

Professor Rodwell

A Meal To Remember

Since I was a little kid food always attracted me. The overpowering smell of spices from the kitchen would engulf my nose. Filling me with bliss and happiness as I wait to finally sit at the dinner table with my siblings and indulge in the magical food. When I turned 16, I was finally able to help cook and began to grasp the idea of how hot the oil should be, how long the food should cook for, and how to make sure your food tastes good. Ingesting all this information made me confident in myself that I'd be able to cook a great dish for my family one day. That day was fast approaching. Little did I know that one aspect of cooking was still foreign to me, which was criticism.

My mother is strict, but also a loving person who encourages her kids to believe in themselves and expects her kids to achieve greatness. Which is why a lot of my cooking skills has come from my mother, her presence has always been a beam of comforting light. Watching her being so ingrained in her cooking was a sight to see. Never measuring her ingredients, but always knowing the right amount of spices to add, never timing how long to cook the food, but always knowing when it's done. Everything my mom did was calculated, despite not appearing as so. My father was different however, he always knew how to make me laugh, but was strict when he needed to be, and his large stature and straight face would sometimes scare me as a child, which caused me to never enter his kitchen when he cooked. Although he never really taught me how to cook he gave me one valuable lesson, he always told me, "When cooking,

never drop the food into the oil, or try to run away from the oil when it pops because you'll end up getting burned". With these lessons flooding my head I knew that I was truly ready to cook.

I already knew what I wanted to cook, it was going to be rice and beans with brown stew chicken. I decided on this dish as it was the easiest recipe to remember. Knowing that the rice and beans would take longer than the chicken, I started that first. Pulling out a can of red kidney beans, scallion, a whole scotch bonnet pepper and a can of coconut milk. I poured the beans into a large pot added some water, half of the coconut milk, and the rest of the contents. Lastly, to make sure the beans would have flavor I added in some adobo seasoning mixed it in and set the pot on the stove on medium heat. Next, was the big challenge, a whole chicken, looking at the chicken, it finally hit me, I never learned how to cut the chicken into sections. I was already too deep into preparing the meal, luckily YouTube existed, so I was able to watch someone do it and followed their steps, I just want to say thank God for the internet. While, cutting the chicken, the stench of raw chicken actually sickened me, I began to think to myself, "Do we really eat this, maybe I should become a vegetarian because this stinks". I eventually got through the stench and remembered another lesson my mom told me about cooking, "Always clean your chicken before cooking", so I took the chicken and washed it with vinegar and water. Once the chicken was cleansed I began adding the dry seasoning such as garlic powder, black pepper, etc. Then I added some onions and scallion, with a few chopped up bell pepper. Lastly, I added in some soy sauce and browning to bring out that brown color to the chicken. After that, I let the chicken sit and marinate as I checked on the beans. In reality I was just really nervous to start cooking the chicken, as I didn't want to mess it up. I added the washed rice into the pot and turn the heat to low. Now, I could begin frying the chicken listening to my dad I laid the chicken down gently

and watched it fry, then it happen, the highest form of betrayal the oil popped and landed right on my hand. I thought to myself, “Wow my father lied to me”. Yelling in pain I grabbed a towel and wipe the oil off. Now severely injured I continued to fry. With all the chicken fried I emptied out the majority of the oil from the pot and threw the chicken back in with the liquid it was being marinated with, added in some water and seasoning to make a nice rich stew. I let it sit for a while on low heat, and then I gave it a taste test, the savory liquid swirled around in my mouth, the taste was definitely different from when my mom makes it, but it was still tasty. I believed that I accomplished my task very well.

Hours past and my mom finally arrives to the house. When she saw that I had cooked, there was a proud and relieved smile on her face. . She then took the food and began eating. After she was done she told me” The food was good but....”. When she said but, my mind began to go frantic trying to figure out where I went wrong, thinking there’s no way I could make a mistake. My mom continued and said that the stew was just slightly salty. It was as if my whole life force left my body. I felt defeated and hurt thinking,”How could she say that she doesn’t know how much care I put into this dish”. But, I kept these thoughts to myself and told her that I was grateful that she told me. It wasn’t until a couple of days later that I realized she was right. My mom has been cooking for years and has been perfecting her craft from a young age. Of course she made mistakes just like me when she was my age, I need to take what she said ingest it and work to better my own cooking skills. There’s no way to be perfect on your first try, you’ll always be working toward perfection and with every mistake there lies a lesson learned to get you that much closer to perfection.