

An Everlasting Meal

Lisa Hanimov

In this article, Lisa explores the definition of what it means to be creative. You do not have to be a producer of elite art or cultural products to be deemed creative; instead, mundane everyday activities hold just as much value. Lisa was able to put this act into practice by forming a new family tradition by utilizing her mother's first recipe book.

Ever since early man discovered fire and cheered the ending of raw meat, celebrations have united human communities in honoring momentous events, rites of passage, religious observances, and more. Celebrating as a group gives a sense of belonging, something crucial to human fulfillment. As these celebrations were enjoyed, it became a habit to repeat, constructing traditions throughout many individual lives. Traditions represent a critical piece of our cultures. They help form the structures and foundations of our families and our societies. They remind us that we are part of a history that defines our past and shapes who we are today and who we are likely to become tomorrow. There is no one way that a person becomes part of a tradition; it can be passed down to you, created on its own out of pure interest, or done unconsciously. Some of the most creative traditions are not original; they are simply the ones that are passed down and revised. What makes a tradition hold its value is the purpose and meaning attached to it. Through the definition provided by Karin Tusting and Uta Papen in their article "Creativity in Everyday Literacy Practices: The Contribution of an Ethnographic Approach," they explain creativity as being "inherent and essential in people's lives," consisting of "the human capacity to make

Everyday Creativity

According to Tusting and Papen, “Creative intellectual and semiotic work is part and parcel of people’s everyday activities of communication and sense-making” even when the texts they produce don’t include the kind of “poetic” features that are commonly associated with creative work (20).

meaning” (6–7). In this article, I’ll share with you how I saw the lack of traditions kept in my family household. Not having a foundation with an embedded culture made me feel detached and distressed, which then led me to realize it is never too late to ingrain new habits. After coming across my Mother’s handcrafted recipe book, I decided this would be the first new tradition that I would learn more about and pass on.

As humans, we grow up with our familiar set of traditions, celebrating them with close relatives and friends or sharing them with anyone who is visiting. We often forget that when we link ourselves to people’s lives, the process includes adapting to a set of customs they are already used to. Usually, the new set of habits intertwine with the previous procedures that were followed, causing a mishmash of multiple traditions. This is what happened to my mother. Coming from an Ashkenazi Jewish household with other ingrained general family customs, she married into a family with different practices. My father is part of a large Sephardic Jewish family, with a very overpowering aura and a particular way of cooking. With the mindset of proving that she too can cook Sephardic meals authentically, my Mother took this mission very passionately. With a blank recipe book endowed to her as a wedding gift, she found the task of taking notes became easier and

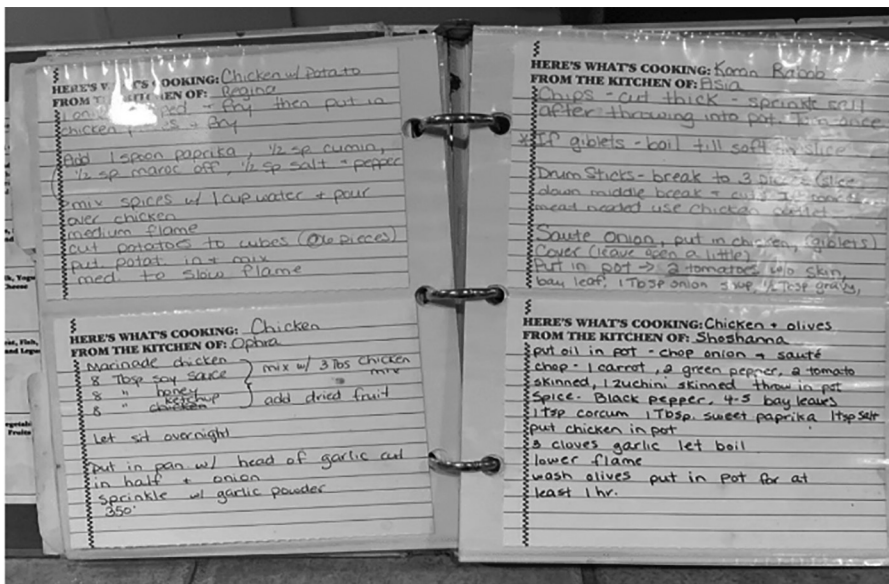


Figure 1: Lisa's Mother's original notes from her recipe book.

more organized. Each of my father's six sisters altered the meals to their own personalities, so when watching them cook, my Mom specified which sister she was watching.

In order to memorize all six alterations to every meal that can be made, my mother wrote it down as she saw it. These dishes that she was observing did not come with exact measurements, guidelines, or oven cooking length times. My mother prioritized the instructions she knew were most essential to successfully carry out each dish. For example, in Figure 2, she wrote “put onions sliced (not diced).” This is an important cooking note because how the onions are chopped can alter the meal, whereas how much oil needed to fry the onions is not as crucial and should be self-explanatory. Since these recipes are based off observation instead of an attempt to offer specific instructions, my Mother was not concerned about describing each step. Knowing what size pots, pans, bowls, and cups to use were all performed out of memory and by using the eyeballing method.

For a beginner, this is usually not the ideal approach when learning a completely new skill; however, that was the only option there was for my Mother. For this exact reason, I was told I would have a difficult time understanding the recipes unless I was shown and taught how to make them. My Mother can picture what the shape and size of the cups and bowls are, but as someone who is an outsider to these recipes, I found the sizing instructions were too vague. The only way to fully understand how to

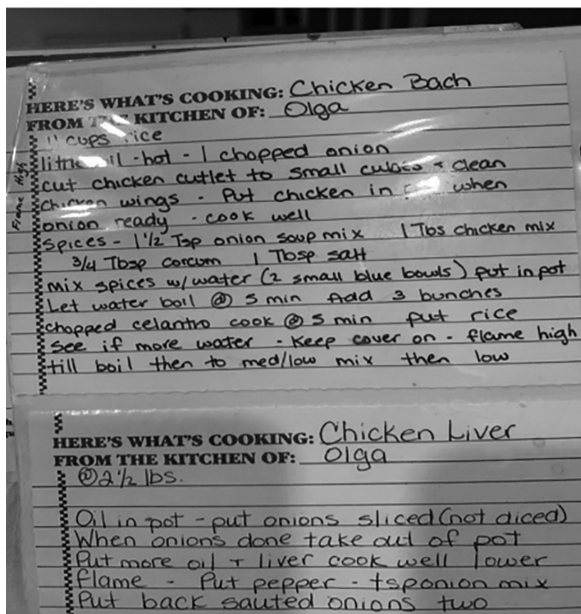


Figure 2: Lisa's Mother's original notes from her recipe book.

masterfully prepare the meals is be properly shown. After watching and, in time, perfecting the different styled plates, it became possible for my Mom to attach her own American twist to them. The influence of American culture caused a few modifications to my own recipe book after mimicking my mom.

Documenting family recipes keeps part of the legacy of our relatives and loved ones alive. For me, I want these family recipe collections to be more powerful than unearthing an old photo album or a cherished piece of clothing with the lingering scent of perfume. It lets anyone peek into my ancestor's everyday lives and to participate in writing the history of our family. If nothing were to be copied, then there would be nothing to pass down. This concept is what Tusting and Papen elaborate on in their article "Creativity in Everyday Literacy Practices: The Contribution of an Ethnographic Approach." Tusting and Papen discuss misconceptions that people have about creativity. They explain that most individuals are taught to believe that in order to be ingenious, they must be a "Creative Genius" (6), producing elite art and cultural products. However, texts that use witty word placement or embody a completely new outlook that are deemed to be creative, couldn't be appreciated if it wasn't for the mundane texts most assume to not be innovative. Tusting and Papen argue that people are trained to see creativity as something special, but in fact it is around us every day. All actions that involve innovative literacies, from writing novels to jotting down notes on napkins, are authentic since creativity is about people's individuality. Everyone has their own format of expressing themselves and that in itself makes it original and creative. Even if the text is copied down, originality can be found since the meaning behind the ideas differs. In developing their concept of everyday creativity, Tusting and Papen examine texts as part of a broader process of researching the everyday literacy practices through which people in a range of different settings produce and interact with texts. How people interpret and choose to connect with the content being observed are always different. We can all claim to be creative writers because we are.

I realized how important forming and then keeping alive a new tradition was only four months before moving away from home to attend college. Knowing that I would be soon moving away for college, I immediately asked my Mom if I could watch her cook and then proceed to write down the recipes in a small portable notebook. My Mother was delighted by my interest in her recipe book and took this opportunity to enrich my knowledge on cooking. I wrote down the recipes based off what we were preparing and eating for dinner, which is why my recipe book is not ordered in any specific format.

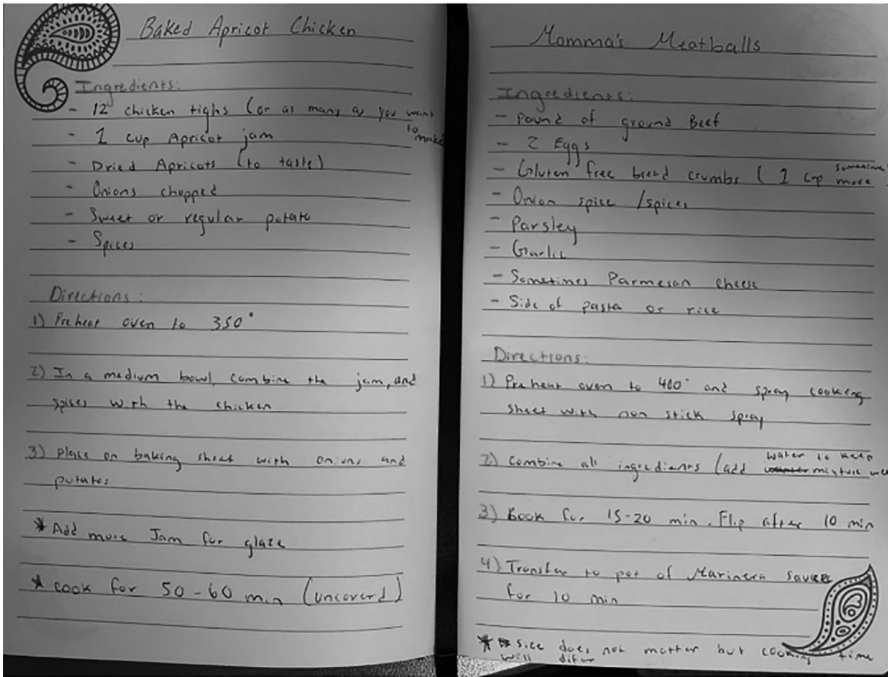


Figure 3: Lisa's portable handcrafted recipe book.

Before my transition to college, I was equipped to compose basic everyday meals (egg salad, meatballs with spaghetti, avocado toast) along with the more cultured meals my Mother worked hard to perfect. Copying down each meal with precise directions compelled me to continue remaking the dishes since I had a basic formula to follow. This routine of cooking allowed my cooking skills to improve exceptionally, which allowed me to gain critical cooking techniques that will last a lifetime. My approach to making my version of a recipe book was unlike my Mother's. Mine was made quickly, unorganized, and was neither labeled nor color coded. The version I use right now is a rough draft of what will come.

Within time, I will acquire a binder to hold my recipes that will be divided up into four sections: Ancestor's Original Recipe, Recipes I Grew Up Eating, Basic Everyday Recipes, and an open area to add anything that does not fit into one of the categories. Since I have design controls over my recipe book, with each meal I want to include the amount of carbohydrates per serving. Being a Type One Diabetic does not mix well with having to guess how many carbs I am consuming and, when not kept in check, causes my blood sugars to be unstable. The accessibility of knowing how many carbs per serving will save me time and insulin when I'm eating. I also want to make my cooking

instructions clear and logical to ensure assumptions are avoided and the meal is made properly. I hope to accomplish this by distinguishing important words or phrases in each recipe and then underlining, circling, or changing their color. Using my mother's original recipe book as a basic outline gave me ideas of how to assemble my recipe book. No other method will be identical to how I chose to format it. Everyone projects their personalities differently through their writing, drawing, and design, which is why Tusting and Papen argue that all texts are creative.

This new tradition that I integrated into my family's life is going to serve as a constant tracker. We will all be able to sit around the packed recipe binder reminiscing on our favorite childhood dinners that will inspire us to start cooking again. This book will effortlessly bring my family closer along with my future family members who are bound to arise in later generations. As someone who is still learning how to prepare and cook food properly, I will continue to be motivated since I have a text to constantly keep up with. I will continue to monitor the new recipes that have become relevant in my life, along with adding modern trendy dishes.

Tusting and Papen's enhanced definition of creativity means that the identity of being a writer can be claimed by anyone. Shifting our ideas of creativity causes us to grow an appreciation for mundane everyday activities that hold value. Many of us have—and can invent—creative traditions that become part of who are as individuals. In my case, writing and re-writing recipes allows me to create meals that are a meaningful experience, and inspires me to create my own versions of dishes, adding in my own flavor and style. As I record the thoughts, ideas, and processes of our traditional family meals, I can create a gift that will be handed down to my children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. I think this is true for many different kinds of creative traditions we might invent and share. They can help us share with loved ones' information about who we are, even after we are gone from this world.

Work Cited

Tusting, Karin, and Uta Papen. "Creativity in Everyday Literacy Practices: The Contribution of an Ethnographic Approach." *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2008, pp. 5–23.

Lisa Hanimov is a second-year student majoring in Health Science at the University of Central Florida. When she's not attempting to become a professional jump roper, hanging with friends, or watching the latest TV shows on Netflix, you can find her studying chemistry and human anatomy or snuggled up next to Chrissy (Lisa's cat).

