The distinct smell of Polish food has the power to transport me straight into my Babcia’s kitchen. I instantly relive the anticipation of watching my favorite dishes being made, as my grandmother puts on her apron and begins her magic. As she fills the counter space with her ingredients, there is always one distinct thing missing. There is never a recipe book to refer to. Her belief is watch and you will learn. She relies on her cooking experiences with our beloved ancestors as guidance. This relationship with my family is what I value, as food intimately continues to connect us all together. Preserving a family recipe honors your heritage, as food evokes generations of memories. This I believe.

It is an accomplishment to learn how to make pierogis, a type of filled dumpling, in my family. I would watch as Babcia poured flour onto a wooden board, repeatedly mixing in butter and water. She would often place her delicate hands on top of mine, directing my movements in kneading the dough. I would then use my great grandmother’s teacup, flipped upside down, to cut out circles on the dough. Eventually placing a potato cheese filling on each circle, meticulously folding the dough and pinching it closed. We would drop them slowly into the boiling pot of water, and wait to see them cook and bounce to the top. I recall the two pierogis that quickly exploded, releasing its still raw contents into the water. My first tragic lesson in not properly sealing the dough. Yet, my first step into a legacy of recipes being passed down from one generation to the next. As my whole family ate that meal of pierogis, stories were shared about my great grandmother who preferred using fruit as a filling, as well as my aunt who loved to fry them in a pan with butter.

Similar to the Aboriginal Australians in “The Painted Desert,” by Geraldine Brooks, I believe the good life is a result of valuing our family and traditions (Brooks). The Ngurrara I and II paintings provided a way to collectively tell the story of how their ancestors originally occupied the land (Brooks). Their artistic abilities enabled them to maintain what was rightfully theirs, while fully appreciating the cultural value of their creations (Brooks). I connect to the importance and comfort of knowing each of their stories will be passed down for generations. I realized that my family’s pierogi recipe, with no documented directions, has most likely been adjusted as it is passed through the decades. Each person unknowingly contributed a piece of themselves; whether through a teacup, introducing a new filling, or a technique on how to knead dough. I take pride in my responsibility to help preserve a recipe that can be traced into my family’s past and future.

After years of watching and practicing to make the perfect dough, I can proudly make pierogis on my own. You’ll have to watch me if you want to learn.

References