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English 110

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Pesto Alfredo Tortellini

Imagine after a long day of galivanting around the town; waking up early to attend school, running errands thereafter, spending time with friends, and going to a sports practice to walk into your house greeted by an aromatic waft of alfredo and cooked pasta. My childhood, from as young as I can remember, yearned for days such as this. My mother has a grand collection of cookbooks for whatever recipe you could ever fathom, whether that be ethnic, traditional, or eclectic. She has a knack for pulling recipes from these cookbooks and tweaking them into her own creation. Traditional alfredo recipes call for fettuccini noodles and perhaps chicken breast added in. Considering the fact that my family is vegetarian, and that my mother finds fettuccini noodles to be “flat, boring noodles of monotonicity,” she uses spinach-packed tortellini. And it is the best dish I’ve ever eaten, bar none.

In order to begin to describe my affection towards this dish, I need to backtrack to when I had been first introduced to it. When I was very young, I was always given different foods to try. My family never cooked the same thing more than once a month as a way to expand my young palate. However, I had an affinity to warm, soft, and savory foods. For example, macaroni and cheese and spaghetti were amongst the top winners on my list. My mother enjoys experimenting with recipes and one night decided to alter the ever-so-popular chicken alfredo fettuccini dish. Her spin on the recipe included pesto mixed into her homemade alfredo sauce—as a way to introduce an earthy “kick” to the flavor. She also decided to substitute the fettuccini with

tortellini. The reason for the noodle substitution was due to the fact that our family does not consume meat. We're vegetarian (take that with a grain of salt, as you will). Therefore, the addition of spinach-packed tortellini adhered to our dietary lifestyles without the compromise of vitamins and minerals to maintain a nutritious dietary intake. With this, alongside a few other herbs and spices, a masterpiece had taken my heart (and soul) by surprise and I've been hooked since.

Often times, for me, a 'liking' towards something, whether that be a person, a hobby, or an object will fade over time and be replaced by something better. I find myself becoming bored with things and finding new ones. However, this dish to me isn't simply a 'liking,' it's love. The tangy and earthy flakes of pesto melding perfectly into a robust, rich, homemade alfredo sauce. The warm, bold, and familiar flavor of spinach filled perfectly into a soft pasta such as a warm pillow is stuffed with comforting goose down. The clean, crisp bite of liberally sprinkled parsley leaves decorating the top. A dish with such simplicity, yet the most elemental ingredients intertwining perfectly to etch a meaningful and unforgettable mark in my youth.

A rather strong reason for my affinity for this dish is because of my mother. Being a self-proclaimed chef, she experiments with many different dishes and always produces an end product that I enjoy thoroughly, as with the pesto alfredo tortellini. She describes some of her best cooking to come in the form of comfort dishes. "If you've had a long day working, the best thing to come home to is a comfort dish. Something familiar, rich, warm, and will produce happiness." My mother mainly aims to cook meals that suit my father's palate. He's a Stone Mason, therefore working with excruciatingly heavy stone in various weather scenarios, burning a lot of calories and working up a hefty appetite. He prefers to eat heavy and caloric meals when he comes home, therefore my mother's typical cooking constitutes comfort foods. My admiration

and love for my mother seep into all of her cooking wherein I cannot disassociate the two, thus creating such an intense relationship between myself and this dish.

To make pesto alfredo tortellini requires not much money, but a great deal of time and patience. There are three major components to this dish, the first being spinach tortellini—which can be bought from the store as is or homemade, depending on the motivation and preparation time my mother set aside for the meal. My mother always makes the alfredo sauce homemade. For this, she uses heavy cream, cream cheese, garlic, generic Italian seasoning, salt and pepper, butter, and an immense amount of block parmesan cheese. The benefit to homemade alfredo sauce is that it isn't as watery and bland as comparable sauces that are typically bought at the store. Trust me, once you try homemade alfredo, you'll never go back. My mother always makes more than she needs, so she cans the surplus for future meals. The last main component is fresh pesto. There is a natural market in my hometown whose owner prepares homemade pesto every week on a Monday. The best time to cook this dish is on a Tuesday after the newly made and purchased pesto has had time to sit and mix together for optimal consistency. With these main ingredients mixed together—after boiling the tortellini al dente for about 15-20 minutes—all there is left to add are parsley leaves garnished on the top and a glass of pinot noir on the side. Pure bliss.

As for cooking the dish, only my mother reserves the right to perform such a task. In asking her why I am never giving the chance to cook for the family, she exclaims: “There is a time to practice cooking, and there's a time to make dinner. Those two times should not be mixed, especially in this household and definitely in my kitchen.” She takes cooking very seriously as if doing so is her duty to our family or some kind of life mission. Either way, I never meddle in her decisions and let her do the task of creating a masterpiece.

One could not begin to describe the feelings I have for this dish, amongst many other dishes of my mother's creation. It's the nostalgia; coming home being hit by a wall of irrepressible and complex fragrances that stay constant and never change throughout my childhood. It's the comfort associated; knowing that when that meal is being made, my family will get together after a long day in merriment to eat and rejoice. It's the love; a dish unique to my own family, made by my beautiful mother, provided by my hardworking father and enjoyed by each of us equally. Many aspects of life bring out emotions in people much like this dish—bringing out appreciation, nostalgia, and love for me.