

The Impact of Food on Basque Culture
To Others it Is Just Food, For Me, It Is My Everything
By: Saioa Sarria

Since the moment I could take my first bite of real food, I have been and will continue to be what experts call a “foodie.” So what is a foodie you may ask? Being a foodie means having a refined interest in food, as I don’t eat out of need for food, but to crave my interests as a hobby. Growing up in a Basque family, it made my love for food grow not only in terms of eating good food, but to cherish and respect the people behind the food. When I was little, I never realized how good I truly had it, until I went to college where I dine on ramen and cereal most days. As I started getting older, it wasn't the food I looked forward to eating, but getting to be with my most favorite people in the whole world. Both of my grandparents on my dad’s side immigrated over when they were in their teenage years from the Basque Country. My grandmother immigrated with her mother and sister, to join her father who had been working in Boise, Idaho, to send money back to his family in Gernika. My grandfather on the other end, the oldest of seven, left his home after his family lost everything. His family relied on him to send his income back to Lekeitio to provide for his family. When you immigrate, you can’t just pack up a suitcase and expect everything from your hometown to be there. Yes, you can bring souvenirs, but it's not the same, being thousands of miles away from the only thing you have ever known. However, food, and yes I said food, has been a connecting force between the two countries that brings my entire family back to the greatest place in the entire world.

As I sit here now, away from my own home, living the college life most girls dream about; being in a sorority, studying something I love, and making lifelong friends, I still think about the amazing tapas and pintxos that my Aita or Amuma would make. It always signaled the beginning of every family dinner or peaceful night at home. It would lead to the most amazing food, always simple to me but to the rest of the world they would drop their jaws in awe. From my Amuma’s infamous ink fish, my Aita’s paella, and of course the best fish money can buy, I have always been spoiled. But like I said before, in my family,

good food doesn't mean you're spoiled, it means you have strong cultural ties and the greatest blessing of all, being Basque.

On both sides of my family, I am Basque. Both sides have unique stories that I can not wait to tell my future kids, and then their future kids, as it is a vocal point in what makes me and my entire family so special. Being Basque, you're connected to a large community that loves to share the same music, love, heritage, culture, and of course food as you do. For as long as I can remember, my family has been rooted in the Boise Basque Community, and my aita and ama always talk so fondly of those who have made this experience so memorable, one of those people being my aita's amuma. I never got the pleasure to meet her, talk to her, or just be with her, but her memory lives on in the hearts of all those she has touched. There will be moments back at my house, where I'll look over to the kitchen to see my aita cooking, and he'll just have this look on his face. A face of pride, emotion, and sense of comfort. That face stems from a memory that my aita will have of his amuma in the kitchen cooking food of her culture, that not even the richest people in the world get to dine from. He will get this smell, that brings him back to being a little boy, walking into his amuma's kitchen smelling what can only be described as heavenly. That's how my aita still describes his amuma to this day, the most heavenly lady that has ever graced this earth.

For me, food isn't something that I just shove down my throat running late for a class or just being flat out hungry. Food isn't a McDonalds cheeseburger or a taco from Taco Bell. Food is so much greater than the imagination lets it be. When I think about food, I think about the days where I didnt want to eat my amuma's lentils so she cooked me chicken noodle soup instead. Food is cooking amumanak, one of my favorite Basque pastries that I only get one time a year, with my amuma, who inspires me everyday to be my best possible self. Food is sitting on the barstool in my kitchen watching my dad put on his apron, ready to bring his childhood memories back to life. Food is all the countless family dinners with my sister, ama and aita, amuma and aitxitxe, tios and tias, cousins, and all the people who matter in my life. Food is the center of my universe as it brings all my favorite things together. I will never forget, three months before I graduated from high school, I brought my two lives together, the life of sports and athletics and combined that with the life of food and family when my aita made a massive paella for everyone to enjoy.

Food once again, is something that brings everyone and everything together to meet a common goal. Food has always been my life, as it reminds me of the culture that I get to represent everyday and connects me with the people I love the most.



Picture of family, in the Basque Country in 2022, having a family lunch together for the first time in years