

When my family gathered, it was always around a big meal.

Aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces, cousins, grandparents, everyone from newborns to others in their eighties would get together at my great grandma's house for arroz con habichuelas, pollo, y platanos (or rice with beans, chicken, and plantains). That has always been and will always be my favorite meal, and whenever I have it, it reminds me of the times that I've had with my family.



-Hycee Fisher

Food has always been something to unite us, and that tradition continued in my immediate family home as well. Dinner time was always the one time we were guaranteed to be together, especially when I was younger. Both of my parents often had to work until the evenings, so cooking and eating that meal was when we would finally have the chance each day to spend time with one another. It was a bonding time, one filled with lots of learning, laughter, and love. Even now, everytime I sit down for dinner with my friends and family, those fond memories and experiences make me smile.



My mom works on a flower and produce farm, and as a kid, my parents would take us to local farms to pick fruit with the changing seasons. When we'd visit my grandparents, we'd pick apples and make apple crisp together.



Food and cooking have been a huge part of my entire life. I grew up with both my parents experimenting with recipes and making most of our own food—recently, down to our bread.



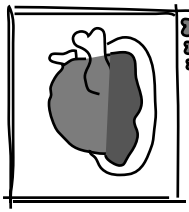
-Celia Ruley



In high school, I started working at a coffee shop and it fulfilled so many parts of me, down to my childhood dream of working in the food and restaurant industry. Food bonds and connects us and dares us to try new things or revel in the familiar. It sounds dramatic to say that food has been an anchor to me, but it's entirely true—I am who I am because of the food and community I've grown up with.



I grew up in a very traditional household with parents who weren't the biggest fan of American food so much of what I have experienced has been through fast food chains and school lunches (mediocre at most).



It wasn't until two years ago did I have my first real American Thanksgiving with my friends. It was such a warming time with good food and great company.

- Melisa Tran

GROWING UP, FOOD AND FAMILY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CONNECTED IN SOME WAY.



Dinner especially was always the one time that that my parents and I would all be in the same place, sharing a meal and spending time with each other. Since we all did different things, there was always something to talk about. Even though we ate a lot of different meals (my mom is an amazing chef!), one meal that I will always associate with our times spent together is Gỏi Cuốn (Vietnamese spring rolls). Since we all rolled our own rolls, it was a very hands on meal when we had it.



That's probably why another favorite food memory I have with my family is making Chả Giò (Vietnamese fried spring rolls) because it was always a group effort.



My mom would make the filling, my dad would help separate the frozen spring roll wrappers while my mom and I wrapped them, and he would fry them afterwards while my mom and I cleaned up.



Both foods required a direct involvement from all of us in one way or another, and eating them now at home or at restaurants brings up fond memories for me.

- JAYCE NGUYEN

Food as a Cultural Experience

I love food. Not only is it a good experience for the taste, but it's also a good experience to be shared with others.

I love how I am able to explore different cultures without the costly travel. I enjoy those moments where I am able to connect with my friends as we introduce each other to dishes and snacks that we grew up eating.

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