

RiverBender Blog: Fall is for the Comfort Food

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The first day of fall is technically in September, but the season really started this weekend, when my friends and I gathered to make potato soup and apple pie. After all, that's the best part of fall: the comfort food.

My best friend, who I've known since preschool, is one of the best cooks I know. Another best bud and I sat around her kitchen table, peeling potatoes, as her roommate fried bacon for the soup and our master chef consulted the recipe she had found on TikTok.

I was on Apple Duty, standing over the table, cutting wedges as carefully as possible for the pie. The apples had been donated by another friend fresh from her farm. As a result, they were bruised and swollen with rotten spots you had to cut around and also the crispest, best I've ever had in my life. We snuck slices while Chef's back was turned.

These cooking nights are a lot like the Hulu show "The Bear," except not at all, because our chef is a lot calmer than the screaming rage we see on the television show. (It's actually just me with the rage; an apple peel flew across the kitchen as I gesticulated wildly about politics.)

Also, no one is good at cooking besides our leader, so she assigns us very basic tasks. It's similar to when you're trying to do something important but there's a toddler in the room who really, really, really wants to help. We peel a potato or two and gossip while she chops, dices and mixes, a tornado in the tiny kitchen.

And just like when you have a toddler, someone inevitably gets hurt. Usually me. I scrape my knuckles on a cheese grater or nick my fingernail with the potato peeler. My friends, because they are kind and very patient, express immediate concern.

"Oh no! Are you alright? Do you need a band-aid?"

The only thing that really hurts is the knowledge I'll never be a five-star chef. We're eating good tonight because of these team efforts, but tomorrow it's back to ramen for yours truly.

But in all seriousness — there is some wonder in a quiet night in, especially with people who have known you for most of your life. I'm lucky to have a few friends like this, girls I met almost two decades ago. We glued together early on and stayed friends through the growing pains of high school, the distance of college and now as young professionals who chat about work and long-term partners instead of dolls and math homework.

The cooking continues, but even Chef is only half-paying attention to the stove as we talk. We occasionally turn serious, and why not? These are the people who have known me the longest; they're probably the people who know me best. We know each other's mannerisms and speech patterns and go-to jokes, and also the pains we've lived through together, the hurts we've never dealt with truly alone.

After the meal is prepared and the pie is in the oven, we sit on the couch (there's not enough room for all of us at the table) and keep talking, but now we also throw in comments about how good the food is, and Chef beams. Of course, I feel equally proud, as if I did anything remotely helpful to prepare this meal.

But the soup and the conversation are good and warm and filling. It's hearty. It strengthens us.

Fall will give way to winter, with its darker afternoons and cold. (The end of daylight saving time already has me in a bad mood, because while it was great to wake up in sunlight this morning, it will suck to leave the RiverBender.com office tonight in pitch dark at 5 p.m.)

But as the season changes, these nights will likely become more frequent, all of us taking comfort in this ritual of gathering in a cozy kitchen to make and share a meal together.

As I scarfed down a piece of hot, melt-in-your-mouth apple pie, I couldn't help thinking it was pretty sweet.

