

# The New Sliding Glass Door

CHRISTOPHER TADROS

February 2020 was a month of firsts: the beginning of my second semester as a first-year college student, my first time exploring the concept of a fraternity at an American university, my first time competing in a ballroom dance competition, and the first time I was able to envision what my identity would be in college. I was riding all sorts of highs, feeling ready to take the rest of the semester full steam ahead. I left for a spring break trip on the first weekend of March with everything normal and returned to a world where everything had changed. Somehow in a week, everything I had worked my way up to was put on pause. We did not fret; we only thought we were getting an extra two weeks of spring break. I returned to my dorm room to pack enough winter clothes for these two weeks as the clothes I had brought to Costa Rica would not have sufficed, and I left the vast majority of my belongings at college. My dance partner and I told each other we would be sure to practice on our own so that we could stay at our best for our national competitions the first weekend after these two weeks off. However, we were later told that there would be no nationals and that we would not return to the classes we had begun. Instead, we had to return to our dorm rooms, pack our things, and leave campus indefinitely. Distraught, we entered the second half of March with little to no knowledge of what to do.

As the semester lulled on, my only source of comfort in the uncertainty of the pandemic was my new-found free time to experiment with all-new recipes. Before I moved into a dorm room, cooking was my life. I started at five years old in the kitchen with my mom making French toast and grew my skills and passion for cuisine as time went on. I would binge-watch hours and hours of chefs Gordon Ramsay and Anthony Bourdain, as well as Food Network's *Chopped*. Unfortunately, I only had time to cook relatively quick meals as an over-involved high school student. During the pandemic, however, I told myself I would embark on a journey to master what I had thought was an unreachable dish: bœuf à la Bourguignonne, beef bourguignon. I had watched Julia Child's *The French Chef* episode countless times and essentially had the recipe memorized, but the thought of creating something so delicate, with so much passion, and with such an intensive

CHRISTOPHER TADROS is a Human Physiology student at the University of Minnesota.

procedure, was almost unattainable. Rightfully so, as my first time attempting the dish resulted in nothing more than some soupy beef. As I continued to put far more effort into this dish than my schoolwork, the final result turned into something that surpassed any of my family's expectations. Letting them see my progress and sharing the final result together as a celebration was far more rewarding than the dish itself (but do not get me wrong, the dish was impeccable).

I was especially glad that by the time I felt that I had mastered the dish, it was warm enough for us to eat outside fully together, as my father was not able to partake in any of the trials and errors the rest of my family had seen me through. While so many people were furloughed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with an uncertain financial future, we were fortunate enough not to experience this. The expenses, however, were the new sliding glass door in the basement we installed so my father would not have to enter the main area of the house when he came home, or the Airbnb we rented when he felt it was not safe to even return home, or the countless bottles of face cream he used to relieve the mask and goggle imprints left around and under his eyes. For months, my father, a cardiologist, lived life separate from the rest of us. What many people were not aware of, is just how many heart attacks were caused or exacerbated by COVID-19. For a period of time, there were not enough tests to know if a patient who was coming in with a heart attack was COVID-19 positive or not. Every time I made food for us, I would leave his plate at the bottom of the basement stairs, and we would video call one another while we ate. Some days, he would not be home for dinner, and I would pack some extras for him later that evening, and other days I found the fridge full of leftovers that he could not come home to enjoy. It was heartbreaking, and sometimes infuriating, to see what he sacrificed for us and for the community when at times it seemed as if the community had no intention of changing their habits to make his life easier.

It is important to acknowledge the privilege I had to be able to dive so deeply into cuisine and culture and to not have had to worry about the expenses of doing so. As parents that had immigrated from Egypt to offer their children, me and my siblings, better opportunities than they themselves had experienced, my parents established a place for us to be able to explore. It is this exploration, perhaps, that primed me to deal with the uncertainty of my father in the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was the hope that by the time I could make an unforgettable beef bourguignon, that we would be able to enjoy it together. Thus, the feeling of finally being able to bring chairs outside spaced far enough apart that we were still safe,

but close enough where we could hear and speak to each other, was one of the most joyful experiences I have had. I know I will never fully understand the scope of my father's sacrifice, but it is my hope that the meal we shared together after four long months expressed my gratitude to him in ways that I would not be able to do verbally. It is because of him that I am where I am today, and he is who I hope to emulate in the future.