

Berry Tart

Although I have been enjoying summer's beautiful berries just as they are, this weekend I couldn't help myself putting them into a tart shell. The berries, of course, play the starring role – but without a yummy crust to back them up, the results would be disappointing. I found my solution taking inspiration from this tomato tart recipe I posted last month in France. With just a few tweaks in flour choices and a splash of maple syrup, I found just what I was looking for – a nice crumbly crust with just enough flavor.

Tart Crust

- 2 tbsp ground flaxseed
- 4 tbsp water
- 1/2 cups ground walnut meal
- ½ cup coconut flour
- 1 cup of buckwheat flour
- 3/4 tsp sea salt
- 2 tbsp coconut oil or melted plant-based spread
- 1-4 tbsp plant-based milk, amount may vary

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Combine flaxseed and water in a small dish and set aside. Measure and mix together all dry ingredients. Blend oil and flaxseed into flours, using your hands. Add enough plant-based milk so that the ingredients can be formed into a ball. Gently press into bottom and sides of tart pan.

Prick the bottom layer with a fork and place in the oven for 10 minutes. Prepare filling.

Filling

- 4 cups of berries (I used blueberries and blackberries)
- Juice from one lemon

- 3 tbsp tapioca starch
- 2 tbsp Maple Syrup
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp fresh grated nutmeg

In a large bowl, combine berries and tapioca starch, coating them well. Mix in additional ingredients. Pour berries into pre-baked tart shell and return to oven for 40 minutes.

Enjoy!

(stores well in a cool oven overnight without covering)

Coaching Stories: Stephanie

Clients who seek my support arrive with varying degrees of self awareness and knowledge of how the body heals. They also vary in their willingness to explore new territory together. It's always with great pleasure that I meet someone so ready and willing to explore and challenge their own beliefs. Stephanie came to my practice with considerable knowledge of Homeopathy and Gemmotherapy, and yet there was a gap between what she knew and how I practiced. It has been delightful collaborating with Stephanie on her health journey, expanding both of our perspectives along the way.

by Stephanie Widmaier

I am a housewife and piano teacher who loves my music and continuing to grow in my walk with the Lord – and, of course, learning more about Gemmotherapy! I've been married to my wonderful husband for fifteen years, and we have a sweet daughter in Heaven, whom the Lord continues to use greatly in my life.

My health issues and a desire to learn more about using Gemmotherapy motivated me to work with Lauren. I was hoping to add to the healing journey I've been on, as well as gain more understanding about using Gemmotherapy protocols.

One of the main things I was reminded of is that emotional awareness and dealing with emotions as they come up is a daily, lifelong "to-do," in order to make more space in the body for good health. I believe that I have a better awareness of my body's health, both physically and emotionally, and I feel a little more confidence about my health journey – that even working through a state of "stuckness" is more doable.

It has been a delight to work with Lauren! She is a great listener and asks questions that really cause a person to pause and think. I believe that I have the opportunity to be a better listener and to be more in control of my emotions.

If you're considering coaching, I'd say be ready to allow the sessions to gradually lead you into a different way of looking at yourself. Then be prepared to learn and apply!

Are You a Gemmo Mom?

"The odd thing about these deep and personal connections of women is that they often ignore barriers of age, economics, worldly experience, race, culture – all the barriers that, in male or mixed society, had seemed so difficult to cross."

– Gloria Steinem

In a recent conversation with my dear friend Christine, I shared a story from my time as a young mother. I hadn't considered the relevance of that story until now. During the

early 80s, the decade of shoulder pads and big hair, I was a mother of two preschoolers and an officer's wife. To most, that role meant staying home, stenciling the yellowing walls of the military quarters, holding teas and NOT having a career. I did have a career. Mine was in the field of education as an innovative and aspiring school administrator. It may come as a great surprise to young women today, but just thirty years ago I was often chastised and called on the carpet by my then-husband's commanding officers. My offense was not putting my husband's career first and foremost – challenging the status quo.

This was a painful period in my life because I struggled with wanting a meaningful career that was important and right for me – versus what was expected. What I was sorely lacked was a tribe – peers who thought like I did and, more importantly, took action. Thank goodness things have changed for military spouses. But I still remember with clarity the deep sense of isolation which led me to considerable self-doubt.

Forming community

My desire to challenge the accepted way of doing things has not faded over the years. Today however, it has moved to the arena of health. Due to my history, I feel a deep bond with the women I coach who find themselves trapped between imposed healthcare norms and their deep-seated beliefs that there is another way to achieve lasting health and well-being for themselves and their children. Like me in the 1980s, these women could benefit greatly from a community of peers who shared similar struggles and mentoring on navigating upstream against an often powerful current.

I began to envision ways I could do my part to mentor and provide a safe and forum to connect.

Last spring, I launched Gemmo Moms and literally connected moms from California to Kyiv. We met bi-weekly, and the

concept developed organically. Staying in tune with the needs of the group, I led them down a path of self-discovery to prepare each one to advocate for themselves and other mothers in their circle of contact.

New programs

This fall, I am thrilled to announce four independent Gemmo Moms series, which include:

- Everything Acute
- Conscious Conception and Pregnancy
- Coaching Skills
- Building Emotional Immunity

To offer this support to mothers of all ages and stages in life is so near and dear to me. I can only begin to imagine how different my self-image and life choices would have been if I had had such a group as a young woman and mother. It is my desire to be the support I would have loved and to encourage my students to begin similar groups of their own when they feel ready. I am so proud to share that some of my first students already have!

Who can join Gemmo Moms?

Any woman, at any stage of mothering, who would like to learn more about supporting natural immunity in children is invited. If you already have experience with Gemmotherapy, all the better, but if you are brand new you are equally welcome. Questions? Feel free to respond directly to this blog post so others can benefit from our exchange.

Hear what others say

Now that you've heard my perspective, I thought it fitting that you hear what a few of the original Gemmo Moms have to say about their personal experiences in the program:

“Gemmo Moms helped me feel connected to other mamas who are exploring Gemmos with their families. It feels so good to not be pioneering this alone! There are amazing women all over the world who are curious about and inspired by this healing path. Lauren provided a safe and comfortable space for us to develop more self awareness and support one another on our Gemmo journeys.”

– Kara from Austin, Texas, USA

“The Gemmo Moms program is an experience like no other! Lauren led us on a transformational journey that brought us to a greater awareness of ourselves in an incredible community of women. I highly recommend Gemmo Moms if you’re looking for a deeper, more connected way of helping family, friends, or clients with Gemmotherapy.”

– Christina from California, USA

“I loved my meetings with Lauren and the other beautiful women who formed our Gemmo Moms group. It felt like an anchoring moment of my busy week when I could settle while soaking in the precious information which Lauren generously shares.”

– Sarah from Toulouse, France

“Gemmo Moms gave me a tribe of like minded mamas who encourage, love and support me! It helped to build my confidence, grow physically, spiritually, mentally and emotionally, and challenged me to unlock a deeper part of myself and what I’m capable of.”

– Megan from Louisiana, USA

“I enjoyed connecting with other Gemmo Moms and exploring the further potential we have for better caring for others. Lauren is a thoughtful guide into insights that can be used in a practical way.”

Vegan Cassoulet

Cassoulet is a French classic and (traditionally) absolutely not vegan. But you can easily capture the essence of this comfort-food dish in my meat-free version. Even better on the second day, cassoulet can be made the night before and gently reheated, perhaps served alongside a hearty kale salad for a delightful weeknight supper.

Ingredients

- 1 cup dry white beans, soaked 8 hours and cooked until tender (drain excess liquid). Alternatively, use 3 cups canned white beans, drained and washed (consider cannellini or navy beans)
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 medium carrots, diced
- 1-2 cloves garlic, finely minced or crushed into a paste
- 15 mushrooms sliced (consider baby bella or crimini)
- 2 tomatoes diced and seeded
- 1 tbsp chopped sage or several fried sage leaves
- 1 tbsp chopped thyme (save some small sprigs for serving)
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 tbsp parsley, chopped
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 vegetarian bouillon cube
- Salt and ground black pepper to taste

Directions

1. Heat oil in a large, heavy saucepan.
 2. Add the onions, garlic and carrots. Add a pinch of salt and ground black pepper. Saute the vegetables for about five minutes, until the onions are translucent. Remove and set aside.
 3. Add coconut oil to the saucepan, and when heated, add the mushrooms. Brown mushrooms in small batches to avoid overcrowding, which leads to steaming rather than searing them.
 4. Add the tomatoes with the bay, sage, parsley and thyme.
 5. Bring the mixture to a gentle boil. Add more water if the stew is too thick. Turn the heat to a level where it boils gently.
 6. Taste to check seasoning, pour into an ovenproof dish and bake for 40 minutes at 350 degrees. Garnish with fresh thyme and enjoy!
-

Nutella Chia Parfait

I do realize that I am sharing a silly chia pudding recipe during peak veggie season. I get it. This wasn't planned, but now that I am home I am missing a little taste of Europe. And what's more European than Nutella, right? I gave up Nutella years ago when I changed my diet, but I still adore the combination of chocolate and hazelnut. If you are also a fan, you'll find this recipe an easy fix for your cravings.

It's been crazy hot here in Texas since my return, so I've been playing with some no-bake treats to get us through the long afternoons spent indoors. This one won the prize. I hope it does at your home as well.

Ingredients

pudding

- 1 cup almond milk + 1 cup coconut milk (or 2 cups of any of the richer plant-based milks, such as cashew or oat)
- 8 slightly rounded tablespoons of chia seeds
- 2 level tablespoons of raw cacao powder
- 2 heaping tablespoons of organic hazelnut butter (or replace with any other nut butter of your choice)
- 2 tablespoons of maple syrup, date syrup or honey (more or less depending on taste)
- 1 tea of vanilla or a pinch of vanilla powder

Fruit topping

- 2-3 bananas
- Ground cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon of the sweetener of your choice above
- Coconut oil or coconut butter

Directions

Mix all ingredients for pudding in a large bowl with a whisk, or shake well in a wide mouth mason jar. Let stand in the fridge for a minimum of 2 hours to hydrate the chia seeds. Overnight works well too.

Then, 15 minutes before assembling the parfait, heat coconut oil or coconut butter in a heavy skillet over medium heat. Add peeled and sliced bananas, sprinkle with cinnamon and drizzle with sweetener. Gently mix as bananas soften. You will want to cook the bananas just until they soften, yet still hold a bit of their shape. Set aside to cool.

When the banana topping is cooled, layer with chia pudding in small glasses and enjoy!

Why I Study Gemmotherapy: Angel Angelov

I get a lot of random inquiries from around the world about Gemmotherapy. There was something, though, about Angel's message last December that caused me to pay special attention.

Now that I've had the pleasure to meet him personally, it's clear that his motivation comes from a very special place in his heart. It will be with great curiosity that I observe how Angel's work with Gemmotherapy unfolds in Sofia. I would say that if anyone would succeed in bringing a brand new therapy to Bulgaria, it will be Angel.

by Angel Angelov

I am a young man who is enjoying life and trying to help others. I am from Sofia, Bulgaria – a little and very beautiful country in the Balkan Peninsula. Currently, I have my own practice of physiotherapy, massage and other ways to improve health. Also, I am working in a state center for people with disabilities.

I first heard of Gemmotherapy when I was creating a Facebook group for nontraditional medicine, and I was looking for cover picture. I came across an image with a small flower and "Gemmotherapy" under the flower. This was the first time I encountered this word. After this, I started to seek out more information about it, and fate led me to Lauren Hubelle and her practice.

I chose to study Gemmotherapy because it was something completely new for me and for my country, Bulgaria. I was

really interested to understand more about this way of helping people. In this process of studying, I've learned a lot about human self-healing possibilities. As I can see more and more people are opening their minds for new things, they are trying to avoid pills and medications. So I hope Gemmotherapy will become popular and reach a lot of people who need help and believe in their inner body powers.

I would like to discover the full range of Gemmotherapy influence and to see the results in my family, friends and patients. I am very happy with my choice. Currently, I am trying to promote Gemmotherapy in Bulgaria because I would like to reach more people. I will be happy to share my knowledge and experience with other healthcare practitioners and people interested in alternative medicine. Who knows? One day we could have association of Gemmotherapists in Bulgaria.

Now, I want to continue learning more details about the acting of Gemmotherapy extracts and acquire confidence in using Gemmotherapy. I would like to learn how to work effectively in difficult situations and with people who have multiple health problems to help them. For me, it is really interesting to learn more about Gemmotherapy in chronic cases.

My advice to anyone interested in Gemmotherapy is, "Just try it! It really works." I believe everyone needs to learn and try more new things during their lives. We have a lot of possibilities, a lot of choices – but most important is to find the best way for ourselves. There is no need to convince anyone. If somebody really wants to help themselves, he or she will do it by their own will. I can only tell people what Gemmotherapy is and how it can help them with many health issues.

This Journey's Growth

"In a forest of a hundred thousand trees, no two leaves are alike. And no two journeys along the same path are alike."

– Paulo Coelho

We are all on a journey, and each day presents unique opportunities for growth. Some journeys move you physically to distant lands. Some move you mentally through ideas, thoughts and emotions. And some journeys allow for both. Each journey, from the mundane to the awe-inspiring, offers unique opportunities for growth. And the trick is, those gifts may only be offered once. So let me share these two simple tips to reap all that is offered: remain present and remain open, and you will surely receive what is meant for you.

I have been on a two-month journey that has carried me to distant lands beyond what I could have imagined for myself – as well as familiar places. My journey has opened my mind to many thoughts, ideas and new perspectives. Some benefits have already begun to materialize, like new branches on the tree representing my work. Others have arrived in the form of seeds that may or may not develop with nurturing and time.

Here's what has materialized over my two months in Europe:

1. **Partnerships**

A totally unexpected and organic development is the creation of partnerships with two of my European students. While still in the early stages, there is a clear commitment to preparing recordings of the ten Foundations of Gemmotherapy modules in both Russian and French languages! While this will be a huge endeavor, it is a giant step forward to share my systematic approach

to restoring immunity. I am thrilled and so grateful to Brigitte and Lena, who will make this possible. Once we have a model established, it will be quite easy to set up further partnerships where there is interest.

2. **Gemmo Moms Cluj-Napoca**

Another branch developed quite organically with the help of Dr. Dana Campean and Coach Dumitrita Margineanu. The first Romanian Gemmo Moms group met during my stay in Cluj, and we filled the room with curious moms brimming with questions about their children. It was remarkable to be present for this inaugural meeting, and I can't wait to see how it grows and inspires future groups.

3. **A Publication Date**

My third book, *Restoring Your Immunity*, is now set for official publication in French by the Piktos Publishing group for February 2020. For you English speakers, please note my agent is actively searching for an English language publishing house to pick up the contract as well.

4. **A Fourth Book**

The start of my fourth book is official. With the brilliant support of my Romanian colleague, Dr. Neli Olah, I will create a clinical and physiological guide to the primary Gemmotherapy extracts. While this will be quite an endeavor, my plan is to have my work completed and ready for translation by May 2020.

5. **A Blind Study**

Also with the support and guidance of my Romanian colleague, Dr. Neli Olah, I have prepared a course which includes the first blind study of Gemmotherapy extracts. This study will be a continuation of my work with micro-dosing extracts for the nervous system. The study will be one of two planned over the next twelve months and will begin in September. More information will be available later this month.

6. **A French Retreat**

The notion of hosting a retreat in Ariege has been

hovering for a year now. This summer, I've made it so far as to identify the focus of the retreat, isolate two possible dates and finalize the venue. It's actually been a big dream of mine, and I couldn't be more thrilled to make this dream a reality with my international group of inspiring movers and shakers, Gemmo Moms.

Other developments – my new seeds – contain immense potential for growth, but they could also lay dormant or never sprout at all. It is no coincidence we are approaching fall, the season in which seeds are scattered, some sprouting in cool temperatures and others waiting for the warmth of spring. So, knowing which of these seed ideas will choose to germinate is something only time will tell.

Here are ideas that were born this summer:

1. **Internship Program**

I'm so excited about this idea that is showing some life this summer. It's been hanging around for years, and I knew it was just a matter of timing. It's too soon for details, but certainly, in the works this fall is an internship opportunity for my students ready to begin their own practices. Just the thought of this makes my heart fill with joy!

2. **Expanding My European Travels**

Now that a new frontier for my work has opened in Eastern Europe, my annual summer trip feels quite stretched. This summer's experience has led me to consider a more sustainable way to teach in both geographic areas. It has not yet materialized, but the seed of this idea is to return to Europe twice annually, teaching during winter in the west to include Belgium and France, and during fall in the east to include Romania and Ukraine. This makes sense in this moment, so until I gain more insight I am preparing to give it a test run for 2020.

3. **Teaching Polarity Analysis Homeopathy**

This is certainly not new, but this seed won't go away. And there is renewed interest in co-teaching Polarity Analysis with my husband, Joachim. He is responsible for building a widely circulated homeopathic software. Polarity Analysis, or PA, is the homeopathic remedy selection method developed by my mentor and our dear friend, Dr. Heiner Frei. If you are a patient of mine, you are used to the polar questions I ask about your symptoms. Coming closer to germinating is our teaching of this method together in 2020. The challenge for us will be to harmonize our very different teaching styles. If it's meant to be, how we manage this will open up for us.

4. **New Friends and Acquaintances**

Meeting new people, especially when you are awake and aware of the value, is like opening a present. No doubt there is a gift, a lesson, an insight or future connection to be revealed. Which one is often not apparent on first meeting, but over time is made known. I so enjoy this experience – especially hearing people's stories – and this summer I was not disappointed. From Belgium to Romania and Ukraine to France, I will carry home the seeds of these contacts. I treasure hearing the dreams of so many – and what each has done to realize his or her dreams is both inspiring and motivating.

While I have been off on my journey, you too have been on your own. Perhaps yours led you to a new geographic location or a journey within yourself. Where has your journey taken you? What have been your immediate benefits? What seeds have you been offered that may need time to germinate? The lessons from our journeys don't need "work" to be received. They only need your attention and a bit of solitude. Can you give yourself the gift of presence? Can you remain open wide enough to receive all that you are being offered?

It's been my pleasure to share my summer journey with you. Thanks for joining me.

A Tale of Two Sauces

I am a huge sauce fan, much to my husband's indifference. Like many passionate cooks, I believe sauce elevates an everyday, simple meal to special status. When perfect seasonal produce is plentiful, I am drawn to create simple meals of grilled veggies, changing things up with a variety of sauces. I don't mind eating zucchini or eggplant several times a week if I can create my own version every time.

So when my dear friend and Ariege Gemmo Mom came for lunch, the menu was simple: tossed salad with a citrus vinaigrette, grilled eggplant and zucchini, and steamed new potatoes.

The stars of the show, however, were my chard pesto and romesco sauce. While pesto has its origins in Genoa, Italy, romesco comes from a city called Tarragona in Catalonia, the northeastern-most region of Spain, only a few hours from Foix. Here how's you can repeat my vegan versions of those sauces at home. You will discover they complement pasta, polenta, rice and a wide variety of veggies.

Lauren's Romesco Sauce (Vegan)

Roast at 400 degrees:

- 8 Roma or 4 large heirloom tomatoes, sliced in half, seeded, roasted until they begin to fall apart
- 2 large sweet/mild red peppers, cut in half and roasted until the skin is charred

Allow tomatoes and peppers to cool and remove skin.

In a heavy skillet on medium heat, roast these items individually:

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup blanched almonds (the skins are fine but will add more texture), remove when lightly toasted
- 1 slice stale gluten-free bread, whole grain if possible, broken into pieces, remove when lightly toasted

Add to the bowl of the food processor:

- Roasted and skinned tomatoes and peppers
- Peeled and diced small shallot or smashed garlic clove (according to taste)
- Almonds
- Bread
- 1 tablespoon wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons flat-leaf parsley
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- A dash of cayenne pepper or 1 tablespoon harissa sauce (optional)
- Salt to taste

Lauren's Chard Pesto (Vegan)

- 1 cup of ground nuts (consider pumpkin seeds and almonds)
- 4 large chard leaves, stem and chiffonade
- 2 handfuls of basil leaves
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup full-bodied olive oil (the better the oil, the better the pesto)
- A splash or two of ume vinegar or 2 tablespoons nutritional yeast (these add a cheesy flavor and can be omitted)
- Juice of one medium lemon or lime
- Salt to taste

I prefer to grind the nuts first, setting them aside in a

mixing bowl, then blend the greens, basil and olive oil. This produces a more textured pesto. But please feel free to add all the ingredients to your food processor and process to your desired consistency. Salt to taste. This can be served immediately but is best if the flavors are given an hour or more to meld.

Pesto stores well for a few days, but it will thicken, so you may want to thin a bit with more oil or citrus juice.

Walnut-Crusted Tomato Tart

May I just say how delighted I am to have mastered a gluten-free, vegan tomato tart this summer? Picture-perfect, savory and seasonal tarts are a mainstay in French cuisine, and they typically involve large quantities of butter, cream, eggs and wheat flour. Thanks to Niki of Rebel Recipes, I have been inspired and succeeded in mastering a tart I could eat. And it was delicious. So many possible variations to try next! That includes zucchini, aubergine, spinach and artichokes, to name just a few.

Ingredients

Tart crust:

- 2 tbsp ground flaxseed
- 4 tbsp water
- 1/2 cups ground walnut meal
- 1 1/2 cups flour (I used a blend of oat and buckwheat)
- 3/4 tsp sea salt
- 1 1/2 tbsp coconut or olive oil
- 3 tbsp plant-based milk

Filling:

- 1 cup soaked cashews (soak for 1 hour in hot water)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water
- 3 tbsp nutritional yeast
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp Herbes de Provence
- 1 tbs. Dijon mustard
- 4 small cherry tomatoes, or 1 medium tomato halved and seeded, set to drain on paper towels
- 1/2 can organic chickpeas drained
- 1 tsp sea salt

Toppings:

- Small colorful heirloom tomatoes, cut in half seeded, set to drain on paper towels
- Drizzle olive oil
- Sprinkle sea salt
- Herbes de Provence

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. Make a flax egg by mixing the ground flax and water in a bowl. Set aside to thicken.
3. Pour walnut meal into bowl. Add flax egg, oil and almond milk. Mix well, using hands to combine ingredients and form a ball.
4. Grease a round, loose bottom pie pan with oil.
5. Using your fingers, press crust dough into the bottom and up the side of the pan. Poke a few holes with a fork across the bottom.
6. Bake for 10 minutes. Remove and set aside to cool while preparing the filling.
7. Place all ingredients for the filling in a high speed blender or food processor. Blend until smooth.
8. Spoon filling mix into crust. Level out with a spoon and

place tomatoes, pressing in slightly.

9. Drizzle with a little olive oil, herbs and sprinkle of sea salt
10. Return to the oven and bake for 25-30 minutes (until the base is crispy and the tomatoes are cooked and caramelized).
11. Allow to cool before removing the pan.
12. Tart is best served at room temperature and keeps well for up to 24 hours.

Enjoy!

Life as an Experiment

“Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do.”

– Mark Twain

This has served as my motto for at least the last two decades. It continues to serve me in the face of my own fears, lines from old stories, questioning from my family and even surprising bouts of homesickness. It continues to guide me because I am committed to living my life without regrets. If life is one big experiment (and I am certain it is), I have surely entered a new phase. Boundaries that I perceived to be real are continually revealed to be illusions. Visiting Kyiv last month was all about dissolving geographical boundaries. But there are so many other boundaries in our lives. Some of these boundaries protect us, and some, in the end, limit us from living life to its fullest. We can gain further inspiration from Twain in the way he continued after the lines above: *“Throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe*

harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover." I am.

While I may not have caught the full potential of those trade winds this past week, I did my best to explore, dream and discover all the riches here in Ariege. After six weeks of solo travel, my husband, Joachim, caught up with me in Toulouse. I was thrilled to see him for countless reasons, and at the top of the list was my excitement to share Foix. In summers past, we have based ourselves in villages outside of Lavelanet and quickly discovered the vast differences in climate and topography over a 30 minutes drive to the other side of a mountain. Foix was the home base I chose for myself last winter to finish my third book, and I quickly fell in love with the mountain views, the warmth of the people and the charm of this small city. Now we had a week off to set sail together.

Although I had known Day 15 of Tour de France would end at Prat d'Albis, just above Foix, I had not given it much thought. That is, until I realized it would literally pass along the street above our house. For any TdF fans, may I just share that we had a front-row seat for the approach to the final ascent of the day? And it was so simple to stroll up the hill, finding a seat along the stone wall to cheer the racers on with our neighbors. We were advised to arrive an hour before the riders were due, for the pre-race entertainment. Our timing was perfect. Just as we settled in, the caravan of wacky sponsor vehicles arrived, tossing out swag to bystanders. It was quite the thrill to see the riders arrive over the hill, with Simon Yates (winner of the day) already far ahead of the pack.

I wasn't too sure how we would improve on that impromptu viewing of TdF, but each day we've had a healthy dose of the natural beauty of our location. Never traveling further than 30 minutes by car, we still only put a dent into our list of options. There is just so much to see and do in this part of

Ariege. If we did nothing but follow the local markets, picnic and swim in the village streams, it would have been fulfilling enough, but there really was so much more.

Within this region, there are three magnificent prehistoric caves. We chose to visit the Niaux Cave, just a 20-minute drive from Foix, passing Tarascon-sur-Ariege. For years as a high school history teacher, these caves have been on my bucket list, but getting to the Pyrenees always seemed a bit out of reach. Now with the opportunity here, I have to say there was just a bit of hesitation. There was no doubt I really really wanted to experience that art, and at the same time, I really really hate caves, especially long, dark slippery ones. I will say in truth the experience definitely did not disappoint, and at the same time, I was delighted to see the light of day at the end of the tour. While I was prepared to be in awe, I really had no idea how powerful the experience would be. The number of paintings alone was surprising, but the attention to detail was astounding. Imagining life that long ago, and the scenes that took place as those paintings were created, is truly overwhelming.

The small town of Foix is a busy place year-round, with a cultural events calendar to challenge cities three times its size. There is literally something artsy happening every week, and lucky for us, our dates in town aligned with the Regional Folk Festival, the Jazz Festival, a weekend antique market and the African Dance Festival. Not usually a festival fan, here in Ariege I am quite comfortable sharing space with the few hundred rather than thousands who enthusiastically attend nearly everything offered.

JazzFoix was a real find, since Joachim is a jazz guitarist and performed for years with a band in Stuttgart before our move to Texas. He was delighted, and more than a little surprised that I had bought three-day passes for the two of us, with a commitment to attend the 9:30 p.m. concerts. Afternoon naps allowed me to power past my bedtime three

nights in a row, much to my own surprise! It certainly helped that the event was literally two blocks from our house. On the first night, we realized that in our twenty years together, we had never attended a single concert as a couple. To be sure, there was a bit of a learning curve, as Joachim is a front row, center seat kind of guy, opting for the full experience, whereas that was my worse nightmare. I prefer something midway back on the aisle, allowing for some perspective to take it all in. It was good that we had three nights to find our way to a good compromise. We enjoyed ourselves so much, we already have the dates on our calendar for next summer.

Scorching temps across France last week led me to make a pact to swim or wade into every stream or river encountered. It was a fabulous idea, and let me just say, I swam in water so cold it hurt even after I was out! Not so many years ago, I would have laughed if anyone had suggested I swim in anything less than 80 degrees. And to think of all I would have missed!

I love local art events and have attended some very special ones over the years, but last week I attended the most enchanting one ever. It was Vagabond Arts, hosted annually in the tiny hamlet of Baulou. Cars are left out on the main road, and the experience begins as you enter the forest paths. Every building in the hamlet, from the church to the barns, is put to use to display work from area artists. Each display was an installation in itself under the canopy of moss-covered beech trees. The effect was mesmerizing, and I left completely rejuvenated, as if I had been to a spa.

Wasn't it perfect that the weather cooperated with my plan to wrap up our week with a short train journey to the thermal baths at Aix-les-Thermes? We went from highs of 98 degrees to rainy skies and 70 degrees, and rain overnight on perfect cue. A 40-minute train ride to the ski resort village of Aix is a treat in itself, but then two hours in the thermal baths with spectacular mountain views puts it over the top. Talking the train is a must, because the last thing you want to do when

your bones are like jelly is to mess with driving home. If you needed another reason to visit Ariege, this should do it.

We have fallen more in love with Ariege on each visit, and we certainly dream of creating a second home in the area. However, with all of the unexpected events and changes in the last year, I have become immensely aware that how I will work in Europe is still unfolding. It would be lovely to make a second home base in Foix, but I think for the meantime, I'll need to take life in six-month chunks and see how this continues to play out. With that in mind, I do have a return ticket to Europe for February 2020. That ticket gets me to this continent. The where and for how long will need to make themselves known in the next chapter, setting sail beyond the safe harbor of home.

Invitations

"Destiny's interventions can sometimes be read as an invitation for us to address and even surmount our biggest fears."

– Elizabeth Gilbert

Sometimes, invitations can challenge our fears. Right now, I have received an invitation that has been developing over nine months in bits and pieces. For some time, I did my best to politely attend to the gentle requests as they arrived but refused to see the big picture they were forming. Instead, I choose to direct my focus to what appeared to be more important tasks. This summer, however, the gentle nudging is over and there is a tangible pull in a direction quite unexpected and to be honest, a little bit scary.

Have you ever received an invitation that you tried to ignore? I am sure you have. Like most things in life, invitations arrive with a variety of qualities. Some are tangible, printed on embellished papers, and some are spoken. Some demand attention, while others are subtle, arriving as hints, glimpses and whispers in your dreams. Invitations may arrive for a joyous celebration or to begin a friendship. Perhaps you have received an invitation to forgive someone from your past, or to take on a new responsibility at work.

It takes a lifetime to learn to receive each invitation with gratitude, then discern the right response. There was a time I thought every invitation was a gift from the universe and I was compelled to accept. I'm thankful to be beyond that stage. Now I know invitations arrive to help us clarify who we are, how we will spend our finite energy and what purpose in life will we fulfill. And in that, sometimes our answer is a resounding "yes" and other times a "no, thank you".

Back to my series of invitations. What is it that I find a bit frightening? I am six months out from my 60th birthday and have lovingly created the home I longed for in the sweet, slow pace of San Marcos, Texas. I can not begin to express how much I love this home, and even more, the fact that all of my children are nearby. I treasure our monthly family meals together and opportunities to meet my girls for lunch or pedicures on the days I ride to Austin with Joachim. What a gift. I recognize it because of the years we were a continent apart – or times when we were near but I was not emotionally present to reap the benefits of my dear family.

Why now, when I have created such a cozy nest for myself, am I being called in a powerful way to work in another continent? And not just the west of Europe, which is a second home to me, but now Eastern Europe too? I had accepted over the past years a life between Texas and Western Europe. Yet now, here comes this invitation stretching well beyond my comfort level, appearing of its own accord. It's no longer willing to wait

quietly in line – it wants my attention here and now.

I have come to know that all invitations are an offering. How they are answered is for me to discern. And thankfully, I have learned over the last decade to open the door to each request and let it sit a bit. Leaning in to see what it will serve, and whether this is a wise investment of my energy. It's quite a bit like checking the weather. That is, checking by stepping outside rather than checking your phone app. How does it feel? Will I need a jacket to be more comfortable? Or is it too hot or too cold, and I should just stay home?

And then there is the issue of travel. Although traveling is exciting, it can also be draining. If I must travel to share this message, there is clearly a limit, as I am not getting younger. Every time I share a plane with a struggling senior, I whisper a silent prayer that by the time I reach that age, those who need what I have to share will come to me!

You know, there is a famous homeopath, George Vithoukas, who over time created a thriving school on his home island in Greece. Now that's a model I could aspire to. But then, where would that be? In the French Pyrenees? In A village in Baden-Württemberg, Germany? Along the banks of the San Marcos River in Texas? Or perhaps the Carpathians?

Today, it seems too soon to tell. I sense more traveling is required before the answer arrives. This time feels like one of those days when you step outside and the air and sky are far too changeable to predict. While I love the potential of days like that, I am not so sure that I love the situation I am in.

Having just traipsed across Eastern Europe, it is clear the message I delivered is being well received. I am sharing a natural path for restoring immunity and reclaiming power over your own health. People here are not only ready to listen – they are ready to take action. What I am sharing doesn't feel

new. It is reminding them of how healing used to be perceived. So the importance of this journey is clear. What is not clear is how I can address my need for home – and more importantly, can I have my cozy nest AND travel farther than I may feel comfortable? My search for a home, a refuge and a place to retreat began early in my life, and the fear of getting too far from mine is hard to ignore.

So, what's a girl to do? Well, I'll tell you what I am going to do next. I am going to take a week off from teaching, clients and overthinking. I am going to enjoy time with my husband, who has just arrived, with the gorgeous backdrop of the Midi-Pyrenees. Today the Tour de France literally whizzes by our back yard, and next week the local jazz festival sets up one street over. I certainly plan to work in some hikes in the forest, a few swims in the river and cooking delicious meals together with local produce from the markets. As always, I'll shift gears as answers begin to appear, and perhaps a path will form that allows me to share what I know, wherever that leads me, while maintaining a deep connection with my family and home. It doesn't have to be an either-or – but I may need some occasional reminding.

Sweet Potatoes with Creamy Tahini Sauce

The pairing of creamy, steamed sweet potato with tangy, tahini topping is a match made in heaven. The simplicity begins with a short, accessible list of ingredients – and there is virtually no clean-up! Serve with a mixed green salad and you've got a weeknight winner.

Ingredients

- 3 lb sweet potatoes, any color (6 small or 3 large), scrubbed
- 6 Tbsp coconut butter or your preferred vegan butter, room temperature
- Juice from 2 limes
- 2 Tbsp tahini
- 1 Tbsp coconut aminos or tamari
- 2 tsp toasted sesame oil
- Kosher salt, freshly ground pepper
- Flaky sea salt
- Toasted sesame seeds and lime wedges (for serving)

Directions

1. Bring a few inches of water to a boil in a medium pot fitted with a steamer basket. Halve sweet potatoes crosswise if large and place in steamer. Cover, reduce heat to medium and steam until fork-tender, 25–30 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, smash together butter, lime juice, tahini, soy sauce and sesame oil in a small bowl with a fork until smooth, about 3 minutes. Season tahini butter with kosher salt and lots of pepper.
3. Arrange sweet potatoes on a platter or a large plate. Let cool until you can just handle them, then split open and generously spread tahini butter over. Season with sea salt; top liberally with sesame seeds. Serve with lime wedges to brighten the flavors

Enjoy!

Adapted from Bon Appetit's Sweet Potatoes with Tahini Butter