Cultural Daily

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Zoomsgiving

Adam Leipzig · Wednesday, November 25th, 2020

I have always been a pre-planner. That's probably my producer genome. I'm trained to look around every corner, to be ready for anything, see the game several chess-moves ahead, have a backup to the backup. People call me a "precrastinator" with good reason. Three months ago it was obvious we could never have a Covid-safe Thanksgiving as we did last year, with thirty family and friends spread across tables set up in our dining and living rooms.

But… what about Zoomsgiving? We emailed an invitation:

> Thanksgiving is our favorite holiday. It's so important to bring together our families and close friends. This year, we invite you to Zoomsgiving. Here's how it will work. We will be preparing the meal we can all share – turkey, Haitian rice, Adam's famous pie. On Thanksgiving Day, you'll receive the meal where you live, with reheating times and instructions. At 4:00 pm, we'll all sign onto Zoom, come together as a large group, then we'll move into smaller "tables" for more intimate discussion. Toward the end of the evening we'll come back together again. Although we'll be physically separate, we will be joined together by our collective meal and presence.

To execute this plan would take a village. But with infectious disease protocols, we could not have an entire village. Addison Brown, chef and family friend, undertook preparation of the main meal. Tiara Parker and her company Almost Anything agreed to handle packaging and delivery logistics. I would make the pies. We all were Covid-tested and would work alone in separate, sanitized locations.

As our family and friends RSVP'd they bunched into groups. There would be one party of eight people in a pod. Others would be eating alone.

Turkey, Haitian rice, stuffing, and green beans could be made in batches and parceled into containers of the right size for reheating. Baguette, butter, water, and wine are individually packed anyway. But the pies are a different story. You can't just send someone a slice of pie. It would look skimpy and would probably fall apart. I decided it would be better to give everyone their own pie. I would make apple pie and pumpkin pie, because it's good to finish strong. There's a quote that goes back in moviedom, way, way back, to when there were sprocket holes and films came in reels: "The most important reels of a movie are the first reel and the last reel, and the first reel

doesn’t matter so much.” Which means the audience really remembers the end of a movie; the last 10 minutes matter most. So it is with pie.

Pounding graham crackers to powder, cubing butter and putting it in the freezer. I wanted to listen to music not news because there is nothing joyful in news, especially not now in this year of living dangerously. I put on *Orfeo ed Euridice.* For me cooking is meditation because you can’t think of anything else. It is timing, careful handwork, measuring right by cup or eye, smelling the finish before the timer tells you. It is predictable, which is why I am drawn to it. So much of the creative work I do in media and entrepreneurship is beyond my control. Here in the kitchen I have certainty. Give me ingredients and time and I will produce for you a perfect roast chicken, a grilled fish, *al dente* snap peas dressed with lime juice, fresh nectarine pie.

On Wednesday morning I opened the fridge and laughed at the quixotic ridiculousness of the 28 pie crusts I had made the day before. Short crists for the apple pies, graham cracker for the pumpkin.

28 pie crusts in the fridge.

Eight pounds of flour, two pounds of white sugar, two pounds of brown sugar, six pounds of butter, two quarts of evaporated milk, eight pounds of pumpkin, five boxes of graham crackers, some salt, two dozen eggs, cinnamon, clove, ginger, a pint of vodka, 32 pounds of apples. The vodka wasn’t to get me through, by the way. You use it instead of water to make the crust. The result is extra flaky. Pie is all about crust.

Tuesday had been a crust assembly line. Wednesday was pie-a-palooza. I made gallons of pumpkin pie filling. While those pies cooked I rolled apple pie crusts into big circles and put them back in the fridge. Dominique and I peeled the apples, a mix of Granny Smith and Golden Delicious, sliced and doused them with lemon juice. By now it was nearly midnight. I pre-cooked the apples so I could drain off the juice that would make the bottom crust soggy, baked the pies, caught a couple hours of sleep. The pies would cool and I would box them by 7 AM, at which point they would go to the Loft where the rest of the meal was being portioned out, and then into boxes for delivery.

We are fortunate that our family is not food insecure, is not unhoused, is healthy right now. I decided to make a contribution to the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank in the amount of everything our Zoomsgiving has cost. I thought about the idea hatched three months ago, the pre-planning that had gone into it, how nothing about 2020 unfolded as had been imagined. I plan things to feel in control, to ordain outcomes as best I can. Sometimes planning makes things happen. Sometimes I face the edged powerlessness of larger worlds, the little we truly control.

But today, this Thanksgiving, our family and friends will be together in an unexpected way, not apart though apart, spiritually joined by eating the same meal. How fortunate to have people we can love and who love us, people for whom we can cook.

Thanksgiving morning, mission accomplished! *Photo by Dominique Shelton Leipzig*

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