

Leave the Cannoli

Category: Eating

written by Jennifer Caputo-Seidler | December 12, 2021

I grew up Italian American, which meant special occasions were marked with food. Christmas was celebrated with a white cardboard box stuffed with cannolis, napoleons, and baba rums. Family gatherings included wedges longer than I am tall piled high with capicola, salami, and prosciutto, accompanied by bowls of mozzarella balls glistening with olive oil. Summer nights entailed grilled sausages and two-for-one ice cream sundaes at the Carvel across town.

In fact, that was the last meal I ever ate with my dad, who died unexpectedly one Wednesday night in August when I was 15. Once he was gone, my Uncle Carmine having preceded him to an early grave, the blood ties to my Italian heritage were lost.

As a teenager, unable to manage my grief, I sought solace in the taste of Sunday gravy, sopping it up with piece after piece of crusty bread. I learned to make my dad's meatball recipe, stacking them high on a bed of spaghetti. I devoured boxes of Entenmann's chocolate donuts, never stopping to think that those had been one of the last treats my father and I had bought in the week before he died. Even a decade later, I chose a wedding cake layered thick with cannoli cream, my consciousness refusing to acknowledge that cannoli cake is no substitute for your dad walking you down the aisle.

It has taken me two decades to work through my grief and arrive at a place where I can enjoy the taste of nostalgia without feeling compelled eat to uncomfortable fullness. The fact that I grew up Italian American now means I can cook family recipes with love and with the knowledge that love persists long past when the meal is finished.

Jennifer Caputo-Seidler

Tampa, Florida