

I love a good costume. Maybe that's why I love Halloween so much. However, you don't have to wait until Halloween to have fun with dress ups. If you keep your eyes open, there are costumes everywhere. Unfortunately you are most likely to see the under-six set wearing them. Think little girls in fluffy pink, tutus-like skirts and boys in Batman t-shirts.

When he was a little boy, my brother John dressed in costume almost every day. His favorite was Superman. Due to some miscommunication, both grandmothers gave him a Superman suit for his birthday. Not a problem, Johnny was just fine with that. If one was in the wash, he could still suit up.

Along with the man of steel, at least once a week he would appear at breakfast in full Daniel Boone or cowboy regalia. Sporting a coonskin cap or cowboy hat, fringed shirt and jeans, he would swagger into the kitchen. Although it was clearly never first or even second choice, when there were no other options, Batman graced our presence.

Then there was that dreadful day. I'm glad I'd already left for school and didn't witness the trauma. Whether the story is nothing more than family legend or true, I'll never know. Anyway, John showed up at his friend Richard's house in jeans and t-shirt. Since she'd rarely, maybe never, seen him in civilian clothes, Richard's mom asked him, "Where's Superman today?" Without missing a beat, Johnny replied, "Both my Superman suits are in the wash. My mother told me I had to be Clark Kent today."

When he started kindergarten or maybe it was nursery school, John gave up his costumes. There was no particular drama. After hundreds of wearings and washings, I'm guessing they fell apart. Maybe the dog ate his coonskin cap or he lost his cowboy hat at the playground. Then again, he might have simply outgrown them – physically or metaphorically or both. These things happen. While I hope not, it's possible some school administrator put the kybosh on super heroes in the classroom. Although they later reneged, I can confirm that those very same administrators outlawed miniskirts at the high school.

Maybe we never actually give up costumes. Instead, we change the characters we play. Could it be that a hungry dog or bureaucrat does nothing more than nudge us into the inevitable next rendition of ourselves? Wonder Woman changes into bookish nerd or cool bohemian and then morphs again into corporate lawyer. Batman becomes an athlete and prom king, transforms into a Peace Corp volunteer and changes once more into an engineer.

Whether you're a teenager in a ratty t-shirt or a Wall Street type in an Armani suit, your clothing sends a message. Admit it; you could just as easily don a pair of jeans as yoga pants, a button-down shirt as a mock turtleneck. Whether it's true or not, yoga pants tell the world you are sporty and fit – or just so busy you don't have time to change your clothes after class. The mock turtleneck? It's your proclamation that you will indeed be the next Steve Jobs.

With Thanksgiving just around the corner and my kitchen all but done, it's time for me to put on my red apron. What does that say about me?

Happy cooking and bon appétit!



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Savory Smashed Sweet Potatoes

It's not too early to start thinking about Thanksgiving. I've never been a fan of sweet potatoes with marshmallows. If you are of the same mind, add this savory dish to your Thanksgiving menu. Enjoy!

Serves 8

4 tablespoons butter, cut in small pieces plus more for the pan
About 3 pounds sweet potatoes, scrubbed
4 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature and cut in small pieces
1/4 cup sour cream
4 ounces cheddar cheese, grated
2 ounces parmesan cheese, grated
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Put the rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or foil. Generously butter a 2-quart shallow baking dish.

Prick each potato several times with a knife, place them on the baking sheet and in the oven. Reduce the heat and bake at 375 degrees until soft, 1-1 1/2 hours. Remove from the oven and set aside.

When cool enough to handle but still warm, halve potatoes and scoop the flesh into a bowl. Add 3 tablespoons butter, the cream cheese and sour cream, sprinkle with the cheeses and season with salt and pepper. Use a masher to smash the potatoes and combine the ingredients. Spread the sweet potatoes in the prepared baking dish and dot with the remaining butter.

Can be made ahead to this point, cooled to room temperature, covered and refrigerated. Bring the potatoes to room temperature before baking.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Bake the sweet potatoes at 350 degrees until piping hot, about 30 minutes.