

One of my most favorite cookbooks of all time is *The Southern Living Community Cookbook: Celebrating Food and Fellowship in the American South*. The first time I read the essay below I literally wept. To be provided comfort through food is a gift beyond the meal itself. A casserole is the “icon of southern hospitality” as Sheri says so beautifully in her article. Whether it is a familiar casserole or the elegant southern comfort we serve at *The Party Bee*, “homemade conveys heartfelt”. Making these items brings me such contentment and I treasure that I can be a part of sharing that comfort and joy with you.

-The Party Bee



COMFORT AND JOY

Casseroles are evocative. Memories of great casseroles remind us that they can be an appealing, versatile, comforting one-pot meal. Recollections of mishmash casseroles that miss the mark cause us to snicker, if not shudder. Making a casserole is easy. You just toss everything into a dish and pop it into the oven. But making a great casserole requires thought about whether those ingredients will play well together. Consider an excellent casserole, full of fresh ingredients bound with a creamy, comforting sauce and topped with crisp, buttery crumbs—that’s good stuff.

A casserole is an icon of Southern hospitality that can rise to any occasion, high or low, with grace and aplomb. Casseroles are what we take to friends who need more than a meal. This is my ode to casseroles that appeared in the January 2014 issue:

A new baby is born. A loved one passes on. A family is forever reshaped. It is possible to take comfort. You can carry it in your hands, in a casserole dish.

When welcoming a new baby, a casserole gives the joyous, exhausted parents a glimpse

of family meals yet to come. During bereavement, a casserole offers a moment of respite. In times of upheaval, a casserole is reassuringly familiar. This meal asks no more of the beleaguered than to peel back the foil.

The day of my adored grandmother Madge Marie Reece Castle’s funeral was filled with equal parts immeasurable love and unspeakable loss. The family returned home to find the kitchen brimming with homemade food brought by friends and neighbors. I found my favorite chicken-and-dressing casserole, spooned some up, and picked a quiet spot where I could sit with my toddler in my lap. One bowl and one spoon for the two of us. It was the only moment all day that made any sense. When words don’t come easy, a casserole says plenty: “I understand that your normal life has come to a complete stop for a few days, so I’m going to pause mine long enough to make you something good to eat.”

Homemade conveys heartfelt. A reliable casserole can deliver comfort and joy, but it’s not the food so much as the gesture of genuine compassion. Casserole unto others as you would have them casserole unto you.