

Looking back on my childhood, I've experienced many fond moments of celebration. Holidays, birthdays, vacations, and the sort have been a time to take a step back from everyday existence and celebrate the love that keeps my world together. As I've gotten older and life has morphed into something new, celebrations have changed their ways and developed meanings that would look quite different to my younger self. But no matter how different celebrations look, two things have continued on as overarching themes—love and good food, with both functioning as outlets through which the other showcases its light.

The earliest occurrences of food as a source of love come from my mother and the immense effort she would go through to make all of life's good and bad moments into special ones. My anxiety-ridden days of elementary school would end in key lime bars from a local bakery and talks of how she would always be there for me when I was upset. Valentine's Day mornings were characterized by the pitter-patter of my feet on the hardwood floors as I ran out into the kitchen to find a basket adorned with chocolates, candy, and other well-loved delicacies. Gatherings around the holidays included elaborate dinners, moments of laughter in the kitchen, and full bellies by the end of the night.

Although any excuse to celebrate with food is good enough for me, I will forever adore the long awaited annual process of making my mother's lasagna on Christmas. With each layer came lessons in love, care, and attention to detail that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

Throughout

all the celebrations I've participated in, I've been able to learn the value of aromas, flavors, and presentation in providing a multisensory food experience as a way to spark joy and showcase a tender appreciation for others. I, without a doubt, can say that these experiences with my family are a large part of why food is so important to me today. I may not always remember exactly what happened at a family event, but chances are I'll always remember the love I felt and the food that accompanied all of the joy.

As life moves along its long, complicated path, I continue to walk with the lessons I've learned about how food can bring us together and lead us to celebrate the journey that we're all on. I encourage you to find ways in which you can share your love with others through food, whether it be through a home-cooked meal, grabbing dinner with an old friend, or creating a basket for your partner filled with their favorite edible delights. Through an act of love so common to our everyday lives, we can foster deeper connections and celebrate each other in ways that words aren't always able to.

Ultimately, this defining quality of food makes it such a powerful tool on our everyday path to everlasting joy and appreciation for our time on this planet.

# Love and Good Food

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PHOTO: Andrew Zhang