

Empty Nester Recipes

And this week...

The UK government recently did a study on empty nesters; the end result being that 98% of those polled felt extreme grief at their children moving out, and on.

Obviously, I miss my son; I do. He is fantastic company -- a lovely, smart, funny, chatty, interesting human being -- hands down my number one choice with whom to have been in lockdown in a small New York City apartment during a pandemic. He left for university in August and when I dropped him at his dormitory for the last time after the obligatory parents' farewell weekend, it was very hard to let go after that final "I am handing you over to your own care now" hug.

But...

I *love* living alone. Though there may be something about the level of introspection and navel gazing possible that might not be entirely healthy, there is something to be said for the selfish peace of living with one's own thoughts, on one's own schedule, and a definite joy in waking up in the morning and finding the kitchen in the same pristine shape that it was when one went to bed. The remote control belongs to me, and whatever music blasts in the house is my choice -- both in terms of selection and decibel level.

Since there is less opportunity for immediate human interaction, there is more time for bouts of nature observation, and even silly things, like watching a bird go about its

business in my garden, realizing that my prayer plants take seventeen minutes each day to close up as the sun goes down, or noticing that my cats have definite musical preferences (and that the male cat rates Meatloaf over Patti Smith), bring me joy. I can fully immerse myself in the fictional mythological world about which I am writing without being dragged back into reality at a moment's notice by someone else's immediate needs and wants, something which always makes me feel discombobulated, jet-lagged, and as though I don't speak English very well for a good hour or so after it happens. I can now emerge slowly, and in my own time.

Most pleasurable of all – and yes, it always comes back to food for me – is being able to eat exactly what I want, when I want. Since I am a very early riser who does not particularly like breakfast beyond a ritualistic coffee at 5:30 am, I am ready for lunch around elevenses. When my son lived at home, lunch was at twelve thirty or one due to his school schedule. If one eats a really early lunch as I now do, one tends to get hungry for dinner early too. And, while I hope to never be one of the early-bird-special diners one sees in restaurant windows as one goes by, seated with a partner yet chomping in silence through dinner at four thirty in the afternoon, my days of eating at eight or nine, as was the past household preference, are gone too.

Eating what I want is quite enjoyable as well. Alliums are scattered into each dish with gay abandon. Eggplant features more often, having been banned for eighteen years. Dill can now enter the house again too. If I want to have smoked bluefin pâté on rye bread at three in the morning, I can do so without judgement. Every meal does not have to be a carefully orchestrated, nutritional powerhouse of a three-course event, but can be a carefully composed treat of exactly what I want. And I am enjoying the like-minded community that I am creating by writing about these meals and posting my recipes for one on this blog.

I look forward to my son coming home for the odd weekend and the holidays, and will spoil him immeasurably when he does. But, being of a pragmatic bend, I always knew that the day when he would spread his wings would come and that my job was to prepare him to do so. The fact that he has done so beautifully and blossomed, taking advantage of every opportunity, experience, and adventure that has come his way so far, makes me proud, and the fact that he left the nest without looking back and carried on care-free means that I have done my maternal work well.

I suspect that I will hug my son tightly as he prepares to leave after his next visit, and perhaps will even get a bit teary-eyed as his car pulls away, but I am also pretty sure that I will then sit in the hanging chair on my porch with my feet up on the railing, watching the blue jays squawk from the branches of the biggest pine tree and the chipmunks bounce happily around the front lawn, and relish in the resumption of a life that is now pretty much solely about fulfilling my whims and needs, and in the pleasure of daydreaming about what opportunity, experience, and adventure might potentially be next – hopefully for me too.

And so, to the weekly recipe recap:

[Garlic Pork Chop with Warm Low Country Okra Salad](#)

[My "Treat" Oatmeal](#)

[Suya-Spiced Tuna Steak with Garlicky Collard Greens](#)

[Fall Squash Soup](#)

[Roast Chicken and Vegetables with Sage Pan Juices](#)

[Chicken, Spiced Rhubarb and Sorrel Stew](#)

[Roasted Eggplant Sandwich](#)