

Game day is just another day for many

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The whole cooking class idea was my husband Dan's, and I know he wouldn't mind me telling you that.

When we got married, we consciously tried not to default to traditional gender roles, but it turned out that I was lousy at lawn and car maintenance and he didn't know a capon from a caper, so what can you do?

Despite this, he said he was interested in learning more about cooking. I did the majority of our day-to-day "maintenance cooking," which, like "maintenance sex," is sometimes expeditious rather than inspired. So I hear. Plus, we were both a little bored with what we'd been having lately. (Meal-wise, that is — what did you think I meant?!)

So at about this time last year, Dan signed us up for a tamale-making class. These were offered at a local kitchen appliance store in their state-of-the-art kitchen/classroom, with a few sales staff on hand in case someone wanted to buy a Swedish dishwasher after class.

That night, our chef-teacher told us we would be making tamales from a recipe that had been in her family for five generations. It had evolved over hundreds of years as the women of antiquity sought, just as you and I do, to find easier ways to get nutritious meals into their husbands and kids.

Apparently, in ancient times, the womenfolk of various warring tribesmen, tired of following them from battle to battle, toting kids and supplies without the benefit of a Subaru Forester, decided there was more to life than front-row season tickets to bloody intertribal warfare.

So some exhausted but enterprising Mayan or Aztec lady had scooped up the leftover meat and cornmeal from a previous meal, added a few spices and stuffed the mixture into a leaf. She handed this light and tidy package to her battle-bound husband, indicating her intention to stay put and telling him in no uncertain terms exactly what he could do with it (store it, steam it, roast it in the embers of the fire, eat it cold — what did you think I meant?).

That, according to the chef-teacher, was the origin of the tamale. Nowadays, thanks to global markets, we have a plethora of spices and fillings to choose from in creating tamales that are savory or sweet; vegetarian or filled with a variety of meats, seafood or cheeses.

We noticed that turnout for tamale class that night seemed a bit light. I discovered, after eavesdropping on several conversations, it was likely due to the Civil War game between the

University of Oregon and Oregon State University. (Football, I believe — too cold for pickle-ball and too late in the year for badminton.)

Now, to say I am a sports nerd is an insult to sports nerds everywhere. I prefer sports ignoramus. Because, although I play golf, I can't watch golf on TV. Although I am an expert skier, I can't watch skiing on TV. And I can neither play nor watch a long list of other sports as well, but that's beside the point. The point is, I have entirely failed to cultivate an interest in front-row season tickets to warfare over the location or possession of a ball of any shape, size or color.

Growing up, I was told repeatedly by my three brothers that my inability to see the genius of spectator sports was due largely to a chromosomal impairment beyond my control (I was born a sister, poor creature — somebody forgot to put the stem on the apple). However, my he-man homebuilder husband, a fine athlete who played football, basketball and golf in high school and ran marathons, is similarly impaired. (As in, he doesn't follow spectator sports — what did you think I meant?)

So the morning of the tamale class, Dan was at the paint store, filling an order for one of his construction projects. In an effort to make small talk, the guy behind the counter said to him, "So, going to the big game tonight?" And without thinking, Dan replied, "What game is that?"

It was like that moment in the horror movie when the main character says, "Gee, why are all the lights out in this house? I better check it out," and reaches for the knob of the basement door, and in your head, you're screaming, "No, no, don't do it! There's a guy in a hockey mask waiting down there with a really, really big knife!" But of course, down he goes.

There was a collective gasp of astonishment and then silence fell over the entire store as a cadre of flannel-clad, coverall-ed men eyed one another and Dan uneasily. Then the paint store guy broke the uncomfortable silence. "Well," he said, "That's the first time I've gotten that response."

Dan just took his paint and left. Somehow, he didn't think it would help to add that he would not be watching the Civil War on TV either, because he would be in cooking class.

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