

Dinner Menu

A final portfolio of works

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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.

The spell begins with a list

The spell begins with a list. After searching my pantries not twice in hopes I may be miraculously gifted more food, I write down on paper what I need to buy and say goodbyes to Brutus, who meows his complaints by the door as I go. I pet his head gently and wave back at him as I begin my walk, two miles to my first stop along a grey autumn coastline. I make my way across a beach of pebbles hues ranging from deep sparkling blues to glowing crimson red, wandering near the waterline where the rocks glow the most intensely and stopping every few minutes to admire particularly good ones. My stomach growls as I pocket some for dessert later this week, they will pair nicely with fresh apples and wine. The tree comes into view and I make my way to the end of the tree line, the landscape turning more to that of rocks and distant hills. Pushing forward in the morning chill, listening to the crabs sing their morning chorus. I used to be scared of their song, an eerie choir of tiny voices singing a familiar language, always just a little too far away to make out the words. One day my father took me out to the boathouse and threw a blanket over us, telling me to be as quiet as I could and to listen closely to the ocean. As we sat in silence, I began to hear them in a quiet murmur, gradually growing louder and louder

until they were closer than I had ever heard them. Still muffled through the door but now intelligible, I heard for the first time the crabs ballads to the water, the rocks, and the stars.

As I reach my destination I begin to tie my dress up around my waist, wrapping my shoes around my shoulders with a cord and hiking my bag up onto my back. Now in line with the tree, taking a moment to admire her as I always do, a vibrant blue beauty growing thirty feet out in the ocean, giving off a faint light marking her place at night, the flame willow tree we all called Mother Ocean. By following the faint glow of her roots I am able to stay just knee deep as I wade out towards her, being careful not to step too hard to or carelessly on the intricate patterns of moss and algae depicting a time long before humans. As I reach the trunk I feel her lacey arms reach out to me, helping me up to her first branches where I can climb with ease to the knotted branches overlooking the far side, with a view of the expansive ocean, glimmering yet grey and ominous. I look out too see if the lighthouse is in town, but the clifftop is just rolling greenery, empty. I see Verta, meticulously sorting a variety of items both edible and non-edible amongst hanging baskets along the branches, frying from one to a next, either taking or leaving, a look of content intensity in her eyes. I cough to let her know I'm here and I see a quick flash of annoyance in her eyes at being disturbed mid-task before she realizes I'm a customer. There's nothing Verta loves more than business.

She begins to make her way over to me, hoping from one branch to the next with impressive speed for her size. I check over my list one more time before holding it out for her, letting her pinch it in her beak before flying off upwards and out of sight. I had never seen the top of Mother Ocean from within. It's been an unspoken rite of passage for young people in our town to try and climb to her peak and so obviously at fifteen I had packed a few day's worth of food and water and began what I believed would be the first successful adventure to the top of Mother Ocean. Two days and a couple of broken dreams later my father found me at the base of

the tree, curled safely in the wispy arms of Mother Ocean. I don't remember much of that climb and nothing at all about my descent, only a dream of riding gently on the wind in a boat made of feathers.

Before I could begin reminiscing further I saw Verta begin her decent downward, a woveb bag gently swinging from her beak. She perched next me and dropped the bag in my lap, I reached inside and pulled out my list along with my groceries. Three of my five items were crossed out in green ink, and the words "*No chestnuts until next rain.*" were written across the bottom in neat cursive. I had never figured out quite how Verta managed to write, and with such precision at that, but she seemed averse to personal questions, preferring only to converse on topics of business. I pulled out a handful of dark brown mushrooms, marveling at the smooth texture of their muffin top heads before running my fingers across their ridged underbelly. Next was a glass jar stuffed to the brim with an assortment of leaves, unsuspecting at first but the transportation vessel to my most fragile ingredient; eggs. I cracked the lid to see what Verta had brought me this time and almost squealed out loud at their glassy pink shells, picturing the rose-gold yolk inside and the delicacy that would soon be my breakfast. Lastly were a variety of potatoes, none larger than my fist but varying in shades of red, purple, and golden brown. The last item on my list, chives, was crossed out but not mentioned in Verta's note. I pointed to it and did my best to describe them, long, thin, green plants with notes of onion or leeks. She cocked her head at me but did not speak, meaning she most likely didn't know I was asking for. I wrote on the back of my list LEEKS or ONIONS and opened it out to her, letting her read it over for a moment before flinching back as she flew past me and upwards back into the branches. I took this time to sort my goods into the many sections of my errand bag, the red pebbles casting a faint glow on the interior as I tried to separate glass from glass and food from dirt. Verta flew back down with a small bunch of spring onions which I accepted happily, pulling out my payment and

opening it up for her to inspect. Inside the plastic takeout container was a handful of mud, grass, and a rather impressive worm ball I had dug out from behind the garden shed the night before. Verta seemed quite happy with this, tipping the contents of the box into the bag she had used for my groceries and giving me an approving look. I pulled myself up, and after saying goodbye in the form of a sunflower seed tossed into the nearest basket I began my descent back down Mother Ocean.

I realized I would have to go on a little further than I planned, chestnuts weren't essential but they sure would be nice and Reigate farm was just a few minutes east of the coastline if I cut along the steep ridgeline up to where the Lighthouse sometimes sat. Blinking a few times as I left the darkened interior of the willow, I looked upwards to my destination realizing that the lighthouse now sat upon the cliff top, towering over the landscape, swaying slowly in the breeze. Huffing and puffing with effort as I climbed the rocky trail towards town, I kept my eyes peeled for the speckled yellow and brown flowers my sister liked with her lunch, picking a few off the rocks as I went and wiping their pungent sap off my fingers. Bitter and sharp, I had never like or even seen the appeal in these so-called delicacies, but Sora had been so busy these past few months she rarely had time to go looking for them and their season would soon be over.

At the top of the ridge the path split, one way towards the lighthouse, one way towards town, and the final path, the one I was taking, wound a small distance down the side of the ridge and into Reigate farm. Rita Reigate was sitting out front as she always had been when I showed up, her border collie, Moxie, curled peacefully at her feet and a bag of chestnuts already encased in her wrinkled grip.

“You used to be faster getting up that hill.”

Rita wasn't mean per se, in fact I had grown up hearing adults sing her praises and boast of what they had seen her do. Now the oldest person in lilac creek county, her skills as an agriculturalist were known to all, but it was another skill that kept people at arms length.

"Well I don't get to class as much as I used to" I quipped back, and I saw her smile as she remembered her teaching days. Most of her former students probably wouldn't share the same reaction as she, I hold back a grimace as I remember the third day of intermediate farming, sweat dripping down my back and forehead as I tried to keep up with her plotting demonstration real time. I shivered as she looked me up and down as I knew what was coming and braced myself to learn what I usually would rather not know.

"You should do something about that, I can see rotation issues in your hips starting around 38 if you do not redirect."

Rita's uncomfortably personal power of sight defiantly came in handy sometimes, but this raise in her psyche seemed to come with the added side effect of never being able to keep it to herself. Everyone respected Rita, cared for her even, but most did not hang around for extended conversations when the work was done, unwilling to hear how they needed to "redirect". Her husband, Garve, was the only one to ever seemed unphased by her matter of factness, often joking that he too was gifted in this way, only his powers were for foreseeing what Rita wanted for dinner.

"You want chestnuts, you also wanted chives but decided on your way here it would but just as good with onions and nettle leaves so you don't need those anymore. Which is good because I don't have any."

I shivered. And then I wondered what to say next. I mean. What do you say in response to that? I felt the awkwardness grow the longer I waited to respond but just as I opened my mouth to

speak, Moxie leapt up from her place on the ground where she had been quietly content for the last few minutes. Over Rita's shoulder I spotted Garve stepping through the now open door of the farmhouse, beaming at Moxie as she greeted him with a barrage of kisses. Internally I sighed with relief, Garve provided a pleasant barrier between Rita and myself that made conversation slightly easier to navigate.

“Maria! It’s been eternity, I barley remember what you looked like!” I laugh at his hello and go to hug him, I had seen him just days prior at the college library. He taught dialect and language studies and I often stopped by his office to borrow or return books from his class bookshelves.

“It’s good to see you too. Did you get that Shakespear collection in yet?” I asked hopefully. He laughed and shook his head.

“It’s supposed to be here by the first snow, but you never know with those big city librarians. Heads filled with so many stacks of books they don’t know where's up and down anymore. But when it gets here you’ll be the first to know, I’ll send Moxie over with a heads up.” I thanked him profusely then noticed Rita's expression, staring up at Garth with a look of sharp expectance in her eyes. I couldn’t quite read it but Garth clearly did.

“But I don’t want to bore you with too much school talk, I’m assuming you didn’t come here just to see me.” He asked, getting down to business. Rita held out the chestnuts.

“Just those, same as last time?” I asked, Garth nodding at me as I dug in my bag. I pulled out two tins the size of palm and hand them to Garth, taking the chestnuts from Rita who let go the second my hand made contact, causing me to almost drop the bag. For farmers, my mothers face and neck sunscreen was a lifesaver, worth its weight in gold (or chestnuts), and after a summer of studying my mother I had finally achieved a result worthy of trading. Rita, however, only

wanted my mothers sunscreen, and so I would bring one of each of them, subtly trying to convince her mine was worthy of the same praise.

Maybe gaining Rita's approval was a lost cause but Garths was not, and he thanked me kindly for my work, wishing me well as I made my way up the road and back towards home. Instead of retracing my steps and following back along the coastline I decided to take the ridge path home, along the top of the cliffside overlooking the beach and the ocean. The sunlight had made its way out, and the water was now a sparking blue, gently rippling and crashing against the pebbled beach. I checked my list again as I walked.

Mushrooms

Potatoes

Chestnuts

Eggs

Chives

I struck through the last items for no particular reason and put it back in my bag, satisfied I had everything I needed. The trail back was an easy one, tall grass tickling my ankles when the path was narrow. My stomach had really begun to wake up now, excited for the fruits of my labor to appear on my lunch plate. As the path began to become a series of switchbacks leading to the final stretch of the beach between me and my home, I started to put together the meal in my head, sliding each ingredient into place. Potatoes roasted in duck fat from my fathers pond, sauteed mushrooms and onions, garlic from the garden, toasted chestnuts, topped with silky, rose gold eggs. It was only mid-day but I ready to sit down, and as my house came into view and I wondered if Brutus would be waiting from me when I got back, or if he was down by the river hounding dragonflies and small fish. Regardless, as soon as I got it, I had a spell to do.

Bitter Rains

I cast unripe berries on bitter souls,
karma which begins in the belly
sours amongst the kitchen wartimes
Your sorry excuses for meals
no longer burden by dinner table.

Take a bite, former friend,
do you find yourself choking on fine foods these days?
See the bounty of sweetness you left for me,
Juices running down my chin in a river of
lustful self-righteousness
your regret sometimes leaves a pesky trail
of ants and painted on sadness
You search for the sugar and gag.

Did your spite lose you everything?
I make you taste it on each plate.
Silent spells reminding spoiled children
you ate from the sugar jar by the fistful,

and while we enjoy our candied treats,
These sweet memories will forever twist your stomach.

I do not have to wish you ill will,
each time I sit down for dinner without you,
it is enough.

Gods In My Kitchen

I never found their god in my kitchen,
He was not hiding in my pantry,
nor did he ever sit down to eat.

The day I stopped setting his plate,
Holy purification cleansed my pallet
Bringing to the forefront
the sweetness
Crystalized,
behind my molars alive and
dancing on my tongue.

Returned by bubbling pot
and smoking pan
My spirit came home through the kitchen window,
drifting in on the scent of candied ambition.

And now
when I think of sweetness

I think of you,

My love.

Honeycomb clouds my vision,

molten sugar strands

climbing my face like vines,

criss-crossing my vision with

my most delicious weakness

I would do anything for a taste.

Watching you chew,

My love,

Between your teeth and

under your tongue.

Does dinner consume you like

you do me?

A smile after you bite,

I am lost in you again.

If my hands have not danced magic in this moment,

I will happily end the search.

If I have not cooked up god in this moment,

I will know I have been right.

Pancakes and Red Poppys

I am cooking pancakes on an old battle field,
Poppys marking where blood once fell
poking red petaled faced through rich dirt,
breathing in syrupy air

No longer a barren land,
wartime smoke clears way for new flavors
A growth of waiting orchards find their way home,
Land both familiar and forgotten

The earth is singing with new life,
rain pours down on prolific fertility
As I make my breakfast in canopied calm
singing out to the trees
both ancient and new,
I'm home,
I'm home

But red poppies are for remembrance
and though my morning song is filled with gentle embrace,
She does not forget, crying her sorrows

as I whisper kindness into trembling palms

I am the anorexic chef

The cheap chef

The “I-can-make-something-from-nothing” chef

She does not yet trust that I will keep the peace,
afraid I will wander too far into my own curiosity.

I lay before her an olive branch,

cooked with deep sorrow,

fire lit as the ground shook from her weeping,

salted with tears of my own.

Golden sweetness dripping

with the own shortcomings of my heartstrings

Flawed as all things are

For a moment as we eat

we can forget what once lay around us.

My Personal Menu

Breakfasts are difficult in our house, stomachs flip in the early morning, dishes from the night before looming over the prospect of cooking. Leftovers are the star of our AM kitchen, offering easy respite from our dishes dilemma. Today I have found leftover breakfast potatoes, ground bison seasoned with sage, oregano, black beans. A small pan offers a quick clean, so I give in and power through a single dish for the sake of fried eggs to top it all off. It takes me less than 15 minutes to reheat and quick fry, timed perfectly for my roommate to be back to the living room and ready to eat and soon we are sat on the floor in satisfied silence. I cant help but praise myself sometimes, even the broken yolk cannot dampen my spirits, and the thanks of my loved ones will push me through the dishes.



When we have company I can't help but want to impress, but at the same time, I don't like to spend too much of my time cooking when my friends are in town. Busy lives have made these moments precious, and the slowcooker my best friend. Pork ribs are sold in huge packs at Safeway, \$13 for at least two meals of three servings making it an absolute bargain, and when combined with crockpot magic it becomes tender pulled pork sandwiches that never fail to win over a guest. Marinated overnight in a spice blend that turns them a gorgeous red-orange, I place slithers of butter between each slice and chop my hot peppers to lay on top. All I have to do for eight hours is give them the occasional flip, and the melted butter will be used to toast my ciabatta, adding that spicy flavor to the crispy bread.



I hope they can taste my gratitude for them, hot as these fresnos. I picked onions yesterday, sweet yellow with rainbow peppercorns and chili flakes. Normally I would use red onions but beggars cant be choosers. I strain out a little of the butter and fat, toasting the bread and laying out my pork. Everyone picks their own toppings but I like a little Louisiana hot sauce and onions, the perfect mix of spice and acidity.



These moments are worth their weight in spiced, buttery gold. Tonight, there were no leftovers, I almost cried with joy.