



About my Dad & Blueberry Crumble Cake

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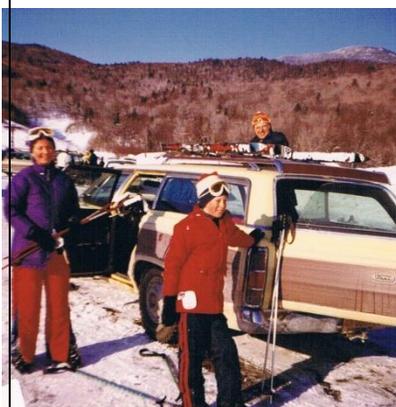
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About my Dad

My father has never met a stranger he didn't like. He can't help himself. If you are in line with him at the supermarket, seated next to him on an airplane or sipping a drink at a crowded cocktail party, he'll start a conversation. He can't keep it to a simple smile and polite hello. Within minutes he'll ferret out some information or connection. He'll find out where you work or go to school or what you do for fun. Chances are good he knows someone who knows someone who knows you. Forget Kevin Bacon, we should all start a game of *Six Degrees of Joe Nye*.

When I was little, I just accepted it. Or maybe I didn't notice; I was a bit of a flaky kid. When I was a teenager I was mortified. How could he just jump in and talk to strangers and near-strangers?

Buying the Sunday paper was a great example. He always got us up too early on winter weekend mornings to ski. Most teenagers were still warm and cozy in their beds when we, groggy, cranky and full of pancakes, piled into the car with boots and skis. On the way to the hill he'd stop to buy the newspaper. Promising that he'd only be a minute, he disappeared into Mr. Lovely's drug store.



Grumpy from our pre-dawn wake-up call we waited for him to return. And waited. And waited. And waited ... until he triumphantly returned with both the paper and a new friend. It could be the brother-in-law of the man who took his sister to the senior prom or maybe the neighbor of the cousin of one of his favorite customers. If they were skiers, they were cajoled into joining us for lunch. After one too many long waits in the parking lot, my sister and I finally rebelled. We insisted he stay in the car and one of us went in to get the paper.

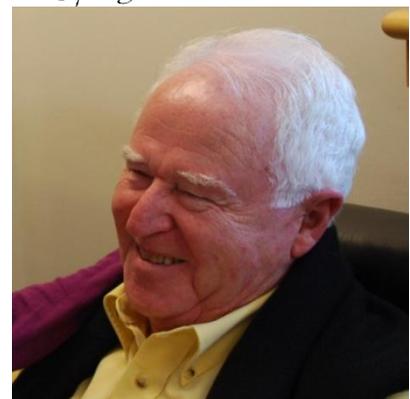
Eventually I went from mortification to benign acceptance. When I lived in Europe, my parents flew over for several visits. We took road trips to some of my favorite spots in Switzerland and France and rendezvoused in Florence. On all of these trips, I smiled and watched Dad carry on cheerful, one-way conversation with strangers. When I suggested that the woman in the elevator or the man in the lobby didn't understand a word he said, he protested. After all they'd smiled and returned his wish for a good morning. I reminded him that I could say hello (plus good bye, please, thank you, cheers and take me to the airport) in at least ten languages. He didn't buy it. Still with his cheerful demeanor and my mother's beautiful smile, they never came away as ugly Americans.

And finally, acceptance turned to emulation. I'm not sure if it is frightening or comforting but over the years I've picked up more than a few of both my mother's and my father's habits. Among them is my dad's propensity to talk to strangers. It didn't come naturally, I was impatient and awkward at first. Even after a lot of practice, I am a pale facsimile of the master.

But the rewards are huge. The world is filled with amazing people, some delightful, some inspiring, some so smart they make your head spin and some so funny your stomach aches from laughing. Not every conversation is magical but I find the tiniest glimpse of what makes a person tick much more interesting than simple people watching. From the teenager waitress working two jobs to pay for college to the writer in the coffee shop with a stack of unpublished detective stories, everyone has something to share. You only need to ask.

Thanks Dad, Happy Father's Day and Bon appétit!

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Blueberry Crumb Cake

My dad loves everything blueberry so this cake is a great choice for Father's Day. Enjoy!

Serves 8



1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
 1/2 teaspoon table salt
 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
 1/2 teaspoon ginger
 Grated zest of 1 lime or lemon
 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
 1 cup brown sugar
 1 large egg
 1/2 cup sour cream
 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
 1 generous cup (about 4 ounces) fresh or frozen blueberries
 Crumbly Topping (recipe follows)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Butter a 9-inch springform pan or deep dish pie plate. If using a springform pan, line it with parchment paper and butter the paper. Dust the pan or plate with flour and tap out any excess.

Whisk the flour, baking powder, spices and lime zest together in a bowl.

Put the butter and sugar in a large bowl and beat until pale and fluffy with an electric mixer, about 3 minutes. Mix in the egg and vanilla until combined.

Add the dry ingredients and sour cream alternately in 2 batches, beginning and ending with the dry ingredients and mixing until just smooth.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Evenly spread the blueberries on top of the batter and sprinkle with Crumbly Topping.

Bake the cake for 10 minutes at 350 degrees. Reduce the oven temperature to 325 degrees and continue baking until the cake is golden brown and a tester comes out free of wet batter, about 45-50 minutes. Cool the cake in the pan. If using a springform pan, remove the collar and slide the cake off of the pan and onto a platter. If using a pie plate, leave it in the plate. Either way, serve at room temperature.



The cake can be stored, covered, at room temperature for up to 2 days.

Crumbly Topping

1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 cup light brown sugar, packed
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ginger
Pinch nutmeg
Pinch kosher salt
3 tablespoons cold, unsalted butter, cut in pieces
1/3 cup oatmeal

Combine the flour, sugar, salt and spices in a small food processor; pulse to combine. Add the butter, pulse until the mixture resembles coarse corn meal. Add the oatmeal; pulse until the topping comes together in large lumps.