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REFLECTING ON 2007'S COMFORT FOODS

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IN RECENT YEARS, I've measured moments of the year just past with food memories -- moments I still can taste, smell or feel because of the foods I enjoyed during them.

Here's my look back at 2007, which was a quiet year. No huge, fabulous meals in big cities, no fancy new finds, but rather familiar, comfortable foods that evoke a sense of comfort when I look back. I recall, for instance, a chilly winter night early in the year when I gathered with my book club at friend Coles Lawton's lovely home in downtown Columbia to discuss Iris Origo's "War in Val d'Orcia," the diary of Origo's daily life in war-torn Italy from January 1943 to July 1944.

As we gathered in Lawton's living room to discuss the book, she placed a tray of the most delicious cheese puffs on the table in front of me. These delicate, warm appetizers were such an unexpected surprise -- cheese pastry with a kick of cayenne wrapped around a firm green olive. I could have eaten the entire tray, but instead I begged for the recipe and made some for myself on another occasion. With Lawton's permission, I'm sharing the recipe with you so you can enjoy them, too.

Another moment came during a tour of Adluh Flour in Columbia's Vista. If you haven't been inside this wonderful building that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, mark it on your list of things to do this year. Biscuits are served after every scheduled tour. Hot from the oven, these tender treats melt in your mouth. You'll appreciate them all the more after learning how the flour that made them has been milled on-site since 1900.

Speaking of biscuits, I had another delicious encounter with bread when I spent the morning in Mary Leverette's Irmo kitchen in November, watching her make apple jelly. The rose-colored concoction came together right before our eyes. And then, she served me a taste of the fresh jelly on warm yeast rolls. The promise of a fall chill in the air made the experience all the more satisfying. Learning about the apples she had received from her family's farm in Hendersonville gave the jelly an extra-sweet taste, too.

Sweet flavors, literally and figuratively, played into a trip my daughter and I made to Tucson, Ariz., in the spring to visit my brother, his wife and their four children -- one a baby we hadn't yet seen.

My food highlight occurred in the lovely resort where my daughter and I stayed, a perk of the

company my brother was working for at the time. (I'm happy to report that he's moved back East since our visit.)

Indulging a bit, I allowed room service for breakfast one morning during our visit. As Abby sat on her comfy bed, draped in the hotel-provided terry cloth robe, enjoying brilliant red strawberries and thick cream, she declared, "Girls just need to be princesses every now and then." Indeed.

Other simple pleasures arrived in the summertime during my family's first weeklong visit to Pawleys Island. Joining two families with whom we are close friends, our week included long days on the beach, bagelbite lunches and lingering suppers of fresh corn, burgers on the grill or big batches of plump, boiled shrimp. The **Palmetto Cheese** pimento cheese, made by Get Carried Away in Georgetown, also kept me happy all week. I loved this pimento cheese so much, I received two tubs for Christmas from my sister-in-law who lives in Georgetown.

And, speaking of Christmas, two flavors of the season wrapped up my year. I counted myself lucky to be among those who got a taste of Blythe Kelly's holiday truffles this season. Kelly, executive chef of Solstice Kitchen & Wine Bar in Northeast Richland, makes the treats for her friends each year. Because I wrote a story about her tradition, I was right there when the first batch was created.

And, finally, my year ended with a sweet treat made by my mother. I've always been crazy about fruit, but as a child, the wonder of ambrosia was lost on me because I hadn't yet developed an appreciation for coconut. She tried again this year and discovered I finally was old enough to appreciate this wonderful combination. The sweet oranges and cherries along with the lovely texture of coconut made for a fabulous, grown-up Christmas Eve dessert.



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