

## **Comfort Foods**

My dad's famous chicken cutlets. You could hear the sound of my father slamming the mallet, tenderizing the raw meat on our marble counter lingers in my mind effortlessly. Next to my father stood my mother, at the stove adding minced garlic to the red sauce and then grabbing a wooden spoonful for us all to taste. He added in spices like Salt Bae as I watched from beneath the island counter. I then mixed the Italian breadcrumbs and grated Parmesan to help out and make it feel like I was cooking too.. The chicken was served with a spicy red marinara, and we laughed as we gobbled it all down at the small round kitchen table together. This was one of the only times that everyone was happy together. Later that year he found her stash of pills in her nightstand and things never went back to normal.

My grandmother's rich chocolate fudge cake was like a warm hug on a cake stand. The aroma of chocolate and sugar filled the air as I opened the door coming home from school. She saved the fudge batter bowl for me to lick clean. She also saved an extra can of frosting next to the cake stand if anyone cared to add more. The cake was so luscious and thick, too rich to have more than one slice at a time. She was so prepared that she put mugs of milk in the freezer, so when you were ready for a slice of gooey cake, there was a frosty mug awaiting you. I thought she was the best, and then cake was just a plus. For reasons still unknown to me, my father never liked her, or her chocolate cake. After she died he laughed about her Diabetes and didn't let me attend her funeral.

My mother often feuded with my aunt over many things, but mostly over who had the best deviled eggs. During the holidays, I would watch her boil water, and add the eggs into the bubbles with a dash of salt. She peeled the eggs so easily and mixed the light yellow yolks on the side. She filled each half egg with a piping bag, and finished them off with a sprinkle of red paprika. This easy dish taught me so much about cooking, and my mom. I no longer see my mom, but I still make the deviled eggs in her place for each holiday. She left me and my dad when I was nine years old. Despite the negativity I found in my relationship with my own biological mother, I now look forward to sharing this recipe with my future daughter, and staying in her life long enough to see her make them on Easter and Thanksgiving.

My other grandmother's legendary layered lasagna dish, only served on Christmas Eve. She labored in the kitchen all day, mixing ricotta and basil, stirring the simmering tomatoes on the stove, and cooling off the long noodles before combining it all in one glass dish together. She always hoped that this family meal would repair all damages amongst everyone, like a yearly Catholic confession. She placed the hot dish on the beautiful Christmas linen and prayed that the tastiness of the lasagna would deter any arguments or past issues with the cousins or siblings. Once the plates are

clear, so are the conversations and mingling. Grandma was only happy when the plates were full of her lasagna.

In an effort to start my own family tradition, I decided to create an Italian inspired meatball dish. A pure, tasteful, happy meatball that could cure the existing pain of the previous meals. I wanted to make something that meant more to me, food that didn't make you feel guilty, or make you remember sad times in life. I blended ground beef with garlic salt, onions, and rosemary. While I gently formed the meatballs, I began to simmer some red sauce. I thought about the memories I wished to create with my own meal, and how this one would differ from my parents and relatives' food. My meatballs will consist only of happiness and love- no drug abuse, no arguments, no abandonment or death. I hoped that when I serve my dish, I could start a new era for my family. I placed my steaming hot meatball dish down in front of my Father and little brother. I've been with just the two of them for years now and impressing their taste buds is never easy. I watch as the two of them dig in, hoping to have made meatballs worthy of praise. Before I could lift my fork and pick up my own meatball to try, my dad and brother begin arguing over missing assignments and schoolwork. All my hardwork and compassion flies right out the window to our left. I guess food can't always fix our issues.

There has always been drama lingering around the midst of my mother, father, grandma, cousins, and me. Under the table full of food lies a graveyard of family secrets and issues that remain unresolved. Food is the only reason that we all gather and somewhat try to put our differences aside for a short amount of time. I wish we ate more meals together in the midst of yummy silence, rather than screaming and yelling over

things that won't matter years from now. I wish my mother stayed around to watch me learn other dishes than just the deviled eggs she taught me, which I perfected on my own. I wish my father apologized to my grandma and tried her rich chocolate cake before she died and he no longer had the chance, because it was so good and we'll never have it again. I wish my meatballs could have been a game-changer and taken away the hurt of the other meals. I remember vivid memories linked with each meal, some good but mostly bad. Maybe one day I'll create a menu with roast beef that has forgetting properties, or an apple pie that makes you want to give everyone around a big hug.