

Harvest

When I ask my grandmother how she makes her pear preserves, she tells me she cooks the pears twice. I don't know what that means. Once, I made blackberry jam, so I think that makes me an expert. I stood over the stove, stirring and pouring and sealing.

I could ask her what she means, but I don't.

I'm asking about a memory anyway. It's been years since I tasted it, and years since she made it. It's hard to cook when you have macular degeneration and can only see bits and pieces of what's around you, so when you don't eat in the retirement home dining room, you heat up soup or open a can of tuna fish.

I remember the last time I ate her pear preserves. I ate them straight from the jar sitting in the small dining area of the apartment she lived in after selling the farm but before moving into the retirement home. I didn't leave any for my toast.

My life is not one where I need to know recipes for pear preserves, so at the U-Pick, I don't choose the Bosc or the Anjou, the firm pears that hold their shape when cooked. I like the Comice, the large juicy pears you can bite into, add to a holiday meal, or send wrapped in gold foil as a gift. Like the crazy gourds I buy, I think of my pears as a part of a display.

When my grandmother dies, my father brings boxes of her things to store in my basement. I go through them. I find hand-crocheted afghans, a flowered teacup, and a wooden recipe box, its broken hinges repaired with masking tape.

The box is organized with tabbed category cards. I go through each one. I know what I want to find, but I'm also curious about what I will find. There are recipes for things I've never heard of like elk mincemeat and toasted peanut butter and chili sauce sandwiches. My grandmother, who always put everything where it belonged, left the preserves section empty.

In the desserts section, I find her recipe for "Lemon Love Notes." She was practical, so I laugh at her whimsical name for lemon bars. I love lemon, and now I remember, so did she.

I will let this inheritance make a new memory, tinged with lemon, wrapped in an afghan, warmed by tea.