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The Benefits of Food

Food: an important piece to our survival; without food life would be over. Is that all food is though? Is food only a utility we need to keep our bodies functioning? Truly, that cannot be all that food is used for- there has to be something of underlying importance for it. Sometimes I sit and ponder what food is really needed for. If it simply was a utility, then why do we enjoy it so much? For me, I find that food has values. It has an emotional importance behind it and demonstrates certain methods of civilization and relationships many people possess. It is not only myself who has these feelings, but many others possess such thoughts and feelings. Michael Pollan composed an article called “Out of the Kitchen, Onto the Couch” which discusses the relationships and meanings of food from the older days to now and it also brings in an interesting aspect of cooking shows veering from Julia Child’s show to more modern day shows like Chopped and Rachel Ray. The article causes one to ponder their own relationships with food and how they believe it is perceived as today. This can connect to many others writers’ ideas on the culture of their own favorite foods and values.

Many of my peers have completed and published papers on their favorite meals. They all spoke about a specific meal that brought them a meaning other than that of using food as a utility. For instance, Erica discusses how food impacts her views on the little things in life as well as allows her to realize the importance of spending time with her family. Bryan discusses his main importance of his favorite meal and how it connects to a holiday that he waits for in anticipation every year because he has such a desire for the meal. Emma brings in her favorite meal by describing its convenience and savory taste. All of my peers’ thoughts connect together in that they all find that food can be seen for something of deeper meaning other than a necessity. This can than be further used to establish an understanding of Pollan’s ideas in his piece. Food can be a convenience, a comfort to many and a connection to others.

Erica’s narrative brings in an interesting perspective on the “rules” of eating within the household. Within the first part of her favorite meal narrative, Erica discusses how chicken is something eaten by her family every Monday and Tuesday: “One of my parents goes grocery shopping on Sunday and buys everything we need for the week, which includes chicken not only for us, but the dogs too. The beginning of the week is usually tiring, and cooking chicken does not require too much effort, especially if it is already cooked when you buy it” (Verville). It builds in the idea of the convenience and quickness some meals have that makes some days a little bit easier. This can be connected to Pollan’s work in his discussion on the new convenience we find we need today. People tend to express they no longer have time to cook meals, and therefore move toward prepared foods as the alternative. (Pollan 14) Today, we always desire a food that is real, but never consider wanting to put time and effort into the meals. Usually, we rely on the quick prepared meals or precooked chicken, such as the ones Erica’s family buys every week. Sometimes though, we find we want to take the time to cook a favorite meal in order to establish a certain gratitude you cannot find elsewhere.

During different seasons, there are many holidays where food becomes an essential theme. Thanksgiving, for example, is a holiday that is mostly based off the sharing of food with your loved ones. Bryan touches upon this holiday as something he finds inclusive of his favorite meal: “My grandmother’s honey baked ham” (McGrath). This ham is something he only really enjoys during the holiday, and it is something he looks forward to yearly. During the holiday, the ham is almost the central point to the table. He finds himself sitting there longer with his family and filling his plate several times. The meal, however, also provides him with some other emotions: “This dish resembles a sense of comfort for myself and for my family as we do not gather very often throughout the year and the idea of the honey baked ham is the idea of a sense of a gathered and loving family that is not present regularly throughout my life” (McGrath). The meal brings him a sense of nostalgia, one of him and his family coming together and just enjoying each other’s company over a time where they are stress free and can just enjoy being with each other. This is like Pollan’s idea of finding comfort in food as well.

Although Pollan found this comfort and nostalgia in watching Julia Child’s cooking show with his mom when he was younger. Pollan elaborates, “but comforting in its familiarity: the clanking of pots and pans, the squeal of an oven door in need of WD-40” (Pollan 1). Pollan believed that it was comforting to see that on television it was much like his experiences he had seen in real life. It provided him with a feeling of pleasure and comfort that he had not gotten anywhere else, much like how Bryan found comfort in his grandmother’s honey ham. The two found food to be a comforting, homey substance that was not only used for providing a utility to the body. Not only does food allow others to feel some certain emotions, but it also brings together families and allows people to feel connected with others.

For many people, recipes of favorite meals may be passed down from generation to generation. In Emma’s favorite meal essay, she discusses her favorite meal, “Hurry Up Spaghetti”, which is a recipe that has been passed down from her grandmother to her mom and now to her. She talks about how her mom would make the meal and it would bring back a certain topic of discussion whenever they ate it; “I hold it close to my heart. Whenever we’re eating spaghetti and ham, we always bring up grandma. This delicious meal came from my grandma. My mom told me she always used to cook it (at least twice a week)” (Bryan). This brings Emma and the rest of her family closer together because it provides them with a wonderful memory of their grandmother or mom. The meal is also something that can now be passed down for years to come, and Emma can always dial it all back to memories of her grandmother and her mom. This can connect with Erica’s favorite meal essay that also includes how her favorite meal was passed down.

Emma’s meal was created by her aunt and it has now become a family staple. Her mom describes, “I had brought Devon to my cousin Patty’s house on a snow day and she made it for dinner. I liked it, so I asked for the recipe. It is nostalgic to me and reminds me of a great time in my life.” Erica later details that, “The ‘great time in [her] life’ that she refers to dates back to about 20 years ago, when my older brother, Devon, was a toddler and some members of our extended family were still living here in Maine” (Verville). Erica can find a connection herself to the past, but it also allows her mom to think about a great time in her life every time she herself cooks the meal. In this case, the food brings together the family in such an amazing and different way.

There are so many different reasons that food is important to our everyday lives. Without it, there would be nothing that provides us with comfort, we would never have such an easy convenience, and we would never have something that so easily provides connections to others. In the world, many people do not think about everything food is important for. It not only provides comfort and connection but on a global scale, it can affect culture, religion, geography, family and society as a whole.

Works Cited

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