

Menu

The Other Side of the Atlantic (2002-2012)

Haynes Family Curry

Shepards Pie

Fairy Cakes

The Land of Opportunity (2012-2015)

Mums Falafel

Bacon Cheeseburger with Sweet Potato Fries

Honey Spice Cake

World Outlook Shifting (2015-2020)

Honey Basil Garlic Wings

Pulled Pork Sandwiches

Chocolate Olive Oil Cake

An Education in Ethics (2020-2022)

Pesto Pasta with Shredded Chicken

Potato Chickpea Curry

Greenery Chocolate Chip Cookies

The Hope Makes It Taste Better (2022-Present)

Ground Pork Chili

Pot Roast (Kristopher's favorite)

Chocolate Bundt Cake

The Other Side of the Atlantic (2002-2012)

The air outside a butcher shop in the early morning had a musty smell that stung my nostrils with cold as I stood outside in line. My coat was almost due to be handed down to my sister, just about fitting around my shoulders and zipped up to my chest, and my father would hold the fuzzy lined hood to assure I didn't wander off. At 7am the door would open, the bell would ring, and each person would file into the shop to pick up their order, eager to beat the rush with Christmas was less than 24 hours away. Now seven years old, it was tradition for me to spend Christmas Eve morning watching cars fly by on Prices Lane with my father as we waited for our turn. Once back home the turkey would disappear into the kitchen, where I most likely wouldn't see it until my mother pulled it out of the oven the next day, golden and ready to be carved. Christmas was no small deal in my family, split into three groups as we juggled both sides of my mothers family as well as my fathers parents, all of whom wanted the most Christmas time with their children and grandchildren. Our family meal did not always fall on Christmas day, sometimes there simply wasn't time after driving back and forth for so long, but every year my mother pulled off culinary magic that left us stuffed and sleepy.

My mother is without a doubt the biggest influence over my food journey, I watched her cook and ate her food for eighteen years, I developed my sense of taste based on foods that she made for me. When I list the foods meaningful to my life I can credit her with many of my favorite dishes, the cookbooks on my shelves reflect the chefs and cooking T.V I watched with her as a child. I can see the cover of Nigella Lawsons' *How to Be a Domestic Goddess* in my mind when I think of home, my favorite on my moms collection to page through, sitting on the floor of the kitchen while she cooked, fantasizing about each and every treat I saw pictured. I think it is a shared experience among women to think that we will not grow up to be our mothers,

but every day I find myself more and more like her. My recipes are not identical, they are copies grown from the same inspiration, molded by circumstance not unlike the core of the family itself.

I am fortunate that most of the English recipes I grew up with can be easily recreated with ingredients in American grocery stores. Classics like leeks and cheese sauce, Yorkshire puddings, and my favorite, Shepards pie, were regularly dishes in our house when I was growing up, and I delight in making my own takes on them now. Shepards pie is an incredibly simple dish that can be made with pretty basic ingredients and little to no skill, as long as you have some ground meat, some potatoes, and cheese, you can make the most basic of Shepards pie (some may argue about what *exactly* you have to have included for it to be a Shepards pie, I am not one of those people). It was the first dish I knew how to cook on my own past eggs and bacon, I can remember the pride of taking it out of the oven, there's a picture somewhere of me holding it up on my friends front porch, smiling at my own accomplishment. I often wonder how different it tastes to my American friends, if the nostalgia adds notes and flavors undetected by newcomers, when I take a bite I can taste the wooden kitchen table and chairs, I can hear our windows rattling as English rain beats down on the back doors. It is this question that drove me to this vein of exploration, how can I make them taste my story?

The Land of Opportunity (2012-2015)

Two weeks before my tenth birthday my family moved from Reigate, Surrey in the south of England, to Walnut Creek, California. The move had many motivations, my fathers career, my mothers desire to experience places far from home, but for my sister and I it was the adventure of a lifetime into a world of options only seen on T.V. Our grandfather told us before we had left that if we could imagine it, they had it in the United States of America. Something important

about my grandfather was his infectious sweet tooth, passing his love to both his children and grandchildren. Each week we would spend a night and each week we would be sent home with a £2 coin and a bag of sweets, and on our last week with them he reminded each of us to have the American children teach us how to blow bubble gum in squares. As children we believed that our grandfather was eating cake and sweets after every meal as he did with us, only later in life did we realize what a celebration those days were for him, that he would save his treats for the weekend.

Sugar marks many of the best celebrations in my family, the most remarkable of which being the cakes my mother makes for our birthdays. Every year she has home baked and decorated elaborate birthday cakes for my sister, father and I, always designing the cake to whatever interest the birthday person has held recently. Standouts include a detailed wooden log and axe cake for my fathers 50th birthday, a panda themed cake for my sisters 11th birthday cake, and a chocolate otter cake floating in ocean green jell-o for my 11th birthday. These cakes are secretive, made by her and only her in the few hours she finds alone in the house, kept carefully hidden from the rest of us until the singing begins. My mother also delighted with other less secretive cakes she would sometimes let us assist with, often a carrot cake donated to the school fair in England, or most often in America, her honey spice cake. This sweet and comforting dessert is especially perfect for the colder months; combining ginger, cumin, and cinnamon with brown sugar create the ultimate rich and sticky dessert you want to eat fresh out of the oven. Our small California kitchen would leak a delicious trail of scents as the cake baked, filling the house with the warm enveloping aroma and the delightful knowledge that there would soon be cake. My mother still makes this cake to this day, it doesn't matter who is at home and who is away, it is a fan favorite that has traveled with us. I find myself naturally drawn to cooking, it feels very intuitive, I find I can see the next step or the obvious choice with ease, and that I can fix my

mistakes without too much hassle as long as I have the necessary supplies. Baking on the other hand is a whole other battlefield, nothing about it feels as easily explainable or explorable as cooking and I often find myself with a dense brick that vaguely resembles my initial goal. Despite my love for this cake I am weary of baking it for fear of disrespecting my mothers recipe, an issue that sounds silly even to myself.

World Outlook Shifting (2015-2020)

For the longest time the only fruit I would willingly eat were apples, specifically the Red Delicious variety. Their exterior is a dark ruby-red, often with patches of light pinks, reds, and greens and speckled with a light white. We would buy them in plastic bags from the grocery store, each apple never much bigger than my fist and sprinkled with grocery store rain, and my mother would put them in whichever ceramic fruit bowl currently held her fancy.

I'd serve them to myself sliced on a plate with a helping of cream cheese, the first bite loaded up with enough savory and sweet to satisfy my afterschool hunger. The Red Delicious is in my opinion the perfect apple texture, crisp yet still giving, making your teeth push for just a

second before allowing them to pierce the skin. The flesh is notably sweet, making it the perfect pair for the savory cream cheese, the bite of the apple couples perfectly with the smooth and creamy nature of the cream cheese.

At age fifteen I took an interest in politics, inspired by my experience on a youth lobby day trip, I managed to land myself a high school internship on a state election campaign, the first bid to state senate for the now Representative Bill Ramos. I began to develop a sense of importance, surrounded by adults of varying ages all of whom believed in the philosophy that one person, and one vote, had the power to make change. It's cheesy, defiantly oversimplified, but I was already experiencing such a lack of control over my life (something I imagine most teenagers experience, amplified by an ongoing eating disorder) that this assurance that I was something more than I felt was something I kept precious. These years of my life were filled with highs and lows, with the highs being grand, walking on air type highs, and the lows being unexpected and unexperienced bouts of depression. I was truly something impressive at seventeen, having interned with several noteworthy institutions and managed a successful city council election, I had a reputation in our small town as the 5th legislative districts teenage poster child.

As much as I enjoyed my success, there was only once any money in these opportunities, and not until the very end of my time in the 5th. I got my first job outside of babysitting a couple of months after turning sixteen, coaching mountain biking classes for children ages six to fourteen, and in the off time between seasons I worked at a value village in our town. With no bills to pay and four days a week of an 8am-9pm schedule, I took pleasure in frequenting an Asian fusion café down the street from my school, known for great food at a great price and incredible fast service. My meal of choice was an order of honey basil garlic wings, at a base price of \$8.95, my total usually reached \$11-12 max. The chicken was tangy yet sweet and sticky

with honey, the skin is crispy but the inside is juicy and soft, just the way you want it. Not the kind of dish you should eat on a first date, they will leave you with a ring of sticky sauce around your mouth and fingers, but perfect for a tired teenager hungry from a day of playing adult.

I will always look back at that community with mixed feelings but a tender heart, I do believe that most of them truly wanted the best for me. I no longer blame anyone for not seeing the signs, I taught myself how not to cry, how to smile when I was frustrated, I wanted so badly to be able to handle it all. At eighteen it all came crashing down, I would spend the next few years dealing with a panic disorder, repositioning my worldview, understanding things perhaps they wished I wouldn't. But in those years, frozen in time, my teenage self is alone in her car, finding a moment of peace to eat and rest away from the storm I so desperately wanted to be a part of. I am grateful for that chicken dish the way I am often grateful for the people amongst the 5th who saw me for more than my uses as their young person, this meal asked me no questions to determine my worth, it simply stood by me when times were rough, asking relatively little of me. Whenever I return home, I try to stop by the Umi Café to visit my friend.

An Education in Ethics (2020-2023)

The first time I tried to cook to win someone over was less than successful. It was my freshman year of college, just two days after move-in, that I decided I would cook a group dinner in an attempt to get to know the strangers I now shared a bathroom with. In theory it was a great idea, an easy meal of pesto and pasta I had seen my mother cook time and time again, the intricate and strangely ironic board game *The Game of LIFE*, and some rosé I had snuck past my parents in a Gatorade bottle. In reality, I had only ever really cooked steaks on the grill or heated up frozen soup, and despite my confidence my chicken ended up dry and too salty to touch. My roommates were gracious, eating around the chicken and complimenting the pasta and store-bought pesto, and while we never became as close as I have with roommates since, this meal did bring us together for the first time. We played a round of *Cards Against Humanity* over our half cups of wine, acquainting ourselves with our new reality.

Luckily, I have had many chances to redeem myself from my first attempt, and over my college career I have cooked many meals that brought the effect I was hoping for from my pasta dinner. In the Spring of that same school year I cooked a fully vegan BBQ style lunch, including vegan cheeseburgers, vegan mac and cheese, and vegan cake. My neighbors both next door and upstairs were taking part in our campus farming program, and came home from class ravenous most days, not yet used to the harsh hours of farming. This meal was fabricated in an attempt to convey both affection and thanks, to those who I felt had taken me in amongst their group, who

had shared a meal with me many times before but never one I had cooked by my own hand. I remember not only the feeling of satisfaction in a job well done, but for the first time truly understanding the tender joy of knowing someone enjoyed my cooking.

The most notable of these “love meals” was learning pot-roast for my best friend, who I also get the joy of calling my roommate. Pot-roast felt like a challenge, it was both Kristopher's favorite *and* the meal I most often hear jokes about, second only to perhaps pork chops, and so providing a definitively delicious pot-roast was a challenge I quickly swallowed. I researched in my book collection first, pulling from *Americas Test Kitchen*, and Rachel Ray. My online searches held even more results, and I picked through websites with varying degrees of notoriety, from *The New York Times – Cooking*, to mommy-blogs and online creole cooks. Videos and pictures proved a useful aid as I cherry picked my steps, from the marinade to the sear, to the vessel and the veggies, I carefully devised the recipe I believed would yield the best results. This recipe became an instant staple in our home, with one of my cast iron pot roasts lasting the two of us several days post our main meal, and the source of my biggest accomplishment in cooking. I think it is the utilization of red wine vinegar in the broth that makes my roast a standout, and perhaps the flick test given to the corners of the meat to ensure it is seared to crispy perfection before it is slow roasted in herbaceous elegance.

Cooking to show my love is, I hope, an identifiable to those around me. I hope it makes my food taste better, as my roommate insists it does, when I cook for or with someone I love. While I do not believe that my box mix cakes taste better than anyone else's, I have to agree that the intentional making and seasoning of food for someone I love tends to end in better meals, and I do hope that the love I put in is notable on the taste buds, even if it is just a trick of the brain.