

Sandwich

My eyes were locked in a gaze staring at the protruding black eyes of a bear. Its round, glassy eyes were inviting, luring me to study its anatomy: the bear had a hard exterior that was a transparent window into its gooey, golden insides. I sat there, staring at the bear, as the light from the kitchen window began to shine in. The sunlight poured in through the window, its beams cutting through the bear and reflecting onto our shabby linoleum countertop. Still, in a trance over the bear with the yellow cap on its head, I heard my mother in the background, “Elise, pass me the honey.” But I was so enraptured with the friendly bear smiling at me that her words passed right through my ears. She finally came over and grabbed the honey from the counter, causing an abrupt end to my dreamy abstraction of the honey bear.

She gathered the simple fixings: honey, peanut butter, and whole wheat bread—the critical ingredients to a delicious and filling sandwich. As my mother began to make the sandwich, my stomach unleashed a massive cry, signaling to my mother how hungry I was. She hears it and laughs as she slowly begins to spread the creamy peanut butter onto the bread. She continues to lather and spread the peanut butter as if we were living in a rose-colored Jif Creamy Peanut Butter commercial. She then opens up my new friend, honey bear, and begins to pour a big pool of honey onto the other slice of bread. I watched eagerly, becoming restless as the golden goo slowly streamed out of the bear. It seemed to taunt my already ravenous appetite.

My anticipation was at an all-time high as I saw her assemble the slices of bread. My mouth began to water at the plain, brown square of thick, sticky substances, provoking me to make an impulsive grab at it. My mother stopped me from this premature gesture and told me to wash my hands. I quickly ran to the bathroom, and when I returned, the plain brown square was no longer. It became a beautiful brown butterfly with honey and peanut butter dripping down the

sides of it. My adolescent mind was taken aback by how that was even possible. I was astonished at how my mother could have possibly made a sandwich butterfly-shaped. I basked in childish wonder at my mom's power and ability to make something so simple feel so glamorous. It further made me believe the long-standing family joke that my mother was a witch.

My impressionable disposition made it easy for people to trick me, especially my cousins and uncle. They created a joke about my mother being the "Wicked Witch of the West" from the Wizard of Oz. The reason behind it is that she moved to the West Coast for some time. Being a gullible child, my older cousins and uncle goaded me into believing that my mom was a creative witch. Even my mom went along with it by saying that she had eyes in the back of her head, so she could see me even when it didn't look like she could. Seeing that beautiful, butterfly-shaped sandwich convinced me even more that my mom must be a witch. She had something magical about her that no one else had.

I sat there, admiring her bewitching abilities and the butterfly that was on my plate. She left me alone in the kitchen as I ate to distract me from what was going on at home. I could vaguely hear her in the other room, having an intense argument over the phone. All my senses were heightened while figuring out what was happening. My olfactory senses were in overdrive, trying to tempt me to eat the delicious sandwich, but my young ears were distracted and distressed by what I was overhearing. My mother usually left me to eat alone with my newly shaped peanut butter and honey sandwich—it was essentially a glorified distraction from the state of poverty and distress we were living in. I'd be so wrapped up in my special sandwich that I wouldn't be able to focus as much on my mother's concerned, hushed tones from the other room. Peanut butter and honey sandwiches became part of my juvenile routine, but as I got older, the shapes began to stop, and the phone calls increased. I began to eavesdrop when I noticed a

melancholic disposition in my mother after every phone call. I slowly started associating peanut butter and honey sandwiches with our food insecurity, lack of monetary resources, and my mother's sadness. Even though it was still delicious, something about it changed.

As the years went by, the sandwich gradually became a brown square again; I associated it with the end of my mother's stupefying "witchcraft." I slowly began to see the emotional damage she endured raising me alone with financial troubles. This sandwich started to remind me of the problems she was going through, and it resulted in a strong distaste for it based on these associations.

Eating has emotional effects or associations with it, whether it be good or bad. The way we perceive our emotions with food is how we interpret a part of ourselves. According to *Frontiers in Psychology*, "the memories of past eating experiences are influential in shaping preferences and consumption behavior, and the emotions that people associate with these memories are linked to their attitudes toward foods and their everyday food-related behaviors." I could not consume peanut butter and honey sandwiches for a long time because I chose to connect it to the displeasing environment around me. Having such a strong association with a simple, cheap sandwich or any other food, for that matter, can change the way we think about life.

My mother took a different approach and tried to make my food creatively. She used peanut butter and honey sandwiches to distract and preserve my childhood innocence while inexpensively feeding me some nutrients. She used big cookie cutters to enhance my imagination, but at the same time, to divert my attention even further. "It was the only time I could be alone and take care of what was going on. I did not want you to hear what was happening. You were only a child, but you did sleuth and were very good at it," said my mother.

The duration of my distaste lasted from middle school to high school. This became a more serious problem for me than I expected. Without my peanut butter and honey sandwiches, there were not many options to cook at my house. My whole palate began to change, which led me to become a picky eater. I could not make another peanut butter and honey sandwich again. I had too much of it, and it reminded me of hard times. With the limited options available and my stubborn pickiness, I eventually stopped eating. I would barely have anything to eat; the most would be a granola bar once a day if I was lucky. Sometimes, I would muster just the right amount of happiness to have a bagel. I became drastically underweight, but people assumed I was healthier than I was. I believe this dark phase of my life was a result of many reasons. These reasons include, but are not limited to, minimal groceries, an unnecessarily picky palate, depression, and a painful anti-peanut butter and honey phase.

I often witnessed my mom prepare herself a peanut butter and honey sandwich, and my immediate reaction was always adverse. I would say, “You are still making that? Why? Aren’t you sick of it?” But my mom, one of the most positive people I know, would say, “No. They are delicious, and they remind me of you.” This gradually started to spark a comforting feeling for peanut butter and honey sandwiches again.

In my senior year of high school, my mother tricked me into loving peanut butter and honey sandwiches again. She started to use it to bond and distract me from the many problems I was dealing with: college applications, mono, FAFSA, and my autoimmune disease diagnosis. I was unbelievably overwhelmed, and she could see the physical and emotional toll it took on me. My mother’s maternal instinct prompted her to facilitate a heartfelt and memorable “distraction.”

Again, she made us peanut butter and honey sandwiches. At first, I was hesitant and did not want to have it, but ultimately she forced me to. We sat in the living room, where we ate and

watched *School of Rock*. It was one of our favorite movies to watch while I was growing up. We sat there, hooting and hollering while eating our tasty sandwiches. This moment jump-started a weekly ritual for the remainder of my senior year of high school. The weekly rituals of sandwich eating with my mom created remarkable memories that I will cherish forever. I learned to start loving a thing I chose to hate from the unfavorable circumstances around me. I finally acknowledged that the sandwich was not the problem; it was the memories associated with it. As I started to eat and make more peanut butter and honey sandwiches again, I realized that I was using them to distract myself from my problems. I would make it if I were too stressed out and did not have enough energy or time to make something better. It became a way to create a blissful distraction for myself.

Food can be an escape from reality, whether it be admiring what you made, eating your meal in peace, or making it a hobby. It can be a powerful tool that can alter how you feel, conceptualize the world, and nourish your body. Upon further self-reflection, I finally understood why my mom was distracting me with elaborately shaped sandwiches. She was trying to preserve my happiness for as long as she could while blocking out the harsh realities of the world. She wanted me to focus on the beautiful butterfly-shaped sandwich instead of the not-so-beautiful troubles around me. It took me a long time to realize that she did this to protect me.

Today, I am no longer a picky eater and I still make peanut butter and honey sandwiches as a struggling college student. I may not cut it as a butterfly-shaped sandwich, but I always admire its beauty as a distraction from everyday stressors. As I sit and write this feature, I keep taking bites of my peanut butter and honey sandwich to distract myself from the stress of finals. “I guess my mom really is a witch; I am still eating her bewitching meals.”

EVM- Food Feature - Writing Sample

Source List

1. Barbara McGee, mother
2. [Frontiers in Psychology](#)