



A LIFE WELL FED  
*Recipes to Remember*

# Confessions from a Pantry

Volume 9: December 17, 2024

## Photo of the Month



Honoring My Mom and Dad, Robert Hughett & Patricia Mulinazzi  
June 30, 1956

Dear Friend,

What a year it has been—filled with adventure, growth, challenges, and every emotion imaginable. I've been bursting with excitement to share some of my favorite holiday recipes and thoughtful gifts to give, straight from the heart of my kitchen.

If you're like me, the holiday season brings a wave of nostalgia. During the 13 years I spent watching my mother—and eventually my father—slip further into the disease, I learned a lot about myself. The holidays taught me to embrace the beauty of simple moments as Alzheimer's reshaped our traditions. I learned to let go of perfection, focusing instead on patience, love, and finding joy in their smiles, even when words or memories faded. Every challenge, every stumble, and every lesson helped shape who I am today and who I will be tomorrow. It was in those most difficult moments with my parents that I found the opportunity to grow, to forgive, to embrace each day with more understanding, and to move through life with a little more grace.

Thank you for your unwavering support, your emails and kind words, and your generosity. You have helped turn a simple idea of a cookbook for my children into a journey of memories, honoring those who have gone before us with a source of hope and a way to make a difference for those living with the challenges of Alzheimer's or other dementia. Your encouragement reinforces that this journey is exactly where I am meant to be... and it's pretty darn exciting.

Enjoy!



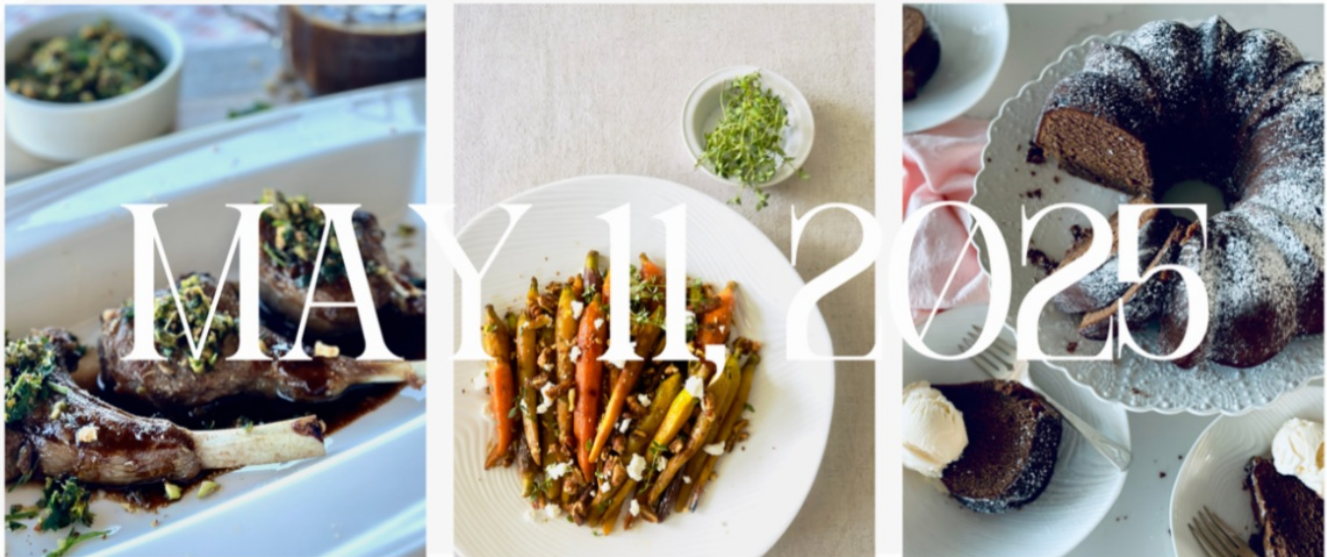
You Are Entered to WIN!  
Smithey Cast Iron  
and Shine a Light on Alzheimer's!

*Sponsored by A Life Well Fed in support of The Longest Day®*

Last week, we launched [A Life Well Fed Cast Iron Giveaway](#) thanks to the generosity of [Smithey Ironware](#). As a subscriber to *Confessions from a Pantry*, you

are automatically entered to win! To boost your chances of winning, click [here](#). Every dollar matters! Your tax-deductible donation of \$10 or more not only increases your odds of winning, but also helps defer the cost of publishing the cookbook and support our mission to bring hope and light to those impacted by Alzheimer's. Together, we can make a difference, one recipe at a time.

## Save The Date!



### On-Sale, May 11, 2025

I'm thrilled to share that *A Life Well Fed: Recipes to Remember* will be released on May 11, 2025. If that date sounds familiar, it's because it's Mother's Day—and it also happens to be my mother's 90th earthly birthday. I can't think of a more perfect day to honor my parents and the millions who have been touched by this devastating disease.

## Recipes to Remember

### *Gifts to Love*

A gift that comes straight from the heart of someone's kitchen is always special. They show you've taken the time to create something special, adding a personal touch that store-bought gifts often can't match. I'll admit, the idea of baking little goodies for neighbors and friends has never been my thing...until now.

Creating *A Life Well Fed* has caused the over-stocked pantry in my brain to come

up with unique and outrageously delicious gifts that take very little time to make, and your friends will always remember. So...I channeled my inner Sandra Lee: Semi-Homemade to come up with this month's recipes. These goodies are so delicious that I wrestled with the decision to reveal the recipe or keep them to myself and let everyone think I'm a culinary wizard with a magic sprinkle of pixie dust. In the end, I couldn't contain my excitement about sharing. After all, 'tis the season' for giving, and this month, I'm giving away a few of the best-kept secrets from my pantry.

PS: Don't forget about the [Pomegranate Molasses](#) and [Lemon Infused Olive Oil](#) and, of course, for the furry member of the family, [Pumpkin Dog Biscuits](#).

### Peppermint Pixie Dust Truffles



[Get  
Recipe](#)

[Caramelized Onion  
and Fig Jam](#)

[Maple Spice Pecans](#)



[Get  
Recipe](#)

**Cranberry Pear Cocktail**



[Get  
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[Get  
Recipe](#)

**Pumpkin Dog Biscuits**



[Get  
Recipe](#)

*A Simple Gift with Lasting Memories*



There's nothing I love to receive—or give—more than a tea towel. Just ask my friends. This may sound silly, but a beautiful tea towel holds a special place in my heart. What's so special about a tea towel?

To begin, they combine practicality with beauty and luxury. Everyone uses tea towels—whether for drying dishes, covering baked goods, or adding a decorative touch to the kitchen, they're a part of everyday life.

Every time I reach for a tea towel, I'm reminded of the person who gave it to me. A simple task like drying dishes can brighten my day with special memories and a sense of connection. I have been blessed with travels around the world, and at this point in life, I certainly don't need another knick-knack destined to collect dust. A tea towel is easy to pack, and years later, it becomes a daily reminder of my adventures. They also make the perfect souvenir—small, affordable, and meaningful.

A tea towel is a little piece of beauty and practicality, a daily reminder of friendship, adventure, and the joy of nostalgia. Whether as a stand-alone gift, the

wrapping for a bottle of wine, or the lining of a basket filled with freshly baked goodies, it adds a thoughtful touch that transforms the ordinary into something truly special.

## *A Very Special Thank You!*



Last month, while shooting photos for the cookbook, I searched for the perfect companion to one of my favorite recipes (and gifts): Crema de Limoncello and **Pomegranate Molasses**. (Sorry, you'll have to wait for the cookbook to get the Limoncello recipe.) That's when I discovered the beautiful handmade tea towels from **Pomegranate**. I wrote a letter to creator and founder, Angela Beck, asking if she would donate the towels to *A Life Well Fed*. Without hesitation, these handcrafted towels arrived at my front door. It is with the generosity and support of companies like **Pomegranate** that this project has become a reality.

I invite you to explore their exquisite collections and bring a special touch to your home and gifting. Each towel is a testament to the craftsmanship and care that align perfectly with the heart and soul of *A Life Well Fed*. I am deeply grateful for their support and am thrilled to share their work with you as part of this journey to celebrate food, family, and community.



[www.pomegranateinc.com](http://www.pomegranateinc.com)



## **News From the Pantry!**



*A Life Well Fed Joins the Amazon Affiliate Program* – Whenever I share recipes, inevitably the question is asked: where to find certain ingredients or “must-have” kitchen gadgets I can’t live without. That got me thinking—why not create an Amazon Affiliate Page? This way, whenever someone makes a purchase through one of our product links, *A Life Well Fed* will receive a small commission. There’s no cost to you, so whenever possible, click the link to purchase. We’re just getting started, and this is an easy way to support our mission while stocking your kitchen!

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## My Journey



A Visit With Santa, 2009

December brings with it the nostalgia of Christmas memories throughout my life. It also carries the weight of my mother’s passing and the news that my dad was nearing the end of his life. It may sound strange, but my mom’s last day on this earth was one of the easiest days in my 13-year journey. The hardest day? It was the very first one. And in between, there was a rollercoaster of emotions: sadness, joy, laughter, pain, and grief, all wrapped in a cloud of the unknown. I realize this month’s journey is much longer than the usual word count. It is my hope that sharing my story will be a comfort to others while at the same time honoring the memory of my parents and the lessons learned along the way.



My mom was 68 when we first noticed subtle changes in her behavior. For years, we wondered if her mishaps were just aging or something more. For years she openly voiced her fear of Alzheimer's, often saying, "I sure hope I don't get it." That DROVE ME CRAZY. Frustrated one day, I snapped, "Mom, stop talking about it, or it'll come true."

At 72, it was time to do something. My dad put me in charge of creating a plan. My first call was to the Alzheimer's Association, where I had an informative and compassionate conversation. Mom always trusted my advice. I approached her with the idea of getting a comprehensive geriatric assessment (GCA) to establish a benchmark of her health and gather all the information within one network of doctors. I didn't have the heart to tell her the exam included cognitive testing. I was nervous and scared; I could only imagine how she might react, including the chance she would refuse to go to the appointment.

I flew in from Connecticut for the testing. The next day, my dad, mom, sister, and I drove 45 minutes to Omaha for the appointment. While my mother was busy with bloodwork, scans, and cognitive testing, the three of us engaged in several hours of conversations with clinicians about her family history, physical health, and the path that led us to this moment. Dad remained mostly quiet, letting my sister and me do the talking. After hours of testing, the doctor called us all into the room (including mom) and gently shared the findings: our mom was in the early stages of Alzheimer's. There was an awkward silence, with a slight nod of acknowledgment. When the doctor asked if we had questions, it was clear no one was prepared to engage, so I thanked him and said I'd follow up on the next steps. The ride home was quiet. Dad turned on the radio, and the only conversation was with Mom repeatedly asking if we were in a new car.

When we arrived home, Mom was her usual cheerful self. Finally, I summoned the courage. I positioned myself close enough to hold her hand while sitting face-to-face. With a deep breath, I asked the question: "Mom, do you have any thoughts about what the doctor said?" With a puzzled look, she said, "What do you mean?" Oh dear, can it be, or is she just in denial? Fighting back tears, I said the words out loud for the first time, "The doctor said you are in the early stages of Alzheimer's." In a tone of annoyance, she asked, "When did the doctor say that?" She truly had no idea what I was talking about. As I began to revisit the day, I watched her eyes darken, turning almost black—something I had never witnessed in another human being. There was pure fear and panic in her eyes. She was stoic, and her face was tense but shed no tears. I paused, collected myself, and held her hands. It was the most intimate conversation I had ever had with her. Looking

directly into her eyes, I said, “Mom, I know you’re scared.” She never cried, never yelled. She just moved on. It was one of the hardest moments of my life.

Mom wasn’t ready for memory care, but managing daily responsibilities alone was too much. I planted the idea of independent living: no cooking, no cleaning, and plenty of bridge games with some of her friends who lived there. I learned that if I said something enough times, it would loop in her mind until it seemed like her idea. Within weeks, she embraced the idea and came to love her new “maintenance-free” life, where she lived for seven years. For almost seven years, she enjoyed independent living—probably a year longer than most residents would have stayed. She was the model resident: never wandered, took good care of her dog, was polite and sociable, and was well-loved by staff, even as Alzheimer’s progressed.

The move to memory care was difficult. She was confused and, in the beginning, begged to go “home.” After a fall, she moved to skilled nursing memory care for rehabilitation of a broken femur. It was supposed to be a temporary stay. The facility was sterile and hospital-like—no fancy furniture, carpeting, or patio gardens—a bit depressing. Our family relied on my sister, Lori, to be the eyes and ears of Mom’s condition. After six weeks in rehab, she suggested Mom stay at the nursing home because the care was unmatched. And so, she did. Once again, the staff loved her. Mom was a registered nurse in her youth and the young nurses who looked after her loved hearing her stories. As the disease progressed, they would indulge her with activities that brought back memories of her nursing career. I once stopped in to find her behind the nurses’ station, reading the nursing manual aloud to the rest of the staff. Another time, they had her folding pillowcases—anything they could do to bring familiarity to her day.

The disease took its old sweet time and was in no hurry. After thirteen years of watching Alzheimer’s slowly steal pieces of her, all that remained was the shell of the person I called Mom. In her final year, the only life skill she could manage was to feed herself. Her words no longer made sense, and she often babbled. But her tone, her inflection, and especially her laugh were unmistakably hers, and I knew, deep down inside somewhere, she was still my mom.

The evening of December 20th was like so many other nights. Before going to bed, I would pray that God would call our mom to her heavenly home. It was a day she looked forward to with great enthusiasm. That night, a sudden jolt of adrenaline shot through my body. I awoke to find myself sitting upright, wide awake, invigorated, and keenly alert. I looked at the clock. It was 3:36 AM. And I knew at that moment, my mother had died. Rather than pace and wander the remainder

of the night, an enormous sense of calm came over my body as I laid back down and fell peacefully back to sleep.

Three hours later, my sister called, and her first words were, “Mom died.” Although I already knew, I asked what time. She said they weren’t sure, but that the staff checked her at 3:00 AM, and then again at 4:00 AM, and she was gone. On December 21, 2020, at 3:36 AM, my mother left her earthly home. Finally! It was over. I will be forever grateful that before she left, she took a fleeting moment to say goodbye.

As the twinkling lights of the holidays and the laughter of grandchildren fill our home, I am reminded that grief and joy are often intertwined. I will embrace the joy without guilt and allow for my grief without judgment. It is the balance of life between holding on and letting go... and it’s okay to feel like doing both.

So, during this holiday season, hold your loved ones close and find peace in the moments that matter most. Wishing you health, much happiness, and a life well fed. /kg



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