

Jonathan Carney

Grade 8

I stirred the pasta as it boiled in the bubbling pot, slowly turning softer and smooth as it cooked. As it grew softer it acquired this light yellow glow. The chicken continued to cast out its aroma, and the spices only strengthened its wondrous smell. We added a can of sliced mushrooms, which taste good with just about anything. The chicken and the pan had turned red from the McCormick spices, and the pan crackled as Dad poured some cooking wine on the dish. The smell was only improved by the addition of this ingredient. Dad attempted to teach me how to flip the pan and the chicken, but I was too cautious to make the chicken do more than jump. Dad flipped it a few times, then let me try again. I managed to do better, even though what I had feared the first time happened as some pieces of chicken fell on the stove. We picked it up and put it back in.

While the chicken was cooking, Dad suddenly slapped himself on the forehead. “Are you kidding me?” he said.

I figured he’d merely cut himself or something. “You okay?” I asked.

“I’m fine, but I forgot to put in the peppers!” Dad said. He laughed as he said, “I went to all that trouble to go to the store and buy peppers, then I go and forget to put them in!”

Apparently we couldn’t put it in now, since it was too late. Still, perhaps it wouldn’t have added much more heat than the spices anyway.

I was excited when the dish was finally served. After saying grace, I took a bite, and it bit back a little. It did have a little kick to it, and I enjoyed it, because I loved the pain.

“I still can’t believe I did that,” Dad said. “I even went to the store to buy them.”

It was still good, however, and still had a little kick. The red, juicy sauce was the best part other than the meat, of course. The meat was red and covered with the good stuff: good old spice. It has become one of my Dad’s best dishes, even though I never had it with the slightly essential pepper ingredient.

Ingredients for Chicken Piperod (with the peppers)

- One chicken breast, cubed
- One green bell pepper
- One red bell pepper
- One onion
- Three tablespoons of butter
- One teaspoon of ground black pepper
- One teaspoon ground red pepper
- One teaspoon ground white pepper

- Half a teaspoon of garlic powder
- Half a teaspoon of onion powder
- Half a teaspoon of salt
- One cup of white (cooking) wine
- Half a cup of chicken stock (chicken broth can be substituted)
- One tablespoon of lemon juice
- Desired amount of linguine or spaghetti

Directions to make Chicken Piperod

1. Sauté the chicken in one tablespoon of butter until browned.
 2. Add the bell peppers and the onions and cook, stirring frequently.
 3. Add the three teaspoons of ground pepper, and the garlic and onion powder
 4. After vegetables are cooked, heat the pan to high and add the white wine.
 5. Allow to simmer, and then add the chicken stock, the remaining two tablespoons of butter, and the lemon juice.
 6. Reduce the sauce and serve over linguine or spaghetti.
 7. Enjoy!
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Sam Hollister

Grade 8

As I round the corner of the staircase, I spot the crumb-dusted plate I left by the chimney last night for Santa and the reindeer. A token of the transaction is left behind: a note that reads,

Dear Sam,

Thank you very much for the cookies. They were quite scrumptious, and I'm sure the reindeer loved the broccoli. I can't wait to come back next year, but for now, I'm off to deliver more presents! Merry Christmas,

Santa

At times, I wonder if these Christmas traditions define the holidays for me. A Christmas season that lacks these essential aspects is a damaged one. Perhaps I feel this way because making cookies is the first sign of the holiday season for my family. Without it, the holidays never really begin.

Usually around two weeks before Christmas, I start planning when my family and I can make the cookies. Around a week later, we actually get the ingredients. However, the realization that the Christmas season is here comes once the first tray of cookies comes out of the oven. Once the oven door opens, the distinct sugary aroma of warm and buttery cookies wakes my brain from an eleven-month hibernation. This experience is unlike any other; before the holidays, I cannot recall how it feels to be in anticipation of Christmas, but that sensation comes rushing through my nose and into my heart the moment I get the tiniest sniff of the cookies.

My mother begins by mixing the dough. Sometimes I help, and when I do, I pay close attention to how it is done. The simple task of baking cookies turns out to be an extremely complex one, and a slightest mistake in proportions can lead to an irreversible error in the final product. However, as I look on, I realize that her firm hands are confident in their actions, and that the possibility of such an error is unlikely. She sifts flour and sugar into a perfect sheet of sweet snow; then she adds the softened butter after a few attempts to get the sticky stuff free from the wooden spoon. I stir in the eggs and almond extract, and watch the swirling ingredients begin to combine into one.

The part that I look forward to the most is forming the cookies. The cookies are in the shape of a crisp wreath, lightly browned on the rims but a golden yellow towards the center. As my father presses long strands of dough through an extruder, I separate good portion pieces and form them in a circle. Each tray gets exactly thirty-five cookies. My mother is waiting to put the tray in the oven, and after she does so, she removes the previous tray. The warm cookies have a flavor that nothing else does: one that comforts you with a powdery texture and a divine flavor.

The cookies are Christmas. I cannot remember a holiday season without them. For months, I look forward to making them. But it isn't just the taste of them that attracts me. I appreciate even more the sense of family, tradition, care, and ease that these cookies accompany. These important connections in my family, above buying gifts or opening presents, allow me to understand the real meaning behind Christmas.

*The cookies are so delicious that, for your own safety, a recipe is not included.

Faith Chadwick
Grade 8

The Icing on the Cake

But it's not just about the frosting on cakes; after every cake is made, my mom puts the frosting on crackers and passes them out to my brother and I. It may sound disgusting- the mixture of salty and sweet, but it is most definitely one of the most delicious dessert items I have ever had. The frosting is spread generously onto the crackers, and together, they taste wonderful- the best combination of crunchy and creamy ever.

When I was little, whenever my mom baked something I would be there, waiting, asking her many times when it would be ready. To this day I get frustrated with her frequent replies telling me it has to cool. I always got to dictate the color of the frosting for my cake, and usually the shape as well. There was a little shop that held so many differently shaped cake pans that you could buy. One year, I picked a pan shaped like Rainbow Brite, and I remember being thrilled. My mom would then bake and expertly decorate the cake with her delectable frosting. My mom baked me a pink Barbie cake one year, and once, for my brother, a cake shaped like a rocket ship. Though I don't remember how old I was when I had the Barbie cake, I can picture it clearly. It rose up, in a mountainous shape of cake and frosting, to form the skirt of the Barbie that had been stuck in the top. All my family was there, and I distinctly remember my uncle being as loud and humorous as always. That cake was amazing – worthy of a spot in a food magazine. But it was always the frosting that made it special. It was the icing on the cake.

Though my grandmother is no longer here to make her special frosting, my mom still carries on the tradition. And I'm always right there by her, helping to mix and stir, and sneaking bites when she's not looking. Sometimes, I assisted with the actual frosting and decorating. A year or two ago, I decorated my dad's cake in big, swirly, letters and polka dots. From the times where I tried to frost the cake and made it entirely lopsided to the cake shaped like Thomas the Tank Engine made by my mother, we've always used the same frosting: the recipe created and passed down by my grandmother.

Frosting Recipe

2/3 cup of milk

2/3 cup of shortening

2 pkg. confectioner's sugar

1/2 tsp. of salt

1 tsp. of vanilla flavoring

optional: food coloring

Mix well on medium speed for 3 to 4 minutes.

Dana Larkin

Grade 8

Relationship in a Tortilla

The delectable aroma in the kitchen leads the waiting, hungry people catch onto the scent, and many heads come snooping in to see what is causing the mouthwatering smell. After placing the meat onto the pan, the trail of a delightful smell increases while cultivating the happiness of the hungry people throughout the house as the tasty, tempting smell reaches them. Even though it's just a meal, it helped build my relationship with my dad.

During the end of my sister's last year at middle school, my dad had his second retinal detachment. This made him feel like a lifeless body; he couldn't drive, read, or do anything. He had to sit with his head lying on a table. When my sister and mom had to go on the Washington D.C trip, I was then in charge of doing everything. I had to cook, clean, walk the dogs. Some kids would mind but I didn't. It made me feel needed from my dad. One night, I decided to cook fajitas for the two of us. They turned out great and he really appreciated them and my effort. It was nice for him to see the product that resulted from all of his lessons when he taught me how to make them. From that time on, fajitas have been a special meal for me, not just because of the

flavor, but because they remind me of the good times cooking with my father.

FAJITAS

Recipe

- 1 pound of stripped beef round
- ½ cup of balsamic vinaigrette
- 1/8 cup of chopped garlic
- 1/3 cup of olive oil
- 2 onions
- 1 red pepper
- A bag of Mild Finely shredded cheddar cheese (use as much as needed)
- 6 flour tortillas

Directions

- Slice beef into strips unless it's already in the strip form
- Put it into a bag with balsamic vinaigrette with some garlic and olive oil
- Place bag into the refrigerator and let meat sit for 2 hours
- Chop the pepper and onions
- After 2 hours, take bag out of the refrigerator
- Put two pans on the stove and pour a little olive oil and garlic on it
- On one pan, put the vegetables on it. On the second, put the meat on it
- After fully cooking the meat and vegetables, mix them together
- Put a serving onto a tortilla and sprinkle as much cheese on it if wanted

Serves 6 people (6 tortillas)

Madeline Brophy

Grade 8

Sizzling Serenade

This time, I decided to ask my mom to teach me how to make the delicious family recipe for roasted potatoes. She didn't have much time, having five kids and being a navy wife turns out to be a lot of work; but she made time to teach me anyways.

As ordered, I went to the pantry and bent over to snatch the coarse bag of small potatoes. They were about the size of a golf ball, give or take. The color reminded me of a rusty truck, burgundy, dusty, and worn down. The potatoes seemed to have dimples all around, and a nasty temper. I took the bag and put a strainer in the sink, then dropped about fifteen into the strainer

and watched as the water splashed over and on top of them. Once they were done rinsing and being washed, I picked the strainer up and out of the sink and put it on the counter next to the cutting board and the knife that my mother had laid out for me. *Chop those in two, and maybe three if they are particularly large. Oh, and make sure to be careful with that sharp knife, I don't want you getting hurt.* She always made sure to look out for me. I did as she said, and chopped them up, embellishing in the sound of the *clock* and *snap* as the knife went through the potatoes and on to the cutting board. My mom criticized me now and again on my cutting, and by the end I was an expert. I picked up the washed, chopped potatoes and dropped them into the pan, one by one, watching the time go by. Once they were in the pan, I stood and looked at my mom expectantly, waiting for her to tell me what to do next.

As usual, she was busy dealing with other things, such as my sister screaming her head off as she does about 24/7 these days. She was also calling out to my dad to put the steak on the grill, please. I watched the asparagus cooking on the stove, and thought to move it around a little, but decided against it, not wanting to take the chance of getting burned. At the table across the room my sister and my brother were sitting doing their homework, since they had recently arrived home from swimming. This is only a taste of the daily busy days, and life of the Brophy household.

After my mom had fulfilled her motherly duties, she sighed as she walked over to me. *What do I do now, mom?* I asked in a kindred voice. I always waited my turn for her attention. She looked down at the potatoes in the pan and ordered me to get out some olive oil from under the stove, rosemary in the cupboard, sea salt above the radio, and to take care to wash my hands, with soap and water of course. I did as she told me to and brought all the ingredients to the counter by the pan, almost slipping in my washed hands. As I did this, she busied herself with the asparagus and checking on my dad with the juicing steak. She's always a good mother, keeping things under control and making sure everything is running smoothly. She came back in the house and told me to pour a considerable amount of olive oil onto the potatoes. I did so and also sprinkled some of the rosemary on there, too. Now this is the fun part. She demonstrated how to mix up the potatoes with the olive oil and the rosemary: Getting my hands down and dirty and picking up the potatoes and moving them around in the pan. The olive oil and rosemary covered my hands, the pan, and the potatoes.

When I finished mixing up the potatoes, I looked to the oven, which had finally reached 400°F. I picked up the pan of potatoes, stuck them in the oven, and set the timer.

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Forty minutes later, I heard the oven *bing*, signaling the end of the cooking of the potatoes. I walked over to the stove, opened the drawer next to the stove, and grabbed the oven mitt that resembled a cow's mouth. I stuck my hand in, and pulled open the stove with a creak. The sight I saw was one of satisfaction. The smell of the potatoes rushed into my nose and filled my body with a sort of comfort and relaxation. The sound of popping salt, and sizzling rosemary reached my ears. The once beige color, like the sand in the desert, that had inhabited the inside of the potatoes, now had turned a hue of golden bronze that only perfectly cooked potatoes can undergo. I sighed with gratitude, knowing that my hard work, and wait, had finally paid off.

They were beautiful, better constructed than the Mona Lisa had been those many years ago. The smell greater than the scent of all the chocolate in the Ghirardelli Chocolate factory combined. The sight, more refreshing than a cold drink after a day in the sun. Simply, they were perfect.

I reached my hand into the oven and picked up the pan from the side. My mom wasn't around, but getting the other food ready on the table, and calling for my little sister, Katherine, to set the table. I was a little disappointed she didn't get to see me succeed in my cooking experience, just as she missed some of my successions in life. But I knew she would be there next time to support me. As she usually was, at every awards ceremony at school, at the swim meets and dinners. She was always there.

Even though my mom wouldn't like me eating them so hot, as they had just come out of the oven, I could not resist. I took a little one, that hadn't needed to be chopped in half, and bit into it slowly. The soft, cracked outer crust burned my fingers, but I didn't feel it. I didn't feel the hotness of the inside of the potatoes either. All I felt was the steam raising from the potato to the roof of my mouth, surrounding my teeth and gums, and the taste. I had to open my mouth to let some of the steam out, and a cloud like smoke coming out of a factory, was released. The taste is very hard to describe. Think of sinking your teeth into a million dollars, metaphorically, of course. I could taste everything, the crisp rosemary, the crunchy salt, the buttery olive oil. My body tingled with love and gratification for this potato. I was in heaven.

I picked up the pan with the cow shaped oven-mitt and walked it out to the kitchen, where the whole family was seated. I walked around and gave everyone a spoonful. I gave them all I could afford to give, just as I do in my life and friendships with them. I gave it to them, even if they might not want or appreciate it. I snuck myself two extra spoonfuls when my parents were looking the other way. As I headed out to the kitchen to put the pan back, I turned around and observed my family. They were all chatting about their days, and how the tests of the day went. Meghan impatiently asked when we were going to start. Tommy complained about the potatoes. Katherine asked if she had her sewing class tomorrow. Claire screamed at everyone, but we are all so used to it that nobody even noticed, nor did anything to stop her. My mom and my dad, at the heads of the table, only looked at each other and smiled, despite all the chaos surrounding them. Standing there, I noticed that my family too, like the potatoes, turned out alright.

Ingredients:

1 ½ lbs. Red Bliss Potatoes

¼ cup of olive oil

1 Tablespoon of fresh rosemary

1 Teaspoon coarse sea salt

Freshly ground pepper (to taste)

Preheat the oven to 400° F

Halve potatoes if large

Place in 2 quart baking dish

Drizzle olive oil over potatoes; add salt, rosemary, and pepper

Mix all ingredients together

Place in oven

Bake for 40 minutes, or until golden brown

Eat

Serves 6 (as a side dish)
