
Why Is It That We Cook?

Do you ever pause to think about why we cook? Beyond the old Southern expression “Well, we’ve gotta eat!” and past the utility of meals and the physical purpose that they serve. When you put that off to the side and really take a look at the underlying picture, why is it that we cook?

For me, I don’t necessarily cook because I am hungry. If it is just me, I grab a sandwich or make a salad. But when I cook for my family, that’s different. I cook for them not just to feed them, but because I love them. And for me, cooking is a way to show that. I cook delicious food and take extra time beyond sandwiches and salads because I want to sit across from them and see them enjoy their meal while I hear about their day.

Why do we cook the old-fashioned dishes, though? Think about the recipes we grew up with. The handwritten ones, from old cookbooks with broken spines and pencil notes written in the margins. The ones where our heart leaps at finding a decades-old speck of flour that remains long after the cook has been gone from our lives.

We cook those recipes because we miss the people we have lost.

We miss the way their house smelled when we walked in to find them in the kitchen, pulling out a pan of cookies or stirring a pot of something special they made because they knew it was one of our favorites. We miss the smile of satisfaction as they fixed us a plate and sat across from us to watch us enjoy it. We miss that first bite, which, no matter what it was, tasted better than anything else in the world because it was made for us with such love. We miss the flavors, but mostly we miss the people, the ones who used to sit across from us at the end of our day.

Making those dishes again renews that connection, just like visiting their resting place does, only in a more real, tangible way. By following the same steps they did, reading notes they made, and remembering them measuring, mixing, and rolling, it is like they are really there with us all along when we sit down to the finished dishes and take that first bite.

We cook for a variety of reasons, but the best meals are the ones where we take time to reach through the generations and bring to life once more the moments from our past. We cook their recipes because we miss them. And cooking these dishes, in the old-fashioned ways, in our hearts and in our memories, brings them back in a very real way.

There you are, Grandmama. I sure have missed you.