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My mom was the master of the kitchen. My sister, dad, and later my baby brother and I were allowed to be in the kitchen, but we were invited guests, able to claim certain foods, and leave the space as we found it, ready for my mom's next culinary creation.

Although she grew up wanting for nothing, with abundant food on the table for every meal, mom was surprisingly stingy when anyone wanted to sample a matzo ball, a single piece of shrimp toast, or the most favorite of tasty items simmering away, the meatball.



These were all small items. My dad and I only wanted a taste, no carving or marring of her culinary presentation required. And yet, having a small taste was a big problem. But why? There were always leftovers. A lot of leftovers. And she would always shoo us away saying we could have some after the dinner. Why would anyone want a cold piece of shrimp toast when there was enough to feed at least double the number of dinner party guests? There were certainly enough meatballs to keep us in leftovers for days. It didn't make sense.

And so my dad and I developed a plan that, though stealthy, worked like a charm. Dad or I would wander through the kitchen noticing something enticing on the stove. We'd meet in a place unlikely for a mom-spotting, most frequently the basement or the garage. If seen, it would be easy enough to grab a tool or finish a chat about my homework, and move along undetected.

During these clandestine meetings, we'd assign roles and spring into action. One of us would distract mom by calling her out of the kitchen. I'd need help with something in my room or dad would have a question about something outside, frequently needing her opinion about something benign yet plausible.

The other schemer would hasten to the kitchen, two forks a-ready and take a small sample for each of us. When the mission was complete, the grabber would sneeze or cough, indicating it was time to release mom.

Upon her return to the kitchen, my dad and I would rush to the side of the house, alone outside, where mom was certain not to find us enjoying a steaming meatball or some other will-not-be missed-no-matter-what delicacy. Mom was none the wiser and dad and I enjoyed tasting the food while still hot and most delicious.

This month's meatball offering is available for your tasting pleasure, no advance scheming necessary. I'm offering the finest of my childhood's stolen food memories—the meatball—with some variations in both ingredients and preparation.

Go forth into your kitchen, head held high, and simmer up a pot or a pan worth sharing. Create some new offerings for yourself or your family, combining generosity of spirit with culinary joy. No stealth involved. Meatballs will abound.