my most productive years academically.

Although I have been involved in various organizations and service projects, there was something particularly therapeutic and meaningful about working in the orchard. I came to realize just how busy I was with school, tennis, family, and friends. To do something worthwhile in an unhurried, peaceful environment was a refreshing change in perspective. I realized that just as Abbot Brian tended so diligently to the orchard, I needed to care for my intellectual and spiritual well-being. Abbot Brian was instrumental in teaching me that and I am truly grateful to have him as a mentor and as a friend.

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**Apple Pie:**

**Ingredients:**

1. Pastry for 2 crusts
2. 8 cups sliced, peeled assorted baking apples - about 3 lbs. (Granny Smith, Cortland, Jonathan)
3. 2 Tablespoons lemon juice
4. 3/4 cup white sugar
5. 1/4 cup brown sugar
6. 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
7. 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
8. 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
9. 2 Tablespoons butter
10. 1 egg yolk
11. 1 Tablespoon milk

**Directions:**

1. In a large bowl, toss the sliced apples with lemon juice.
2. Combine sugars, flour, cinnamon and nutmeg; add to apples and toss well to coat.
3. Fill pastry lined 9-inch pie pan with apple mixture and dot with butter.
4. Place second crust on top of pie filling and cut slits in top of crust to vent. Seal the edges of the crust with a fork or by hand.
5. In a small bowl, beat the egg yolk and milk. Brush the mixture over the top crust.
6. Bake at 425 degrees for 15 minutes.
7. Reduce heat to 350 degrees and bake 40-45 minutes more or until the crust is golden and filling is bubbly.
A Taste of the Caribbean
Philip Camille

“I ate slowly, knowing that I should not be as hungry as I ought to be for the trout, but knowing too that I had never tasted such delicate savory morsels.”

— Define This Word, M.F.K. Fisher

My food story begins with me at the age of eight. I remember still attending, for elementary school, the catholic school St. Thomas Aquinas. I must have been in 3rd or 4th grade at this time. In order gain a little extra money to pay for the tuition, for my sister and I’s education, my parents decided to renovate and rent out the basement of the house that we still currently live in, to this day. Over the years we have had a handful of tenants but I will never forget the first person to live downstairs. Her name was Marcia Garcia but my sister and I called her Miss Marcia, as children. She settled downstairs alone with no husband or children to our knowledge at the time. She was from Trinidad & Tobago and this was apparent partly due to her cooking. Every so often, when Miss Marcia cooked dinner, powerful and delicious smells of the Caribbean would waft throughout the house. My family and I would often be able to guess was she was making based off of the smells of the ingredients she used like: garlic, onion, curry, peppers, bay leaves, and cumin. It was not as if these smells were uncommon to us. My parents are from Haiti and they often use ingredients like those to cook traditional Haitian food. However, something about Miss. Marcia’s cooking was different. It was intriguing because the mix of smells and flavors seemed familiar but foreign at the same time.

It was not until the end of the month, when the rent was due, that I gotten to find out the source of what had intrigued us so much. As a nice gesture, Miss Marcia brought us a plate of food as well as the rent. My parents must have told her how much my sister and I talked about her cooking. I have never forgotten that plate of food, even to this day. She had brought us roti, a traditional Caribbean dish compromising the diet of Trinidadians and Guyanese people but is well known in the general Caribbean. The roti is kind of a wrap that contains a savory curry based filling. The bread itself, called roti, is where the meal derives its name. She had wrapped two roti tightly in paper towels as if they were presents. The smell that emanated from them was incredible and so full of curry. It seemed like our house would smell like this forever.

My parents thanked Miss Marcia, as did my little sister and I. My sister and I ran to the kitchen table awaiting my dad to place the two roti on the table so that we could finally try this mysterious treat. As we peeled back the paper towel we looked at the round mass of bread and wondered what to do with it. It was certainly too big to pick up and there was no indication of where to begin. My mom brought over some forks and hinted that we should just dive in. So I took the initiative and pierced my fork through the bread wrapping to release a bit of the curry filling inside. I had stabbed a chuck of meat with my fork and brought the meat and bread portion to my mouth. As soon as I had taken that first bite I knew that I was eating something special. I went in for more and realized that the wrapping held more surprises inside, like potatoes and chickpeas. As my family and I went on devouring the roti, it occurred to me that the meat I had been eating was not beef. It looked like beef but for some reason it did not taste like beef. I really could not pinpoint the taste of it but I let it slide because it was so good. I finally asked and my dad responded, “I think its goat.” I paused for a second and thought who in the world would eat goat?! However, as I took my next bite, I had realized I answered my own question. I thought goat was delicious and I couldn’t get enough of it!

Since that moment, Miss Marcia would bring up roti every month for my sister and I to enjoy. At the time I would have to say it was my favorite food. Eventually Miss Marcia moved and found another place to move but that did not stop my attachment to roti. My parents had found a West Indian shop nearby that served roti that was similar to Miss Marcia’s roti. It is still an informal tradition that one of my return meals for break, at home, is a roti and more specifically goat roti.

Whenever I eat roti and Caribbean food in general, it brings me back to my childhood when I first remember being exposed to such flavors. The reoccurring theme of food is memory matches perfectly with this story. Another aspect this experience has taught me was to be more critical to other’s attempts at making Caribbean food. I remember I had a teacher at boarding school that enjoyed cooking for my friends and I. He also loved roti and offered us several variations that were a bit lackluster. He knew
my friends and I were from Caribbean decent; so he could trust our opinion. However, without that first experience, I may not have an accurate idea of what roti was supposed to taste like.

For as much as I love roti I have yet to try to make it. I have always thought of it as a complex recipe because of the many different flavors and textures I sense when I eat one but it seems fairly reasonable to make. The difficult part is the bread, if you want to make it yourself. Traditionally, roti is served with Dhalmouri bread which is fairly thin and has a dry chickpea and spice mixture inside. Below is a recipe for the curry filling that looks promising and time consuming. However, all the time spent preparing this is definitely worth it in the end.

**Roti:**

4 tablespoons curry powder
½ tablespoon coriander seeds
½ tablespoon ground cloves
½ tablespoon ground ginger
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
2 teaspoons salt
2 bay leaves
2 sprigs fresh thyme
6 cloves garlic, minced
2 cups onions, finely chopped
Scotch bonnet/Serrano pepper, finely chopped
1 cup vegetable oil
1 cup beef broth
1 cup coconut milk
2 pounds lean boneless meat (boneless goat, lamb, or beef)
2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro

In a mixing bowl combine the chicken, 2 tablespoons of the curry powder, 1 teaspoon of the salt and 2 tablespoons of the vegetable oil and set aside, covered, for 20 minutes. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a heavy bottomed skillet. Add onions and cook until they turn soft and glazed. Stir in garlic, curry powder, coriander, cloves, ginger, black pepper, salt, allspice until fragrant. Add broth, coconut milk, thyme, bay leaves, hot pepper, and remaining curry powder. Cover and cook curry over low heat, until meat is tender, about 1 1/2 hours. Add potatoes during the last 20 minutes of cooking. Stir in chopped cilantro. Serve with Dhalmouri Bread.

Serve the meat and sauce ladled into the center of the bread, then fold both sides over the filling. Fold the top and bottom ends over the sides to form a neat square package, and serve.

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M. F. K. Fisher

“I tell about myself, and how I ate bread on a lasting hillside, or drank red wine in a room now blown to bits, and it happens without my willing it that I am telling too about the people with me then, and their other deeper needs for love and happiness.”

The earliest memory I have in which food plays a prominent role concerns my father. This is strange as it was my mother who nursed me as an infant, prepared dinner each night for our family, and continues to stress healthy eating to this day. She controlled my caloric intake for the first decade of my life. With an iron fist, I might add. Vending machines—vehicles of free will—were her nemesis.

It was her who furnished our house with the smells of baking bread, dark chocolate and peppermint tea, to name a few. These smells still haunt me today. Their ability to transcend time and geography and invoke lost memories of childhood is without parallel. If I am away from home for too long, my palate begins to reject the foreign and yearn for these staples. Thus, I find it largely unfair that my most salient, and perhaps fondest, food memory does not reflect her efforts.

Venison. My father would cook it for my brother and me whenever my mother was away. Sometimes it was given to him as a present by the retired police officers that hunted in the woods surrounding our lower fields. Other times, he shot it himself, from his bedroom window, in his tighty-whities. I refuse to entertain the possibility that he ever served road kill as my mother always claimed. Coarse and bloody, the meat has a full, deep taste, somewhat akin to woody red wine. It is extremely tough when cooked rare, and inedible when cooked through. Until we were full grown, my father insisted on slicing the meat into small pieces to keep us from
choking. Piece by piece, he passed us the steaming slivers from the bloodstained cutting board. His gnarled fingers, stained from the dirt and grime of the day’s work, always looked dirty despite his best efforts to clean them.

Like goose, and to an extent lamb, the flavor resembles the animal and the land; making it impossible to overlook that this was once a living, breathing animal.

Other than salt and pepper, we ate it un-garnished, with red fingers—sharing in a ceremony, reveling in our defiance.

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Many Names for the Same Thing
Anna Clements

“Food is not about impressing people. It’s about making people feel comfortable.” - Ina Garten

My friends and I always fight about what to call the breakfast meal I make out of eggs, bread, cheese, butter, salt and pepper. My friend from Vermont calls it a gas-house egg. My friend from Boston grew up calling it a hen in a basket. One day not so long ago I tried to put this issue to rest by doing some research to determine the true name. Unsurprisingly, there seems to be endless names for this dish: eggs in a pocket, one-eyed jack, baby in the hole, Alabama eggs, bird’s nest, bull’s eye eggs, cowboy eggs, egg-in-the-hole, hole in toast, egg in a frame, frog in a hole, toad in a hole, moon eggs, Guy Kibbee eggs, one-eyed monsters, Rocky Mountain toast and I’m sure the list continues. Most of you know by now that the dish I am referring to is an egg-in-the-middle (the name I grew up calling it).

This dish is perhaps the most simple breakfast fare out there—which explains why there are so many names for it. For me, it is the perfect breakfast. It is a well-balanced combination of protein, dairy, carbs, fat, and vegetables (if you like). It is fast to make and can be transported for easy eating on-the-go. Depending on how fancy you get, it can be cheap. Most importantly, it is delicious.

My dad has been making my sisters and I egg-in-the-middle for breakfast since we were young. It was a go-to dish for the times when he was feeling uninspired or if we were running late for school. If I could, I would always help him. My favorite part was the first one: making the hole in the bread. Sometimes I would use a small glass to punch out the hole but more often than not, I would use a spoon to trace out a circle in the middle of the bread. Then, we would butter the frying pan and turn the heat to medium-high. My dad would crack the egg into the hole (until I got old enough to master it) and we would watch it sizzle and pop. I would always be nervous that the area of bread I cut out would be too small and the egg would not cook properly but that almost never happened. For optimal enjoyment, we would butter the cutout and fry it up right next to the other piece. After a minute or so, my dad would expertly loosen the bread/egg from the pan and flick the pan with his wrist to flip the bread over. I spent the greater part of my childhood (and wasted countless dozens of eggs) trying to master the trick of a spatula-less flip—it wasn’t until college that I could do it by myself. Add a slice of cheese on top and let the egg cook to the desired state (over easy, over medium, yolk cooked all the way through). Since I tended to eat mine on the go, my dad would let the yolk cook all the way through so that it would not be so messy. You can also add any other vegetable and/or meat to the top to enhance the flavor. Don’t forget to salt and pepper to taste!
While this dish had been a staple breakfast item since childhood, the second week of my senior year of high school my dad started making me an egg-in-the-middle every morning before school. Without fail, as I was running out the door he would hand me breakfast wrapped in wax paper and give me a kiss on the cheek. Some mornings, if it were particularly cold out, he would warm up my car 10 minutes before I left and leave the wrapped egg-in-the-middle sitting on the passenger seat next to me. Most days it was the same egg, multigrain toast, and cheddar cheese but on special occasions I would see the chef side of him manifest itself in this seemingly simple meal. Sourdough bread, an egg, and havarti. Brioche, an egg, and brie. Honey wheat toast, an egg, goat cheese, and arugula. A thick piece of bread, an egg, a hunk of extra sharp cheddar, and caramelized onions. Whatever the combination, I could count on a solid breakfast to carry me through the day.

At first, I found it somewhat strange that my dad started being wholeheartedly committed to fixing me breakfast every single day before school. Looking back on it now, I realize that for my dad, it was the last time he would ever be able to make one of his daughter's breakfast before school (I am the youngest of three). It was the end of an era for him, and he wanted to do it justice. No matter how simple, I know now that each of those breakfasts contained more memories and love than just about any other breakfast I'd ever had or ever will have.

Since coming to Middlebury (and especially this past year), I have tried to make egg-in-the-middle as often as possible. I have my own kitchen this year so it's been easier to do than in the past. Each time I make it, I am reminded so distinctly of my senior year in high school and the care that my dad took in making me breakfast each morning. I find that I enjoy making this dish for my friends or any other empty stomach around. If there's one thing my dad taught me it's the joy and pleasure you can give people by feeding them. It doesn't have to be complex, just made with a little love.

### Egg in the Middle:
One egg
One piece of bread
Butter or olive oil
Cheese
Greens

Cut a hole in the middle of the piece of bread using a glass cup or a spoon. Butter a frying pan and put on medium to high heat. Place the bread in the frying pan and crack the egg into the hole. Cook for a minute or so and flip. Continue cooking until desired egg preference. Place cheese on top. Salt and pepper to taste. Add arugula or mixed greens and/or other veggies and/or meat. Enjoy!

### In the Kitchen with My Father
Alexis Coolidge

There is no sincerer love than the love of food.
–George Bernard Shaw

The gnocchi stops my father from speaking to me. In fact, he won’t even look at me, like he doesn’t even recognize his own daughter. I turn to my mother at the dinner table and say, “Not too much, please don’t put more than a spoonful on my plate.” I can feel the heat from his face, burning with anger, whisk across the table and touch my hand, which is firmly gripping the silver-plated fork. The green speckled pesto stops running over the gnocchi and it quickly turns cold. He doesn’t speak to me for the rest of the meal. I’m not the same girl that I was when I left this old house a year ago.

Growing up, my father never said much; he'd always been considerably quiet. As a little girl, I wondered why my dad was the way he was. He never missed a single soccer game, parent-teacher conference, or Christmas concert, but was hardly willing to strike up conversation even with his own daughter. I was perplexed by my father's lack of interest in my life yet his attempts to be part of my life. My father’s inability to communicate with me left me questioning and curious about who he was, where he grew up, and if I would be like him when I got older.
I'm wearing red overalls, my dad’s favorite color, home from a Monday in second grade and just barely peeping over the counter. My father lifts me up onto a tall chair next to him so that I can get a full view of what’s going on. He’s making salsa from a recipe that is not in his own handwriting. He always does this—tries someone else’s food at a get-together or is given food from a friend for Christmas—and is so overwhelmed at how amazing the dish tastes that he asks for the recipe so he can make it for his own family. When he does, he never ends up eating much of it, but sincerely hopes that we like it as much as he did. There are so many colors on the kitchen counter that I can hardly take my eyes off them. My dad slices through a thick, ripe tomato and then cuts it into fine pieces. He hands me a piece to try and I willingly eat it. The sour look on my face tells my father that I don’t like tomatoes and never will. He tells me that it’s okay; he never has liked them either. He follows the recipe, but says that it doesn’t taste the way he remembers it. He says the salsa he had tried had more cilantro, so he tweaks the recipe his friend has given him. The salsa is for my mom in celebration of her promotion at work. I stay on the counter for two hours while he makes the salsa. He lets me add the freshly cut tomatoes, cilantro, and jalapeños to the mixing bowl.

That day I couldn’t get my dad to stop talking. I started to associate my father’s love for other people, including myself, with cooking. He was making a special salsa to show my mom that he loved her. I learned over the next few years that the best expression of my father’s love for others was when he cooked for them.

I’m ten years old now and standing at the kitchen counter covered head-to-toe in flour. I shouldn’t have turned the beater on that high. Making chocolate chip cookies should not be this hard. My dad comes into the kitchen and smiles at my dusted appearance. He asks me what happened and I tell him that I ruined the chocolate chip cookies that I was trying to make for him for his birthday. He comes over, pats me on the head and a puff of white dust floats off into the air. He tells me that hardly anything is ever done in the kitchen that can’t be fixed. My cookies look more like soup on the pan rather than twelve 2-inch drops. My dad tells me that a wooden spoon is best when working with large quantities of ingredients like when you are making cookies. He shows me that adding the flour a little at a time and folding the dough work best for mixing. I try to take the spoon from him to try myself, but he won’t let go; keeps stirring and keeps talking.

He always did this—a classic move of his. I’d try to whisk egg whites for meringue or spread frosting over a warm cake, and the moment I verbalized a struggle, he would swiftly come to my rescue. With the best intentions, he would rather unconsciously take over my project. If I didn’t fight the spoon out of his hand, I’d find myself sitting down back in that tall chair beside him and just chatting with him while he cooked. I realized that cooking was no longer just a medium I used to communicate with my father, but that he used it as an opportunity to talk to me as well.

Why we thought we could make our own pasta, I do not know. A freshman in high school, I was inexperienced to the undertakings of homemade pasta. It seemed as though my dad was, too. He wanted to make pasta like his mother used to so that my mom, my brother and I could try it with his homemade marinara sauce. As we struggled together to turn the pasta machine he had just unwrapped from the Pampered Chef, he tells me that he didn’t remember his mother struggling with this much with fresh pasta. He told me that his mother used to sing beautifully while she was cooking and baking, and that listening to his mother sing in the kitchen was one of his favorite childhood memories. My father grew up on a farm with many brothers and sisters, and told me all of the things he used to have to do as a child to help out. He told me that they barely ever bought food from the grocery store. All of their food came from the farm and the garden. He elaborated on the craziest things his mother used to make for them to eat: head cheese, giant omelets, and pork rinds. He went on to tell me the all kinds of stories, like when my mother and he had just gotten married and my mom visited his mother to learn to how to can food. I wished this day would never end.

As I got older, I seemed to have less and less time to spend in the kitchen with my dad. I didn’t want to lose the relationship I had built with my father, so I tried my best to stay in the kitchen. Every night, I sat at the kitchen counter and did my homework. By senior year, I was filling out college applications and tasting spoonfuls of my father’s soups, sauces, and whatever else he was making for dinner that night regularly.
When I returned home from college one weekend, my father made my favorite gnocchi. It upset him that I didn’t eat it, and I understand because for my father, cooking for other people is his way of expressing his love for them. It allowed me to learn about my father’s childhood, his likes and dislikes, and most importantly, to understand that he will always love me regardless of how quiet he may be. It was these afternoons spent in the kitchen with him that I will always treasure.

My Dad’s Everything Cookies

1 ¼ cups Butter Flavor Crisco
1 ½ cups firmly packed brown sugar
1 cup granulated sugar
3 eggs
1 ½ cups Peanut Butter
4 ½ cups old-fashioned oats
2 teaspoons baking soda
1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips
1 cup butterscotch chips
1 cup peanut butter chips

Makes 6 dozen

My mom was born and raised in a small town in central Oklahoma called Okemah. She remembers it as a thriving, middle class town of about three thousand. Generations of family had lived around the area, and her dad was well known in town as an attorney and active World War II veteran. My mom and her sisters roamed free in Okemah, riding their bicycles around town with their dog, Taffy, running along side them. After high school, all of the girls moved away from home for college and established adult lives elsewhere, although they often came home to visit their parents and fall back into the slow-paced Okemah lifestyle for a few days.

When I was a small kid, my mom’s parents became very old all of a sudden. They moved in with my Aunt Ellie and her family for a while, but they were unhappy being away from their friends and their house in Okemah. As my grandfather’s health further declined, they decided it would be better for them all to go back to the house in Okemah together. My uncle left his job as an engineer and my aunt left hers as a kindergarten teacher. They sold their house, and moved with their youngest daughter, sixteen at the time, back to my grandparent’s first and only home.

My family was living in Midland, Texas. One summer, when my younger brother and I had gotten out of school, my mom piled us in the back of the car and drove the eight hours to Okemah, with periodic gas station stops for snow cones and coloring books. John and I thought it was the ideal vacation. We crossed the Texas-Oklahoma border and squealed in delight thinking of all of the fun that awaited us with Aunt Ellie and Uncle Jim. As we pulled off the interstate and into town, my mom shook her head and sighed. Okemah had really gone downhill after she moved away, and the poverty always seemed to take her by surprise. Main Street featured boarded up windows and dilapidated storefronts. Front yards were littered with pieces of plastic.
play sets or broken-down cars. A community that used to be an example of the post-war American Dream had become another ageing, poor, rural town.

As she always did when we pulled into my grandparents’ driveway at 14 Cherry Street, my Aunt Ellie ran out onto the front porch and start waving at us. I practically threw the car door open and ran into her arms as fast as I could. My mom got my brother out of the backseat, and started unloading all of the things she had brought with us—new pajamas for my grandparents, books, home accessories, fresh breads, organic meats, a few bottles of decent wine. She harbored guilt about not being the one to move back and take care of her parents during their last years and channeled that guilt into ‘city shopping’ for the household.

While my mom and my aunt chatted in hushed voices about my grandparent’s deteriorating health in the living room, Uncle Jim scooped up my brother and took my hand and lead us into the backyard to his garden, where the tomatoes were red and fat. He told us he needed our help picking them, a task in which we took great pleasure. As city kids, we were never around farms or gardens and the novelty of growing food at your house never wore off for us. We placed the tomatoes into a plastic grocery sack as the family dogs ran circles around our ankles, and then carried the produce into the kitchen, where my uncle had laid out peppers, garlic, onions, and the rest of the ingredients for his homemade salsa. After placing John up on the countertop, Uncle Jim began chopping up the veggies one by one—onions, tomatoes, bell peppers, garlic, jalapeños, and letting me push the pieces off the cutting board into the big pot on the stovetop. As we chopped and stirred, we sang along with the country songs that came through on the ancient white portable radio sitting on the table. We added the tomato paste, splattering some of it all over my grandparent’s old linoleum floors. Next there was the vinegar, cumin, lime juice and salt, all in guesstimated proportions thanks to Uncle Jim’s many years (and many batches) of salsa. Then we waited. John begged to play outside, but the hundred-degree heat made it almost unbearable. Uncle Jim finally relented, turning on the sprinkler system in the front yard for us to run through still dressed in our clothes. We ended up soaking wet, our bare legs covered in itchy grass clippings. By then, though, the salsa was cool. We sat out on the porch with a bag of white corn tortilla chips and a big bowl of our newest creation as the sun got lower on the horizon. My mom and Aunt Ellie joined us briefly, praising my work as Uncle Jim’s sous chef and claiming it was the best batch yet. Uncle Jim, as usual, canned the rest of it and stored in at the back of the pantry, to be opened up later in the year as a memory of those Oklahoma hot summer days. To this day, I always get a jar of homemade salsa for Christmas from Uncle Jim.

It was only when I became much older, and my grandparents had long since passed away, that I really understood the purpose of our Oklahoma “vacations” or realized why my brother and I always seemed to be in Uncle Jim’s care making salsa, walking the dogs, going to the neighborhood park, or doing handy work around the house. My mom needed to be with her dying parents, who were virtually bedridden by the time I was old enough to know them. Sadly, my brother and I never knew them before a stroke, Alzheimer’s and cancers had taken a drastic toll. We would occasionally be ushered into Mimi and Poppy’s back bedroom to give them a quick hug or a kiss, but our exposure to them was otherwise minimal, mostly because seeing us interact with them in that state upset my mom. I know she always wanted us to know them the way she knew them, but sadly it was too late. My mom needed us to be with her, but she also didn’t want to fully expose us to the situation. When I think back on those visits with my brother and my mom, I distinctly remember Aunt Ellie and Uncle Jim’s dogs, the runs through the sprinkler system, the stifling heat, the old linoleum. But most of all, I remember picking tomatoes and eating salsa.

John and Genevieve in Oklahoma,
Summer 2011
Condict Family Salsa

6 cups chopped tomatoes
2 cups chopped onions
2 cups ground or chopped bell peppers
10-12 jalapeño peppers (remove seeds)
3 small cans tomato paste
1 1/2 teaspoon cumin
2 tablespoons canning salt (regular salt works)
1 cup white vinegar
4-5 garlic cloves, chopped

Mix together and simmer for 20 minutes. This makes about 3 quarts. If you aren't canning this, you can reduce the vinegar by half and I think it tastes better. I like cumin so I add a little extra -- heats it up a little. If you like hot and spicy, leave the seeds of one jalapeño in.

Hope this works out well for you. :-)
Uncle Jim

The Real Pleasures of Nestlé Toll House
Ali Fox

Can we separate the pleasures of eating and drinking from other pleasures? In typical situations where we enjoy eating it is very difficult to work out how much of our enjoyment derives from the food itself and how much from the company or setting. The difficulty arises because the pleasures of the food and of the company are not merely simultaneous experiences: they also enhance and modify each other.

- Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food, Elizabeth Telfer

Throughout the semester I have been grappling with Elizabeth Telfer’s question over whether it is the food or the people that create more pleasure. It is not a simple question to answer but I have come to think that the people, the experiences, and the memories are more critical than the food itself. For example in my family as much as we love the stocked fridge and overflowing pantry the staple in the kitchen remains my mom’s glass cake platter. It is beautiful and big and has a perfect lid that is quite tall allowing for fabulous desserts to stay fresh underneath it. The cake plate is always full, which is quite a challenge considering how many grimy little hands sneak under the lid on any given day. Nine out of ten times it is piled high with my family’s favorite dessert, which is chocolate chip cookies. They are a simple classic. And they are good at anytime of the day. On your way off to school early in the morning, for a mid-afternoon snack accompanied by a tall glass of milk, they hold you over until dinner, and they are perfect for satisfying any late night sweets cravings. My family enjoys the dough almost as much as the baked product. So along with the heap of cookies there is usually a bowl with leftover dough in the fridge that my mom sets aside for her four demanding children.

My little brother, who loves them the more than any of us, memorized the recipe for our chocolate chip cookies when he was only eight. I unfortunately still do not have the recipe memorized completely. I know the basic list of ingredients but fail to recall the exact measurements. Our recipe is not my grandmother’s treasure recipe nor does it involve a secret family ingredient. It is the recipe from the back of the Nestlé Toll House Semi-Sweet Chocolate Chip bag.

Many other families also religiously use this recipe for their own chocolate chip cookies. However, the experiences, memories, and traditions involved around their cookies are definitely unique and different from my own. For example my best friends family also uses the same recipe. Yet, they always make their chocolate chip cookies in a massive brownie pan, which produces Blondes. These look very different from our circular and often bite size golden brown cookies. The Burke family even creates a thick oozing layer of chocolate chips in the middle of the Blondie’s. Both desserts are a
product of the same recipe and go perfectly well with a glass of cold milk but they are not the same. Each family has different traditions and memories associated with the Nestlé Toll House bag. Even in the hit show Friends there is an episode on Nestlé Toll House Chocolate Chip Cookies. In this episode, Monica desperately tries to uncover Phoebe’s secret family recipe for chocolate chip cookies because she remembers them being delectable. By the end of the episode it is revealed the special recipe is on the back of the Nestlé Toll House bag.

The pervasiveness of the recipe does not change the fact that it creates inimitable pleasure for various individuals. Although the cookies are delicious, I love them because my family loves them. Because we spend time baking them, and eating them. It is more about the time spent with my siblings, and the effort constantly made by my mom than about the cookie itself.

_Nestlé Toll House Chocolate Chip Cookie Recipe:_

**Ingredients:**
- 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 Teaspoon baking soda
- 1 Teaspoon salt
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 Teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 large eggs
- 2 cups (12-oz. pkg.) Nestlé Toll House Semi-Sweet Chocolate Morsels

**Directions:**
Preheat oven to 375°F. Combine flour, baking soda, and salt in a small bowl. Beat butter, granulated sugar, brown sugar and vanilla extract in large mixer bowl until cream. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Gradually beat in flour mixture. Stir in morsels. Drop rounded tablespoon sized dough balls onto ungreased baking sheet. Bake for 9 to 11 minutes or until golden brown (I usually do 8 minutes). Cool on baking sheet and enjoy!!!

_Fish for All_  
J.P. Garofalo

“Nourishment is spiritual, metaphorical, yet palpable and real” – Alane Salierino Mason

The loud incessant hum of the twin 800-horsepower engines filled the air—accompanied by only the rhythmic splashing and crunching of the waves beneath. Looking out from the stern of the boat, Montauk Lighthouse stood on the bluff like a final pillar of civilization. The mid-morning sun lit up the choppy water like yellow butter on the dark blue hue. I cannot remember exactly what I was thinking or what I felt at that moment, but I can tell you I was happy. I was happy and at home on the ocean with the singular purpose of catching fish.

The thirty-one foot Cabo Express had gone through over ten seasons of fishing so far, not to mention countless journeys to Gulf Stream. At the helm my father stood hunched over the wheel looking at the controls and scanning the horizon ahead. The trip to Atlantic Canyon would take approximately six hours depending on the size of the waves. Next to my father, my twenty-three year old brother sat on the port side of the cabin. Along with the three Garofalo guys, two of my brother’s friends had been invited to join us: Matt Alkaitis and Brad Auerbach. In truth, there are few things to record on the long journey to Altanis Canyon besides the endless monotony of water. It is the paradise at the end of this journey that truly matters.

The Gulf Stream is the hot tropic waters that originate from small body of where from which it gets its name, the Gulf of Mexico. As this water shoots up the eastern coast of America, it follows along the ridge of the continental shelf. From Montauk New York, it is a six-hour journey to reach the continental shelf and the Gulf Stream. However, when you reach the Gulf Stream, it immediately becomes apparent how worth it these six hours were. The water lights up to a different brighter blue. It is a deeper blue along with a spike in temperature up to 80 degrees. On this certain trip in August of 2010, the water was so hot it got up to 83-85 degrees. The water was as calm as had ever seen it. In a place where swells can sometimes reach 6-8 feet, it was as flat as a lake ninety miles off shore.

We slowed the boat down from around eighteen knots to around six or seven knots. This is the speed we would troll at. As we put out the lines, it was clear that there
were fish here. The ocean was teeming with wildlife. There were ocean gulls in the skies and dolphins performing acrobatics in the water. A few boats like our own spotted the horizon; however, they were but a distant reminder of land.

The fishing started off in spectacular fashion. In a sport where you can often wait all day to get a single fish, we were fortunate to get one right at the start. My father had rigged ballyhoo lines—a specialty of his. They are notorious for attracting and catching Marlin. True to its legend, the ballyhoo came through on this day. We immediately landed a beautiful Striped Marlin. As my father manned the helm, my brother reeled in the fish and I was there to grab its bill as it got to the boat. However, we have never had the particular taste buds for Marlin so we simply took out the hook and let it go. It is nonetheless a great success and a thrill to land a Striped Marlin weighing over 100 pounds. Our true goal was to catch Yellowfin Tuna though.

Thankfully, this proved to be surprisingly easy. The ocean was teeming with small Yellowfin Tuna. The second we would reel in the lines after hitting a school of tuna, they would immediately go off again. These tuna were small though. They couldn’t have weighed more than 15 or 20 pounds. In a species that grows to over three hundred pounds, these were very small fish and we threw most of them back. Furthermore, this is not the best meat. The best tuna meat comes from the bigger stronger and more fatty adult fish. Thus, as the day wined down we continued to be unsuccessful in catching a tuna worthy of any dinner table distinction.

For reasons unknown to me, sunset and sunrise always prove to be the best times to fish. In between those miraculous changes of light, the big fish always seem to make their appearance. It was no different on this trip. As the sun was setting, we finally landed our first significant Yellowfin, weighing in at over 70 pounds. With the sun setting, it was important to tie up for the night. The ocean this far out is over 600 feet deep. It is difficult to actually put an anchor down. Sport fishermen have taken up the custom of tying up to the lobster buoys, much to the chagrin of the lobstermen. After having freshly landed this tuna, we quickly spotted a lobster pot and tied up for the night. However, before we put away the lines and got ready for the 'night chunk', my father thought it would be best to cut up some fish. He took out the huge filleting knife and promptly cut the fish’s head right off as if he was cutting through butter. He threw it in the ocean and took out his smaller filleting knife. He slit open the belly and pulled out the guts. As per his tradition, he emptied the stomach to see what the fish was eating—usually squid. Without any garnish or soy sauce, wasabi or lemon, we cut up and ate that tuna right there within minutes of catching it. Some people may balk at the sound of this, but there is truly nothing more delicious and savory than fresh raw tuna. It melts in your mouth seamlessly making you only wish for more.

The nights offshore are generally uneventful. We fish casually by throwing out chunks of bait trying to attract more tuna. I enjoy the night because it is the most social and homely feeling. With the sun down, I always cook up a meal for the guys. We hang around eat, drink, listen to music and reflect on the day of fishing. The long night ahead is difficult, as each person has to take a watch at one point to ensure that we are always safe. I usually try not to fall asleep and wait for the coming sunrise dreaming of another big fish.

The morning sunrise was just as fruitful as the previous day’s sunset. Within minutes of the sun taking up residence in the sky, we landed another big tuna weighing in at over 85 pounds. However, we didn’t stop to cut it up and eat it this time, but quickly got the lines back in the water in the hopes of catching more. Sure enough, we landed another and another. Within an hour, we caught over 200 pounds of tuna. In an era where the ocean’s bounty has been highly depleted by overfishing and commercial longlines, this was truly a rarity. My father always mentions the fact that he used to catch far more fish and could do it 50 miles closer to shore. He was brought back to those early times on this trip. With the boat literally full of tuna and no more room in the ice box, we headed home.

The arrival at the docks in Connecticut is always exciting and rewarding. It is like coming back from war and you are the conquering heroes. As we carry the fish boxes up onto the dock and start cutting up the fish right there, we always draw a pretty big crowd. Our neighbors know and expect us now and often come down with platters and tin foil to get a few steaks for a night’s meal. We are always happy to give it to them. My dad gives away probably 50 pounds of this tuna to the nurses and fellow doctors at his hospital. It is bounty we have always been happy and proud to share with our friends and family. My sisters and mother, Aunt and Uncle also come down and
help out, cleaning and filleting fish. Within a few hours, we always find ourselves surrounding the island in the kitchen cutting up sushi and gobbling it down. My mom will cut a dozen of the prime steaks up, marinade them heavily with olive oil, lemon and basil. It’s a simple recipe, but the beauty of this food is that it doesn’t need much else. It is so fresh and pure and good just as it is. Good food is a product of the quality of its ingredients, and there is no better way to ensure quality than to go out and catch your own meal. It is certainly a dying art, but it is not lost. It is something that I will do when I grow old and I hope there are still tuna there to be caught. One day, I hope to look up and see my own family filling up the kitchen, chatting and eating fresh caught tuna.

The Art of Técito
Danielle Gladstone

“La vida en Chile sin el tecito sería algo cercano a la Tercera Guerra Mundial.” – Nicolas Sanguinetti

Most Chileans eat the same thing for breakfast everyday. They also eat it for dinner. Toasted bread fresh from the bakery down the road with mashed avocado or butter or marmalade or cheese and ham or a small portion of scrambled eggs. They drink tea or coffee, not usually with milk and usually with sugar. In the morning they call it “tomando desayuno” and at night, despite the fact that they are probably eating exactly the same thing that they ate that morning (with maybe some leftovers from lunch thrown into the mix of assorted goods to be put on your “pan”, they call it “tomando tecito”. My experience is Chile was shaped around my feelings for this breakfast and evening routine.

When I first arrived and maybe for a month or two, I loved this breakfast. I craved the white fluffy bread and the salty avocado mash and tea with water from a thermos on the table. I’d always be the one searching for another whole avocado or the unopened bag of marmalade in the fridge because I couldn’t get enough of what I was eating. Although one might think that this was just because I loved it so much, one should also be aware that I was probably still hungry. Truthfully, white bread and a little accompaniment just weren’t cutting it for my appetite and me.

By the second month I was frustrated with my breakfast and dinner routine. I was hungry. And gaining weight from so much bread. I still liked the taste but I didn’t like the calorie count. The third month I liked it again. I was living with my chef boyfriend who took the whole scrambled-eggs on bread thing to a new level, incorporating a couple vegetables and real life spices, such as pepper, that would have been simply too spicy for my host family’s tastes. He also knew how to make scrambled eggs without cooking them with so much oil that I could take spoonfuls of it from my bowl, which was a plus in my already worrying-about-my-arteries book.

November was a hard one. We didn’t have enough time for breakfast and I was hungry most mornings. I would spend a couple hours sitting at my internship just waiting for lunch, missing my avocado, white bread, and scrambled egg friends. Lunch was eaten this month at the host family’s house of my best friend, whose “tía”
happened to be an amazing cook and left us lunch every day. I simply couldn’t get enough of her quiche. She used more foods than my first host family, and seemed to be a little bit of an anatomy when it came to traditional Chilean cooking. We mostly stopped “tomando tecito” in the evenings because we would get back to the house so late. Sometimes we ate “dinner” around 10 o’clock. My stomach suffered, and but that I mean it grew because the meat or rice chicken stir-frys that Nico had taken to making were simply too good to leave any of it on the plate.

In December I got sick and spent most of the month in bed. Seguí tomando desauyno, pero en pijamas en la mesa o desde la cama. I’d pull myself out of the bed to tomar tecito again in the evening, but my appetite was so small that I wasn’t eating much anyway. I was also living in a house without any adults and thus a little farther away from the very traditional Chilean eating schedule. Most of the time there was bread in the house, but not always. No one would go consistently to the bakery in the morning to get bread, and sometimes I would even buy sliced wheat bread from the supermarket. Scandalous. Sometimes I really missed my traditional Chilean bread, cheese, ham, and avacado and would encourage my boyfriend to find the ingredients on a moments notice. When his family came to town or just showed up at the house in the evening, everything came back out as if we had been tomando tecito cada noche por todo el mes. Thermoses graced the table like they belonged there and I drank tea till I fell asleep. I should also mention here our trips to Vallenar to visit Nico’s whole extended family. All thirty women (or so it seemed to me, with only a couple male uncles and one young male cousin) were experts at tomando desauyno y tomando tecito. It appeared every night on this table with zero question. And sometimes on a tray in the morning brought to our beds. Let’s just say I drank a lot of tea, ate a lot of bread, and mashed a lot of avocados. By the time we got to “tomando tecito” in the evening, I was always surprised that I seemed to be the only one craving a real dinner, or maybe one more in line with American variety.

Since I have been back in the United States I crave those breakfasts and tea times. I’ll arrive back in Chile in five weeks, and let me assure you that within the week that I arrive, I will eat 14 avocados (at the rate of two a day), 28 pieces of bread (at the rate of two per tea time), and one entire bag of marmalade. I will also rejoin the gym.

“Rob, Where Are Your Shells?”
Michael Griffin

“I wouldn’t be sitting at this desk, or writing this paper if it wasn’t for the exoskeleton of shrimp.”
~Michael Griffin

On September 4th, 1966, Robert Griffin, my father, saw Cathy Bishop, my mother, for the first time in the Hatherly Middle School milk line. My father, with more confidence than intelligence, approached my mother saying, “My names Rob, and one day I’m going to marry you.” My mother, horribly embarrassed in front of her new school friends, told my dad to get away from her. However, my father was not deterred and persistently pursued my mother for the next few months. Everyday he repeatedly asked my mother if he could take her out for dinner. Although my father was not deterred and persistently pursued my mother for the next few months. Everyday he repeatedly asked my mother if he could take her out for dinner. Although my father’s friends constantly told my mom how cute they thought my father was, my mother thought my dad was overly confident and annoying. She was upset that he embarrassed her in front of her friends, and thought it was strange for a kid in middle school to ask a girl to
dinner. However, my dad’s persistence paid off and eventually my mother agreed to go to dinner with him. The only problem was, my dad had never even been out to dinner himself.

My parents grew up in a small town twenty-five minutes outside Boston, called Scituate, Massachusetts. The town of Scituate is a small fishing community filled with primarily lower middle-class families. The town predominantly consisted of families from Dorchester, Massachusetts that saved enough money to get out of the city and raise a family in the suburbs. Scituate is still nicknamed the “Irish Riviera” because it has more Irish Americans per capita than anywhere else in the United States. My dad’s father had gotten sick at a young age. Therefore, my grandmother was forced to work at a local real estate agency, while simultaneously raising three mischievous boys. My grandmother paid for my grandfather’s hospital bills, while also paying for my dad and his brothers to play on an elite youth hockey team. Therefore, my grandmother did not have the time or the financial means to take my dad and his brothers out to dinner. In spite of this, my dad was determined to take my mother out to dinner because he felt that this was the best way to win her over.

My dad started working in sixth grade as a lobster fisherman’s assistant in order to buy hockey tape and ice cream from a store called Wilber Wheels. He had some money saved, but he knew that it wouldn’t be enough to take my mother out to dinner. Therefore, my dad worked twice as many hours in order to save enough money for a date with my mom. When he earned enough money, he scheduled a dinner date for Monday at 6:30 P.M. However, since my mother’s parents would never have let their daughter go out to dinner in seventh grade, my dad changed the reservation to 3:30 P.M. so they could go directly from school.

On the day of the dinner, my dad met my mom in front of the school and they walked together to Jake’s Seafood. When they walked into the restaurant, the hostess asked, “How many will be joining you?” When my dad replied “nobody” the hostess was shocked, but agreed to show them to their table. As they sat down, my dad studied my mom’s every move. Since he had never been to a restaurant before, he did not know proper dining etiquette. It is also worth noting, that my dad was embarrassed to tell my mom that he had never been to a restaurant before. However, he imitated my mom’s every move and seemed to be getting away with it. When the waitress came over to the table, she informed them that the special that particular afternoon was an all you can eat shrimp bar. Excited about the special, my mom told the waitress that she would have the shrimp. My dad, afraid to order his meal improperly, copied my mother even though he had never eaten shrimp before. He followed my mom to the shrimp bar and picked from the wide variety of shrimp. When they returned to their seats they ate their food while they talked about school, as well as the sports they played. Although they both recognized that they had many of the same interests, the conversation seemed forced because they were both extremely nervous. As the meal came to a close, my mother looked down at my father’s plate and recognized that it was completely clean. First she was impressed with how much shrimp he had ate, but then she recognized that there was a big difference between his plate and hers. Despite the few pieces of shrimp that my mother was unable to finish, my mother’s plate was filled with the shells of the shrimp she had ate. However, my dad’s plate didn’t have a single shrimp shell. Curious, my mom asked, “Rob, where are your shells?” My dad, unsure of what she meant, looked down at his plate, across at my mother’s plate, then back down at his. Suddenly recognizing that the meal he just devoured had a particularly crunchy texture, his face turned sheet white. My mother trying to conceal her emotions, covered her mouth, and then burst into laughter. My dad, realizing the absurdity of his mistake, erupted into laughter as well.

Eating the shrimp shells was the icebreaker that calmed the nerves of both my mom and my dad. As soon as my mom recognized what he had done, it completely transformed the nervous environment. After my dad realized that my mom had an eerily similar sense of humor, he came clean, telling my mom he had never been to a restaurant before, and that he had never eaten shrimp. As soon as he told her this, she viewed my dad in an entirely different manner. Although my dad’s poor etiquette would have grossed most people out. My mom recognized how much he had done to organize their date and impress her.

I was speaking in jest when I said, “I wouldn’t be sitting at this desk, or writing this paper if it wasn’t for the exoskeleton of shrimp.” However, in many respects it is true. If you look closely at this story, food undoubtedly contributed to my existence. If
it weren’t for the potato famine my great grandparents never would have left Ireland, and my parents would have never lived in Scituate. If middle school children didn’t drink milk, then my dad never would have seen my mother in a line waiting for it. If my dad didn’t enjoy ice cream so much, he wouldn’t have had the money to pay for the date he scheduled. If my parents didn’t live in close proximity to the water, shrimp most likely wouldn’t be on special that night. If my dad hadn’t eaten the shrimp shells’ and made my mother laugh, chances are that my mother would never have agreed to another date.

The effort that my dad went through to acquire food is also important. My dad fished for food, in order to earn money so that he could buy different food. Also, my mother started to admire my father when she recognized the distance he went in order to buy her a special meal. Although the price of the food did not matter to my mom, the effort that my dad went through in order to buy her the meal did.

Food is the driving force behind our motivations and our entire existence. Viewing society through the lens of food completely changes your perception of the world. As Americans, we tend to look at food as a nuisance, something that gets in the way of our everyday activities. However, a story like this should prove to us that food is much more important than we give it credit for. Simply by looking closely at a seemingly small event in life, it is easy to recognize that food is not a tangential subject, but the essential subject. (Carletti)

A Farm to Table Lifestyle
Sophia Gubernick

Learn from the birds what food the thickets yield;
Learn from the beasts the physic of the field;
The arts of building from the bee receive;
Learn of the mole to plow, the worm to weave.
-Alexander Pope

Before I could see over the kitchen counter I was standing on a chair, peering over the mixing bowl. I knew how to top of dry ingredients with the dull end of a knife before I could read and how to perfectly sauté onions before I could ride a bike. When I think of my childhood, and especially my relationship with my mother, I am always brought back to time spent preparing and eating food. Cooking in my family is not about tradition or cultural history but about a shared love of a good meal, and for my mother and I, the pleasure of preparing it.

Growing up in New York City I was exposed to an incredible diversity of cuisines. We would wander down the crowded streets of Chinatown in search of the best peking duck. Sometimes we would find ourselves in a restaurant with white tablecloths and a modern interior and sometimes we wound up in an absolute whole in the wall where we were the only non-Chinese speaking family. In New York you’re able to get the best of everything. For Thai food we would go to this little place in the Chelsea Food Hall. I would always order a rice dish and a Thai tea. The rice was super spicy and the milky sweat tea was the perfect compliment. We would go to Magnolia bakery for the best cupcake. The line was always out the door; when you finally got inside you were overwhelmed by the powerful, intoxicating smell of cake batter. I would always get the vanilla cupcake with chocolate buttercream. We were constantly finding new favorite Italian restaurants but one staple was Sandro’s near our house on the Upper East Side. My favorite dish was the lemon pasta. Sandro would come to the table after the meal with homemade grappa and almond cookies. If we were in the mood for Cuban food we would go to Café Habana on Spring Street. They are famous for their grilled corn rolled in cheese and sprinkled with paprika and lime. Before Shake Shack Melons was our favorite place to go for a burger; the burger was always perfect and they had the best fries. I could go on about my favorite restaurants in New York.
but I think it all comes down to the mentality of a New York foodie - the willingness to allow exuberant amounts of time and effort for the perfect meal. While New York is home to some of the best upscale restaurants, a true New Yorker also appreciates the abundance of ethnic food and has a favorite spot for every culinary craving.

In fifth grade we left New York City and moved to a small town in Vermont. We bought a farm and over the next few years were raising chickens, turkeys, bees, pigs, geese and cows. My food world had been flipped upside-down. We had traded in the luxury of living in a global culinary community for the benefits of a farm to table lifestyle. While my mom had always bought local and organic when possible we were now growing and raising most of our food or buying it from local farmers.

We get our unpasteurized milk from the Van Trapp farm down the road. You have to go before the milk trucks come for their daily pick up. In a small room attached to the barn there is a large silver container that holds all the milk. You turn the lever to churn the milk and make sure the cream hasn’t settled on the top. Then, you slowly turn the nozzle to get a manageable, steady stream without spilling all over the floor; it takes practice and the farmer gets mad if you make a mess. There is a box to leave the money by the door. While I had considered myself considerably worldly when it came to what I ate this was a whole new kind of knowledge about food and where it comes from. So many people have no idea what actually goes into their food and the truth is, I didn’t have that much of an idea either. I had seen an heirloom tomato and a jar of raw honey at the Union Square farmers market but what I would learn over the next few years was a whole new kind of education.

Even though I’m wearing the suite and mask I am still nervous I am going to get stung. The bees swarm around my head and land on my arms, they sit for a minute and then fly away. There is a loud humming in my ears. My mom pulls out one of the drawers in the hive and shows me the comb, oozing with thick golden honey. I ask her why we don’t take it and she says the first year you can’t harvest any honey because the hive isn’t strong enough. If they survive the winter we can collect the honey in the spring.

Yesterday a man came to the house and shot one of our pigs. My mom thinks it’s inhuman to make them travel anywhere to be slaughtered so we do everything on the farm. A local chef came over and helped my mom butcher the pig. Now I am standing at the kitchen counter mixing pork, herbs and Parmesan for sausage filling. My mom takes a long tube of intestine and attaches it to the nozzle of the grinder. “What is that?” I shriek. “It’s the sausage casing,” she said, “what did you think it was made of?” “I guess I never thought about it,” I said.

My food education over the next few years continued to change the way I thought about what I ate. I no longer could eat a meal completely oblivious to the process the ingredients took to wind up on our table. Now I notices the bright yellow of our egg yolks and the incredible fragrance of the first strawberries picked in summer. When we sit down to a meal at home it is incredibly satisfying to know we raised the chicken and grew the vegetables we are about to eat.
La Table: Then & Now
Charlotte Heilbronn

“One of the very nicest things about life is the way we must regularly stop whatever it is we are doing and devote our attention to eating.”

-Luciano Pavarotti

Growing up in a French family means one thing above all else: FOOD. So much of who I am and how I was raised is deeply rooted in French culture and tradition. My parents immigrated to New York in the 1980’s and never seemed to let go of where they came from despite having to assimilate. As I got older, my brothers and I were forced to simultaneously balance our American school life with that of our unique French household. While my friends at school were eating take out at 5 pm alone in front of the television, I was having sit down dinners every night at 7:30 pm when my father got home from work. My distinct experiences with these family meals stand out in my mind as being some of the most precious moments in my entire life. There is something about gathering around a table with your loved ones sharing stories, exploding with laughter, and devouring anything and everything that is put in front of you, that consistently seems to stay with you. These precise moments in time have always resonated with me regardless of where in the world I am. However, there is one special place during a particular time of year with a specific group of twenty-two people that seem to make time stand still and nothing else matter.

Sixty kilometers from Bordeaux, France located in the municipality of La Teste-de-Buch at the entrance to the Basin d’Arcachon lies Pyla-sur-mer, a beach town filled with old villa style houses that have been passed down for generations. In 1927 my great-great-grandmother, Bonne Maman, bought a summer home here for her family. The second they settled in during the months of July and August the space was full of life: vibrant, welcoming, and ready to burst with family members. Despite being occupied by German soldiers during World War Two, this house named “Etcha Haurrena” (which translates to “the house of the children”), managed to stand strong and stay within the family. Throughout my entire life this house has been a place of refuge for me, a beautiful space for me to relax and have fun with my grandparents, cousins, siblings, aunts and uncles, just like it has been for my mother her entire life.

When she was growing up, however, the family size was about forty people, consisting of four generations, an incredibly overwhelming number to accommodate, especially when it came to feeding. This turned the house into what my mother calls a “beehive” and made meals an absolute spectacle. While dinners embodied French old school chic with men in coat and tie and women in gloves and cocktail dresses, it is the lunches that are worth mentioning. Because there were so many family members and every generation seemed to have a different schedule, Bonne Maman instituted a buffet lunch lasting between 1:30 and 3 pm. This made feeding a lot easier even though not everyone could sit together. Nevertheless, she insisted on having her lunch at the same exact time every single day. She would sit powerfully yet cheerfully at a small table of six by the same big open double doors overlooking the Atlantic and invite a different group of five of her grand-children and great-grandchildren to come and have lunch with her everyday. Even though Bonne Maman died in 1974, her lunch traditions from 1927 seem for the most part to remain the same into the 21st century.

The long weekend of August 15th, the Catholic holiday celebrating the Assumption of Mary, is the most chaotic of the summer because the house is at absolute capacity. Though not all of us can make it for the whole month of August, or even a week, we seem to always spend at least a couple of days all together, all twenty of us. Despite all of our busy schedules we seem to make time for each other and congregate around the table. There is nothing I love more than coming to this house because of what it represents to me. It is so rich in history and rooted in family values that it reaffirms what my family is truly all about. We love to laugh and talk but above all else, we love to eat, and talk about what we eat. Lunch is especially meaningful because it is a time, other than dinner (which until I got to be old enough, since I am the youngest, did not include the children) for us to all come together and share our lives. Though we have now managed to seat all of us at the same time for dinner, Bonne Maman’s lunch buffet has nonetheless remained unaltered.

The insanely large table is fully decorated and ready for lunch at 1:30 pm every day. We all come up from the beach together and join my grandparents for lunch. By the time everyone makes it back up to the house and into the dinning room, they are both at their assigned seats across from one another heading the table waiting for us to
arrive. There is something incredibly special about this particular table. Despite all the renovations that have been made to the house throughout the years, the table (and chairs) is the one thing that has remained untouched. The table décor indicates the extent to which this house and all it represents is a mixture of the old and the new, a way of bringing the past and present together. Chairs tightly line the lengths of the table to the point where they are touching, prohibiting anyone from moving once seated throughout the meal. Dishes and cutlery that have been passed down by each generation of women heading the household are strategically placed on the table in a sort of militant assembly line. As the shiny silverware and delicate wine and water glasses frame each plate, carafes of water and bottles of Rosé from Provence travel down the center of the sleek and colorful tablecloth. Little by little the table is transformed into an idyllic image, as if resembling a painted landscape.

Before even sitting down the first thing we all do is check and see what there is for lunch. The scene around the food practically mimics wild animals surrounding a dead carcass. You would think that we had not eaten in days due to all the pushes and shoves, “ooohs” and “ahhs.” The best part of the buffet is that you get to dabble in all sorts of delicious foods. The quintessential buffet typically includes enough food to feed a small army, which my family in appetite and size seems to embody.

On the buffet table are two big dishes of “goujonnettes de sole,” pan-fried breaded pieces of dover of sole, with fried parsley and an aioli. The sole is so fresh that it melts instantly in your mouth, yet has the perfect amount of crunch before reaching the warm and soft center. This modern and sophisticated take on fish sticks is probably the dish that instantly makes me think of a lunch at Etche Haurrena because it captures summer at the beach in every single bite. Right next to these platters is cold fresh petit pois (“pea”) soup with a touch of cream, a dish of melon and prosciutto, green salad, and cold tomato and carrot salad with olive oil, lemon, and herbs, all fresh, healthy and absolutely perfect to cool you down on a warm summer day. The colors of the buffet are incredibly important because it demonstrates the way in which the buffet seems to excite all of the senses: sight, smell, and taste. The mixture of the brown of the goujonnettes, green of the peas and red/orange of the tomatoes and carrots animate the entire table, as well as everyone’s individual plates as they serve themselves one by one. The aesthetics and ambience surrounding this meal wholeheartedly contribute to my experience each and every time.

My grandfather begins “discretely” feeding the dogs under the table usually around the time people are finishing up and are ready for cheese. A meal in my household is never whole without cheese. Despite being full at lunch, the cheese platter taunts and draws you in each and every time. While my father and uncle love the smelliness and tang of the Roquefort (blue cheese), I always go straight for the savouriness of Emmental (swiss cheese) and creaminess of the chevre (goat cheese). The pungent aroma of all the cheeses fills the air and tickles your nostrils in a weird yet delightful way only French people would appreciate. The bread essentially brings these cheeses to life. There are always two types of bread in old baskets scattered down the center of the table. While there is some regular toasted whole grain bread, there is also, my favorite, fresh baguette that we pick up every morning at the boulangerie. I seem to devour baguettes at every meal in the summer; it is something I miss the most while in America during the school year. Throughout the duration of lunch we are constantly rushing back and forth between the dining room and kitchen to get more. The crisp crust and smooth doughy inside seem to be an unbeatable combination, especially with the addition of delectable French cheeses.

By the time we end the meal with some juicy seasonal fruit, we have all been sitting at the table for an hour and a half, not even paying attention to anything other than the processes of eating and enjoying one another’s company. Lunch in this
household is not just a meal, but rather a family activity. Our love for one another is captured within these very moments of eating together. We literally laugh until we cry, smile until our cheeks start to hurt, eat until we are going to explode, and fully engage ourselves in our surroundings. It is funny to acknowledge that during every lunch, regardless of how much food we have consumed, we always seem to talk about the next meal even before finishing the current one. My family is full of surprises, but when it comes to food and conversation, everything seems to fall right into place. This goes to show that we are not only what we eat, but also how and with whom we eat it. Part of the amazing and comforting thing about having a meal in Pyla is that you know exactly what you are getting, and never, ever, are disappointed. The conversations, the food, the jokes, and the laughs, never seem to ever change. Collectively as a unit we enter into a physical food comma and euphoric dream, and the rest is history. Mangez bien, riez souvent, aimez beaucoup; eat well, laugh often, love much.

The Oyster, Considered
Hanna Howell

“An oyster leads a dreadful but exciting life. Indeed, his chance to live at all is slim, and if he should survive the arrows of his own outrageous fortune and in the two weeks of his carefree youth find a clean smooth place to fix on, the years afterwards are full of stress, passion and danger.” -Love and Death Among the Molluscs, MFK Fisher

Margaret Fisher, a renowned writer on food topics wrote a book called Consider the Oyster. I think one would not typically spend much time considering the life and times of such an inanimate and plain-looking creature. In fact, to most, I bet an oyster comes to mind first as a ‘thing’, not a ‘creature’, but in fact, they are alive! Oysters spend their lives seeing parts of the world unknown to most people on this planet. It is their own niche, and no other creatures share it, except for the occasional unhappy rock crab who finds himself on the run from a bigger, badder creature.

I happen to consider myself an expert on the oyster, as the oyster has been a very defining element of my upbringing. I do not contest Margaret Fisher’s words, but I would like to add to her thoughts because I have a personal relationship with the oyster. I have a personal relationship with the oyster because of my unregulated access to the inner workings of oysterhood. My parents own a shellfish business on the southern coast of Maine and so I have grown up with a strong connection not only to local food farming, but also with a small connection to the food industry at large. The oyster is so important to me, not only because it has funded my time at Middlebury, but also because it is probably a large part of the reason why I was admitted to Middlebury. Thus, I credit the incredible influence, joy, and personal growth my time at Middlebury has given me to the oyster.

It is not a common thing to be in the business of growing and selling oysters. Not too many people know what goes on in an oyster’s life, nor in the daily lives of those who grow and sell them. To be part of a shellfish business means to know an ethic of hard work and the physical stress of manual labor. It means to know and associate with the good old folks, ‘old’ no matter their true age, browned by the sun, cracked by the salt and wind, and hardened by this unruly lifestyle. There is a rebellious streak, large or small, in every clam digger and oyster harvester that I’ve ever met. And I’ve met a lot…I spent my early years in the passenger seat of the truck, with it’s threadbare seats once a brilliant color now pretty much the same color as the mud that washes off the product we’ll be picking up. We drove hours down east (which is actually up north) to meet the crews coming off the flats, always full of steam. To be a part of a shellfish business means to speak in the colloquial way and quarrel in the ludicrous way that only a clam digger can.

To harvest an oyster requires hours spent underwater breathing compressed air and learning what to pick up. (No wonder you get some real cracked out old timers…) To be efficient in harvesting, one must know to work upstream, lest the sediment raised from their pickings blurs the area they are trying to work. Once put in the basket and hauled to service, lifted into the boat, and then onto the dock, they are carried uphill to the plant to be pampered. To process an oyster requires skill with a rock hammer and patience or mindlessness to bear the tedium, for it takes many more to cull the oysters apart that have grown into one another, locked by a bond meant for survival. The elements below the surface are different from those above where we live,
but the currents are as fierce as our winds. Yet again, we humans have defeated the natural process. A mere fox of bear searching the shore for sustenance would have been entirely unable to pry the sharp creature off its resting place on the side of a rock in the shallows.

Now the acquisition of an oyster itself is not the sole factor of importance. My connection goes deeper, to the meaning of eating an oyster and the type of events where an oyster is served. Generally considered a luscious treat, it is most often a food ordered or served by or to a particular level of class or affluence, or within a particular region where it is more readily available. Different oysters come from different places and so some people identify with a particular oyster more than others – be it through pride or just through exposure to that one kind throughout their childhood, if they were lucky enough to grow up on the coast or vacation to a cottage in Maine. An event where an oyster is served is important for some reason, and if you’ve ever read the oyster list – like the wine list – you know what I mean. The eloquent description of the taste of a particular type of oyster is the literary feast that precedes the actual consumption. A lifetime of solitude glued to a rock or laying, lost, in the sediment at the bottom of still, cold, and dark waters embodied a script of words as ridiculous and unlike anything they actually represent you’ll see nowhere else – except maybe on the wine list.

The oyster is also considered an aphrodisiac, a food of love. Scientifically, there is no grounding for this idea, but alas, food is a magical thing with magical implications. My connection to the oyster begins at the level of growing and harvesting and extends to the preparation, presentation and consumption. It transcends to the domains of personal status, timeless events, and love of all sorts…it is a relationship that embodies all these things at once. For all these reasons, I identify most closely with the oyster.

This is my grandmother, Jane Howell, harvesting quahogs for the family business in 2002.
Stories of a Food-Obsessed Family
Spencer Hurst

“Eating together regularly is a way in which a group, be it a family, fosters unity and feelings of loyalty. Eating together has a powerful bonding effect.”

“Preparing meals for others or eating meals with them are often acts of friendship and love. A friend, parent or lover wants to give things to the loved one, and a common gift is food.”

-Elizabeth Telfer, Food For Thought.

My family and I spend every summer on Cape Cod at my Grandparent’s house. At the Cape, my Uncle and his family own a house directly across the street from my Grandparents house (where my family and I stay) and we spend loads of family time together by eating. It is hard to think of Cape Cod without conjuring up memories of entertaining meals with the family. The culinary talents of my Mom and Grandmother fuse together to create a summer full of luscious meals.

Three tightly knit families in two houses right next to each other make for extremely enjoyable meals. My family and my Grandparents “share” the kitchen in our house, but we do not share the same eating schedule. My Grandparents have lunch exactly at noon and dinner at 5:30 on the dot. My immediate family will all independently eat lunch from noon till around 1:30 and, on most occasions, will eat dinner together around 7 o’clock. In order to prepare dinner by 7, my mom usually needs access to the kitchen around 6. This 6 o’clock time is a complete danger zone in the house, as my Grandparents are finishing their meal and my mom is cautiously yet feverously trying to put together our meal. The kitchen is swamped, the dogs are being stepped on, and people’s insides start to simmer, all in the goal to eat food.

In order to avoid the 6 o’clock craziness, advanced preparation is needed. As my siblings and I wake up in the morning, we are bombarded with questions on what we want to eat that night. “Ma, I literally have no idea. I have not even had breakfast” and “I don’t care, whatever you want” are common responses at the early hour. We, as teenage, are less conformed and rigid than our elders and sometimes we fail to realize that preparation is actually needed in life.

Since my cousin’s moved into their new house, we have been eating Thanksgiving at their place for the past three years. The brunt of hosting the family has shifted from my Mom and Grandmother to my Aunt, as she is now dealt the task of cooking the turkey. My Aunt is a good cook, but my Mom and Grandmother are phenomenal cooks. My Grandfather, who is constantly pampered with hoards of food from his wife and my Mom, has always met my Aunt’s cooking with skeptical eyes. He tends to have an opinion on all food, as he believes his palette is well seasoned. When something’s taste is off, my Grandfather will be the first one to notice it.

Two years ago my Grandfather decided that my Aunt’s turkey was undercooked. His comments were quickly hushed by everyone to avoid a scene breaking out, even though we all knew that the turkey was indeed undercooked. Since this “incident” two years ago, my Grandmother has made a “backup” Thanksgiving meal at our house. An extra set of mashed potatoes, stuffing and turkey remain at our house, waiting to be consumed at a later hour. The dynamic is hilarious as we are forced to douse my Aunt’s turkey with gravy, just waiting for the opportunity to make a Thanksgiving lunch the next day with the backup turkey.

My Grandfather’s reliance on my Grandmother’s cooking is hard to comprehend. His chair at the table is dubbed “the magic chair” because he sits there and food is, voluntarily and happily, cooked for him morning, noon and night. One day last year my Grandparent’s schedule did not line up and they were unable to have their customary noon lunch together. My Grandfather was left in the house, his stomach grumbling and the magic chair not working. He was supposed to make his own lunch this day and ideas were not flooding into his head. He opted to take a couple of pieces of turkey and throw them between two pieces of bread. No condiments, no extras on the sandwich and no toasted bread. A stark contrast to the usual masterpieces he consumes from my Grandmother. Whenever this story is brought up to him, his face gets all red and he responds, “what are you a tattle tale?” He is completely capable in preparing his own meal, as he has watched thousands of meals made for him, yet he failed to complete the task this given day.

My Grandfather also has a knack for “knowing” when food is sufficiently cooked on the grill. Grilling is an enormous component of our summer meals as steak, chicken, and all sorts of seafood usually feel the wrath of the grill. My brother, dad, uncle or I will usually do the grilling at family dinners. This allows my Grandfather
ample time to sit in the rocking chair and tell the griller when the food is ready. Since his stomach is always grumbling, his technique on the grill is to scorch the food at a high temperature to expedite the process. This usually results in a poor end product, hence why he is “retired” from grilling. Playful comments such as “they look good, lets bring them in” or “alright, they’ve been on their long enough” are commonly heard out of his mouth during grilling hours. His grill advice is rarely followed, as there would be many hungry family members if his way were implemented.

Grilling for an extended family dinner of twelve people is an entertaining scene, as the griller is bombarded with a series of benign criticisms. The most common phrase said is “I want mine rare rare.” This phrase stems from four summers ago, when we were grilling steaks one night and the steak was not rare enough for my Grandmother. She responded by making it extremely clear that her steaks were to be “rare rare” from now on. While the griller is going about his business, the peanut gallery fires off demands for how the food should be cooked. The goal of the peanut gallery is to increase the pressure and anxiety of the griller to uncomfortable levels. 99% of the time the food is cooked perfectly, as the peanut gallery’s comments rarely affect the focus of the griller, but it is still wildly entertaining to set a stage like this.

Around fifteen years ago, when my first dog Duke was a puppy, a bond between our family’s dogs and grilling sparked. It all started when we were grilling cheeseburgers outside and an extra piece of cheese was left. My dad decided to give it to Duke and since then cheese has become a necessary component to any grill session. It does not matter if we are grilling fish, chicken or steak, pieces of cheese must be brought out for the dogs because they are expecting it. The expectation that the dogs have for the cheese during grilling is comparable to the expectations that my family members have for home cooked meals most every night. Sometimes our expectations take away from our ability to appreciate the vast talents my Mom and Grandmother have.

Expectations have played a large role throughout this whole class, as we have constantly talked about how people expect food to be cheap. Why should the thing that keeps us alive and healthy be deemed “cheap”? If our final product is our health and well being then why should we be skimpy on cheap inputs into our body? My family’s love for food has given me an appreciation and awareness of food that I am grateful for. The time spent making and consuming food in my family has so much intrinsic value to me. Not only am I putting delicious food into my body, I am also bonding and enjoying the company of my family.

When you have a family as engrossed into food as mine, meal times are cherished times and I am forever indebted to that.

Heart Food
Teddy Kuo

“Love is food and food is love”
- Nancy Savoca

My mother always said “your father expresses his love to you by cooking for you.”

Being born in Taiwan’s “Rooster Cage”, my father’s birth place presents an interesting connection to food. It should be noted that Taiwan is most well-known for its food. Secondly, Rooster Cage’s Temple Mouth area may be the origin of Taiwan’s famous night markets. Since Taiwan is a very small country with huge population, many of these night markets were right around the corner from your apartment. These night markets are the prime social center for Taiwanese cultures. They provide entertainment and most importantly a large array of food. Everyone knows how important food is in Chinese culture.
The night markets consist of hundreds of little food stands where vendors sell only a few different kinds of foods. Walking around the night markets you can see that each vendor specializes in the food they make best. They also face competitors that also specialize in the same food as them. Selling food in small portions and cheap prices allows you to try everything. Being born in Rooster Cage, Taiwan, my father was constantly exposed to a variety of the best tasting food you can find. This exposure gave my father the opportunity to try different foods and prefect his cooking style.

The cooking journey of my father started when he was very young, probably when he was under 12 years old. Being one of the older children of the family (second eldest), my father felt obligated to help take care of his younger brother and younger twin sisters. My father had to cook for the family when my grandmother and grandfather were busy, which was pretty frequent. For my father, cooking at first was done because he had to and then it was because he loved his family. Cooking slowly turned into a hobby. With just a taste of the food he is eating, he can tell you all the ingredients that were used in that dish.

Besides learning how to cook from night markets and from cooking for his family, my father was also friends with a family full of cooks, the Chang family. The Chang family had I believe three brothers, all good friends with my father. All the Chang brothers ended up working in restaurants. One of them even had a very successful restaurant in the World Trade Center. Since they were all so interested in food, they would cook for each other and exchange food for each other to try. They worked together to make their cooking better and better. When I went back to Taiwan and visited one of the brother’s restaurants, I ate this cold seasoned mixed dried bean curd. My father and he did not cook for each other in a long time because my family was in America while theirs went back to Taiwan. Surprisingly, the taste of the cold seasoned mixed dried bean curd tasted very similar to my father’s after all these years. The similar taste after so many years was like how their friendship was still strong after being apart for so long.

Ever since I was little, my sister and I have always loved my father’s cooking. We were always so excited about dinner on Tuesday nights because we knew our dad was going to be cooking since it was his day off. The preparation for dinner always took forever. When my father cooked, it could last from the afternoon all through the evening. My sister and I would be starving while our dad was still cooking food. We would sit by the kitchen just smelling all the wonderful scents and listening to the sounds of the food being cooked. We would wait patiently because we knew that the food was going to be great. Being grown up now, we also know that my father’s cooking took so long because he wanted to make sure everything was perfect for us.

Our favorite holidays would be the ones where we knew there was going to be a big feast involved. These holidays were Chinese New Year, and a Chinese style Thanksgiving. These dinners were more like feasts because of the quantity of food and people we invited. It was customary for there to be at least ten dishes, soup, fish, and dumplings. We could not eat all the fish because there was a symbol associated with it. Not finishing the fish represented that we had so much food we couldn’t finish it. Having dumplings were important because they represented money due to the shape of the dumpling being similar to ancient Chinese currency. You were not supposed to count how many dumplings you ate because that symbolized that you had so much money you couldn’t even out it. My dad would always make a dish of roasted beef, egg, seaweed, pig ear, and bean curd. That was one of my favorite dishes because my dad made the sauce for it himself. The sauce consists of some ketchup, parsley, Chinese chili hot sauce, and maybe a few other ingredients that I do not know about. He also makes a lot of cold mixed dishes. These dishes include cucumber with a peanut butter sauce, and hot chili oil.

For Thanksgiving, there was less food but the preparation time would start a week before Thanksgiving. It took my father a few Thanksgivings to perfect his turkey making skills. My mother would buy the turkey from either an Amish farm, a two hour drive away, or from somewhere where they sell free range organic turkey in the New York City, which was also quite a two hour journey due to traffic and difficulty in trying to find a parking spot. Once my mother got the turkey, my father would begin seasoning, drying, and…believe it or not…massaging it. My favorite Thanksgiving dish is one that resembles a Chinese turkey hamburger. The bun is this white puffy type of Chinese bread. The insides would consist of turkey, large pieces of scallion, topped with a dark colored thick, Chinese sauce. Perhaps my father’s most famous dish is his shrimp
with sweet ketchup and hot sauce. This shrimp is stir fried with a sauce that consists of ketchup, some hot sauce, onions, scallions, and parsley. It was necessary for the shrimp to be cooked with the shell still on it because it was part of the eating experience. When you eat the shrimp, you must first suck it with the shell still on so you get all the flavors that were cooked into the shrimp. Once all the sauce was sucked out, you can then begin to peel it. The last step after you finished eating all the shrimp was to lick your fingers. My mom always says it’s so good that after all the shrimp is gone, you end up licking your fingers because you still want to experience the taste. With the experience my father had from cooking for all his life, he really knew what details to really pay attention to so he can cook the best meal for us. He got better and better at cooking these feasts each year.

My dad was always busy working so he would not be able to attend my swim meets or my sister regattas. Instead of being there through spirit, he was there through food. A few days before competitions, my dad would make foods that would recover and prepare our bodies for competition. One of my favorite foods that he would make would be Chinese chicken noodle soup which was brewed with chicken and a bunch of Chinese herbs. He would also make a soup brewed from vegetables, fruits, and ox-tail. Although my dad wasn’t there to watch the races and sometimes didn’t ask too much about how I did, he showed his concern by making all these soups to help me be in the best shape I could, and for my enjoyment.

My father would also make tons of food for birthday parties my sister and I had. Since we are now both at Middlebury, my mother would have to drive up a van that was filled tightly with food to be able to bring all of it up. Although some of these foods were not too hard to make, they did take a long time. My American friends loved American Chinese food such as spring rolls, and dumplings. My parents would end up making hundreds of spring rolls and dumplings. We were able to slowly introduce them to some more traditional Chinese foods such as cold noodle with peanut butter and sesame sauce, and a roasted meat sauce that was very traditional to Taiwan. Since my father got home from work late, he would spend all night, staying up to around three or four in the morning making these foods for us. My father was willing to put so much effort into the food because he loved and cared for us.

Even now with my sister and me both at Middlebury College, my father still cooks for us. When my mother comes up to watch my swim races or my sister’s crew regattas, she would end up coming to Middlebury around three times a month. She would make a five hour drive up to deliver the food my father made. Some of the foods include a shrimp, corn, and egg drop soup, a collection of roasted foods, my father’s famous shrimp cooked in a sweet ketchup and hot sauce, and so many more of our favorite foods. A lot of the time when either my sister or I call my father, one of the first things he would ask is if we ate. My mother would always be a bit mad that he asks this question the most and doesn’t ask too much about how we are doing. But my mother understands that he truly expresses his concerns about us through food because to him, food is the most important.

An Identity Rediscovered at Supper
Michael Longo

“Often, the less there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it.” -Mark Twain

We begin with shrimp, cheese, and some champagne for the adults. Next come the clams, accompanied by aioli. Then the chilled, salty salads made from ocean dwellers such as squid, cod, and octopus. Following a break comes everyone’s favorite, the lobster, completing the feast of seafood that occurs every year in my family on Christmas Eve. Finally, much to the pleasure of the children, comes dessert, complete with an unusual vegetable enjoyed after dinner almost exclusively in my family. This meal never fails to conclude with a surprise from Pop-pop that young ones look
forward to all year. Always the same, our feast never varies, and I would have it no other way.

The sequence of our Christmas is served with military precision, and I can recall every detail like it was yesterday. Grandma spends weeks going to different stores in Newark, Harrison, and even Caldwell to prepare the antipasti. The unique provisions that constitute the first part of our meal can only be found in the most concentrated Italian areas of Jersey, and she treks out to her childhood neighborhoods in search of the best ingredients. After acquiring the necessary provisions, she truly comes alive and enlists many of the grandchildren as her apprentices. Everyone loves to cook with Grandma, yet no one would dare interrupt Pop-pop as he prepares his sacred clams. These clams, served ONLY on Christmas, are Pop-Pop’s specialty as the recipe has been passed through his family for generations. Such a dedication on the part of my grandparents, who go through so much to prepare this one meal, indicates how important they consider their Italian heritage, and how essential it is to preserve it.

Perhaps the most unique feature about dinner on Christmas Eve is our tradition of enjoying fennel with dessert. This vegetable, often found in salads rather than aside lemon meringue pie, has a surprisingly refreshing taste grandma tells me “cleans off the pallet after a large meal.” No meal can end at Grandma and Pop-pop's house without picking at fennel and surprising the youngest grandchildren. Every grandchild receives his or her first gift at the dinner table, and such a surprise makes waiting through the extended feast extra difficult for some of the more rambunctious children in my family. Pop-pop has a “popper” for every child, much like his grandpa used to distribute back in the 1930’s and 1940’s. These entertaining toys are meant to be ripped, and explode to produce some sort of fun trinket for the person who rips it. While the toys are never at the top of anyone’s list to Santa Claus, the tradition has created one of the most lasting images of Christmas at my grandparent’s house.

To an outsider it may seem incomplete. How can you have such an important meal without any turkey, steak, or even chicken? Where are the vegetables? Why is it split up into so many courses? While such questions may seem plausible at first glance, they fail to account for the most crucial aspect of my family’s Christmas Eve dinner: tradition. Since I can remember, my grandparents have championed our Italian heritage, and our seafood feast on Christmas Eve is an essential part of this culture. Each year on the day before Christmas, my family takes the short drive to my grandparent’s house to meet the other members of my extended family to experience the meal that confirms my grandmother reputation for being a phenomenal cook. This night teaches me, more than anything else, what it means to be an Italian, and what an integral role food plays in that identity.

I chuckle when I recall questioning my grandma on her Christmas menu. Having expressed my displeasure with our never-changing seafood menu, my sweet, old grandmother shot me a look that would strike fear in God himself. Her kitchen, filled with its usual aroma of fresh Italian cooking, provided the backdrop for one of the most terrifying conversations I have ever had. A youth, I foolishly asked why such traditions were necessary or even relevant, as I hated fish at the time and was tired of being forced to eat something so unsavory. She responded that such a custom began many generations ago, back in Italy. At great risk, I pressed the matter and again inquired why we continued to practice a seemingly outdated ritual. This final question finally pushed my delicate grandmother to her breaking point as she exploded, “MICHAEL! That’s how we do things!” To this day I have never seen my grandmother become so defensive of something. Reflecting on this event many years later, I realize that our decision to eat fish every year is of utmost importance, as to abandon the seafood feast would essentially be abandoning our ancestors. While the origins for such an important event could not be pinpointed by either of my grandparents, I remain impressed by their blind devotion to such a ritual. This devotion has taught me a lot about the importance of loyalty, even if it may seem illogical. My grandparents recognize that continuing our seafood feast every year is the most effective way to transmit the values that they were brought up with to the next generation. This persistence in our annual Christmas Eve meal has taught me that some things should be done because they always have, and need no further validation. By changing what we have done for so long, we would lose a part of what makes us up as a family.

In addition to upholding tradition, our Christmas meal emphasizes how close we are as a family. Looking around the table, it is hard to ignore the joy that comes with the excitement of being together. Hectic schedules and distance tend to keep us apart
during most of the year, yet viewing this meal would give no indication of such a fact. Every year the conversation reverts back to the same old topics such as business, other relatives, and current events. I have come to understand, however, that it is not the content of our conversation that matters. What truly counts is that we strengthen the ties that link us together through good times and bad, to stay true to the most important thing in life, family.

Clams Oreganata
Ingredients
1 dozen littleneck clams, scrubbed
1 cups plain bread crumbs
2 cloves garlic, smashed and chopped
3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh oregano
2 tablespoons finely chopped Italian parsley leaves
salt
2-3 tablespoons olive oil
the clam juice that came with the clams
Directions
Preheat oven to 450 degrees F
Place clams on a sheet tray and put them in the preheated oven for 2-3 minutes or until clams begin to open a little.
Pry the clams open and remove the unwanted shells, remove the clam, and place it back in the shell
Combine breadcrumbs, parsley, garlic, oregano, and salt. Add olive oil and stir until well combined.
Spread concoction over clams that are already in their shells.
Place the clams on a sheet tray and add some water. Put the clams back into the oven and cook until they are dark brown and crispy.

Salsa Adventures
Maggie Melberg

“Dining with one’s friends and beloved family is certainly one of life’s primal and most innocent delights, one that is both soul-satisfying and eternal”
- Julia Child

Since I can remember, my family has been obsessed with cooking and eating Mexican food. If there was any question of where we wanted to go out to eat, or what we wanted to cook, it was always easy to know what the verdict would be… Mexican! This one food choice was probably the only thing we never argued about. Since we loved Mexican food it was fairly obvious that we also loved salsa. I in particular could not get enough of it. My favorite salsa was made at a restaurant called La Cantina. While “La Cantina” translates in English to, “The Bar” or “The Saloon,” it wasn’t the virgin margaritas that got my attention. It was always the salsa.

I am the youngest member of my family so I was rarely engaged in the conversations that were occurring during meals. I was also the shyest member of the group. My brother and sister were always playing and jibber-jabbering with each other, and my parents were trying to talk to us, but we refused to pay attention long enough to get any real conversation going. This left my parents to their own conversations and my brother and sister to their own fun endeavors. This meant that I was usually entertaining myself. I was not content coloring or playing with my imaginary friends, instead I was focused on eating as much salsa as possible.
La Cantina’s hot salsa was unlike any other salsa I have ever had in my life. It wasn’t thick and chunky with clumps of tomatoes overwhelming my chip. The presentation of it wasn’t especially beautiful either. It lacked the corn and visible leaves of cilantro that some restaurants layer their salsa with. La Cantina’s salsa was red and brownish in color, with flecks of green dispersed throughout. Its consistency was similar to a thick juice… and I preferred to consume it in the same fashion as a beverage. Sipping the salsa was the quickest and most efficient way to get the salsa from the cup to my mouth. Once inside my mouth, my taste buds were immersed in a spicy, salty, and tomato-cilantro infusion that I loved so dearly that I would insist the waiter bring at least three cups at a time. I know people thought I was weird and crazy for drinking up all the salsa I possibly could, but I really loved this salsa. It got to the point that I needed this salsa so much that I would beg for my family to go to La Cantina every time we went out for Mexican food. I was a salsa fanatic. This addiction I had led my mom and me on a hunt for the best salsa recipe that was just as good as my favorite La Cantina salsa.

It took more time than expected to find an adequate concoction that would suit my desires. My mom and I flocked to the grocery store to get all of the ripest ingredients. The tomatoes at the store were big and voluptuous. If you bit into one it had a sweet refreshing flavor. The seeds enveloped in their liquid capsules would burst and slip around in my mouth. I was convinced that these tomatoes must have been the same ones that La Cantina used. We then moved on to get the cilantro. It came in a bouquet-like fashion. A rubber band grouped the stems of the cilantro together, and the tops blossomed into a beautiful tree-like arrangement. So we put them in a plastic bag and moved through the aisles of the store looking for ingredients that would give us La Cantina’s flavors. I knew salt was involved, but I really wasn’t sure what else the cooks at the restaurant put in there. The colors of the salsa weren’t much help either. Red and green, we had our tomatoes and cilantro. What else was in those cups of delicious soupy salsa? My mom and I agreed that there must be some jalapenos in the spicy blend to give it some kick, but what else?

My mom had always been an amazing cook, and underneath it all she had a good idea of what the other ingredients we needed in order to make the salsa. Yet she played it off as if I was making amazing discoveries when I choose an ingredient that was destined to be in the mix. At the end of our spree we had a basket full of tomatoes, cilantro, jalapenos, onions, limes, salt and pepper. What else could there be?

When we got home we unpacked the plastic grocery bags, and my mom started prepping the kitchen for our salsa creating. We chopped the tomatoes, onions, jalapenos and cilantro. We squeezed the limes and dashed the mixture with salt and pepper. This clearly was not the correct way of making my liquid substance. It looked pretty and colorful… that was not what I was interested in. We blew it. Out initial attempt was a complete failure. Being only eight years old I was devastated. My mom again knew an easy solution to make the salsa more of a liquid than its current solid state. She pulled out her trusty Cuisinart food processor and slid the mixture into bowl. In a matter of thirty seconds the salsa was looking almost exactly like La Cantina’s. The look of it was only one aspect though. Unfortunately, it tasted nothing like the salsa of my favorite restaurant. Instead, it was watery and lacked the right flavors. Again I was devastated. My mom could see that the tears were going to come soon if she didn’t do something. So to soothe my damaged ego we went to the top to try and find out what really was in the mixture. My mom drove me to town and we marched into La Cantina for a quick taco and enchilada.

Inside the restaurant I diligently tried to decipher what was what in the salsa. It looked just like ours, but clearly we were missing some key component. I finally gave up and tried to enjoy the salsa by slugging a couple back. My mom, on the other hand, knew that it would be much more productive if we simply asked the salsa creator in person what was in it. It turns out that when she asked about the ingredients he looked at her and laughed. We had been using almost all of the right ingredients, but there were a few variations that would have to be dealt with. First of all, we were using the wrong type of tomatoes. I was under the impression that all food was better when prepared from fresh produce, but this salsa was made with canned tomatoes. The darker color that the restaurant’s salsa embodied was because the tomatoes were older and sitting in juice for so long. Of all the ingredient variations, the tomatoes were the most crucial if we wanted to get the flavors right. Another important aspect of the salsa was the time it needed to sit in order for the spice to kick just right. The salsa would have to sit
overnight. I was blown away by how changing a few small aspects of the ingredients could create such a change.

My mom and I would have to go back to the store and get new ingredients. She scanned the tops of the aisle and looked for the sign that marked canned foods. Regardless, we picked up four big cans of tomatoes and a jar of jalapenos. We could salvage the rest of the ingredients from our previous visit to the store. Again we collected our ingredients and put them in the Cuisinart to be liquefied. This time the mixture looked and smelled very similar to the recipe from La Cantina.

It wasn’t long before we transferred the salsa into a large Tupperware that would wait in the fridge for the night before I could see if the salsa truly was adequate. The next morning when I woke up the first thing I did was sprint over to the kitchen to see if my creation was a success. It was to a degree. It tasted right, but I still wasn’t content with something. I sat by myself eating it and it really did taste quite similar, but what on earth was it missing? Later in the day I figured out exactly what the missing link was. It was my family. Even though I usually sat at the dinner table and amused myself, I didn’t realize that I enjoyed the salsa so much more with the presence of my family. As we sat around the dinner table I looked around and saw that everyone was smiling and bantering about their days occurrences. I was pleased that everyone was enjoying the salsa that my mom and I hunted for and investigated, but I was mostly happy because I was surrounded by my family, the people that subconsciously made me happy. Inside my little belly I had a warm feeling that left me with a sense of fullness. Not fullness in the sense that I was physically full, but a sense of complete contentment. The family dining experience continues to make me feel this way and now that my family is older and we rarely are together it is extremely fulfilling to sit down and be with each other. My salsa adventure helped me understand myself, and it helped me understand the relationship I have with food and my family. Although I love salsa, it is never as good as when I am eating it with my family.

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Melberg’s Homemade Salsa

1 - 15oz can diced tomatoes
1/4 cup cilantro
1/8 - 1/4 cup (depends on desired spiciness) pickled jalapenos
1 lime squeezed
1/2 teaspoon cumin
salt and pepper to taste

put in cuisinart and blend until desired consistency

add 1/3 cup finely chopped onions to salsa
put in fridge for 12 hours and ready to eat

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Fresh Food and Dancing Rocks
Alice Pfeifer

After dinner sit a while, and after supper walk a mile.
- English Saying

The main focus of any day off of work from my sleep-away camp is to eat anything and everything that is unavailable to you when you’re in camp. These days usually include a luxurious breakfast at the locally acclaimed Moody’s Diner, a fantastic sandwich bursting with ingredients from the Market Basket, and a sit-down dinner at Cappy’s Chowder House. However, one July day in the summer of 2009, three of my best friends and I decided to break out of the usual day-off script and travel two hours to Malmor, my grandmother’s house in Seal Harbor on Mount Desert Island in Maine for a day of total escape. We did this knowing that our day would involve much more than three low-key meals: two hours by car to Malmor, a boat ride to an island, a mile-long walk across the island, a picnic feast with a gorgeous view, the mile hike and boat journey back, several hours of sitting on the porch discussing the world, and two hours back to camp at the end of the day. We were up for the adventure, and it was well worth it.
Kate, Courtney, Eli, and I wandered into the small kitchen that I’d grown up in during my childhood summers. My mom had already visited Pine Tree Market, the local grocery store in neighboring Northeast Harbor, earlier that morning. The four of us immediately crowded around the kitchen counter as we took in the sight of all the fresh food that awaited our arrival. Three kinds of freshly baked bread sat on a cutting board, smelling of the bakery in town. Mounds of newly sliced deli meats – turkey, ham, and roast beef – lay on a plate that I recognized from every dinner I ate growing up in the summertime. Great slabs of chicken, fresh off the bone, sat close by. Thick, juicy slices of tomato from my grandmother’s vegetable garden caught my eye as blocks of cheddar cheese mimicked mountains on the worn wooden cutting board. The mayonnaise, mustard, and butter framed the countertop, waiting to be opened. Without hesitation the four of us began to pile the fresh ingredients on the fresh bread, meanwhile tossing fresh fruit from a bowl nearby directly into our mouths every few moments. We were in a fresh heaven. My mom and grandmother sat around the kitchen table as we threw this feast together, asking us questions about our campers, activities, and plans for the fall. Engaging conversation and delicious food were abundant. Once made, each sandwich – two or three per counselor, one per other family member – went into a simple sandwich bag and a Sharpee quickly labeled every one with the respective consumer’s initials. These were set aside as we packed the rest of the food in picnic bags in efforts to avoid the disappointing nature of a smushed sandwich.

The four of us began to toss the other elements of our feast in the picnic bags, which were scattered across the kitchen floor. Family-size bags of Smartfood popcorn flew through the air, landing softly in an old L.L.Bean bag of my grandmothers. Bags of Milano, Brussels, Bordeaux, and Nantucket Dark Chocolate Pepperidge Farm cookies were piled on top of one another and ready to be enjoyed. There were multiple containers of fruit stacked inside a cooler – strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries. A heap of cherries sat prepared for their usual fate: a cherry pit-spitting contest off the bow of the boat, sometime late afternoon. The carrots and hummus were added to the fruit cooler while the beverages filled up one of their own. Coke, IBC Root Beer, Transfusions (ginger ale and grape juice), and bottles of chocolate milk included. Last but certainly not least, we packed the cherished sandwiches.

After packing our entire picnic, my friends, family, and I headed down to the small but pristine Seal Harbor Yacht Club to get on our boat. Kate, Courtney, Eli, and I enjoyed the sunshine – but more so, the lack of kids running around us – while my mom and stepfather took on the role of captain. Eventually we reached the buoy designated for our yacht club just off the northwest coast of a decently sized island called Baker’s Island. Being sailing counselors, Courtney and I assisted in catching the mooring, hauling in the small dinghy that had trailed behind us the entire trip, and rowing the family (black lab, included) and most importantly the food to shore.

Once on land our picnic crew divvied up the food bags and began the much-loved walk across the island to the perfect picnic spot: the Dancing Rocks. The four of us carried the bulk of the food luggage, eager to break into the bags of Smartfood Popcorn and Milanos as we went. But rather than prematurely dig into the snack food, we explored the fairy houses placed discreetly along the path. I’ve seen these every summer since I can remember; they never cease to capture my attention and imagination. Soon enough the trees began to clear and the smells and sounds of the ocean came back into our heads.

The Dancing Rocks are comprised of hundreds of oddly shaped pink granite boulders jumbled together to form a shoreline. In addition to a perfect natural jungle gym for any energetic kid, the sometime flat boulders provide picnic-goers with an abundance of spots to settle for the afternoon. Being the first to reach the shore, Courtney, Kate, Eli, and I were the ones to search for the ideal picnic location. Once we found it, we settled down; laid out the sandwiches, fruit, cookies, snack food, and
drinks; and – surprisingly – waited patiently for the rest of the group to find us before we dug into the food. As soon as they arrived, the feast began. Sandwiches, laughs, cookies, group pictures, sodas, and quick summer naps in the sunshine abounded.

The walk back helped to settle our stomachs and provided a wonderfully natural end to our epic day-off picnic. The four of us strolled side-by-side, with my black lab playfully wandering nearby and eagerly wagging his tail with each smell. There are few times in my life that I remember feeling quite so satisfied. I was entirely at ease: full of food, on a pretty walk with my friends and family, and altogether at peace with the world.

To this day my mom loves to tell the story of what a sight the four of us were, stumbling exhaustedly out of my car and somehow gaining all the energy of an exciting day ahead the moment we saw what the kitchen had in store for us. Reaching across each other, putting one handful of food into a sandwich and the other handful into our mouths – we must have looked like we hadn’t eaten in days. But there’s something exhilarating about being able to craft your own meal after a summer of pre-determined dining hall meals. That’s not to say the food at camp is bad; in fact, it’s actually quite good. Yet the freedom that comes with making your own meal and the possible excitement of making an adventure out of that meal are hard to beat.

Her name is Lorna Greenberg, or as we call her Aunt Lorna. Despite working for my family for close to 25 years, taking care of my three sisters and I when my parents were off at work, she never revealed her age. When I was younger I would play guessing games to figure it out, with numbers ranging from 60 to 90, but she never budged. Eventually the reality of her age became meaningless, both to her and to us. She was young in spirit.

Aunt Lorna began working for my family when my eldest sister was only 2 months old, bringing with her a passion for children, a strong Jewish heritage, and an incredible cooking ability. She was an extraordinarily selfless woman, as dedicated and devoted as I have ever encountered. As a child she won me over in the simplest of ways: by sneaking me foods that would never have been allowed around my health-conscious mother. Grilled Cheese? Sure. French Fries and a milkshake? Absolutely. Her goal was to make her little princesses happy, and she always succeeded. It was not until I grew older that I became aware that her true culinary skills far surpassed these simple pleasures.

My family is large, to say the least. My mother is the eldest of nine and my dad is one of four. Growing up in such an overwhelmingly Irish-Catholic family meant I was constantly surrounded by dozens of cousins and never-ending traditional holiday meals. Having Aunt Lorna around meant that I had to balance my Irish routines with her own Jewish traditions. At first, this was difficult. I was young and, quite simply, out of tune with cultural differences. Aunt Lorna exposed me to her religion, slowly but surely, through her love of cooking and desire to take care of others. By the time I entered elementary school, Catholic and Jewish holidays divided my year. During Christmas and Easter Aunt Lorna would bring her family to eat at my grandmother’s house, and during Passover and Rosh Hashanah my sisters and I were the guests at her home. I remember the hours we would spend watching her in the kitchen, breathing in the smells that were so exotic to us. Holiday after holiday, year after year, we would sit and learn about Judaism through the beautiful round challah, blintzes, latkes, and matzah brie. Aunt Lorna spent so much of her time and energy caring for us that these meals were a way for us to repay her, to celebrate her culture and to appreciate her ancestors. It didn’t hurt that the food was amazing either.

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The Power of Matzah Ball Soup
Laura Romig

Worries go down better with soup. ~Jewish Proverb

I remember the struggle I faced trying to pull myself out of bed each day, despite my mom’s yells and my older sister’s banter. It was always the same on those early mornings before school: I would throw on a sweatshirt and make my way through my bedroom door before pausing at the top of the stairs. It was there that I would be hit with the smell that was a constant fixture in my life for 18 years. The distinctive smell of my babysitter’s perfume, so strong and feminine, would seep into every crevice of my home, signaling her arrival and the start of my day.
I distinctly remember the first time she switched my usual lunch of chicken noodle soup and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for matzah ball soup and a potato latke. What is this? I thought. Where is my pb & j with the crust cut off? I was a very stubborn child, and particularly picky about trying anything new, but after the first sip of soup I was hooked. This new taste became a staple in my diet. Good times or bad times, there was always an occasion for Lorna to prepare a big batch of this delicious creation and change the course of my day.

One of the greatest memories I have from my childhood is making the daily walk up to Sam’s, a neighborhood diner. Ever since I was a baby my Aunt Lorna and I would stroll up to the diner for lunch. We were the most loyal customers, with Lorna rarely missing a visit in the decades she lived in my town. Sam’s happened to be a diner that specialized in Jewish cuisine, but to me that was irrelevant. Walking into this neighborhood restaurant felt like I was walking into my own kitchen. The waiters and waitresses all knew me, and Sam himself would frequently bring me into the back to play with the colorful tooth-picks that lined the countertops, waiting to fill the massive sandwiches. My time spent hanging out at Sam’s is priceless: Aunt Lorna taught me how simple and enjoyable life can be. More importantly, though, she taught me about comfort and friendship that can be found in the most unlikely of places. It didn’t matter if I was Catholic or Jewish or even atheist. Her greatest joys, which have become my own as well, come from traditions, both religious and not, and family, both blood relatives and simply the friends you pick up along the way.

When my youngest sister turned 16, my Aunt Lorna decided that her work with my family was done. She moved down to Florida where her own children live and established a new home for herself. She has been fighting heart disease for many years but just recently it had become so intense that frequent visits to the hospital became her normal. In early April, her condition worsened to the point where she needed a drastic and risky surgery in order to live. I remember getting off the phone with my mom after hearing the news and strolling into Proctor in a complete daze. Just as I was struggling with the idea of losing a woman who had been like a second mother to me, the smell filled my soul: matzah ball soup. The all-too familiar smell hit me like a brick, almost knocking me to the ground. Did Proctor always serve matzah ball soup or was I being mocked? I looked at the calendar: it was the first day of Passover.

I sat down with my first bowl of matzah ball soup in who knows how long. While it wasn’t nearly as good as my Aunt Lorna’s, the warm soup wrapped me in a state of calmness. I’ll never know whether it was coincidence or fate that I was put face-to-face with the ultimate comfort food of my past just as my Aunt was entering surgery. What I do know is that I will always be grateful for the soup that soothed my worries and for the woman who has brought a sense of comfort and love to my life that will never be fully recreated.

Aunt Lorna’s surgery went amazingly well and she is currently settling back into her home in Florida, probably already at work on a new batch of soup.

Our Own Holiday
Julie Seo

Every year, my extended family convenes for a special “Seo” holiday. It is an arbitrary day, usually in the month of August before all the kids go off to school. We meet at one relative’s house and it is a daylong festival for us to eat, dance, and socialize with our family and close friends before we kick off another school year. In particular, the “Seo-Day” during the August before I started college was the most memorable. It was special for me as it was held at my house and I was extremely eager to make the most of the last time I was able to see everyone before coming to Middlebury. The food served was so delectable and scrumptious that my mouth has been trained to water at
even just the thought of it---four years later. One could not help but to see, smell, and eventually dream the food while remembering being in great company.

This three course meal began with hors d'oeuvres and we were served delicacies that were truly out of this world. They were arranged in a circle to symbolize the everlasting bond of the family. I remember vividly how the bright crimson bell pepper stood mighty in the face of its relative: the humble, dull, green pepper. The darkened pieces of beef had visible hints of all-purpose seasoning and slivers of onions. The dull pink jumbo shrimp looked like crescent moons, deliciously plump as if they were about to burst out of their transparent shells. The smell of the appetizers was enough to even arouse the interest of my usually stern Uncle Kenneth. My taste buds watered after eating them and I could hardly wait to taste the main course as the hickory smell of beef stood out to draw everyone closer to the kitchen. I don’t know who was more excited to eat: the group of little cousins who were whining about their level of hunger or me.

My mom and aunts did the most magnificent job of arranging the meats, rice, and vegetables on various platters and dishes. I saw roasted chicken in the most perfect form, covered by an orange sauce with green onions glued to the surface of the sauce. The rice contained a full color palette, as it housed pieces of yellow and white scrambled egg, pieces of cured ham, and shreds of shrimp meat. The stir fry vegetables consisting of carrots, string beans, and broccoli, clung to each other for dear life with just enough juice for a savory taste.

Not only did the main course look good, it tasted incredible! The roasted orange glazed chicken was sweet and spicy, spicy enough so that with every few bites I had to sip some cold water. The fried rice reeked of salty ham, and freshly scrambled egg. The rice also had the scent of soy sauce, which was used to darken the hue. The carrots dominated the scent of the stir fry vegetables. The faint, bitter smell of broccoli came in second, while the buttered string beans had little scent at all. Later, the smell of the string beans snuck up on you.

In time, dessert was the only frontier left to explore. I don’t even know how this was possible because we were all absolutely stuffed from the earlier courses. My cousin Jeannie made the most fabulous dessert ever: the strawberry pretzel dessert! It's a three layer dessert filled with the most decadent ingredients: strawberry flavored Jell-O, pretzels, and my weight in cream cheese. This pie has a pretzel crust and is filled with a fresh strawberry, whipped cream, and gelatin filling for a quick dessert. It's a fabulous contrast of salty and sweet with a satisfying crunch and the crust is just delicious enough to eat on its own.

The smell of the dessert climaxed the food experience. The strawberry pretzel dessert pie smelled like a ripe strawberry patch with the most heavenly whipped cream topping that was bound to send all of us tipping over our chairs. The excellent food and company served to be such a fond memory that I remember each second and I consider it to be one of the best times I have spent with my family, ever. Whenever I found myself being homesick during my time at Middlebury, this is the reflection that I first jump back to down on memory lane.

### STRAWBERRY PRETZEL DESSERT

Prep Time: 20 minutes  
Cook Time: 10 minutes  
Total Time: 30 minutes  
Yield: 24 to 36 servings

**Ingredients:**
- 2 cups crushed thin pretzel sticks (see Notes)  
- 3 Tablespoons granulated sugar  
- 3/4 cup (1-1/2 sticks or 12 Tablespoons) butter, at room temperature  
- 2 cups boiling water  
- 1 package (6 ounce) strawberry flavor gelatin  
- 8 ounces (1 large block) cream cheese, at room temperature  
- 1 cup sugar

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• 1 cup whipped topping (see Notes)
• 2 heaping cups sliced strawberries, fresh or frozen
• Additional whipped cream for garnish, optional

**Preparation:**
• Preheat oven to 400 F.
• Finely crush pretzels with a rolling pin or food processor. Combine crushed pretzels with 3 tablespoons sugar and butter. With a spatula, press pretzel mixture into the bottom of a 9 x 13-inch baking pan to form a crust. Bake 6 to 10 minutes until lightly browned. Cool completely.
• Pour 2 cups boiling water over strawberry gelatin. Stir until melted and let cool to room temperature.
• Beat cream cheese, 1 cup sugar, and whipped topping until combined. Spread evenly over cooled crust.
• Add strawberries to cooled gelatin and let thicken slightly. Spread strawberries and gelatin over cream cheese layer. Refrigerate until firm.
• Cut into squares to serve.

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**Catherine's Cookies**
Margaret Souther

“In the childhood memories of every good cook, there's a large kitchen, a warm stove, a simmering pot, and a mom.” -Barbara Costikyan

My mother is an amazing baker. It is no wonder I developed a sweet tooth so early, growing up surrounded by her famous chocolate chip cookies, savory sugar cookies, and moist homemade cakes almost daily.

I know I am biased, but I truly believe my mom makes the best homemade chocolate chip cookies in the world. They have a certain ingredient inside them that makes them addictive so you truly cannot have just one. People have tried to steal the recipe for years, but it has stayed in the family for generations. I am honored to be a part of such a tradition. Growing up, people always thought my siblings and I were so lucky to eat the cookies all the time, but little did they know my mom rarely baked them for us! She was always making them for coworkers, teachers, birthdays, etc. As a result, my brother and I came up with some stealth cookie-stealing techniques to get them when they were still hot, and gooey in the center. Looking back, my mom had to have known that we stole a few. Being 10 and 12 years old, how stealth could we really have been?

Throughout this course we have debated whether or not cooking is a true art form, on par with drawings, paintings, etc. This debate came as a shock to me at first as I have always considered my mother's sugar cookies true pieces of art. My mom has been making her sugar cookies for years and years, creating crafty, colorful platters for any occasion. While she wasn't working, driving my brother, my sister, or me to soccer practice or attending a PTA meeting of some sort, she was often in the kitchen whipping up a batch of cookies, often sugar cookies. Simply listing every cookie cutter that she owns would be impossible, as she stores hundreds in the basement with each cutter eager to be called upon and used for one of her creations. Literally any shape, object, country, president you can think of, she has it, each one grouped with other, similar themed cutters to keep things organized. Her different cookie cutters mirror an artist's different brushes and utensils while the cookies themselves act as her canvas. She treats every cookie with care, choosing carefully from her wide variety of colored sprinkles to make the perfect assortment of cookies. If she can't buy the right color, she’ll create it.

The two-day process truly begins with research on the “client”, or, recipient of the cookies. My mom has baked her sugar cookies for numerous events, including graduations, communions, weddings, bar mitzvahs, birthdays, bridal showers, lacrosse games, groundhogs day. Pretty much any holiday, she's ready to celebrate with her cookies. Take graduations, for example. She finds out the graduate’s favorite colors, making sure to incorporate them within the platter. She then looks closely into the graduate’s hair color (including highlights!) and eye color for little cookie “mini-me’s” while further investigating the graduate’s likes, interests, and hobbies to incorporate any sports or themes to make up the plate. She does her homework on her clients. After her brainstorming is finished, the actual baking begins, starting with making the dough from scratch:

**Recipe:**

FAMILY SECRET…Sorry!
Once refrigerated overnight, the dough is pounded and rolled out into perfect slabs with just the right thickness, ready to be cut. After cutting the cookie slices into their designated shapes, the true artwork begins. Despite, at times, making hundreds of cookies (especially for a whole grade worth of graduates), the cookies are decorated by hand with the right amount of sprinkles shaken onto each one. With big events, I was always honored to add a helping hand, but got nervous because I knew she had set such high standards. I knew her cookies meant a lot, and often feared over-sprinkling or using the wrong color, but she always found a way to turn my mistakes positives. While her decorations were specific, the designs are flexible, outlets for my mom’s creativity. Next comes the milk or white chocolate icings, dyed to match any color, piped through a small hole cut in the corner of a zip-lock bag. Her clever technique proves useful when writing names or numbers in her signature handwriting, styling hair, or simply drawing a smiley face onto a circle cookie, a classic. 

Time and time again my family has suggested that my mom open her own business, which she has considered, but making money was never her goal. She enjoys baking, using it as a way to show support for her friends and family. Her cookie making, passed down from my grandmother, will continue to travel from generation to generation, serving as a bonding experience between mothers and daughters, a common theme we have explored in this course. With her intricate designs and countless hours logged in the kitchen, I would put my mom in the same category as Chef Wu or Babette in her ability to produce great works of art. While her cookies are aesthetically pleasing, they too evoke a response from her audience, who often does not want to even eat and “ruin” her masterpieces. Through her cookies, she selflessly encourages the celebration of an event, holiday, or person while still expressing herself. Her cookies are not just cookies, but carry meaning to anyone who is lucky enough to eat one.

“Family traditions counter alienation and confusion. They help us define who we are; they provide something steady, reliable and safe in a confusing world.”

-Susan Lieberman, New Traditions

“Dad’s home!” My younger brother Miller and I both scream simultaneously as his Volvo rolls into the driveway. It is 6:00 on a cold, snowy Winter night. We immediately run into the garage and open the back doors of the car before Dad can even turn off the engine. He laughs as we both earnestly grab as many grocery bags as we can fit in our tiny hands.

It is a Sunday night, and both Miller and I know what that means. For as long as we can remember, Mom and Dad prepare the same delicious meal for us every
Sunday night during the long Winter months. Although it is predictable, the excitement never diminishes. It is constant, comforting, and delectable.

“Pasta and prosciutto” is a delightful combination of penne, dry-cured ham, and fresh broccoli cooked in garlic and garnished with shredded parmesan cheese. My parents repeatedly remind us that they created this Italian recipe, proudly claiming it as their own.

Like the regularity of the weekly dish itself, the preparation procedure has become routine. However, we still watch intently and embrace the process with all of our senses. Mom fills a large pot with water and puts it on the back burner. The still water will eventually transform into a pool of uncontrollable bubbling. Meanwhile, Dad unwraps the mound of thinly-sliced, salted prosciutto and crisply cuts through it. He slices it into smaller squares and without fail hands his two eager, mouthwatering children a “taste-test”.

Soon the entire house is permeated by the pervasive smell of sauteed garlic; a smell that will linger for days, stealthily attaching itself to every exposed article of clothing and leaving us longing for the next Sunday night’s dinner.

The prosciutto gradually becomes dark and crisp as it basks in the sizzling oil and garlic. Miller and I wait until the pot is left unattended to sprint over to the stove and snatch a few pieces of the half-cooked parma ham.

Mom drops the penne into the boiling water at just the right time. As Miller and I sit impatiently at the kitchen island, Mom and Dad ask us about our day. Like always, we take turns sharing the best part, the worst part, and laughing about the weekend occurrences. Music continually plays in the background, and we can hear the roaring fire crackling from the other room. Although the waiting process is long and tempting, these things reassure me that I wouldn’t trade it for anything.

Finally! Dad throws the stalks of broccoli into the pan, indicating that we are in the final stages of preparation. Only a few short minutes, to prevent the broccoli from getting mushy and soft. The pasta is drained, the ingredients are combined, and the dish is complete. We watch a mass of hot, moist steam spring up from the pot as Mom tosses everything together. Miller and I sit at the dinner table with satisfied grins on our faces as we look down at the perfect composition of colors and textures on our plates; the same feeling we experience every Sunday night.

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Last summer, my mom and I both decided to stop eating red meat. This decision did not pose a problem until the frigid winter months rolled around again. It suddenly occurred to us that our new eating regimen excluded prosciutto. Initially, a pang a sorrow and nostalgia overwhelmed me. Would these special nights be a thing of the past? Have I ruined what was so unique and reassuring about Sunday nights?

As I’ve grown older, I’ve realized that this meal itself was not the main source of my excitement and content on those memorable nights. Pasta and prosciutto is tasty, but by no means my favorite meal. Since I’ve left home, I rarely find myself craving the pasta dish. What I do miss are those Sunday nights at home surrounded by family and filled with comfort. I’ve learned that this dish was always just a supplement to our weekly family bonding; a mere contribution to our larger connection. It could have been any dish, so long as it was served at our family dinner table and enjoyed over good conversation.

I used to complain about the our nightly family meals together. I would go over to my friend’s houses for dinner and watch in disbelief as they microwaved a frozen pizza or heated up some leftover macaroni and cheese. Most of my friends would eat at completely different times than the rest of their family. Each child would eat when they were hungry and would make whatever was left in the refrigerator. Once their meal was heated up, they would eat in front of the television. This concept was so foreign to me. For a while, I envied my friends freedom and control. The thought of eating what and where I wanted largely appealed to me. However, I realize now the impact that eating together as a family has had on me. It sounds extreme, but I would be a different person today if I hadn’t experienced those routine family meals. Through these nightly dinners, I learned proper manners and dinner etiquette, which many of my friends fail to demonstrate. Unknowingly, I was constantly practicing my conversation skills through discussion with my parents and brothers. I would consider myself a good conversationalist and I largely attribute that to what I learned at the dinner table. These skills have indisputably strengthened my character, however I believe that the most
significant thing I learned at my dinner table is the importance of family. I am unbelievably close to my family and have just recently began to appreciate my relationships with them. I truly enjoy spending time with my parents and brothers, specifically during meals together.

Despite what I had initially thought, it wasn’t the meal that defined our time together, it was the tradition. This family tradition provided something “steady, reliable, and safe” in an otherwise confusing world. It is now apparent to me that this feeling was not only present during our pasta and prosciutto nights, but almost every night. Growing up in a household that emphasized the importance of eating together on a nightly-basis has taught me to appreciate a meal as more than food. It is an experience that provokes strong feelings of belonging and support. The power of a family meal is remarkable.

Recipe for Pasta and Prosciutto:
Sauté garlic and hot pepper flakes in a fry pan for a few minutes
Add cut prosciutto and let brown on medium heat for about 20 minutes
Cut broccoli crowns and set aside
Simultaneously, boil water
When water comes to a boil, add Penne pasta
Add broccoli to prosciutto, cover and turn to low heat
When pasta is cooked, the broccoli should be steamed
Empty the pasta into strainer
Add olive oil to pasta pot and heat on stove
Add pasta and prosciutto/broccoli to pot and stir over low heat
Serve and enjoy!

Texas Pecan Pie
Heath Townsend

“Be sure not to push the pecans down too hard, otherwise they won’t rise,” my father asserts from behind another glass of bourbon. “We don’t want another debacle like last year”. “Dad that was like five years ago” I proclaim over the snickers of our family friends who have joined us for the evening. “You’re just afraid to admit that my pie baking abilities are starting to rival your own!” Then secretly I go back to recheck each pecan to make sure it will rise.

It is a Wednesday night and we were already well into our annual pre-Thanksgiving tradition. Before putting the finishing touches to my masterpiece, I look toward the kitchen table at my parents and our good friend, Ambassador Philips, as they listen apprehensively to the Ambassador’s daughter, Maggie, talk about her anxieties of her first semester in college. She has long since finished preparing her pie and I am not one to be upstaged by a girl three years my junior, especially this year. Besides, I am confident I have just developed a diabolical new pecan decorative placement technique that will surely make my pie the best.

As I work meticulously, gently placing each individual pecan into concentric circles, I become apprehensive at the thoughts of past years fiascoes. One year, I had placed the pecans in the pie last, unaware that the sugary coating of the pie mixture kept them from getting burned. Another time, I had forgotten to cover the crust with tinfoil to keep the brittle edges from burning. And, most recently, and the event my father had not let me forget, I pushed the pecans into the crust with too much force, and no pecans rose at all. But not this time; this time, my pie would be perfect.

“Finally!” Maggie sighs walking up behind me, “Are we ready to pour the mix in and bake these things?” Our parents remain seated, giving us the ok to pour the contents of the mixing bowls into the pie crust before placing the pies in the preheated oven. They are too caught up in conversation to get overly excited about a tradition they have been a part of since before my father even met my mom. Of course, Maggie and I have been part of this ritual since birth. In fact, by age ten, each of us is required to
make the family pie to be served at our respective Thanksgiving meals the following day. Yet, in order for me to ever appreciate this tradition beyond the enjoyment of getting together with friends, I had to understand its beginnings.

Long before my father was born, my grandfather was a strapping young bachelor fresh off his latest tour of duty in World War II. He began a tradition of baking a Texas Pecan Pie on the eve of his first Thanksgiving back in the States for his girlfriend of the time to impress her and prove his domestic capabilities. As the story goes, that evening was so successful that they wound up getting engaged the very same month and then purchasing a house with a majestic pecan tree in the back yard. My grandparents continued this tradition, using their own fresh pecans while incorporating new friends and family into the mix. Then, when my father was born, this tradition was passed on to him. However, by the time my father had grown old enough to make the tradition his own, the story of the first Thanksgiving Eve had grown so big that my father was led to believe that the sacred pie baking was a necessity in finding the right woman and the right friends to grow old with.

This tradition has since been practiced by him in New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco, and on various residences and ranches throughout Texas, New Mexico and Colorado. Yet every year, no matter where he celebrated Thanksgiving, he could always expect a small package of Texas pecans picked from his parents’ tree to be waiting for him. It was not until 1981 at the age of 32 that he finally baked the perfect pie and fell in love with a small town woman from east Texas. As it so happens, that particular evening Ambassador Philips and her husband happened to be present. Thus, every year since, their family has joined ours in this time honored tradition.

Over the last sixty-three years, my dad’s goal has been to improve on the traditional Pecan Pie recipe of my grandfather’s, and over the years he has experimented with recipes found in the Dallas Junior League Cook Book, Julia Child’s Art of French Cooking and The Joy of Cooking, among others. The surviving basic Texas Pecan Pie recipe is a nine-inch crust made of the chef’s choice of pie dough (homemade tastes best), three-eggs, one-cup each of sugar and syrup, half-teaspoon of salt, a third-cup of melted butter, one-cup or more shelled pecans and a teaspoon of vanilla. Depending on availability of ingredients and preference, sugar may be either white or dark, syrup natural or corn, and a pinch of salt can be included (an addition made by my mother), but you must always use butter, never margarine, and pecans must always be from trees grown in Texas. This last rule is an absolute must, and my dad claims that our pies never have been the same since his parents passed away and their house with the homegrown pecans was sold.

A Transparent Meal
Dana Tripp

“It had taken many hands to bring this meal to the table. Scarcely an ingredient in it had ever worn a label or bar code or price tag...And I knew the true cost of this food, the precise sacrifice of time and life and energy that it entailed.” ~Michael Pollan, The Omnivore’s Dilemma

Biting into the succulent pork chop I remembered patting the smooth bristled backs of the three pigs Larry, Curly, and Moe. As I approached the pen with a five-gallon bucket of whey in each hand, their pink backs danced in the sunlight, contrasted with their muddy underbellies. Grunts of happiness made air bubbles as I poured gallons of pungent whey, the waste from Mom’s last batch of cheese, into the trough. The whey that fattened the rotund bodies of the pigs had been extracted from the protein and fat components of the cultured goat milk. The goat milk came from the herd which fed on the grasses fertilized by manure. The manure was made by the pigs, cattle, and goats themselves. This is just one of the many loops of bioproductivity found on farms like ours. And the best part of it all? The reassurance that when I sit down to the table after an arduous day of haying (another loop of bioproductivity wherein my energy is expended to provide the livestock their future energy, whose bodily products will supply me with energy) to sup, I can tell you almost every step that it took for the food to reach my plate.

Last to sit down at the dining room table with my mom, dad, brother, sister, and her fiancé, I was able to hear even the soft creak of the wooden chair beneath my weight over the silence that befell our feeding family. I loved those old chairs and table
that long needed replacing, a set which my grandfather had built out of spruce from the 40-acre woodlot behind the fields. It was my fall break and the house had been a flurry of activity since I arrived. It wasn’t until we had all taken that first bite that the house resolved into a quiet ingestive hum, interspersed with the sound of a knife scratching a plate or a smooth swallow. And just as we were sure of the reason for our quietude, the food, we were similarly as sure of its contents and origins. As I read Pollan’s account of working and eating with the Salatins, I was amused by how closely it resembled my family dinners— the same mood, the same topic of conversation, and the same fresh, straightforward fare. On that first night I returned home from school, I couldn’t have asked for a meal more illustrative of the satisfaction the farm life brings. Though I had not been home to do chores and work for a while, my efforts that summer in the garden, shoveling manure, canning and freezing, feeding animals, and more, were quite clear. They took the form of many of the following...bloomy-rind camembert cheese spread over sliced baguette. Pork chops seasoned and roasted with apples and carrots. Acorn squash halved and baked with butter and brown sugar. Pickled beets and green beans washed down with raw goat milk. Beer brewed by Dad’s Masonic brother Greg Milliken up the road. And for dessert? Custard pie served with Fod’s Finest Vanilla Ice Cream.

I recalled the texture of the fragrant soil as I worked it in my hands and dirt ground under my fingernails after a day of tending the carrots, green beans, cucumbers, and squash in the garden. Memories of Saturdays mornings at the farmer’s markets when I left my tent quickly to trade our cheese for Harris Farm butter, Snell Farm apples, or a Big Sky Bakery baguette. The way their udders flopped back and forth underneath them as the girls galloped when I called them in from the pasture for evening milking. The rich coolness of not-quite ice cream on my tongue when Forrest let me spoon the remnants of the stirrer he used to make goat milk ice cream, his new and thus far successful business venture. The sound of Mom’s laughter when I came into the cheese room late at night as she was adding culture to milk to tell her stories until she was done. The praise from my critical father for the pie crust (made with King Arthur flour, a Vermont-based company). And sliding my hand under the warm, downy feathers of a quietly clucking brood hen as I disturbed her to search for eggs to use in my custard pie that night.

This initial period of hushed intake melted into a dialectic between my libertarian brother Forrest, conservative Dad, and soil-minded Nate concerning corn-derived ethanol and the impending food crisis. Forrest believed that with the inevitable collapse of the dollar and thus the collapse of the fossil fuel-based economy, would come the chaos of trying to acquire food without petroleum. Urban populations of “townies” would storm the countryside looking for food, animals to eat, and the weapons required to obtain those ends. Which is why Forrest and Dad had been stocking up on the weapons and ammunitions necessary to defend our home, ready for when empty pantries send starving urban masses into the countryside in search of their most basic need— food.

Far-fetched? Perhaps. But self-sustaining, small farms such as ours need not worry as much about falling into the trap of the industrial food system collapse as those who are at the whim of their local supermarket. Living and eating “off the grid”, we maintain buffers: the land and animals with the ability to harness solar energy in the form of crops, meat, eggs, and dairy. It need not be repeated that our system of exponential growth relying on fossil fuels is in trouble. People don’t desire to meet the basic needs to live comfortably, they must live indulgently. Earth is finite, there is an upper limit to the amount of land that can be cultivated and the amount of fossil fuels to transport food and materials. Technology can increase crop yields and extraction capabilities, but always at a higher resource investment. All this was far less daunting sitting in the dining room with my family, in our own “self-contained world” in the words of Joel Salatin. Michael Pollan describes Polyface Farm as “alternative”, but I believe this is a skewed perspective. America was once built upon countless self-sustaining family farms— the poor and the wealthy alike owned livestock and grew crops to provide for themselves. To me, the inefficiency and uncertainty of the current food system indicates that perhaps a return to an agrarian way of life should not be viewed as alternative after all.

When guests dine with the Tripps, they experience their own omnivore’s dilemma. My vegetarian friend Grace sat there mulling over her own moral dilemma,
gazing first at the goat burger on my plate then out the picture window at the herd of goats grazing in the June sun. Poor Grace, we always chuckled, had once accidentally stopped by my house on the day devoted to the 4-head broiler slaughter behind the blacksmith shop. On another occasion she dropped in to find Dad and I in the barn skinning the deer he had shot in our woodlot. I’ll admit it was a gruesome sight even for me, the eight point buck appearing massive as it hung half-skinned, its flesh and blood giving off a strong primordial scent. But this exposure to the full life cycle of a food animal, domesticated or wild, was exactly what she needed to understand the side of the meat-eating world that didn’t involve CAFOs, disrespect, and industrial complexity.

It’s a strange transition to go from a place where I was intimately involved with the processes involved before spooning food onto my plate to a place where my only conception of what I ingest three meals a day is written briefly on a display card. I feel too removed, too clean to deserve what is set in front of me. I cannot think of a time back home when I did not exert myself in some way during the course of the day, whether at a hard day of haying or simply tossing out a cup of grain to the laying hens, before sitting down to supper that night. Often as I’m drinking a glass of milk I’ll recall one of the many 2:00am kiddings when I stood up from where I was kneeling in amniotic fluid and blood to lead a doe to the milk stand for her first milking of the season. Her udder swollen and cold, I breathe into my hands before wrapping my fingers around her tender teat, and patiently work her until thick yellow colostrum streams into the pail. This is the side of the clean, organized, bright white dairy aisle few see. Talking softly to my doe, I ease her first milk, clean off the steaming mucus clinging to her hocks, and hand feed her raisins for a job well done. It is a beautiful process to be a part of, one which I would never trade for the ease of a life off the farm. Knowledge comes with having your hands in the mix – dirtied with soil, woody matter, manure. Deciding what to have for dinner? That’s a tough question. What’s actually for dinner? That’s easy.

Photo: Buckling from 2012 kidding season, named Casanova

Italian Culture in Eagle Bay, New York
Jack Viellieu

“La cucina piccola fa la casa grande”
“A small kitchen makes the house big” – Italian Proverb

Every summer my family and I see the identical progression from civilization to wilderness, the sudden outcropping of birch forests as we pass the same “Entering the Adirondack Park” sign en route to our small Adirondack town of 293 permanent residents, generally in a car loaded with people, dogs, and food. Since 1948, when my great-grandfather and his brother built two cabins on small Fourth Lake in even smaller Eagle Bay, New York, the Adirondacks has been a place for generations of my family to gather, relax, and more importantly, eat.

My Italian ancestors, living in Utica, New York, established their summer getaway as a way to escape industrial home life for the few genuinely warm months that occur in upstate New York. However, one aspect of life in Utica that they were not willing to leave behind was food; the Italian American cooking that pervaded their daily eating habits, and has remained to for generations of their descendants. It is no secret that Italians enjoy the entire process of food preparation, the conversation that accompanies it, and quite obviously, eating. Throughout my life, my father’s life since he met my mother, my mother’s entire life, and her mother’s entire life, spending time in the Adirondacks has been synonymous with enjoying food, among the numerous other summer activities that take place.
Today, while the cast of characters is different, the traditions remain the same. My mother, her 3 siblings, and associated families, share both cabins on Fourth Lake. My mother and her siblings take turns preparing meals for the entire group, and while not every night is a traditional Italian dish, those are typically the favorites. In addition, there is a consensus as to who is going to prepare each dish. For example, everyone expects that a certain aunt is going to spend the day preparing spaghetti and meatballs, based on the fact that she has historically been best at it.

One of my family’s more unique Italian American meal traditions, which I have yet to encounter anywhere besides the Adirondacks, is actually a breakfast food. While “pizza frites” are always eaten for breakfast, it is difficult to classify them as something worthy of starting the day. Pizza frites are fried discs of pizza dough that are eventually covered in butter and then drizzled with sugar. The amount of these that I personally consume has decreased in recent years, yet for the younger members of the family, pizza frite morning is a very important occasion. Younger cousins argue over how many each person has had before the next batch of steaming hot, greasy pieces of dough are served, not that they are in short supply, as the adult crowd has quickly realized that pizza frites for breakfast are not particularly beneficial for cholesterol, weight, and overall well-being throughout the day. However, the summer would not be complete without at least one pizza frite, as they have secured a spot as a family staple.

Far more important than meal preparation and consumption is the ingredients: specifically, the dough. My family has been used to particular Italian dough for years, whether it be for bread, pizza, or anything else. As long as I can remember, we have always bought dough and Italian bread from the same bakery an hour away in Utica for use at the lake. The dough that is used defines pizza, bread, and pizza frites more than any other ingredient. Any other type of dough that can be bought at the local grocery store, or that can be found at a different Italian deli in Utica, causes not only uproar, but also the inevitable consensus that everyone can taste the obvious differences. Without dough from Danielle’s Bakery in Utica, the food that is eaten by my family in the Adirondacks is not the same. The year that Danielle’s Bakery caught fire and closed for the summer created a small family catastrophe. Different relatives were forced to use different types of dough to somehow recreate our carbohydrate-loaded Italian staples.

While an outside visitor may not have had the slightest clue of what the differences were, the adult members of the family assert that nothing but Danielle’s dough will suffice.

In relation to the quote at the beginning of this piece, traditional meals are more than just sustenance during our family trips to the Adirondacks. When a meal is served during one of the weeks when the entire group of aunts, uncles, and cousins are in town, it is more than a small affair. Feeding the entire crowd aside, it is difficult enough to put everyone in a single home to eat, especially considering that the age range often covers infants to very elderly relatives. However, between carrying chairs and folding tables between houses and squeezing everyone in, it always seems to work out. One of the important things about dinner is that it is often the one time of day when the whole family is together, participating in the same activity. Between younger kids playing in the water, adults golfing, boating, or hiking, the day is a busy time, and dinner allows the entire family to interact and share all at once, what the coordinated family week is intended to be.

Like many families, especially Italian ones, dinner ends up being a process rather than an event. The preparation for the primary chef can easily begin in the afternoon, with others helping out later in the process. However, there is nothing my mother dislikes more than too many people in her kitchen space, especially when they are hungry and looking to see what scraps are available before the meal is served. Once food is ready, the process of children, and then adults, serving themselves commences. Generally, there is a rush for everyone to get ready, as the younger cousins run out of the lake or have to be called in from the yard to wash up. The meal itself is fairly standard for a large family meal, with younger children asking to be excused early on, and the older crowd staying around to slowly eat and converse. At this point, everyone realizes that sooner or later, dishes must be done. Like the cooking, there is often a predetermined group who are to do the dishes, which is a never an easy task given the amount of plates and lack of a dishwasher. However, there is something to be said for being on dish-duty, which is a twenty minute diversion from the family arguments as dinner winds down, and the hectic rush as the younger members of the family scramble to get in line for the evening’s dessert option. When all is complete, a group always
remains at the main kitchen table for a glass of wine or a game of cards, stretching out the social aspects of the family meal further into the evening. This entire process allows for family bonding at all stages, and the interactions that take place are what create the memories that amount to family tradition.

The family traditions and routines that surround the cabins in the Adirondacks are what make the two small, simple cabins on the lake homes for everyone. Food is only a part of the experience, albeit a significant one. What has remained with our family for generations are the recipes, the culture, the process, and the setting. Numerous generations of relatives and different friends have visited and participated in many of the activities and meals that we call tradition. Their contributions are always positive, which only add to the memories of each tradition and cement them as unique to our family. However, having these experiences for a lifetime gives them permanence, an important aspect of family history.

We did this last year, and the year before that, and the year before that. The event of the day was by new means the start of a new tradition, but rather my family participating in an old Maine tradition; the lobster cookout. My family has been going to Pretty Marsh, Maine for over one hundred and twenty years now. My Grandmother grew up there, my dad grew up there and I grew up there. Besides a new coat of paint on the front of the house, hardly anything has changed in over a century.

Last summer was hardly any different. Fourteen of us, all family, arrived at the house at the end of August to spend time together and celebrate the end of another memorable summer. When spending time with family and friends in Maine, the days go slow but the weeks go by in a blink of an eye. At the end of our two week vacation, it was time for the final cookout, a tradition that has been passed on from generation to generation. Without lists or direction, everybody went their separate ways to collect supplies for the afternoon. Although there were fourteen people staying at the house, this was going to be a small get together for us as our family meals have been known to be as large as thirty or forty people on any given weekday. This is never something we plan; we all just enjoy eating summer meals together.

When everyone arrived back at the house in the early afternoon, we packed up the coolers and filled the boats. We were headed to a place called Baker’s Island, about an hour and a half away. I took one boat full of kids and cousins while my dad gathered up the slower adults and ushered them out to the island separately. Anticipation was building especially for the little ones as this was the first time for two of them in particular. They were bundled up in life jackets from the 1960’s which were essentially orange pieces of Styrofoam strapped to their bodies. They looked uncomfortable beyond belief. Even if the anticipation drove them to fidgeting and squirming, the life jackets would have restricted that from happening. Because of the length of the trip, the
cousins brought saltines and lemonade as snacks along the way given that it wouldn’t spoil their appetite.

The trip turned out to be uneventful as usual and, assuming we were racing, we beat the parents there by almost half an hour giving us time to relax on the stone beach before they showed up. At the house in Maine, there are few distractions. There is no internet, no TV and barely any cell service. The house gives you a place to relax and contemplate. It’s not often in today’s society when we get to enjoy complete silence. When we arrived at the island, the place was dead calm. The island is small and uninhabited but has one hidden secret which we call the dance floor. The dance floor is a massive surface of rock which is completely flat and smooth and mimics an open air ballroom. The group flocked there to lie out in the sun before we turned into the manual labor of the afternoon. Although this was far from the first lobster meal of the summer, the home cooked aspect of it always excited people. Once or twice a week we go out to one of two favorite lobster pounds, either Thurston’s or Abel’s. The process is simple as you go up to the counter, choose the weight of your lobster, the size of your steamed clam basket and then wait until they’re ready. But this is where true Mainers get upset. The lobster pound wants to make the process as streamlined as possible so they crack the lobster shells for you and pull the meat out so your hands don’t get dirty. It’s sounds nice in theory, but that’s not how it’s done! On Baker’s island, our lobster cookout was going to leave us covered head to toe in shells and claws by the end of the afternoon.

When the parents finally arrived, the festivities began. We unloaded everything from the two boats; the raw lobsters and clams, the fresh lemonade and ice tea, the corn still in their husks, lots and lots of butter and a box of matches is all we needed. We built two separate fires; one for the lobsters and one for the clams. The corn was to be cooked when everything else was done. When the water in the pot came to a boil, the lobsters, then a brownish maroon color, were slowly submerged. I always loved this part of the meal not because I’m cruel but because of the reactions of the little kids. They’re always fascinated by the screaming sound that comes from the pot. They want to be as close as possible so that they almost feel the high pitched whistle but when it comes to putting the critters in the bubbling water, they just want to watch. For the clams we usually steamed them in seaweed. The kids collected handfuls of wet seaweed attached to the shallow ocean floor and brought it back to the fire to create a blanket for the clams. Inevitably, during the seaweed collection, someone always ends up wearing slimy plants as a wig. It’s just part of the game and has come to be a part of the tradition.

Not much time passed before the brown, crawling creatures turned into a bright red main course for the family. They were pulled out of the water and tossed aimlessly onto the dance floor where they would cool down and wait for the corn to cook over the open fire. Before we could serve the lobsters to all fourteen family members, I was constantly reminded that we were missing the best part of the meal; the butter! I boiled down three sticks of butter and put the pot alongside the cooling lobsters. Everything was finally ready and I removed the lid from the pot exposing the butter. Everyone knew it was time to eat and they ate like savages. They smashed the shells on rocks while juice sprayed every which direction covering our clothes and hands. There was no escaping that fishy smell.

While I was sitting on the dance floor with everyone, it made me realize that although we hadn’t been together in over a year, it felt like no time had passed at all. We had all grown a year older and a year wiser but, at the end of the day, we were still just a family, sitting on a rock having a late afternoon cookout together. Nothing else mattered. It was rare to see the cell phones off. There were no radios or TVs mentioning dying soldiers in Iraq or a crashing stock market. We were isolated and we were brought to that island, we were brought together for a meal that we all felt passionate about. In our family, like many families, everyone leads their own hectic life. Between college, high school, jobs and whatever else, it has never been easy to carve out
prolonged family time. It’s just the way it is. But for us, when it comes to a lobster dinner with a side of steamed clams on Baker’s, there’s no need for scheduling because it’s something that we just have to do.

You know, I can confidently say that lobster is my favorite food but in a purely objective way, that might not be true. I love the taste of lobster, but more importantly, I love being by the ocean when I eat it. I am always with friends and family in Maine when I eat lobster so I automatically associate a lobster meal with a great summer evening. That day on Bakers Island, well that meal still means a lot to me. I have grown to cherish the time I spend eating meals with family and friends because one day, that may no longer be possible. The meal last summer was simple. There was no silverware, no plates, no kitchen or mixed drinks; there was just lobster and lobster is all we needed.

A very complicated recipe for the lobster cookout:

- 14 boiled lobsters
- 1.5-2 lbs
- 8 lbs. of steamed Clams
- 3 sticks of melted butter
- 14 ears of grilled corn
- Soak in beer with husks on before grilling
- Lemonade

Biographies of Authors

Sydney Alfonso is a senior from New Mexico. She is a Geography and German major who enjoys taking food Literature classes. One important thing she learned in this course is the how the universality of hunger unites men better than any object or subject.

Claire Bovet is a Middlebury College senior molecular biology and biochemistry major from Longmont, Colorado. She grew up on a farm with a family that loves to cook, and can’t wait to start her own culinary traditions. Her French minor inspired her to study abroad in Poitiers, a medieval city in central France, which is the setting for her story. Her biggest priorities in life are food, love, and living well.

Sarah Boylan is a junior from Danvers, Massachusetts, majoring in Molecular Biology and Biochemistry. She plays softball at Middlebury and is looking forward to spending her summer with her aunt in Rockport, MA. Although she enjoys various dishes, her favorite food is apple crisp. Sarah has made some great friends in Literary Feasts over the course of the semester and is really glad she has been able to enjoy not only great literature but also great company.

James Burke is a sophomore from Summit, New Jersey and is majoring in philosophy with a minor in economics. He plays on the men’s varsity tennis team and also likes to golf. His favorite dish is his mother’s meatballs, but his favorite food is Mexican. An important thing he learned from his Literary Feasts course was the detrimental effect the American food industry is having on the environment.

Phil Camille is a senior from Brooklyn, NY majoring in Biology. He likes to eat, talk about food, and listen to others talk about food, which prompted him to take this course. His favorite food would have to be anything with seafood. Anything that lives in the sea he is game to eat; except for the endangered stuff because that would be wrong as a bio major.
Galen Carroll is a graduating senior and has majored in International Studies with a focus on Latin America and a discipline in Economics. He grew up with two siblings and a random assortment of barnyard animals on a family farm outside of Baltimore, Maryland. Intrigued by all sorts of foods and food processes, he took Literary Feast with Professor Carletti in the spring of 2012.

Anna Clements is a senior Feb hailing from Louisville, Kentucky. Here at Middlebury, she is a geography major and global health minor. One thing that Literary Feasts taught her was that food is never just about food. Her hobbies include: grocery shopping, making maps, drinking espresso beverages, cooking, baking, watching thunderstorms, listening to podcasts, dance parties, and going on adventures. When she grows up, she wants to be a nurse midwife.

Alexis Coolidge is a freshman from Lake Placid, New York majoring in biochemistry. She loves spending time outdoors and listening to music. Her favorite sandwich is peanut butter and jelly, and she had learned to appreciate the natural peanut butter served in the Middlebury College dining halls.

Genevieve Dukes is a junior Economics major, Global Health minor from Midland, Texas. She enjoys traveling, cooking, and being outside. As a pescatarian studying abroad in Prague last semester, she is enjoying the diversity of foods available to her back in the United States. In particular, Genevieve is a connoisseur of ‘Fresh Mex’ and is known to never turn down a bowl of fresh salsa.

Ali Fox is a senior from Connecticut, majoring in economics. She has a younger sister and two younger brothers. She is an unbelievable baker, specializing in cupcakes of all sorts.

J.P. Garofalo is a rising junior studying at Middlebury College. At 20 years of age, he has grown up on the shores of Connecticut and spent summers fishing and water skiing. A family of four, the Garofalos have always cherished seafood. JP’s father’s favorite hobby to go tuna fishing in the summers. Along with his older brother and father, J.P. heads out to the open sea summer after summer.

Danielle Gladstone is a junior double majoring in Molecular Biology and Biochemistry and Spanish. She eats many times a day in the dining halls and likes the open meal plan. She remembers when there was Caprese salad that one time at Ross. She loved reading and watching the movie Chocolat for this class, as it was fun and entertaining relief from her Bioinformatics textbook.

Michael Griffin is a senior from Scituate, Massachusetts. He has celiac and is allergic to all dairy products. His favorite foods are the ones he can no longer eat.

Sophia Gubernick is a twenty-year-old sophomore at Middlebury College. When she was in fifth grade she moved with her family from New York City to a rural town in Vermont. A farm to table lifestyle supported by a small-scale, organic family farm replaced the culinary diversity of city life.

Charlotte Heilbronn is a Junior Sociology/Anthropology major and an Art History minor from New York City. She loves to travel and spend time with her family in France. The most interesting thing she learned in this course was the idea that food is never just something in which we eat; food is powerful and ultimately defines who you are.

Hanna Howell is a senior Feb, meaning she has one semester left at college. She is from Southern Maine. Besides enjoying the sun, salt and manual labor of the family shellfish business, she also enjoys skiing, horseback riding, and tap dancing. Before coming to Middlebury where she studies psychology, she lived in Belgium. She does not like to eat oysters.
Spencer Hurst is a junior from Greenwich, CT studying economics and mathematics. He has a younger brother Parker and a younger sister Lizzie. He loves food and is very glad he took this class as it has increased his knowledge about food exponentially.

Teddy Kuo is a freshmen from New York, he does not know what he wants to do with his life yet. He likes to swim (part of the reason for his food obsession), dance, and enjoy the sun. His favorite food is pretty much everything, but especially Asian food. One interesting thing he this course was learned in a deeper understanding in why he loves food so much and how his food came to be.

Michael Longo is a sophomore from New Jersey, and is majoring in economics. He enjoys sports, especially ice hockey, which he plays at Middlebury. His favorite type of cuisine is Italian, and he has a problem with the lack of any good Italian restaurant in Middlebury. Mike’s favorite part about Literary Feasts was learning about the slow food movement.

Maggie Melberg is a senior from Colorado, majoring in American Studies. She likes to play hockey and ski. Her favorite food is salsa. One important aspect of this class that inspired her is the numerous ways in which people experience food.

Alice Pfeifer is a junior from Washington, DC, majoring in English with a minor in Education Studies. She enjoys the ocean, playing on the swings, and pinning delicious-looking dishes on Pinterest. Her comfort meal (the same since she was 8 years old) is her father’s famous “chicken and pasta” dinner. One thing she gained from this course is a basic knowledge of the food philosophies that exist across cultures.

Laura Romig is a senior from Long Beach, New York. She is majoring in Environmental Studies and Economics and minoring in Italian. She likes to run, draw, hike, and play with her nephew. One important thing she learned from this course is that food is both one of the most basic and complex elements of life.

Julie Seo is a senior from Little Rock, Arkansas who is majoring in International Studies. She was hesitant to take the course at first because she doesn’t speak a lick of Italian but is glad she took it anyway! Everything she’s learned in this course— from reading about making quail sauce out of rose petals, tasting Christmas rolls at 10am, and learning about how food can be interpreted as art— has helped advance her current cooking abilities: making scrambled eggs and cereal. Wish her good luck in the real world when she has to start cooking for herself! Thanks to Professor Carletti and her goofy classmates who made class (more) interesting!

Margaret Souther is a junior from Scarsdale, New York, majoring in Economics and minoring in Political Science. She likes to play field hockey, lacrosse, and paddle tennis in the winter. Her favorite dinner dish is penne vodka and dessert is a chocolate molten cake with powdered sugar, a scoop of vanilla ice cream, and strawberries on the side. One thing she enjoyed learning about was the intricate Japanese obento boxes!

Sarah Steinle is a junior from West Hartford, CT majoring in psychology major and minoring in philosophy. She likes to run and spend time with friends and family. Her favorite dish is grilled salmon with sautéed vegetables. Through this course, she has learned that food is more than just something to eat; it has the power to shape and strengthen relationships.

R. Heath Townsend Jr. is a Senior Economics major minor in American History from Dallas, TX. He is the son of Missy and Bob Townsend and a 7th generation Texan who prides himself on the art of Texas cooking. Though surprisingly not an avid hunter, his cooking interests include steak, barbeque ribs, quail, and venison chili.

Dana Tripp is a sophomore biology/pre-vet major from Saco, Maine. She is a thrower on the women’s Track and Field team with an undying love for movies often played on the track bus such as Brave heart and Gladiator. A Sagittarius rising, she enjoys eating dirt and climbing mountains in Vermont and beach runs and freshly shucked peas in Maine.
Jack Viellieu is a junior from Winnetka, Illinois, majoring in Economics and minoring in political science. His favorite type of food is Italian, although he likes most foods – one of his reasons for taking this course. Jack enjoyed learning about the contemporary issues surrounding food and nutrition in America in Literary Feasts.

Reeve Waud is a junior from Chicago, Illinois who is an Economic major and a French minor. He enjoys spending his free time being active outdoors either in the mountains or on the water. His favorite food is undoubtedly seafood. The course made him realize that food, in all its power, has had an extremely commanding influence in the course of humanity.

~A selection of food quotes~

Wisdom from Around the World

A tavola non si invecchia ~Italian proverb ("one does not get old at the table" meaning: time spent at the table with good food and good friends is time well spent)

L'appetito vien mangiando ~Italian proverb ("appetite comes while eating")

He who eats alone chokes alone. ~Arabian proverb

After dinner sit a while, and after supper walk a mile. ~English Saying

The more you eat, the less flavor; the less you eat, the more flavor. ~Chinese Proverb

A nickel will get you on the subway, but garlic will get you a seat. ~Old New York Proverb

Worries go down better with soup. ~Jewish Proverb

Laughter is brightest where food is best ~ Irish Proverb

In vino veritas ~Latin proverb ("In wine [there is] truth" meaning wine loosens the tongue)

On National Identity and the Trouble with Other Cuisines ....

What is patriotism but the love of the food one ate as a child? ~Lin Yutang

The trouble with eating Italian food is that five or six days later you're hungry again. ~George Miller
I don't think America will have really made it until we have our own salad dressing. Until then we're stuck behind the French, Italians, Russians and Caesarians. ~ Pat McNelis

In Mexico we have a word for sushi: bait. ~ José Simons

I'll bet what motivated the British to colonize so much of the world is that they were just looking for a decent meal. ~ Martha Harrison

And I find chopsticks frankly distressing. Am I alone in thinking it odd that a people ingenious enough to invent paper, gunpowder, kites and any number of other useful objects, and who have a noble history extending back 3,000 years haven't yet worked out that a pair of knitting needles is no way to capture food? ~ Bill Bryson

When I'm at a Chinese restaurant having a hard time with chopsticks, I always hope that there's a Chinese kid at an American restaurant somewhere who's struggling mightily with a fork. ~ Rick Budinich

**Food and Language**

The whole of nature, as has been said, is a conjugation of the verb to eat, in the active and in the passive. ~ William Ralph Inge

I went to a restaurant that serves 'Breakfast at any time'. So I ordered French Toast during the Renaissance. ~ Steven Wright

**Serious questions we did not have the time to answer**

High-tech tomatoes. Mysterious milk. Supersquash. Are we supposed to eat this stuff? Or is it going to eat us? ~ Annita Manning

If organic farming is the natural way, shouldn't organic produce just be called "produce" and make the pesticide-laden stuff take the burden of an adjective? ~ Ymber Delecto

Do vegetarians eat animal crackers? ~ Author Unknown