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Exploring the Connection: The Scale of Time and Effort Within American Baked Goods

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Introduction

After an exhausting full day of intro level courses, I would fall on my raised bed in my freshman college dorm. I would pull my pink throw blanket, encasing myself in warmth and open my computer to the internet. The fan in my computer whirled and heat radiated out the bottom warming me further. I typed Youtube into the search. When the familiar red and white logo flashed on my screen, the day's worries and stresses loosened their grip on me. They finally let go when I clicked on the first video that was listed, a baking video.

I was away from home for the first time. My whole day was filled with academics and so when I finally had a break I found myself drawn to everything baking. Something about watching others bake gave me great comfort. Perhaps it was because I could envision the baked goods right in front of me. The smell of freshly baked yeast-risen dough, and the roughness of the outer crust.

I switched from Netflix, to Youtube, to Hulu, finding new shows to binge. These shows helped me relax, gave me time to clear my brain. It was fascinating that watching people do something so mundane as baking gave me so much joy and consolation. My dorm did not have a kitchen, so while I watched I fantasized about having a set up like on the competition shows, or being back at home and trying out all the recipes I saw.

In April of my freshman year, that desire came true. Covid-19 was spreading rapidly and it had reached Massachusetts. The day after we received the email about needing to leave campus, I packed up my things and called my sister for a ride. I remember my friends were talking in our group chat about how it would not be for long. Little did I know, when I slammed my sister's car door shut that day, it would be the last time I would be on that campus.

Weeks and weeks passed. Everyone was forced to stay home. It was such an abrupt change from our daily lives. Usually the streets were full and everyone was busy. Now, we had days and days, months and months of time. What would we do with all this time? For me, the answer was simple. I would finally get to bake. And I did. I went on a baking spree. I had been making a list of the recipes and things I wanted to make. All I had to do was start.

Cookies, macarons, scones, eclairs, cakes (too many cakes), even croissants. Even though I was home I still turned on baking shows and clicked on baking channels at home. But this time when I was inspired I would rush down the stairs, tie on my apron and get baking. Nothing felt better than using that free time to work hard on making something delish for my family to eat. I found that with that time I could make something special.

The resource of time and its influence of baking is one that we have known about but it was never as obvious until the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused people to stay at home and with that we all had a lot of time that we did not know what to do with.

I was not the only one taking advantage of the mostly empty days by baking. Ironically, when items like the frozen dinner meal came about, it gave women more free time to do things other than cook and bake. On the contrary, in the present day, things like working from home and hybrid working have been implemented which lead to some of us using that free time to bake. Now that it has been three years since lockdown and we are mostly back in person it is easy to see the correlation between free time and production of homemade baked goods.

Through the use of memoir and historical occurrences this paper will discuss the spectrum and correlations that all baked goods lie on. There are two scales: the spectrum of labor versus leisure, and the spectrum of specialness versus overindulgence. They have a positive

correlation relationship. Often when something is on the high end of the leisure scale, it is also high in the overindulgence scale. Then that means the opposite end is true- high in labor can significantly relate to being higher in specialness. These relations of labor and specialness and leisure and overindulgence can tell us something about who we are as a society.

Memoirs are used in this paper as a way to illustrate these spectrums as experienced by in real time. Mixing these short narrative non-fiction stories with specific events relating to each baked good allowed for an all encompassing view into the significance of the food in our society.

The memoirs and historical events allow the assessment that the most convenient and easily obtainable things are never the most rewarding or fulfilling. It is what takes time, labor, and thoughtfulness that gives the most sincere and eloquent message. It is an important note that much of the baked goods we see today is high on the leisure end. This is due to our fast paced lifestyle. It can also illustrate how valuable something is. The more time one spends on preparing and baking the more special it is. For the majority of baked goods, there is a lack of effort and labor, therefore there is a lack of reward and satisfaction when it is consumed.

The conversation around food and culture is not a new one, but in each chapter this spectrum helps to measure the value that the four particular baked goods chosen hold. The four baked goods are ones that were seen the most during the pandemic and so I wanted to evaluate their measurements on the proposed scale. The four baked goods are: cookies, cake, pie and donuts.

Line Between Pie

Although a humble dessert, pie is one of the most abundant and notable items on the menu of American baked goods. The word “pie” dates back to 1302 from middle English. Essentially, pie is anything with a flaky pastry crust stuffed with something. It can have a crust covering the top or be left open so it exposes the baked center.¹ In ancient Rome, they made their pie crust with oil, whereas those in northern Europe replaced the liquid with other forms of fat such as butter or lard. Nowadays, we use cold, cubed butter to make the pastry portion of the pie.²

Before the pie of today, the savory, meat and vegetable filled pies were essential for the survival of harsh times. Savory pies were a staple in England, not among royalty, but among the common folk. Pies stretched precious ingredients to feed many with little. It can be no surprise that pie carried over to the New World when early settlers ventured across the ocean looking for a new home. New World settlers had to face extreme weather conditions, the difficulties of building a stable community, and stress about food scarcity. Pie was necessary; it served the purpose of adding more carbs to one's daily diet while using only a bit of extra ingredients. Additionally, pie did not need any special heating system to cook, making it an ideal meal during the voyage and after. Chicken, beef, carrot, celery, peas—an endless selection of nutrient dense and stomach filling ingredients that, when added to the shell of flour and butter (or whatever fat was available), created a satisfying meal. That is what pie was: a tool to fill ourselves so we can carry on.

¹ American Heart Association (2023). *How Much Sugar is Too Much?*

² Hannah, T., & Spence, D. (1996). *The international sugar trade*. Elsevier.

When I was a little girl my best friend Nicole and I would play outside for hours. We had imaginations that went wild, creating stories, games, and characters. We wore a hundred different hats in a day. The two of us were always up to something. Some days we pretended to bake and serve food for our imaginary friends. Nicole and I were working away with the play shovels and rakes in the sandbox, preparing for the harvest of the season ahead of us. I tried to make even rows while Nicole sloshed dollops of water every couple of inches to hydrate the crops. I leaned against the rake's wooden stick whipping my brow and appreciated my hard work.

Once Nicole finished it was time to harvest the miracle crop. We scooped up the dampened sand and began the baking process. With the batter from the ground, I mashed and mixed. Nicole poured more water into the batter that had turned warmed from sitting in the rays of the sun. I tried to mimic my mom in the moments when she prepared dishes to go into the oven. First there was the packed, dark, wet sand that formed the crust, then I added the lighter sand that represented the salty-sweet filling.

Now looking back, we decided to play a game that was labor intensive and required hard work. It mimicked what was actually done in the days when pie's were made out of necessity; the game was pretend to us, but to those who came before us it was how they lived. The end product was so amazing because we had put in the hard work of each and every step to get there.

I pressed the filling into the crust that lined the shallow bucket and passed the dish off to Nicole, remembering that it was important to share. Nicole finished off the dish with some real leaves and placed the bucket under the slide. The oven door closed and the pie baked.

Time always went by faster when playing all day and finally after a couple of unbearable moments the timer went off, and I would yell for everyone to gather around the table, which was just the wooden planks that edged the sandbox protecting the grass. Nicole would sit patiently awaiting her serving, and I walked along the table and placed a heaping helping of the crispy, spiced apple mud pie for all our friends to eat.

This imaginary game was fun and exciting because in real life I was not old enough to actually make anything by myself the way I wanted. Additionally we played this game where we had to grow our own crops and bake pies because it was not something that we would ever do in reality. Pie is something that could be shared with many. The Encyclopedia of Food and Drink emphasizes the importance of feeding as many people as possible, “pies could stretch even the most meager provisions into sustaining a few more hungry mouths... The crusts were often heavy, composed of some form of rough flour mixed with suet.”³(831). When the only thing people thought about was survival they valued a meal that was heavy and filling such as savory pie. However, they also enjoyed a sweet pie every so often if the resource was available to them. In the twenty-first century when someone brings up pie, it will conjure an image of something sweet filling the middle.

Once America became more stable pie lost its place as a main meal. Now it is a dessert. It has turned into a luxury; once a thing of need is now a fancy dessert. Sweet filled pies have taken over the consumer and pulled them away from the savory; now we can get that many other ways

³ Life-Time Books (1982). *Cookies and Cracker*. Life Time Education.

all times of day. The crispy crust stayed the same while the old difference is what it was filled with.

Pie has turned into such a luxury that there is a whole market around apple pies. This past year, in early November in New England my sister, mom and I went apple picking. We pulled down the dirt road to C&C Smith farm. Cars formed a long line behind us, and we quickly snagged a spot that opened up a second earlier. Walking a few feet across the dirt road, my family and I hurried to get in line. Families waited before us, little kids giggling and holding their bags, couples on dates walked into the field of apple trees disappearing to collect their stash of apples. Making a pie was a process, it took hard work, temperature control and creativity. Would you add lattice to the crust covering, or make a little brown sugar crumble topping? The opportunities to customize this holiday dessert are as endless as the types of apples in the field.

That fall, my sister, Syd, and I already decided we would make an apple pie, and maybe apple cider if there were any left over. The fallen leaves crunched under our feet as we traveled down that path dividing rows and rows of apple trees. Every two rows a new sign appeared with the variety of apples you'd find hanging in those trees. Syd held that bag and my mom grabbed a long stick with a basket at the top that is for pulling the apples down from up high. The whole time we weaved in and out of the short trees we joked and taunted each other, talked about upcoming events and of course the holidays. Making pie, even picking the fruit for the filling has transformed into an activity of money and time. It truly is a luxury to spend an after picking apples and making pie with family.

There are as many types of apple as there are recipes for pie. Most of those variations present themselves in the filling because the crust is relatively the same. For apple pie, some may

choose to not cook down the apples while others swear by it. One side could require a lattice covering, full covering, or maybe more avant-garde and go open faced. My Nana says the best combination is equal parts pink lady, granny smith, and yellow ones. You could get lost in the sea of recipes provided online, but sometimes the most basic is best.

In the supermarket, in the freezer aisle you can find frozen pie crust, and now, even a whole frozen pie. When frozen food was first introduced to America the meals were marketed towards women. They emphasized that by using frozen meals women would have more time for things they actually wanted to do, or that they only had to bake or cook if they really wanted to. Frozen foods were a shortcut but also a stepping stone for women to explore more in baking and in life.⁴(175-177). When I think about frozen food now it is something that I try to avoid because I would rather have something fresh. But, in the late twentieth-century, frozen pie (any frozen food for that matter) was a gift. Precious time could be spent doing fun activities and all their time in the kitchen was not needed because of the popularity of freezers and these frozen meals.

While the frozen crust and pies does cause a disconnect to baking, it was a step towards a more accepting society. Is frozen food a short cut, an easy way out? Or is it innovative, saving time and money? The issue that I have with frozen items like pie crust or a whole pie is that these types of desserts are significant because they are important staples of holidays. There will be no real other time that a pie is served. I rarely see it on dessert menus at restaurants. Why is that? Well, whether it is an apple, pumpkin, pecan, or key lime pie, it is present around the holidays. This can connect to the season and the resources that are produced in abundance during that

⁴ Inness, S. A. (Ed.). (2001). *Kitchen culture in America: Popular representations of food, gender, and race*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

time, apples, and pumpkin harvest in the fall in New England. In other places such as California and Florida where the sun shines bright, you can find citrus growing everywhere and so the sour key lime pie is popular there. However, most pies need an occasion to be made such as Thanksgiving, or the other alternative is making pie as an activity.

Thanksgiving is the holiday that represents pie. Thanksgiving is in autumn the perfect time for harvesting the crops that grew all summer. The pies that we see on the table at Thanksgiving are there because that was the food available to the early settlers. Because this is still true for the twenty-first century, we continue to see the tan, browns, and dull oranges of pie on the table.

Pie has evolved from a dish of utility and need, to one of luxury and presentation. This transition includes the creation of the frozen pie and the development of marketing tools to urge people to spend money to have more time doing other things which in itself is opulence. This has not dulled the impact or the flavor of pie; the original form has with-held the stand of time. It is a large part of the American cuisine and will be for a while longer.

A factor that differentiated pie from other desserts such as the cookie, but similar to cake, is that it is meant to be shared. In my house, the pie knife lays next to the tin and you are able to cut whatever size piece of pie that you desire. It brings people to the table to converse and connect. Whether it was frozen or homemade, pie will still appear on that table and a brother, sister, uncle, aunt, or grandparent will call out to everyone, 'You've got to have some of this pie!'"

Cookies: Bittersweet

I never thought that a red-blooded American staple like the chocolate chip cookie could find its way to the south of France. France, with its world-renowned cuisine, especially in that of patisserie, bread, and desserts has mastered the technique of reaching delicate and elevated flavors.

In the summer of 2021, I found myself walking the main street of Cannes in the Cote D'Azur Provence located in the south of France. People chatted in an elegant language. I followed a cobblestone street that was too narrow for two passing cars. The street was lined with decorative shops advertising the latest fashion, and nestled on every corner was a cafe emanating the sweet smell of sugar, and every few feet the street splintered into narrow through alleys filled with pastel colors and spots of sunlight. Just a mile off waved the magnificent sea carrying a slight salty feeling in the air. The sun warmed me from the inside out.

When I was younger, I had always dreamed about going places far from home and seeing the world. I loved my family, but I never appreciated them; I never thought twice about how lucky I am for the incredible people around me. But I wanted something different. Everyone around me seemed content with where they were and what they were doing. I never wanted that, I wanted free will to explore and see the world. I wanted to travel and drink in the culture and customs of places other than the ones I had known all my life. Deep down I wanted something new and exciting, I wanted to be my own person, someone individual from my large family.

I held onto this decision for a long time, and got defensive whenever someone would say, “well you’re still very young, you’ll have kids one day,” or “you don’t mean that, there’s still plenty of time for you to change your mind.” Hearing people completely dismiss my feelings on

that topic fed my petty soul. I was determined to see this through and show them that I didn't need anyone, I just wanted to take care of myself, wanted to be the cool aunt unburdened by a family and kids.

With hard work I escaped and traveled. I found my way to France for a second time. The first was to visit Lyon and Paris on a school exchange trip. This time I was working as an au pair, living with a family, and helping the mom, Jenna, with the kids. The girls were busy with their classes and Jenna was meeting a friend in the city, so I had some time to myself. I spent that time practicing my broken French and trying all the little cafes- making too many stops because I kept saying, "I need to take advantage of the croissants while I'm here."

When I arrived back at the house, Jenna showed me what she picked up after meeting with her friend. It was a bag of cookies from an America-styled bakery. I laughed at the thought that she wanted to stop at an American-styled bakery when she had every kind of confection in close reach.

I had just stopped at Ladurée- a great shop known for its macarons. Jenna a native French woman, bought cookies, and I, a 21-year-old American, bought the macaron. Technically, the shell of the macaron with its clean tough outside and soft fragrant inside is a cookie. Side by side the macaron shell and the cookie are very different. We stood in the kitchen chatting about the bakery and I shared about the warm cookies I made for my family and how we had a designated jar for them. Holding that cookie and conversing with Jenna in her kitchen I thought of my own; about how all my six family members would hang in the kitchen while I bake or my mom cooks and we all catch up on our days. There, thousands of miles away I silently longed for that comforting feeling.

Jenna mentioned that American cookies were her guilty pleasure and that this particular bakery had the best. She of course let me have one and I gobbled it up greedily. I was proud that a cookie- with all its simplicity could impress a person from a place that produced such fine and sleek foods.

The cookie had not always been the circular, crispy on the outside soft on the inside, treat that we know today. Before technology took over and changed the way we bake, cookies were known as crackers and/or biscuits.

Humans must eat- to think and move and work, we need food. We need a certain number of calories, usually 2,000 a day, to be alert and awake for 10-12 hours. Humans do not need sweets; most of us could even benefit from cutting down on the amount we consume. In America, the average person consumes about 77 grams of sugar a day. The American Heart Association says that women should consume about 25 grams and men 36 grams per day to sustain our mind and body.⁵ It is a craving, a desire, one so deep that we know it's not good for us, that it could even kill us, but we have it anyway.

In a time when sugar was limited to the island's sugarcane grew on, biscuits and crackers were crunchy, hard, and unsweetened. The Romans had a version of the biscuit that is still widely known today, the biscotti. (Food That Changed History) It is a rectangular biscuit that

⁵ American Heart Association (2023). *How Much Sugar is Too Much?*
<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/sugar/how-much-sugar-is-too-much>.

requires a tough bite and lacks a sugary taste. Instead, it may contain nuts, raisins, or other additives to make the plain biscuit more interesting.

I will not often reach for a biscotti. Really, the only time would be if they have been sitting in the pantry for far too long and even then, I won't eat it alone. Having a biscotti with coffee is the only way I will have it. The tough crumb of the biscuit softens and melts with a dip into the steaming coffee. While it is not sweet, the plain flavor with the crunchy almonds is a nice contrast to the bitter coffee. This biscuit is not a dessert, or a sweet indulgence that drives so many to the cookie today; that happened because of sugar.

Making sugar is a hard and laborious task. Even today half of the harvesting is done by cutting the sugar cane with a machete. The sweetest did not come without a price. For many years slaves and those with no other choice but manual labor, worked long and hard hours transforming plants into sugar. When I bake at home it is because I have the time and I want to enjoy the process of mixing and cutting and tasting. It is not something I have to do, as I have already eaten a meal and have my calories. I do not need to bake to survive. For a long time, from the time of humans hunting for game until the invention of machines slicing bread, cooking, and baking in the kitchen was laborious. This labor is now something respected and valued. It is what makes home baked goods so meaningful.

To bring someone something homemade today is to show off that you have time to indulge in creativity. People do not have much time for that because our days are full of working, studying, and more working. Working so much that you forget to eat or need to run out and hope you can survive on gas station food. Although the need and want for food has never changed as time has gone on we have lost the need to spend time on the cooking for sustenance.

Back in a time when home cooked meals were the only type of meal, people ate for energy. However, in Persia, around 500 B.C a general of Alexander the Great recorded his encounter with sugar. From there sugar traveled east reaching as far as China by 100 B.C. The knowledge and taste for sugar spread fast in 630 BC, as a prophet preaching in Persia came across it and told others about it on his journeys.⁶

After this, the craze of sugar spread far and wide, becoming an ingredient that was favored in the kitchen. From this a new branch of baking arose. A branch of baking that was something other than what was absolutely necessary. Although the biscuits could now be sweetened, and variations of the cookie began popping up everywhere, it was a tremendous task.

Homes were furnished with large ovens, ones that were used to bake and heat the entire home. On cold days it would provide warmth and safety, and it would aid in making meals of soups, stews, and breads. As the kitchen in my home is the heart of the house, the ovens too were a great source of security and dependability. If I had to imagine which room in my house, or most homes, could not do without, it would be the kitchen; Not only because of the food, but also because it is a gathering space. One that all seven members of my family gather at the end of the day and talk about anything and everything. It is the one that we welcome others into, the one we celebrate birthdays, and holidays in. In American desserts the cookie is the kitchen of the house. It is a treat reminding people that although not necessary for our body, every once and a while we deserve something sweet.

In the fourteenth century, during the Renaissance in France, many cookbooks were filled with recipes for a sweet biscuit or cookie. The streets were lined with stands selling these

⁶ Hannah, T., & Spence, D. (1996). *The international sugar trade*. Elsevier.

confections to the public.⁷ Most likely it was the macaron, an almond flour margarine based delicate shell with a sweet filling. Making the perfect macaron is no easy task. If you over mix, the batter will be runny, if you under mix there may not be enough air to develop the proper foot. If they cook too long, they will be too hard, if not the cookie will be mush. It is a careful dance between the sugary shell and a contrasting filling, oversweet will give you a toothache, but a filling that is overpowering is even worse.

Even a homemade version of macarons contrasts from an American cookie. The identical shape and the clean round mounds demonstrate technique and an advanced level of baking. But, the cookie is irregular, it has lumps of chocolate or other mix-ins, and they may not all be the same size. Macarons are not something that is done with others, whereas making a cookie can be a group activity. I would *never* have my brother come help me with the macaronage of the macaron batter, that takes a keen eye and patience. However, I will call in anyone I can to help me mix and roll out two dozen cookies. This is what makes a cookie an American treat. It does not have to be perfect, does not need special techniques or ingredients, it just needs to have the intention of giving a little sweetness to a not always sweet life.

Cookies came to America, like most things did, because of immigrants. Specifically, from the English and Dutch immigrants in the 1600s. Oxford food and drink). The baked good migrated all over the country because of immigrants traveling further west after trying and enjoying cookies from in the east where the Dutch and English settled. The ingredients and directions for making cookies also ventured around the country because of popular cookbooks, such as *American Cookery*. During this time, is when the Dutch term *Koekje* (a differentiation of

⁷ Life-Time Books (1982). *Cookies and Cracker*. Life Time Education.

cake) turned into cookie. The word cookie really took over during the nineteenth century because Americans preferred having their own distinguished term.⁸(518)

America has always had this fascination in making itself distinct. So, we call the biscuit a cookie and leave the u out of flavor, but we never abandoned our love of baked goods. The chocolate chip cookie is the cookie that best represents that love of independence but also home. This popular cookie was made by Ruth Wakefield. One day, in 1939 Ruth was making drop cookies, a simple sugar cookie with nuts. Then, she added a bag of Nestle's chocolate morsels. When they were cooked, Ruth noticed that the morsels did not melt but retained their shape instead of melting into the dough⁹. These cookies, deemed the Toll House Cookie, named after the Toll House Inn the cookies were first made, became a town favorite and were soon passed along across the country. Nestle noticed that sales of their chocolate morsels had increased in the region where the chocolate chip cookies were being made, and when they discovered why, they were able to buy Ruth's recipe and have it printed on the back of every morsel bag.¹⁰(519)

The story of Ruth's cookie spread and chocolate chip cookies were being made and consumed in home kitchens everywhere in the country. The chocolate pieces added another layer of sweetness to the already sweetened cookies. The efforts of baking cookies were well paid when biting into the chewy round filled with chocolate.

⁸ Smith, A, (2013). *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*. New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press.

⁹ *The Food Encyclopedia*.

¹⁰ Smith, A, (2013). *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*. New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press. Text

The chocolate chip cookie is not something completely different from other cookies in the market. But, there is something about them, something a little extra sweet that has made them so popular and mean so much.

At the end of my neighborhood, the dad of one of my friends always made the best chocolate chip cookies. They were known around town as being the best, and if he made you a batch you knew you were doing something right. One time, after me and the other neighborhood kids got on, he even ran after the bus, just to give a large, gallon plastic bag, filled with his chocolate chip cookies, to the bus driver. They were always a thank you for your hard work type of gift. He would even bring them into the local baristas at Starbucks that knew him by first name.

The other day, I asked that friend for his recipe and she responded that she has watched him bake them over a hundred times and that it was simply the recipe on the back of the Nestle chocolate chip bag. I laughed because it is truly amazing that the recipe Ruth made for tired travelers who were far from home were still being made today and given as gifts for people away from their homes working hard for others. That friend also told me the secret is that he always puts in more chocolate chips than it's called for. An additional testimony that supports the fact we all need a little more sweetness in life.

Cookies, like most baked goods, have become an item that you pick up at the grocery store. The process of baking sweets is somewhat of a lost art these days. While there are people online posting recipes and pictures of the item they baked. It seems that there is not enough time in the day for everyone to spend doing that, and not everyone wants to. By spending more time working and worried about money, and the economy, and politics, we have lost the connection to

baking. Like Atlantis with the oceans rising, the waves of busy lives have washed away the necessity of baking your own goods.

What we have not lost, however, is that new need for sweetness. On that busy American day, there is always time to stop and take a bite. As there is more bitterness in our lives, pandemics, wars, brutality, we have needed that extra layer of sweetness. We need that chocolate in the cookie. It is a reminder of safety and warmth, of home and comfort. There are hundreds of types of cookies, but none represent American life better than the chocolate chip cookie. It is something made in the home and given to others as an act of kindness, treating someone to a little something sweet.

Back in the South of France, the next weekend after Jenna informed me of the American bakery, I found my way down the similar narrow streets. Purple and yellow flowers were planted in boxes outside homes with large, open windows, a sight that made me understand why so many, including myself, were drawn to this place.

Eventually I stood in front of a door marketing American baked goods. I pushed my way in and was met with a woman behind the counter and an array of cookies and brownies and other familiar items.

The room was tiny, the store front maybe eight by ten feet, but the colors were bright and the smell intoxicating. The small room with this lady whose face I cannot recall and the name of the store I cannot remember gave me a sense of home.

I was thousands of miles away. I had been away from my family for two months, the longest I had ever been, and I missed them greatly. I bought a few cookies. One to bring back to the mom to share, one for myself later, and one for myself in that very moment. I sat in a small wooden chair outside the shop, as there were single chairs for any to sit and enjoy the beautiful day. I sat in that chair and ate my cookie.

Eating that cookie, I was taken back into my kitchen with its hideous green walls and wooden cabinets. I was in that old wooden chair on the island stealing some chocolate chips from the bag my mom had opened on the counter, these were the moments when it was the hardest to hold onto that grudge of escape. I thought about how, in my absence, my mom had reclaimed that task of filling the cookie jar at home. I imagined my family members tricking in from a long day of school and work and them gathering around the kitchen chatting and laughing, without me.

But- I had made it to France, a country of love and food and art. And there I sat eating an American style cookie. It was all bittersweet. The cookie tasted like home, like comfort, like I was there with my family. The distance between me and home did not feel so far away. I took another bite of the large round chocolate chip cookie, and I could have cried. I was in France! The place of my childhood dreams, having a once in a lifetime experience, but I found myself missing home, and a simple combination of flour, eggs, butter, and chocolate made me feel a lot less alone.

Celebrate Cake

Cake has been around for a long time and thus has changed from the influence of its surroundings. Somewhere in the “Neolithic late Villages in Switzerland” traces of an item like cake was found. They were called compound cakes and described as “flat rounds of crushed grain, moistened, compacted and cooled,” and were most likely baked over hot ashes from a fire¹¹ (10). These ‘cakes’ were similar to the texture of a cracker or biscuit leaving the mouth with a sharp crackly texture. In early times these ‘cakes’ were used as offerings to gods and a utensil for religions. Even the great writer Homer wrote about food as an offering hoping to win the favor of a specific god. Cakes could be given to “Artemis and Hecate,” or “Sacrificed to Iris,” and even “carried in Syracuse in procession for Demeter and Persephone.”¹²(11). During the earliest time of cake it was used to share and honor greater beginnings- not to be eaten by people but as a token of good faith and ultimately good karma. However, the flame for this idea blew out while personal consumption of cake started growing from quiet embers.

After the cracker-like cakes the next evolution towards the modern ones was bread cakes. Yeast was used to raise the batter, giving cakes a chewy dense texture. Often what distinguished cake and bread was the mix in such as spices and dried fruits. Yet again this cake was documented in literature; In the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer wrote about a cake “both flat and round” used at a celebration.¹³ (15).

Once cake escaped from alters and found its way onto plates, they became greatly associated with pleasure and indulgence. The bright embers grew into grand flames. The Puritans limited themselves on the two fasciitis: indulgence and pleasure. This created a dilemma for

¹¹ Humble, Nicola. (2010). *Cake: a global history*. Reaktion Books Ltd.

¹² [see 7]

¹³ [see 7]

these people and so cake was restricted and only permitted from being enjoyed for special occasions such as a “funeral, Christmas and Good Friday.”¹⁴(16). Bakers were not allowed to make the spiced bread that was cake. This guideline was difficult to enforce but could contribute to why cakes are always thought of as a special celebratory dessert.

Interestingly, porridge is the next predecessor to modern cake. In the Middle Ages people began to quite literally spice up their bland enriched oats and wheat by including “dried fruits, suet, butter, honey and species,”¹⁵(19).

The species and dried fruit added to the porridge called Plum porridge and was the chosen celebratory dessert for Christmas. As the content of dry ingredients increased and overtook the inclusion of wet ingredients, the porridge became stiffer. A critical tool that limited the flame of cake was that of ovens. Homes in the Middle Ages were not built with the capacity to contain an oven creating a limitation to the types of baked goods cooked at home. Luckily this changed in the sixteenth century when ovens could be found more often in stouter homes leading to a greater production of many baked goods- most notably cakes¹⁶(19).

The next development leading to the modern cake- whisking eggs as a raising agent- arose and became popular in the early fifteenth century. When eggs are whisked with force and for a long duration the air builds up and when added to a mixture causes it to rise. In 1615 in England, cooks began using whisked eggs when preparing cakes. The first that used this technique was a recipe from *The English Huswife*.¹⁷ (20). Looking at a cookbook from 1796 called *American Cookery* by Amelia Simmons it is clear that this form of baking became extremely popular. The recipe for plumb cake for 21 eggs and the pound cake calls for a pound

¹⁴ [see 7]

¹⁵ [see 7]

¹⁶ [see 7]

¹⁷ [see 7]

(around 10). They relied on the egg to increase the volume. Cakes were branching off now becoming new things based on the different ingredients and techniques used to bake them. The first recorded recipe of the “wedding cake” was in 1655 when a well-known family, the “Manners of Belvoir” requested a wedding cake for their daughter.¹⁸(53). This family was one of the greatest in the area and shows that wedding cakes were for people who could afford them and had access to cooks and ovens that could make a cake.

While working in an English manor, Elizabeth Raffald wrote a recipe for a Bride cake in her cookbook called *The Experienced English Housekeeper* and as the years went on many people copied her recipe without giving her the due credit¹⁹ (56). Her recipe (a copied version) eventually made its way over the ocean and was said to have traveled on the Mayflower where it landed and became well-known in America during the 1830s²⁰ (58). In America plum cake was a high-demand treat and was used as the wedding cake, often referred to as ‘black cake’. One person, in particular, made an extraordinary plum cake, “Duchess Quamino, the pastry Queen of Newport,” who was a freed slave and earned enough from her iced plum cakes to buy herself a house in the 1790s²¹(30).

Creativity and choices are two things that America prides itself on. These two facets also translate to cake. Once plum cake became popular bakers continued to bake and make changes to it. One of these changes was the development of something new, the ‘white cake’. Contrasting with the wedding cake or the ‘black cake’ this baked good did not contain the fruit and species

¹⁸ Charsley, Simon R. (1992) *Wedding Cakes and Cultural History*. Routledge.

¹⁹ [see 14]

²⁰ [see 14]

²¹ Muckenhoupt, Meg. (2022) *The Truth About Baked Beans*. Washington Mews Books.

that its counterpart did. The white cake was plain, pure, and with no vibrant and distinguished flavor.

For my parents 28th wedding anniversary this year I made them cake. I wanted to do something for them to celebrate because if I did not they would have just said ‘happy anniversary’ to each other over the phone because at this point in their marriage anniversaries are just like every other day. And because they are both extremely busy. My dad doesn’t like going out to restaurants, because he thinks it’s unnecessary and usually overpriced for bad food. My mom doesn’t care either way. I knew that to celebrate their accomplishment I would have to set up a surprise dinner date for them. Cake is something that is made to make a day a little less ordinary and because it was an unordinary day cake was the only thing special enough to celebrate.

For dinner, I made chicken parmesan with asparagus, and for dessert, I originally planned to make panna cotta. The pairing was perfect. The chicken parmesan was coated heavily with pale breadcrumbs, warm from the acidic marinara sauce and the chewy pasta coated in melty, salty parmesan cheese. A panna cotta would have had a smooth, creamy texture, light taste, and color thanks to the heavy cream and sweetness from the vanilla flavor. The simple yet refreshing dessert would have been a lovely complement to the heavier, more acidic main dish.

That was what I had planned- but not what happened. The day before their anniversary I had a craving deep in my bones to make a cake. The whole day I was feeling energized and excited, and I needed an outlet for this energy. So, I used the occasion to fill my passion for baking and I suddenly found myself mixing up a chocolate cake batter. After the fact, I realized

the cake was also a good choice as it was celebrating a wedding anniversary reminiscent of the classic tradition of wedding cake.

The wedding cake had a competitor, one that changed and developed over and over. The birthday cake. This cake and its purpose were inherited by Germany where they celebrated birthdays grandly and with dessert.

In my own home, this is how we utilize the birthday cake: whoever has a birthday gets to choose the flavor combination. It could be all chocolate, all vanilla, lemon, or even ice cream cake. Then there are the candles: the number of candles correlated to the birthday person's new age, plus one for good luck. As the cake is being brought over the guests all sing 'Happy Birthday' and depending on whose birthday it is they may sit there quietly smiling, or singing along, or bobbing their head, but once the song is over, they take a deep breath and blow out the candles; all in one go. As the candles are being blown out the birthday person makes a silent wish, and then they slice the cake and serve it to the guests.

I imagine most people have similar traditions, but it was not always that way. Items like the candle ring were designed so the candles did not ruin the cake's appearance. The candles were blown out one at a time by people close to the birthday person. Over time it changes from the wishes for the person being said aloud and then said silently. It again changed so the birthday person blew the candles out one by one and then metamorphosed into what we do today. Who knows, it may very well evolve again.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are when the modern cake appeared.²²(22) This happened because of many tools created for the kitchen such as cake hoops, ovens, and rising agents”²³ (22-24). Along with the greater availability of resources such as food security and information, there was an influx in baking tools and materials. In America, during the 1790s the first rising agent was developed from wood ash utilizing its potassium carbonate to give rise to baked goods. About 60 years later in the 1850s baking powder was manufactured allowing “for the development of soft, light, spongy cakes without the necessity of a large proportion of egg and lengthy whisking.” Thus, the modern cake finally made its entrance²⁴ (24).

The next biggest change to cake was the invention of box cake mix. The first box mix to hit the shelf was in 1930. At first the product did not perform well and was dismissed by its primary audience, housewives. To make the cake all that was needed was to add... which required very little from the baker. To those making the box mis it was not close enough to the experience of making a cake from scratch so eventually they removed the egg power. This created a larger draw to the cake because the home baker could physically break in the eggs increasing their contribution and decreasing the guilt of not making it from scratch. Once this small detail changed box cake mix took off and is still granted a large section in grocery stores today.

In the “1970s, in Los Angeles at least, cakes were to be seen in an array of fantasy styles, sometimes with ethnic titles or motifs” ²⁵(24). Freedom of expression and the ability to do something different is what pushed the evolution of cake in America. In the 1980s there became a large diversity and more creative cakes. The flavors and designs, colors, and toppers were up to

²² [see 7]

²³ [see 7]

²⁴ [see 7]

²⁵ [see 14]

the couple's wishes and wants. Now in the twenty-first-century cakes have become limitless and no two cakes are the same, each uniquely different as the individual it is for.

A good cake takes time. Time - here in this fast-paced world- is precious. So to give up my time to take great care in creating something for someone shows my appreciation. I use my precious time here to contribute to the celebration of someone else's time. I love making cakes for this reason. It shows passion and love. When I finally started making the cake for my parents it was as if I were performing the Swan Lake ballet under the moonlight. I fluttered to the cabinet and grabbed the containers of sugar, flour, baking soda, and powder. Luckily I did not need 21 eggs. Some cakes use just one or another, but the combination stabilized the raising of the cake and the release of gasses to make a well-structured crumb. Leaping to the fringe I snatched the milk and eggs. My imaginary partner spun me to the drawers to pick up the final ingredients: vanilla and salt. Looking at early recipes of cakes, vanilla and salt are not two ingredients seen; they have become additions later in the development of this treat. It was a dazzling dance, one that ended in a flash; the crowd was left anticipating the next routine. Not one to disappoint, I began the next.

Cakes have long been the symbol of momentous occasions such as weddings, graduations, birthdays, and anniversaries. People send their love and condolences through the measure of cakes. Recently it has become a large genre on social media. While meaninglessly scrolling on Instagram, TikTok, or Pinterest, you will most likely find videos of people decorating cakes. The cake may be for a birthday, but most are just random messages that people want to send to friends and family. It could even be a mini cake, ice cream cake, or a cake for a dog's birthday. Cakes may come in all different forms but still have the same meaning- a form of communication. In her book *Cake: a global history*, Nicola Humble says that "Cake is one of

those foodstuffs whose symbolic function can completely overwhelm its actual status as comestible. More than anything, the cake is an idea. But cakes are also incontrovertibly material: lusciously spongy or solid with fruit, sticky, cream, loaded with sweetness, and filled and iced and decorated (8).”

With the development of social media and larger reach to more people, postmodern cakes have become something completely different than those first crumbling cakes in regard to appearance. If you want a recipe all it takes is a google search and you have endless options. With global consumption of media trends and fads have surrounded even cake and baked goods. Not only is there a mobile attraction but on Netflix, Peacock, and any tv program there are baking competitions. One of the newest ones is called *Is it Cake?* where the judges have to guess which item is cake and which is not. The trend of baking cakes that looked like real-life objects was a huge social media buzz a few years ago. Perhaps this has to do with the pandemic where people had much more time, and everyone was online on Tic Tok or Instagram. People were fascinated when the person on the screen would begin to cut into what looked like a shoe and it ended up being a cake. It has turned into a spectacle.

The night of my parents' anniversary, I set the dining table and set out the special dining plates, wine glasses, and matching napkins. Soft, instrumental Italian music played in the background, and my parents sat at either end.

When I was young, I played this game where I would wear my mom's apron and hold a notepad playing at a restaurant. I would have my siblings or friends stand at the door, give me their names and hand them a menu that was just scribbled. That night I got to play that game once more. I took their plates and loaded the pasta onto the dish. I had made sure to place my

dad's favorite sweet red wine in the fridge so it would be a perfect temperature. I loaded my mom's glass with ice and her favorite juice as she left the wine for my dad.

My sister who played the waiter approached the table of my laughing parents extending the cheese grater and saying the classic 'tell me when'. Although it was supposed to be a private meal my sisters and I hung around, snacking on the scrap chicken and veggies. My parents chatted about their day and reminisced about their past 28 years together. They cleaned their plates leaving patches of red sauce and as I took them away my mom asked what was for dessert. She laughed jokingly but gasped in surprise when I brought out the mini white and purple cake. They each got half although they just had a full entree they happily finished off the cake. My youngest sister snatched up a slice and sat at the island table condemning me. She said, "I hate you; this cake is so good. Why do you do this to me?" and cut another piece.

The cake itself has changed a hundred times but the idea of cake will always remain relatively the same. The idea that it can make an occasion special is an idea and a material object.

When we celebrate something like a holiday, a big change in a person's life whether a wedding, birthday, graduation, or death. Cake has two sides. The indulgent selfish side is where the cake is made in selfishness. The other side is that it is shared. Why is it shared? It may be because it is too big to eat for one person, so why isn't it smaller? Even the mini cake that I made for my parents, they shared. But cake is meant to be shared. But then really, it's something to share, something to slice off and give to people you are close to. Having cake at a celebration is an indulgence of selfishness. Set in front of us is a sugary treat all for one person, candles, or toppers to encapsulate the importance of that person's wishes to hope for more things, better things, things we want, and things we think we deserve.

This indulgence in dessert is an indulgence in selfishness, whether self-planned or planned by others. The average American day consists of a lot of selfishness, caring for the kids, pleasing the upper management requests, and covering a coworker who called in sick. There aren't too many chances to live for us, to celebrate ourselves or people close to us. It is indulgent and selfish, but it is necessary. Making a cake for someone, receiving a cake from someone, and sharing your birthday cake with friends that celebrate with you helps to bring balance to a busy and selfish world. Taking time to celebrate a birthday, or a wedding is a chance to appreciate and slow down. A cake is not the sole American baked good but is one of great significance to the American person.

Do Not Donut

On my way to the commuter parking lot at my university, the morning sun shines through the windshield of my car, warming me. The music plays softly through the speakers and my fingers taps the steering wheel and shifter to the beat. Every morning I drive on route 18 and signal my blinker, maneuvering into the left lane to turn onto the street with the parking lot. I drive the same route every day to get to my school, park in the same lot, and walk the same paths to my classes. And every single morning the Dunkin' Donuts that are stuffed into the plaza next to the small brick post office, has a line wrapping all the way around the building and into the street.

The SUVs, trucks, and sedans line up to place their order. Some get a hot coffee with milk and sugar, others an iced coffee or cold brew, and maybe some get a breakfast sandwich or muffin for their own commute. The rare times I go, my order is a medium iced coffee with

almond milk. This only occurs occasionally as I have followed my dad's lead in making coffee from the machine at home to save my cash on what's usually watered-down, bitter coffee.

Watching the line of cars grow as I waited for the green arrow to light up allowing me to take the left, my stomach growled. Often, with my early classes, I don't have enough time to eat a good breakfast or sometimes anything at all. I might not have had food in my stomach for class, but I would always, *always* have a thermos of steaming hot medium-roasted coffee in the cup holder next to me.

When you walk into Dunkin's the sound of orders being taken and machines running show how the place is constantly busy. The smell of coffee and sweets emanates from the back of the counter where you are met with the glorious sight of rows and rows of sugary donuts. Glazed, chocolate, chocolate glazed, strawberry, and seasonal flavors like pumpkin, apple, and cinnamon all swirl around dizzying the senses.

While in the past year I have been lucky to travel to a few different states in the US. Specifically ones out west, such as California, Wisconsin, and Arizona. One thing I noticed besides the different landscapes, socioeconomic and cultural differences was that- to my disbelief- Dunkin Donuts popped up a few times. Having been founded in Quincy, Massachusetts in 1950, Dunks is thought to be a primarily New England chain. However on my travels I have been shocked, infrequent they may be, that there are locations all across the country. That demonstrates the demand of the marriage between coffee and donuts is significant enough that a brand with donut in the name has franchised across the 50 states.

Another of these famous donut shops is Krispy Kreme. Again, on my travels, this time in Edinburgh Scotland, there was a Krispy Kreme in the local mall. When I first walked into the modern indoor outdoor mall in another country and looked up to see the classic red, white and

green of Krispy Kreme I immediately pointed out its oddity. I had never thought that of all things that would be the thing from our country to make itself present in another. Our legacy as a country includes that of donuts. We have literally reached international shores with the deep fried sweetness of donuts.

You walk up to the counter and say your order but there is always the thought in the back of your head reminding you that it's only *99 cents for one donut*. It would be so easy to add it to the order for just a dollar. The glossy glaze and the bright spots of sprinkles whisper loving words like a temptress luring you forward. The circular dough with the missing center can be eaten in just three bites, and the fudgy soft chocolate -which is arguably the best- lingers briefly on the tongue but quickly disappears as if you didn't just feast on it—a sin you won't even remember committing.

There are a few different stories fabricated as to how the donut got its hole. One of these is that a Dutch immigrant from Pennsylvania cut out the center because it made the donut easier to dunk into his coffee. Coffee and donuts, it seems, have always been the perfect pair. It was actually the Dutch settlers that carried over the recipe that would create the variety of donuts we see today.²⁶ Another story is that in 1857, the captain of a ship from New England poked a hole into the dough and became the one to invent the donut hole²⁷. Before the hole was added to the donut they mainly came in solid shapes, but it turned out that whether because it is better for dunking or because of a captain, the dough without a center fried much better.²⁸(79-78).

²⁶ Smith, Andrew F. (2006) *Encyclopedia of junk food and fast food*. Greenwood Press.

²⁷ Davidson, Alan. (2006) *The Oxford companion to food*. Oxford University Press.

²⁸ [see 26]

While in America there are a plethora of flavors a donut comes in, around the world most countries have food similar to it. Most have a version of the sweet consisting of a similar yeast dough that is deep fried with a sweet topping like cruller, fritters, malasadas from Hawaii, and French beignets. The American donut, however, seems different. It's not a refined dessert like the beignet. It's too easy to get and, like so much food on the American landscape, it's too easy to get and full of empty calories. Something about American donuts creates a separation between them and the others. The reason behind this could be the convenience and their lack of healthy calories.

An absurd amount - 80% according to "The Encyclopedia of Junk food and Fast Food"- of donuts sold in the US are bought as take out. Dunkin Donuts alone sells about 6.4 million donuts a day which climbs to over 2 billion in a single year. That is approximately 28% of the world population. An unhealthy amount of donuts are being sold, bought and consumed by the American population.

Interestingly, donuts were not that popular until World War I. During that war, the Salvation Army provided donuts for the soldiers while they were overseas, no doubt these donuts were related to the beignets of the French, and from this donuts became extremely popular. Once home from war the men sought them out. They were such a favorite that there is even a Donut-Day celebrated in June since 1938²⁹. A donut for a soldier who was seeing the most evil sides of humanity has a perfectly understandable reason for having a connection and craving for them. For a soldier who has witnessed the most evil side humanity has to offer, it's no wonder they connected to and craved this small sweet treat, the donut. However, once the idea of health and healthy lifestyles and diets became popularized, starting in the 1980's, donut sales decreased

²⁹ [see 26]

greatly³⁰. As we know, they never went away completely and it is hard to believe that sales were once even higher.

A single donut from Dunkin contains 13 grams of sugar, almost half of the daily recommended allowance. According to the CDC, there has been an 11.4 % increase from 1999-2020 in the prevalence of obesity and a 4.5% increase in severe obesity in American adults.³¹ The last thing that Americans need is easier access to more sugar. There is no longer a need for this type of sweet. Cake and pie are also not healthy food, but they are saved for occasions, whereas donuts are daily consumption for some. This daily consumption and the easy access are harming us.

As a child, my neighborhood, consisting of three full streets, two cul-de-sacs, and houses filled with children, was the hub of trick-or-treating. My sisters and I would seal up the invitations to our annual Halloween garage party invitations that were held in our garage and stuff them secretly in everyone's mailboxes. We had bobbing for apples, wrapping the mummy, costume contests, and, best of all, the donut-eating race. It was the highlight of the night, pure childhood fun. The donut was like the sun hanging on a string signifying the rush of enjoyment to come.

The rules of the game varied year to year. For this, each year varied. Sometimes we would have it dangling on a string, sometimes it would just be sitting on a plate. But the goal remained the same: Whoever could eat the whole donut first without using their hands won. What did they win? Well, another donut of course. So, there we stood, children dressed from

³⁰ [see 26]

³¹ CDC. Quickstates: Prevalence of Obesity.
https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6913a6.htm?s_cid=mm6913a6_w

witches, to zombies, and to soccer players, and singers in front of the table with a glistening gleaming, circular chocolate donut before us on our plates. Our partners stood at our backs securing our hands, and on the count of three, my mom would sayid go. We would spring into action and go wild, devouring those donuts like our lives depended on it. The Halloween music thudded in our eardrums intensifying the pace of our eating. Our heads twisted in all different directions– to the right, the left, to the right, trying to get the donut in the perfect spot. Honestly, it didn't really matter if you won because you already got to eat a donut. It was truly a win for all of us.

So even though I am all too aware of how bad they are for you, I cannot, myself, escape the glory of a sweet donut even knowing the nutrition behind them. Chocolate donuts with their rich and deep flavor are my favorite. It made winning the donut-eating race on Halloween worthwhile.

Donuts taste good- that is why there is such a large market for them. Every other weekend or so, my sisters and I will go out on a sunday morning and grab a coffee. We try to keep the spending on coffee down so we allow a single indulgence every once and a while. During one of these excursions that particular coffee shop had a trailing line. Between chatting with my sisters and daydreaming about coffee I looked up at the pastry case and spotted some large round donuts. One shelf held oreo donuts, one a cereal donut, another chocolate and one row of the glittering glazed. My mouth watered at the sight of the fluffy, pillowy fried dough in front of me. Maybe it was because I hadn't eaten that morning, but I could imagine nothing more satisfying than that donut melting in my mouth and being downed with a sip of hot coffee.

I am for the reduction of the amount of donuts, but I still see and appreciate all that they are. That morning I bought two donuts, one glazed and one with a ridiculous amount of sugar.

Somehow, I managed to contain enough willpower to leave the donuts intact the whole ride home. Once we finally did walk through the door, I ran to retrieve a knife and cut each donut into four equal sections. My two sisters, myself and my mom stood around the donuts and dug in. It was like magic how they vanished so fast. The light airy dough melted away instantly and with a sip of coffee my morning was complete. It is that time when the donut truly shines as a baked good.

Contrastingly, most of the time, the donut is not a stand out baked good. Part of that reason comes from how Americans easily overconsume. Donuts represent that overconsumption. Additionally, because what we tend to overindulge in is not healthy (whether its food, work, or lifestyle) it becomes gluttony. This gluttony stems from something that all of humankind has trouble with: willpower. Do we have enough willpower to be able to enjoy just a single donut?

When I look at the munchkins or the donuts filling the grocery store shelves I struggle to find that connection to baking that was once there. Another way that we may be doing too much is that we are not just enjoying those bad things. It is either too much, or to a point where it is extremely toxic. We have strayed so far from seeing the middle that we must be on either end. Can we not just enjoy a donut every so often? Did we have to make them so modified that we fear having one?

Donuts from the store or from the drive through at Dunkin Donuts were a special treat as a kid. There was a consciousness around the health concerns of the greasy deep fried treat but every once in a while it was a reward. However, our society has grown into a phase of toxic

eating. Most of the baked goods I have discussed are all foods usually consumed in a limited amount. Donuts are the exception, and one that is not good.

Donuts have moved away from the once in a while approach and so too has the excitement of them. As a kid, that donut on the string was the best thing to happen all day. It was truly an indulgence. Now it does not take a second thought.

Later in the day, I stop for gas on my way home from school, driving to the gas station in the center of my town because it is the cheapest. Across the street sits yet another Dunkin Donuts. This one I avoid at all costs because the coffee tastes like dirt and they put too much almond milk in my order. Definitely worth it to make it at home.

As I stand at the pump clicking the lever into place, so I don't have to hold the greasy rubber of the handle. I watched as person after person enters and exits the Dunks. There is a consistent flow of cars pulling up to the window and then away with their items. I see the worker hand a customer a box of munchkins in the classic white paper container with the orange font.

As a preschool teacher I have seen the over saturation of donuts in an adult and child life. For any birthday, celebration, holiday, or event there would be one of the munchkin boxes sitting, waiting for the kid's snack time. Sometimes it would be 25 munchkins, other time, it was the horrific 50-count box. On bigger occasions, (like teacher appreciation day or Christmas Eve,) the parents would send in the large boxes. Up in the office, the large white flat boxes would be opened like the missing treasure from the *Goonies*, and out of it would shine glorious donuts. It was infuriating to see those sugary balls all clumped together in the container. I would dread the sugar rush that would follow after the kids wolfed them down asking for more. My restraint and

self-control would be dangling like the laces of the kid's untied shoes every time I popped one onto a plate. Just one wasn't that bad, but it was never just one.

Donuts have become a classic American baked good and enjoyed by many throughout the country. From a Dunkin Donuts to a Krispy Cream to local bakeries or coffee shops; donuts are a favorite. At the top of a ski mountain or at the local farm stand the apple cider sugar donuts are always in high demand. Companies used seasonal trends to draw more interest in the normal glazed and chocolate donuts. Donuts are a baked good that has lost the comfort of being a homemade treat and is now a staple in the fast food business. It has become commercialized, and the taste and look capture that. In the moment of the first bite the flavors are present and the dough melts on the taste buds but after it's gone the heaviness of the oil sits in the stomach and the sweetness bites into the teeth. This is a dish that has been taken out of the home and stuffed relentlessly down our thoughts into a transactional world.

The gas pump clicked, and the machine asked if I wanted a receipt. I declined. Getting back into the car and driving off to my last stop of the day I watched as the sun lowered but the line across the street stayed the same.

Donuts have turned into a universal gift, but one without any real thought. People like them so they give them. Is it easier to buy them and give them away then to eat them because we know we shouldn't? Is it to indulge in the act of them but not really? If we know they are so bad for us, then why do we continue to eat them? If it is homemade, which takes a lot of effort, then the donut is well deserved, there is time and effort and meaning behind it. Enjoy it. But when all of that is taken away then it becomes gluttony, an indulgence that is too much.

Donuts are not good, they just taste good. Instant regret for eating a donut is not something that we should be okay with. As much as I love baking and recognize donuts as a staple of American baked goods, I think they need to be decreased. One way could be baking donuts- it reduces the fat intake from the oil, but does that change it too much for people to enjoy. People enjoy the false flavor, the taste of unnatural flavors. The donuts that have taken over the American food system would benefit from reverting back to a treat that is a *treat*. One made at home and one that can be fully enjoyed.

Conclusion

Baking homemade goods in the kitchen is a personal adventure. The items we choose to bake and the item we choose not to bake can enlighten what we each value. This is because it takes time and effort to produce something made at home, whereas there is not much sustenance in the products bought in a drive through.

The COVID-19 pandemic trapped us in our homes and forced us to do something with time. It became obvious then that baking is important to us. Pies, cookies, cake and donuts are cornerstone baked goods around America. They have all come to this land from different places and yet they have become dishes that represent our values so well.

I am sure that there will be many more changes, trends and new techniques that arise, but the scale of a baked good will remain the same. These tried and true homemade treats require more labor and because of that labor and thoughtfulness, they also contain more love. When the world needed a bit more love, it makes sense that we all ran to the kitchen and tried our hand at sourdough.

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