

KITCHEN OBSESSIONS?

Shelli Bell

I have some big questions. The biggest one at the moment is: At what point do you consider your dopamine agonist to be a problem? I was going to phone my doctor to discuss this again because I'm concerned I'm becoming a tad compulsive. I thought it might be a problem when I when I started waking up at 2AM to obsessively troll the internet. I am fixated day and night on one thing. I daydream, fantasize and spend a large amount of time on upgrading my ability to gratify this obsession.

You see, I am a compulsive baker. Those 2AM awakenings bring thoughts of "I wonder how much a used commercial oven would be on Craigslist?" and "I wonder if I have space for a 12 qt. Hobart mixer in my dining room?" Just writing this sent me to ebay for "research." Guess what I found? A used 20 quart Hobart! An hour away! Cheap! I joke about this to friends and they look a little panicked. No, not because they are concerned about me. They are concerned for themselves.

I sell baked goods at my local farmers' market and I need guinea pigs for a never ending supply of bread, pastry, pie, muffins, scones, cookies, cake and brownies.

As the holidays (I am American so I do include Thanksgiving. It is the best holiday of all and a hassle free dress rehearsal for Christmas.) approach, this has ramped up to a fever pitch. I awoke at 3AM one night last week to order a book on cream pies and ended up ordering 7 baking books. They're like potato chips. They are also so beautifully photographed these days that they really ought to be classified as porn.

So now as I bunk down for the night I wonder: Is a compulsive behavior a problem if no one gets hurt, nothing gets broken (but eggs)? If everybody is happy except my sainted physical therapist who wonders what I've been doing and I give her a box of raspberry almond rugelach and lemon tarts with a sheepish grin?



ALMOND CRESCENTS

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Ingredients

1lb. almond paste (not marzipan)
9.4 oz. sugar
2 egg whites
 $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. vanilla extract
 $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. almond extract
2 cups sliced almonds

Procedure

Preheat oven to 350F (180C, Gas 4).

Mix almond paste and sugar, slowly add egg whites and extracts and beat until mixture has no visible lumps left.

Pile sliced almonds on a tray or large plate.

Roll golf ball sized pieces of dough in the sliced almonds one at a time to coat them.

Lightly roll the balls back and forth to make a cylinder.

Fold them into crescent shapes and place on a parchment lined baking sheet.

Bake 12-18 min until they are a golden color



Then I remember this is who I used to be before my dopamine leaked away. Before life changed. I used to get up on a Saturday, scribble a plan on the back of an envelope, go shopping and start baking and cooking until I either ran out of ingredients or ran out of steam. Then I invited everybody I could think of over to eat. It was a long time ago and I have missed me.

So maybe that 20 quart Hobart that I'm picking up in New Jersey on Sunday and the 15 lb. of tart Michigan cherries that I ordered yesterday (Christmas pies!) are more than I require to be me, but I'm ok with that. I am all too aware that I don't have another 50 (or 40, or 30, or maybe even 20) years to bake pies for my family, friends, neighbors, and random but grateful strangers at the market.

This Thanksgiving I gave thanks for my medication and the years of second chances it is going to give me. I'm thankful the solstice, Christmas and New Year are coming, bringing light and time with those we love. I'm mostly thankful for new beginnings, love and for almond crescents.

