

A good weekend

I spent last weekend puttering around. I made three different kinds of bread – a basic whole wheat, French bread for garlic bread, and pizza dough – and I got the house cleaned up a bit. I spent some time at the gym, got a haircut, and helped bring up a belly dancing costume for a friend. Sunday evening we had guests for dinner, so Xander and I cooked together. The menu consisted of pizza, garlic bread, and hot wings, and Xander made his blue cheese dressing as a dip. Our guests brought a very good salad to add to the mix. Somehow, at least for me, cooking together helps solidify what we love about each other. We play together in the kitchen, an imprecise dance in which we ask for help, hand over required ingredients, and are careful to avoid poking each other with sharp objects.

We've been playing with various pizza crusts for years and have never found one that really works. The biggest problem is that we often don't finish the pizza the same day we make it, so by the next morning it is soggy. Last time we made pizza I used a crust recipe from Moosewood Restaurant Celebrates. The recipe has to be cut at least in half, as it makes a lot of pizza dough. We tend to halve it and then make two pizzas with the dough, which gives a slightly thick crust. The next morning, after we'd used this recipe for the first time, I took a piece out for breakfast, expecting to have it fall apart. It held together and the crust was not soggy at all. Considering how much we had loaded onto that pizza, I was pleasantly surprised.

We have also been working on grilled pizza for about a year. The basic approach is make a pizza crust, brush one side with olive oil so it doesn't stick, throw it on the grill, cook until that side seems done, brush the other side with olive oil and flip it over, and then add toppings and cook until it all looks done. The smoky flavor from the grill adds nicely to the flavor of the pizza. This requires a somewhat burly crust

too, though, especially if we load it up too much with toppings. We have learned. This time the toppings were Portabella mushrooms sliced thinly, mozzarella, asiago, roasted pine nuts, and fresh garlic. The toppings were spread to cover most of the crust, but the pizza wasn't loaded down. That's one of the benefits of having a crust with some taste to it; you don't have to load up the pizza to have it taste good.

We used the pizza crust we had tried with the last pizza as the base for the grilled pizza and it came out very well. The small amount of honey in the crust added a touch of sweetness which balanced well with the smoky flavor from the grill and the tang of the cheese. The garlic was nice and not overpowering, and the mushrooms added a mellow note to the assembly of tastes.

The wings were a new experiment. I had never made chicken wings before, but a few weeks ago I cooked a chicken in the slow cooker with a sauce made of beer and sriracha. The recipe called for chili sauce, but I think they meant something with a little less bite than sriracha has, because the sauce was very spicy. It tasted good, but it cleared out my sinuses really fast. Anyway, once I had put together the chicken and vegetables and used as much of the sauce as I wanted, I still had about two cups of sauce left. I was not sure what to do with it, but Xander looked at it, tasted it, and said "Wing sauce!" We put it in the freezer. This weekend, since we knew we were making pizza and pizza goes well with wings, we decided it was the perfect time to use it. The wings came out very well, and the blue cheese dip was, as always, excellent.

I forgot to take pictures, but the food was quite good. I am still tasting garlic a little bit this morning. Earl grey tea with a hint of garlic is odd, but not unpleasant, surprisingly enough.

Cooking for more than just the two of us is nice sometimes.

Left to my own devices, I probably would have had popcorn for dinner. It's easy, fast, and I can season it any way I want to. Knowing that we had people coming over, though, meant that we had reason to play in the kitchen. It was nice having good company, especially company that appreciated good food, and the conversation never lagged.

We are both introverts. Xander is absolutely an introvert, and I am right on the cusp; I test as introvert or extravert depending on the day. We've had people in our house lately for the home study for adoption and it felt like an invasion. I had begun to forget that having people over, preparing for company and then enjoying the conversation and companionship, could be a very good thing. This weekend helped me feel like our house was our home again rather than someplace that people would be judging. I like our home, I like what we've done with it, and it feels more comfortable again now that we have had friends over to share good food.

Ramble

There are days when I just sit and stare at the computer screen, unsure what to write. I've been doing that lately. I need to just write anyway. It helps me process things, helps me make some sense out of a world that has none.

We went biking yesterday, just a short ride to pick up some bread. It was nice to just be out, speeding down a hill and eventually chugging back up it again. I found myself wishing that I rode more often. I might remember that once I have more time.

I've been taking a teenager to bellydancing. She's still very self conscious, just as I was to start with, but she seems to

be having fun. We've been working on a step that has been giving her a lot of trouble, and I took a few minutes out of practice to work with her. I discovered that if I held her hands and stood right in front of her, she could feel the movement and, having tried to practice the move for quite a while, something clicked and she fell into it easily and suddenly. Her feet did what she'd been trying to get them to do for weeks, and after that she could just do it. I'm not sure if it will stick until next week, but at least she's felt what it ought to feel like.

When I was teaching people how to use computers when I worked for the school district, I spent some time trying to learn how people learn. I wanted to be able to reach everyone, especially the people who were afraid of computers. I know how I learn, but I knew that wasn't right for everyone. I'm not a teacher at bellydance, but I have a few friends who ask me for help interpreting, because I explain things differently. With the teenager, I'm doing the same thing, just trying to put the information in a format she can understand. It's interesting and sometimes frustrating to show something in a way that wouldn't help me at all, but seems to help others. It's also a good exercise for me to try to see things through other peoples' eyes.

[Back to bellydancing](#)

Bellydance class started again last night. I'm a bit sore this morning. It's definitely a good sore, at least, one that reminds me that I did something to get sore. Right after Daniel died, everything just hurt, all the time, and it didn't matter if I did anything or not. That has mostly stopped. Feeling sore because I actually used muscles is something I

can really enjoy.

I'm taking both the beginning and intermediate classes this time. It's good exercise, and I'm dragging a teenager along to the beginning class by special dispensation from the teachers. I get almost three hours of exercise on a Friday night, which can't be a bad thing. It's good for me to work on the basics again, too, and to make sure my form is reasonable.

The classes are a very supportive community of interesting people. I think that comes from the teachers being so open and comfortable with what they are doing. One of them is really, really flexible and one isn't. There are people of all shapes and sizes in the classes, which means that pretty much no matter what you look like or how your body works you aren't out of place. They don't want us to work to the point of injury; they want us to learn to really enjoy belly dancing and not hurt ourselves in the process. The class is comfortable and relaxed and we still end up working hard. I like that anyone can ask questions and they are encouraged, since most questions are ones that other people are thinking.

I worry a little sometimes that I talk too much, but I figure someone will kindly tell me to stuff it if it becomes too much. Many people there are quite capable of that comment, and I wouldn't take it the wrong way.

We worked on grapevines in the intermediate class. We started with grapevines while using zills (finger cymbals) but we kept getting out of step because we were a little unclear on the directions, so after we put the zills away we drilled grapevines in a line and then all over the room, holding on with our pinkies to the next person in line. I didn't fall over, but going around the corners a few times it was a close thing. I ended the second class dripping sweat and feeling wonderful.

I'm working my way back to the things I love, and bellydancing

is one of those things. I'm generally a klutz, but somehow this kind of dance mostly overcomes that. A couple of years ago we did a whole piece balancing swords, which I never thought I'd be able to do. I'm still not sure about veil work, but I'm getting more comfortable every year.

It's good to be back!

Moments

I spent yesterday morning puttering around the kitchen and the afternoon hanging out with kids. A little tiring, but ok.

In the evening, Xander and I and a teenager who is the daughter of a friend of ours went to Controlled Burn's Compression, the yearly Fire Arts Festival. We went to see the belly dancers, essentially. Someday I will have enough energy to stay awake until the fire dancers actually go on, but they weren't on until 9:30 or so, and the night before had been more waking than sleeping, so this time it was just for the belly dancing.

We got there just in time for Hipswitch, which was fun. I enjoy watching them, and maybe next year I'll be back to dancing with them. Depends on how much energy I have at the time. I got to say hello to people I haven't seen in a few months, which was good. We sat on the grass while various ballroom-type dancing was going on.

I was surrounded by people. I was there with two people I enjoy. As I sat on the grass, though, I felt dislocated and lost. I didn't feel like I belonged anywhere, and I was overwhelmingly sad. I had a wave of missing Daniel more than usual, wanting him to slide his fingers between mine as he had

since he was tiny, to go for a walk and tell him all the strange and wonderful things I've seen. I wanted to make him laugh again.

In the heat, in the midst of people, watching people dance and talk and wander and eat and drink, I was very, very alone.

By Xander's request, the teenager came up next to me and stuck a piece of grass in my ear. It's very hard to be lost, unhappy, and wrapped up in my own head when someone is sticking grass in my ear. It made me laugh and jolted me out of the long minutes of sadness.

We watched a belly dancing group in from another area. They were technically good, but they didn't seem to be having fun. Not one of them smiled. The response from the audience was half-hearted. Yes, it was pretty, but it was a remote kind of prettiness, nothing anyone could connect to. It seemed somewhat disappointing.

[Asha World Dancers](#) came on, and the audience perked up. They were having fun, being silly, playing, telling a story, and the audience was coming along with them. The energy was totally different. People were laughing and paying attention, and the dancing was very good. When they finished and went offstage, the applause was louder and more energetic. The audience had fun. The first set of technically good dancers had come across as somewhat remote, professional, doing their job but not loving it. They felt like artists putting on a very careful show of their talents. Asha was technically good, too, but they seemed to be having fun, despite the heat. They drew the audience with them and made us laugh. That's performance on top of artistry, and it's a lot more fun to watch.

We went to dinner after watching the dancers. I didn't have the energy to be around that many people for much longer. The food was good and we relaxed. I got very sad at one point,

which still happens often. I try hard to control it, but sometimes there is no controlling the emotions, and I am learning to just let them wash over me. I'm not very good at that yet.

There are good moments and bad moments in every day. The bad are still really hard to deal with, but there are good ones even on the worst days. I am allowed to cry, to be sad, to feel lost and disconnected. At the same time, when someone pulls me back into the present, I am allowed to be happy and silly and goofy. It's a balance I haven't learned to walk yet. One step at a time, one foot in front of the other, learning to balance this new kind of life with a big hole in it, is not easy, but family and friends are helping me through.

Sometimes a moment is all I need to bring me back to realizing that there is good in the world or just that a teenager needs to have grass stuck in her ear, too.

Fears, bravery, and being sick

I've been sick for the past week or so. I'm not good at being sick. I get impatient with myself and my inability to do what I want to do, and I try to push too hard and end up sicker for longer because I won't accept limitations.

I get really frustrated with my fears, too. I am afraid of drowning, due to an unfortunate incident with a boogie board and some big waves at the Del Mar beach when I was very young. I decided I couldn't stand to be afraid, so I learned to swim well and then I learned to SCUBA dive. It turned out that I was afraid of the ocean even when I knew how to swim, so

diving in the ocean was very hard for me to get through, but I did, eventually.

I'm afraid of heights. I've discovered, though, that I'm afraid of heights between about six and thirty feet up. Above that, as far as I can tell, some part of my brain figures I'm dead anyway, so who cares? I fly, and I love it. I got up on a ladder yesterday in the snow to get a branch out from on top of a cable in the backyard. I was overbalanced a few times, but I've been working through this particular fear enough that I could steady my breathing and finish what needed to be done.

My first reaction to fear is the sensible one. Don't do whatever you are afraid of. There are reasons for most fears. Spiders, snakes, and scorpions, to name three.

After that first reaction, though, I generally get angry. Why should I let my fears limit me? I understand that sometimes I will have physical limitations and if I work hard I may be able to overcome those. Mental limitations, though, really tick me off.

I am afraid of standing in front of a mirror and dancing. I'm a klutz. I was in ballet for several years growing up and was told I just didn't have the body for it. My shoulders are wider than many men's, and while "petite" is a good word for my height, even in perfect shape I am not a tiny person. So why am I belly dancing? Because I was afraid. Because I still am, sometimes. Because I stand up next to others in my class who are poised and comfortable and absolutely stunning, and I challenge myself to learn, dance, and not fall over a veil (again). I'm learning, slowly, how to choreograph. I like moving to music. I may never be awesome at it, but I am getting pretty good. My hands don't hurt from zill drills anymore. I'm getting better at isolations. I'm even learning some of the harder moves, and I don't look bad doing them. I balanced a sword on my head, and danced with it, and didn't drop it.

When I was fairly young, I was fascinated by Nelson Mandela. He said, "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear." That quote still resonates with me.

I'm still learning to be brave. My braveries are small things, like cooking without a recipe or dancing in front of a mirror or an audience, or even flying, but I am learning to overcome fear where I find it, however hard that can be at times. There are also still things I am afraid of that I have not faced. I may eventually learn to face them, too.

What are you afraid of?