

Eating Disorders and Egg Loaf: Healing Through Food

The first thing I remember being taught how to cook was a basic white sauce. Sitting on the counter of our small English kitchen, my dad explained how the butter milk and flour mix would thicken into the base of a cheese sauce for that night's dinner. Long before high school would invite the eating disorder that dulled the taste of my favorite meals, watching my parents cook fascinated me. I was not a cooking prodigy by any means, even into my teens I lacked the patience for cooking and whilst I enjoyed the freedom it gave, I didn't come to appreciate the art I see in it today until I found myself faced with the less than appetizing Evergreen dining hall. Now my own for the first time I truly had to face the fact that I was eating to live as opposed to finding any enjoyment in my food anymore, and that I would have to overcome that and be responsible for my own meals. I relied heavily on school meals for the first few months, having neighbors who also frequented the greenery made it easier to maintain a routine, and with Covid in full effect I began to enjoy mealtimes as assured socialization. But after a few months of the same cheeseburgers and rotating mysterious chicken dishes, I began to crave something more satisfying, something that would make me feel fulfilled as opposed to just filled. Following an intense case of severe covid pneumonia, I knew I could not sustain my health on the poor nutritional options offered by Evergreen.

I began cooking for my roommates and my neighbors, forcing myself to learn out of social and nutritional necessity, and it was here that my passion for cooking really took off as I explored foods and cuisines I had never touched before. But as quickly as I was falling in love with the kitchen, my social circles and mental health began to fall apart and I found myself retreating from the kitchen. The end of my freshman year was marked by my first inpatient trip at a mental health hospital, with two more following that summer. In many ways these trips

saved my life, I do not think I could have survived the coming years without the lessons I learnt within South Sound, but there are many other things that I could have done without.

Egg loaf was a staple at every breakfast in the hospital, and I am not exaggerating when I say writing about it stirs my stomach in the most unpleasant way. Cooked in deep sheet pans, its nickname came due to the fact that it resembled bread in both look and texture. It had a chewier edge that most would shave off, and a texture inside that can most closely be compared to a soft roll soaked in milk. I detested it, along with much of the hospital food, I would rather not have eaten anything at all but the M-techs logging our behavior were enough for me to choke it down many mealtimes. I wondered how on earth I was supposed to get better when every meal seemed designed to push my progress back. I could not yet love eating but I was recovered to the point where I knew this was not the path for progress, and following fourth and final visit in the summer of 2022 I committed to starting to cook as my rebellion against the bad psych ward food.

At the time I was living with my still roommate and dear friend Kristopher, they and I had seen each other through some of our worst times and I was grateful to be going home to someone who wouldn't judge my recovery. Living with Kristopher was what really pushed me to follow through on my goal, whereas when I cooked for myself I could only think about what I was going to eat and the dreaded calories, now I looked forward to the food being ready and the care I could provide for someone I loved. I learnt their favorite meals which became some of my favorite meals, pot roast, mac and cheese, quesadillas, and breakfast sandwiches became staples in our house as I expanded my repertoire to match their taste. I was still fearful of my plate, I still overthought my food with every bite, but I no longer skipped meals or made do with an egg and water. The changes came gradually as I began to explore food academically in tandem with my own personal explorations.

Surrounding myself with food academia was one of the harder things I had ever done in my academic life, but despite my challenges in my first year of food studies my curiosity won out and I was determined to have my eyes opened to the global world of food. I studied food access, food origins, recipes, and eating disorders. Each project I had a moment in which I wondered if this was a good idea, if I was only biding my time until it all came back around to get me, and every time I knew that letting this voice of doubt would be the real step back. As my understanding grew so did my cookbook, my activity in the kitchen grew and continues to grow as my plate becomes less and less of an aggressor each day and as food continues to pull back the curtain on the world and humanity.

Today I find myself finally calm in the kitchen; while I still enjoy the love Kristopher gives my food I can also find joy from passion projects outside of their taste. As a sophomore I developed a habit of pickling red onions, whilst only I enjoy the texture it is an almost weekly ritual for me to refill the jar, I find their sweet and acidic crunch irresistible even if it means brushing my teeth after each snack. I find myself curious about my plate, asking questions in restaurants, excited to cook because I cannot wait to have a taste.

Pot-Roast for Kristopher

Ingredients

1-1.5lbs Chuck roast

2 Tablespoons of olive oil

1 Onion, rough chopped

2 Cups of baby carrots

2 Cups of chopped golden potatoes

3 Cups beef stock

1 Cup red wine

6-8 Garlic cloves, large chopped

4 Sprigs of thyme

2 Sprigs of fresh rosemary

2 Bay leaves

Splash of red wine vinegar

Salt

Pepper

Method

1. An hour before you begin your cook, generously salt the roast all over and let rest on the counter. Bringing your roast closer to room temperature will help with an even cook.
2. Preheat your oven to 300 degrees.
3. Bring a cast iron pot or dutch oven to high heat and add the olive oil. When hot, sear the meat on all sides, around 2-3 minutes per side for a large roast. When golden and crispy remove from the pot and set aside and sprinkle with black pepper. Reduce heat and add onions and garlic, cook for two minutes stirring to prevent burning, and then add roast back in.
4. Add your beef stock and wine to the pot, you may need to adjust the amount of liquid as you only want two thirds of your roast covered but maintain the 75% beef stock to 25% red wine for best results.
5. Add in your rosemary and thyme, you can also choose to add some whole garlic cloves and they will become soft garlic bites by the end of the cook.
6. Bring your pot to a simmer, remove from heat, add bay leaves, and cover.
7. Place in the oven for two hours.
8. Remove pot from the oven, add in your potatoes and carrots. If you have trouble fitting them around the roast, gently lift and slide them underneath. You can add a little more cooking liquid if needed. Place back in the oven for another 1.5-2 hours.
9. Remove from the oven 15 minutes before you finish your total cook time, add in a splash of red wine vinegar.

10. You can serve up two ways. Option #1 is to serve up as is, with meat and veggies in the broth. Option #2 is to strain out the broth and reduce it to a gravy (you may want use a cornstarch slurry to do this), and pour it over your roast and veggies.