

Thursday, November 11, 2021
almost your 13th birthday
Wishing I was there with you

Sophia,

Do you still cook? Over the years, your mom has posted some photos of you on Facebook that show you cooking with your sister. I'm sending you \$200 in gift cards to a grocery store in Lynchburg. If you like to cook, why not pick one new recipe, study it carefully, and give it a go?

There's a chef from Scotland on YouTube named Gordon Ramsay. I've cooked for myself for years, but I learn plenty from his videos. Your mother used to enjoy steak sandwiches. Perhaps you can learn to make a proper steak sandwich for her. Just search YouTube for "gordon ramsay steak sandwich" to see all the ingredients and his techniques. By the way, if you decide to try it, he uses a cut of meat called fillet – also called beef tenderloin or fillet mignon. It's an expensive cut of meat; that's why I sent you plenty of money so you could try it if you want.

Before I met your mother, I dated a chef. She told me the real secrets to cooking are in the techniques. Anyone can buy a cookbook or find a recipe on the Internet, but it doesn't make them a chef. It's the technique, not the recipe, that really makes a difference. So why not learn some new techniques?

If you really want to be impressed, watch Chef Ramsay make homemade pasta. It takes a long time to develop his level of talent. But it's far better than any pasta from a box. And until I watched his videos, I was unaware I was making scrambled eggs wrong my entire life. Something so simple.

Chef Ramsay has a daughter named Tilly who's Morey's age. She writes children's cookbooks. I actually met her once. Well, that's a stretch. I saw her in her father's restaurant in Dubai. In Chef Ramsay's videos, he often cooks with his kids. I miss that. I wish we could cook together someday. Your mom is a good cook, but I can make a respectable Thai chicken pizza, crab fried rice, macaroni and cheese, and steak and eggs. I'd love to cook those dishes with you someday, or any dish.

Chef Ramsay is a professionally trained chef. He learned French just so he could study under the great chefs in Paris. You know what's funny? In one video, he challenges his mother to a cook-off and he lost. Despite all the fancy food he makes, he likes to cook the food from his childhood that his mother made.

If you cook something, please take some photos and share them. I'd love to see. Which reminds me, you still owe me a painting. Remember? I sent you a canvas and some paints once. I wanted you to paint an original for me. Don't rush it; paint from the heart. Decide what's in your heart and express it. Does your mom still have Lau Chun paintings? They're great, of course. But I always liked Catherine Cranford. Ask your mom about her. After all these years, believe it or not, I still have one of her originals from Hawaii.

I invited you to Abu Dhabi for Christmas 2021. I figured COVID wouldn't be an issue by then. Abu Dhabi now requires everyone to be vaccinated, including visitors. There are vaccines now for teenagers, but maybe I was too optimistic that everything would be resolved by Christmas. #sobexmas2021

A few years ago, I was spending time in Mexico City. I don't know if you have any opinions about Mexico. Some of it is dirty and dangerous, for sure. But I was staying in the Polanco neighborhood of Mexico City. It's not only clean and safe, but beautiful as well with Spanish Colonial Revival architecture. Nana Julie and your aunt Betsy met me there last year. For you to fly to Abu Dhabi would take a long time. But, just to let you know, you can fly from Lynchburg to Mexico City in only five hours. The flight stops just once, in Charlotte. Mexico is even in the Hague Convention. I know you don't know what that means, but it should make your mother's lawyer happy – it should – but I know it probably doesn't.

Have you ever heard of the famous sculptor François Rodin? His most famous sculptures are *The Thinker* and *The Kiss*. Even if you don't recognize the names, you probably know the sculptures. Anyway, the world's largest collection of Rodin's sculptures are in a museum in Polanco. Why am I telling you this? Maybe you don't care about sculptures or Mexico or cooking. But the world is a big place filled with many more things than you can imagine. Get out and see some of it. Surely, in the Venn Diagram of things that interest you and things that interest me, there must be some overlap somewhere.

I've seen your report card. You're doing well in mathematics, which is great. Perhaps it's inevitable; it's in your DNA. I would guess that, at some point your life, your mother told you I am a math weenie. If you ever need a math tutor, I'm one Skype call away. No one wants you to succeed in math more than I do. I'd love to share some tricks and hacks and even dumb math jokes.

Three statisticians are duck hunting. Suddenly, they see a duck flying by. The first one shoots, but his shot is one foot too high. The next one shoots, but his shot is one foot too low. The third one shouts, "We got it!"

Later, they're all having coffee at an outdoor café, watching people go in and out of the building across the street. They count 17 people going in, and 21 people going out. One of them says, "If four more people go inside, it will be empty."

As per usual, I'm enclosing some postcards and stamps. If you want to write to me, it's as simple as ever. Just write my name and my USA address ("Christopher Becker, PO Box 25246, Chattanooga, TN 37422") on the righthand side, and then write or draw anything on the lefthand side. Then put a stamp in the upper righthand corner and drop that puppy into any mailbox or bring it to any post office.

As always, all my contact info is here: <http://black.blue/contact>

I will iterate what I've always said. You have a father that loves you. If you ever said, "I don't even know my father", I wouldn't blame you. I used to joke that your first words were, "Where's dad?".

I admit that I don't know you, either. I want that to change someday.

I was gone all the time when you were younger. At first, it was my decision. I wanted to go far away to make money. But I always intended to come home to you. But then the decisions went to other people. I'm sure you have questions. I can answer them, but it all takes time. For now, just know that I never wanted your life to be like this. I did not ever intend for you to grow up without a father. You deserve more than what I can give. Hope you can at least have a Happy Birthday, Dagmar SoBe. Love You, Dad

