

September 2018

Reminiscence of Home

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Recommended Citation

Parschauer, Daniel (2018) "Reminiscence of Home," *The Idea of an Essay*: Vol. 5 , Article 11.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/idea_of_an_essay/vol5/iss1/11

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Daniel Parschauer is a sophomore pharmacy major from Lancaster, PA. Although he has had his fair share of writing assignments, he has never considered himself a skilled writer. Outside of studying to become a pharmacist, he enjoys playing volleyball and spending time with friends and reading a good book.

Reminiscence of Home

It's no secret that college food is almost always awful, and this fact is proven true yet again today. I have just sat down at my previously saved seat in the cafeteria of our college. I make a brief and silent prayer and then look down at my food. How wonderful. A heap of droopy, shiny pizza, a bowl of mush trying to be chili, and a cup of apple juice. I'm definitely getting cereal after this. Eating a bowl of cereal after dinner ensures that I will leave at least somewhat satisfied with my meal. The cafeteria is alive with hungry students, and their individual voices are all contributing to the overarching jumble of sound. Several tables over, someone has burned something at the grill, as evidenced by the acrid smell that has reached my table. My hall mates trickle over to our table and initiate the normal jargon of a weekday dinner.

"How was your day?"

"Fine. I had two exams – that was fun."

"Dude, that sucks."

"Is anybody making a run to Walmart tonight?"

"What'd you think of the chapel speaker?"

"Yeah, I'm going to Walmart after dinner."

The conversations continue to roll, blending with one another until they coalesce with the hum of the crowds, and my mind begins to wander back to a time when I was home.

I have just returned from the grocery store down the road. After church that morning, Mom set to making dinner – what we called the Sunday after-church meal – and, as usual, made me a quick list of things to pick up for her. This time the list is relatively short: fat free ricotta, a loaf of French bread, and seltzer water for Dad. Victoriously carrying my two plastic bags, I enter our home. Mom is across the room at her stove stirring homemade gravy (marinara sauce with meatballs cooking in it) and tending to a pot of boiling water. The oven range fan is humming away as it collects steam from the twin pots. I can hear water spilling over the rim of its vessel and sizzling on the hot stove before evaporating – a sure sign that it's ready for whatever the

choice pasta is. To my right the screen door is letting in a soft summer breeze that carries with it the ringing of wind chimes on our back porch. The scent of dark, nutty coffee drifts in the air. Mom probably brewed a pot for her and me to enjoy. The most overwhelming detail, however, is the smell of the gravy. The dramatic aroma is so strong that I can identify each ingredient in the sauce: fresh basil, parsley, and oregano from our garden, meatballs, olive oil, extra garlic for good measure, and a hint of Splenda to counter the acidic tomatoes. We always eat pasta on Sundays, just like Mom's family before us and her grandparents' before her. Tradition runs deep in Italian homes. Summer Sundays are extra special because we have dinner outside on the back deck.

I walk into the kitchen and begin unpacking what I had bought, bragging about how I had picked the crispest loaf of bread they had. Just as I finish putting the ricotta in the fridge, my sister walks in from the garden, carrying under her arm a bowl of red, yellow, and purple tomatoes and sprigs of more basil. To take advantage of the massive harvest, Mom is making bruschetta to go with dinner, another classic. She offers me a mug of that coffee to pass the time. I take my usual seat for when I watch her cook: on the countertop opposite the stove. As predicted, the water is ready and Mom had selected ravioli. She pours them into the turbulent water and we begin to talk. The most meaningful conversations I've ever had with my mother take place in the kitchen. Perhaps it's because we are most comfortable here, or perhaps the hectic setting stimulates thoughtful topics. We picked out my tux for prom here. We figured out what my major in college would be here. We laughed over Mom's impersonation of Julia Child here and cried over my grandmother's death here. I can safely say that much of who I am has come out of this kitchen. Today the conversation is light, and we chat away while she cooks, losing track of time and enjoying each other's company. Unfortunately, the kitchen is no place to lose track of anything, and the ravioli boils over, leading Mom into a frenzy as she lowers the temperature and stirs the water to calm it down. Finally succeeding, she checks the sauce to make sure the taste is right and asks for my opinion on its flavor. My conclusion is that it needs more salt, which is usually the case since Mom has a perpetual fear of over-salting anything she makes. After settling the dispute, my two sisters and I begin setting the table. We use the glass plates and good set of silverware when we eat outside – another tradition. Between the three of us, the joint effort will only take a couple minutes.

Just as we are bringing out the last few items, I hear the smoke alarm go off in the kitchen. Although unpleasant and piercingly loud, I'm not surprised. Mom is a fantastic cook, but it's not uncommon for her to accidentally fill the kitchen with smoke. In this case, meatball grease that had dripped out in the oven began to burn, and smoke poured out when Mom opened the oven

door to put the bread in. “Hey, Bubba! Come turn the alarm off!” she yells above the ringing. “Coming!” Since I am the tallest person home, it’s my responsibility to solve the problem, which I promptly do by removing the battery from the alarm. With it turned off, we continue with our work. Shortly after, I can hear the rhythmic thud of the garage door opening, and we all know Dad is home from church. As the pastor, it’s normal for him to stay behind and talk to people well after the service is over. Our dog, a short and fat bolt of energy, rushes past us to greet him. Dad gets swept into the fray of finishing dinner when Mom asks him to retrieve the scolapasta – a massive strainer for pasta – from the pantry. With pride, Mom reminds us that you always know when ravioli is done cooking when they float to the surface.

Finally, after much preparation, all of us are seated at the table. We fold our hands as Dad prepares to pray, but I take a moment to absorb the scene. It is a truly perfect day. The pergola my Dad and I built covers us in just the right amount of shade, keeping us neatly cool. Mom’s flower beds surround the entire deck in a diverse palette of brilliant yellows, reds, pinks, and blues. The breeze is still mingling with the wind chimes, adding another line of notes to the already harmonious music of local birds. Behind me, cream colored curtains drift in the wind, contrasting perfectly with the deep chestnut of our deck. Before me, a flawless meal is sprawled out on the round table. Ravioli mixed with short, fingerlike cavatelli are displayed in a ceramic sky blue bowl, covered in red, steaming gravy. A white platter of fresh bruschetta sits next to it. We need to hurry and get to eating before the balsamic vinegar soaks through the bread. Immediately in front of me sits another bowl, this one filled with more sauce and meatballs. Smaller bowls of ricotta, parmesan, and olives dot the table, available for anyone to help themselves to. Even though we eat this meal often, I am eager to dig in and taste everything all over again. Dad finishes his thoughtful prayer and we begin dinner. The following time would be full of cheerful conversation. My sisters would talk about the latest happenings on their favorite TV show. Mom would express her satisfaction with the latest results in the Presidential elections. Dad would tell his inspiring stories of ministry at church, and I would sit back and take it all in, enjoying the company of my family.

All is as it should be. Food is on the table, and my family is together with me. But suddenly they aren’t. The songs of birds are replaced by the scooting of chairs, the warm sun by cold fluorescent lights, and my family by my hall mates. I find myself once again in the campus cafeteria. My friends are ready to return to our dorm, and everybody is getting up and putting on their coats. I quickly return to reality to join them, but reflect on my memories. How curious it is that the past is draped in a golden light. Moments of joy are exaggerated for fondness’ sake

while hints of reality are quietly tucked away. Will I look on this current time – walking through a cafeteria after a disappointing meal with friends – with the same ideality as I have just now looked at home? I suppose the creation of memory warped by wishful thinking is the device by which we continue to enjoy the past. Nevertheless, I will remember the home I am most fond of because it is these memories that I enjoy most.