

COME TOGETHER

Tequila handles and new traditions

BY CAROLINE COX



Aunt Anita, oil on canvas by Hayley Gaberlavage

HERE'S HOW GATHERINGS WITH MY MOM'S SIDE OF THE FAMILY go down: About twenty-five of us spill into Aunt C's kitchen in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. Two-plus decades of family photos and cards smother her refrigerator—childhood summers at the lake house, proms, graduations, and engagement announcements. My mom laughs her pitchy laugh at inside jokes with her sister. The Clemson game buzzes in the background. Grandma passes around small plastic cups of fragrant ambrosia. We drain several bottles of cold, crisp Frontera. Mom says she buys it because she prefers Spanish wine, but I'm pretty sure it's because Frontera comes in extra-large 1.5-liter bottles. If it's the holidays, my sister, our eleven female cousins, and I stretch out on Aunt C's California king bed and nod off to *The Fox & the Hound*.

In the past few years, the rosy glow with which I viewed these times started to fade. Two of my uncles got laid off in a year. The off-color jokes and political grumblings suddenly shifted into focus. Last Thanksgiving, I entered the kitchen as someone asked the names of the turkeys pardoned that year. When my generally affable uncle replied with the name of the presidential candidate I voted for, I heel-turned. I'd always been known as the free spirit in our conservative family. The one who doesn't care about football. The art school alum who hides new tattoos, the Democrat who dyes her hair pink.

Here's another family tradition: For the past two or three years, the Jenkins women have been fantasizing about an all-ladies cookout weekend. A chance to learn the recipes we ooh and aah over but don't know how to make, like my Aunt T's damn-near buoyant potato rolls. We'd been talking about this weekend for so long, part of the routine was that it never happened.

This year, Aunt T declared it was time. Aunt T is my cool aunt—she's the first person I knew who had a tattoo, a small 1990s-esque rose with a thorny stem on her ankle. She'd been known to hit the bar scene with her daughter, my younger

cousin, and even pound a shot or two. We began a text thread with a few relatives. We decided on a weekend in July.

THEN WE WERE SIX. Aunt C hosted, because she always hosts. Aunt T, who travels with her own knives and pans, had received recipe requests in advance. We'd unanimously requested her potato rolls. Aunt T also announced via text that she'd be making a signature summer cocktail, which seemed to sway anyone who was on the fence about attending from a noncommittal "maybe" to a strong "Hell yes."

Ladies' cooking weekend had a precise schedule: Daylight hours sunbathing at Isle of Palms beach; evenings cooking family recipes. We made homemade pizzas—ricotta with spinach, caramelized onion with pineapple chunks. I learned the secret to my family's creamy dips: gobs of Duke's mayonnaise. Blue cheese dip, cold spinach dip; mayo, mayo. We mashed our version of guacamole: avocados, red onion, Roma tomatoes, Concord Foods seasoning mix, and lime juice. Aunt T taught us how to make "Summer Drink"—one can 7up, a bottle of Corona, one can frozen limeade concentrate and a handle of tequila. Pour into a pitcher, add ice, and boo-ya. Summer Drink is Aunt T's go-to



during Edisto Island vacations with my parents, aunts, and uncles. I imagined them slurping cocktails and playing games until the wee morning hours. I thought about how that could one day be my cousins, my sister, and me.

EVEN THOUGH I'D been eating potato rolls for years, I'd never heard the story behind them. Aunt T's maternal grandmother used to make them. Craving the rolls as an adult, Aunt T searched for a recipe in her mom's cooking notebooks (of which there were, by her estimation, "4,782"). No dice. When Aunt T's brother was diagnosed with renal cell carcinoma, she wanted to bring him familiar comfort. She would perfect the potato roll recipe on her own. Aunt T tried a handful of variations. She let each one rise for hours, globbing off a handful of the mound of bread dough, slick with oil and dusted with flour, the way her grandmother

taught her. When Aunt T thought an iteration was close, she FedExed them to her brother in Dallas. She shipped probably a dozen batches before he gave the seal of approval. He died in 2011.

The six of us sat around Aunt C's long counter that summer night in Mount Pleasant, sweating glasses of Summer Drink in hand. Aunt T chopped a large potato and mashed it tender. She melted Crisco in a pot over the glowing stove eye and mixed it with whole milk and water, heated to exactly 123.5 degrees, measured with her candy thermometer. She mixed King Arthur flour with sugar, a dash of kosher salt, and a whole packet of fresh, active dry yeast. She greased the bowl, dumped in the dough, and kneaded like hell. That's where we came in. We floured our hands and took turns pinching and knotting dough.

We placed the rolls on greased pans and let them rise overnight. The next morning, Aunt T slid the pans into the oven. After seven minutes, she turned the pans and let the rolls bake for seven minutes more. The oven timer beeped as we dragged our duffels downstairs and into our respective cars, bound for our respective lives. I left Mount Pleasant with a belly full of rolls—one steaming and hanging out of my mouth like a puppy with a chew toy—and a few tossed in a Ziploc freezer bag.

Next summer's cooking weekend is already in the works, and each person will bring her signature recipe. I make a mean white-wine orzotto. Now, when I think of family gatherings, I taste Summer Drink and see flour-dusted dough. I feel comfort and belonging. I can't wait for next year. ♡

Caroline Cox is a writer and editor based in Atlanta. She's written for Nylon, VICE, Complex, BuzzFeed, Rolling Stone, and Atlanta magazine.

Keeping Your Cool, oil on canvas by Hayley Gaberiavage

MY FATHER'S SOUTH

Old lessons ring true

BY MARIA GODOY

I WAS BORN IN GUATEMALA CITY, Guatemala, and moved to the suburbs of Washington, DC, when I was almost five. For years, every time I've been faced with that loaded question that immigrants know all too well—*where are you from, really?*—I've often answered, "The South...you know, the Deep South." It's a corny joke, but it's grounded in reality. My American story does begin in the Deep South, in Alabama, with my father.

Humberto Godoy was born and raised in Guatemala City. He wasn't dirt poor, but he was poor enough that he had to shine shoes to buy pencils for school. Those pencils wrote him a new destiny: In 1954, he won a scholarship to attend what was then called Jacksonville State College in Jacksonville, Alabama (now Jacksonville State University).

The scholarship covered tuition, but Dad still needed to pay for living expenses. Like many immigrants before and after him, he gained his economic foothold selling food. He rented a hot dog cart and went door to door in the dormitories during exams. The way Dad told it, he made friends with just about everyone on campus, including the football players. In Alabama, being friends with the football team meant that he was *in*. Papi was too small to play football, so he



Jacksonville State College cheerleaders. "Bert" Godoy stands second from right.

joined the cheerleading squad instead. (Judging from his yearbook, male cheerleaders were apparently a thing back then.) Dad was short, brown, and charming, full of hustle and spark. In my favorite yearbook photo, he's dressed in a crisp white cheerleader outfit, huddled with his white Alabama pals, all wearing big smiles—the very picture of 1950s Americana. For a time, Papi even dated the homecoming queen, a blonde, blue-eyed Southern belle.

But the acceptance he found in Jacksonville was limited. Off campus, he faced racism. My father was a dark-skinned man. This was Jim Crow-era Alabama. When Dad boarded a bus, the driver would sometimes tell him to sit in the back. My father would explain that he was not colored, using the terminology of the day. He'd say he was