

Write Your Life

A micro memoir writing project

What small thing made you realize your family's habits were not everybody's habits?

Laying It on Thick

“Our jam today,” our server says, “is peach Melba.”

Tizi and I exchange glances. “That sounds good,” I say.

Jesse the server says it's her favorite.

We haven't been to The Fly Trap (a daring name for a restaurant) in at least a decade. I order the Red Flannel Hash (hot spiced beef brisket, potatoes, beets, onions). I order it for the beets, which I love and which Tizi hates and which we—no, I— never eat at home. True to form, she gets a veggie rumble, and true to form asks if she can add even more vegetables. To her, an omelet without spinach has not yet begun to rumble. Beside our platters, toasted sourdough, dry.

The peach Melba jam comes in a plastic squeeze bottle, which on one hand strikes me as edgy and the other hand unfortunate. In the interest of good health Tizi has declared war on plastics.

I squirt some Melba (she's been chilling in the kitchen fridge) on my toast, then hand Tizi the squirt bottle. In the case of Melba, she decides to make an exception. True to form, she generously applies it to her toast. From the bottle comes a slow-moving red-pink rivulet that oozes across the surface of her toast. She paints it, back and forth. I've eaten half a piece of toast and Tizi is still applying Melba to hers, twice, no three times as much as I've used.

It reminds me of when I was a kid. If I was down at Danny Leman's house and we were hungry, he'd grab two slices of Hillbilly bread and the large economy jar of Skippy. The first time I saw it, I was appalled: Not an inch but most certainly a half inch—a thick, heavy shiny coating of peanut butter twice the weight of the bread.

“You don't need that much.” I didn't say that, but I thought it. Because that's what I had heard my father say, and probably my mother, whenever I was in the additive mode. Adding sugar to cereal? You don't need that much. Adding catsup to a hot dog, you don't need that much. Want vs Need. Want knowing no bounds, need being fully under control, cramped, squashed. It was Great Depression thinking. Both my parents lived through a long season of lack, of curtailed desire. Theirs was also a Yankee ethos of modesty and self-control.

Tizi's upbringing was different. In her Italian youth she remembers her father bringing not boxes but whole cases of cookies, tubs, not jars, of Nutella; remembers sitting at the dinner table

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and her grandfather or her father spreading (slathering) Nutella on cookies for her, the more the better. Excess was the path to wisdom.

She takes a bite of her toast now, which is finally loaded with Melba, considers, and shakes her head. “Not good,” she says.

I tell her I barely detect peach.

Not good, she says again.

Not good in small doses, you can deal with that. Not good in excess? Who wants that?