



Lifestyles

Living local and large in Loretto/ Lawrence County

By Emily Weathers Kennedy

When my husband, Kerry, and I first moved back to our home county, people often asked us why. The next question would be “Your husband drives *how* far?” We both would smile and try to answer as best we could. Sometimes we would say we loved the people here, many of whom are our relatives. Other times we would tell them that we thrive living on a farm, growing our own vegetables, fruit, and herbs, as well as freezing and canning the fruits of our labor together. We knew that a sentence or two could not describe this place that is as in our blood as the plasma coursing through our veins. Over time, several folks from other areas would drive through the county and end up on our farm in the outskirts of Loretto (It makes me smile to say this, but even Loretto has outskirts!). As they got out of their vehicles, we would watch them scan the land, their eyes pausing sometimes to catch a vista or a plant. They would then turn to us and say, “Now I get it!”

After folks get the beauty and land secret, they still wonder how in the world we can stay entertained in such a small place. All we have to do is to let them into our world, and then they understand.

When we moved back home, of course, we rekindled relationships from birth through high school. We also found that people were actually moving to Loretto, West Point, Leoma, St. Joseph, Lawrenceburg, and other outlying areas from places like Florida, Virginia, Michigan, and California! We asked ourselves how they found out about this place we call home. How did they leave families and amenities behind and choose us? What we did didn’t take nearly as much “guts” as those coming here knowing nary a soul. Talk about a leap of faith!

I am curious when I meet these families. After all, they *chose* Lawrence County. I ask them, “How did you find this place? Why did you leave your home? What is it about Lawrence County that drew you?” The answers are almost always a delightful affirmation of the advantages and pleasures of the place we call home.

Last May Kerry and I had the pleasure of meeting Eric and Michelle Lewis, a couple from California. Their story sounded so similar to many of the others we had heard, but of course, Eric and Michelle brought to us here something unique indeed. Like Kerry and me, they wanted a slower pace, land, and a lifestyle suited for a couple who are crazy about spending time together on outdoor projects. When they talked of growing their own food and cooking healthy meals with produce from the garden, we clicked immediately.



Alternative cooking instructor Michelle Lewis gathers spinach from her garden for the risotto.

Want to know more about Michelle and her alternative cooking classes? Visit her website at <http://adventuresinalternativecooking.wordpress.com>.



LASTING LORETTO FRIENDSHIPS FORMED OVER DELICIOUS DINNER: Kerry Kennedy takes his turn stirring risotto with Michelle Lewis, Emily Kennedy, DeAnna Ayers, Annelise Kennedy, and Sandi Pettus.

Michelle was way ahead of my culinary level. She knew of ingredients and methods of food preparation that I only experience in restaurants in larger cities. Over the next several months, she cooked meals for us and other friends and delighted us all with her skills. She explained that she had been a caterer, but she also recognized that people are healthiest when they eat foods prepared with certain *alternative* ingredients.



Mother-daughter team Emily and Annelise Kennedy learns to clarify butter as Michelle Lewis instructs.

As she tested the waters with her burgeoning circle of friends, an idea crystallized in her pretty head, and she called me one day and told me, “I want to start an alternative cooking school and offer workshops to teach people how to cook and eat better!” She could hardly contain the ideas that tumbled one by one out of her mouth. I remember, “We’ll grow our own food to use in the classes! Some workshops can be outdoors! We could take trips to organic farms! I’ll start a blog with great photography!” My mind reeled with, “We can bring people from the entire area together! Bring new people in! Learn to cook gourmet dishes!”

Wednesday night Kerry, our daughter, Annelise, and I joined friends for Michelle’s Adventures in Alternative Cooking reduction sauce workshop held on her beautiful farm in Loretto. She had enticed me with the concept for the class: ***Learn to make a reduction sauce with wine resulting in an Italian dish called Chicken Marsala.*** As a lover of Italian food, my family and I were instantly intrigued.

When you go to an Italian or French restaurant and experience one of their many intricate and delicious sauces, you know there are flavors that burst in your mouth but can’t always identify what they are because they are so complex. These sauces are usually made by a method of *reduction*, which means they start out as a larger volume liquid, with say a broth base, and are cooked at high temperatures to reduce the liquid into something thicker and more flavorful. Into the broth go spices, alcohol, clarified butter, and other ingredients. They are simmered until the sauce thickens. Michelle told us that you must be patient to make a reduction sauce; sometimes you must stand for quite a while to allow the liquids to reduce. Some chefs, particularly those cooking French food, make sauces that are reduced for hours with a lid used to

prevent evaporation.

Our reduction sauce took around ten minutes. Not bad for something that made our mouths water with the beautiful aroma wafting through the air as we took turns stirring. According to Michelle, “Most great “flavors” in food comes from aromas in the nose rather than the mouth. (Ever notice how you can’t fully taste the food when you have a stuffed up nose?)”

Michelle paired the Chicken Marsala with Spinach Risotto. She mentioned on her blog that “The risotto (also known as arborio rice) was also a learning opportunity since most hadn’t tried their hand at making this saucy kind of rice. Making risotto is more of a hands-on art in contrast to making rice (in which you boil it and put on the lid). Risotto requires that you add liquid a cup at a time until the liquid is absorbed. It can take up to 5 cups of liquid for a cup of risotto. You add the liquid until the rice is soft and not al dente. We finished it off with Parmesan and spinach. It made a nice accompaniment to our chicken.”

One of the joys of attending Michelle’s workshops is the pleasure at the end when you sit down to enjoy the fruits of your labor. This time, none of us were prepared for the taste sensations erupting into our mouths with each bite. We could taste the sherry, the marsala wine, the batter-free chicken, the garlic. As we chewed, we noticed the creamy texture of the risotto. The parsley and lemon, added at the end of the cooking process, lent their own unique flavors, enhancing the



New Orleans native Sandi Pettis browning the butterfied and flattened chicken breasts as Annelise Kennedy stirs the risotto.

already-delicious dish!

Whether you attend one of Michelle’s workshops, volunteer at the church or school bazaar, exercise in a fitness class or yoga class, participate in one of the local club events around the county like the Lioness Club Taste Fair or the Lions Club Pancake Breakfast, or build a campfire along Factory or Shoal Creeks and cook out with your friends, ***the key is to enjoy this special place – with our extraordinary local people – doing ordinary and extraordinary things.***

One of my greatest joys is bringing the “new” people in Lawrence County together with the “old.” Each time we cook together, exercise together, sing together, laugh together, we enhance our quality of life. The threads of our collective backgrounds weave together, making the fabric of life here stronger and much more beautiful with every stitch.

This is the first of a series of articles that celebrate living in Lawrence County. My editor has asked me to share some of the goings-on that make me so excited about being here. Next time I will explore some fun community activities that celebrate the body and mind through healthy living and fitness.

Emily Weathers Kennedy is a freelance writer, blogger, artist, photo stylist, and decorator. She often contributes to the Advocate. Emily lives with her husband, 3 dogs, and 2 cats and writes from their farm in Loretto.



The secrets to reduction sauce are revealed! Eric Lewis, Michelle Lewis, DeAnna Ayers, Sandi Pettus and Emily Kennedy prepare to savor the fruits of their labor.

KIDS have all the answers

Renay Fernandez’s Pre-K, David Crockett Elementary



ISAIAH HALL
What makes you mad?
“When Caleb knocks me off of his bed. I smack him every time.”



AUBRI CARTER
What kind of Easter dress will you have?
“Pink, with ruffles.”



BRITANY MCGILL
Do you like spring?
“No, I like summer, because I get to play in the pool at my Nana’s house.”

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