This album celebrates the life and work of Mildred Covert and her contributions to Jewish food culture in the South.

Columns and articles excerpted here were originally published in the *Times-Picayune* during the years 1985 to 2004, with many of the early articles being written with the late Sylvia Gerson.

Excerpts are printed here courtesy of the *Times-Picayune*.

Booklet compiled by Samantha Burns, Beth Baron, and Susan Tucker.

Edited by Beth Baron, Samantha Burns, and Crystal Kile.

Special thanks to the Newcomb Foundation, Crystal Kile, Lindsey Tubbs, and David Emerson.

Copyright 2004 Newcomb College Center for Research on Women

Publication of this booklet was made possible by a grant from The Newcomb Foundation. The 2004 Culinary History symposium honoring Mildred Covert was made possible by a grant from the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities.

The culinary history symposium held April 1st at the Newcomb College Center for Research on Women featured a talk by Dr. Marcie Ferris, Visiting Professor of American Studies at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, on the topic of “Southern Jewish Foodways.” A recording of Dr. Ferris’s lecture is available in MP3 format on the Newcomb College Center for Research on Women website.

Newcomb College Center for Research on Women
Newcomb College
Tulane University
New Orleans, Louisiana 70118
504 865 5238 voice
504 862 8948 fax
nccrow@tulane.edu
nccrow.tulane.edu

Table of Contents

Introduction............................................................5
Rosh Hashana..........................................................7
Yom Kippur................................................................11
Sukkot....................................................................15
Hanukkah...............................................................19
Purim ......................................................................23
Passover.................................................................27
Shavuot.................................................................31
Memories of Life Lived Around Food.....................34
Introduction

This booklet celebrates the work of Mildred Lubritz Covert who has carried the Jewish cooking of New Orleans to many parts of our world. Coauthored with Sylvia Gerson, her books include The Kosher Creole Cookbook (1982), The Kosher Cajun Cookbook (1987), The Kosher Southern-Style Cookbook (1993) and A Kid’s Kosher Cooking Cruise (1997). Reviewed in cities across the U.S. and in Israel, these books tell of the cooking of our homes, adapted to the dietary laws of the kosher kitchen.

We also honor here the memory of Sylvia Gerson who died on April 19, 2003 at the age of 87.
Mildred
Mission Beach, California, 1945
Rosh Hashana

Rosh Hashana commemorates the creation of the world, the beginning of life, the beginning of the year (according to the Hebrew lunar calendar) and the beginning of many festive occasions.

For Rosh Hashana, traditional foods are the round hallah bread symbolizing the continuous cycle of life, honey to add sweetness to the coming year, and carrots, which are called “merin” in Yiddish, meaning to “increase” as in one’s fortune and children.

New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 12, 1996.

Memories

We can remember when the summer was not yet over and we were still thinking of swimming, sunning and fishing and our mothers would announce, “Do you know the high holidays are almost here?” With that question began the planning and preparation for Rosh Hashana, the Jewish new year.

As children, we sat at our own table since only the adults used the good china and silver. But we didn’t care, because all of the brothers, sisters and cousins couldn’t wait to start eating the delicious food our mothers and aunts had prepared.

This was how our new year began, year after year. Now, as we set the children’s table for our grandchildren, we know the new year will begin for them the same as it did for us, and that the traditions of our forefathers continue with each succeeding generation.

Yom Tov Hallah

Yields two loaves

Hallah recipes and baking methods abound. Whether you prefer the hand-kneaded traditional egg recipe, a quick food processor method, or a wheat flour version, nothing says “yom tov” (holiday) like the warm yeasty smell of rounded golden loaves coming from the oven. The aroma and homemade taste are unforgettable.

3 packages active dry yeast
1 1/3 cups warm water (100 to 115 degrees, approximately)
1 tablespoon sugar
1 tablespoon coarse salt
3 tablespoons softened non-dairy margarine
3 eggs
5 to 5 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 egg yolk mixed with 1 teaspoon cold water
poppy seeds

Proof the yeast in the lukewarm water in a large bowl. Add the sugar, salt, margarine, eggs and five cups of flour, a cup at a time. Beat thoroughly with a wooden spoon or with your hands. Gradually add more flour until the dough is very stiff. Turn the dough out on a board sprinkled with flour. Knead until the dough is smooth and elastic, approximately 10 minutes.

Place the dough on a very large greased bowl, and turn to coat the surface with margarine. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place until doubled in bulk, about one to two hours. Punch dough down and divide into six equal parts. Roll each portion into a rope about one inch in diameter on a lightly floured board. Braid three ropes together and twist into a circle and pinch ends together to make two round loaves. Place the breads about six inches apart on a greased baking sheet. Cover and let rise in a warm place until almost doubled in bulk. Brush the top of the loaves with the egg wash and sprinkle with poppy seeds.

Bake in a preheated 400 degree oven for 35 to 45 minutes, or until loaves sound hollow when tapped with the knuckles. Cool on racks.
**Carrot Tzimmes**

Serves 8 to 10

*Tzimmes is a general term for a sweet vegetable, or meat, dish. It also means “a big fuss.” But there’s no “big fuss” to serve this tzimmes as a holiday side dish.*

- 2 pounds carrots
- 1 cup orange juice
- 4 tablespoons non-dairy margarine
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped dried apricots
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch, dissolved in 2 teaspoons cold water

Peel, trim, and slice carrots into one-fourth-inch rounds. In a large skillet, over moderately high heat, bring orange juice, margarine, honey, ginger and salt to a boil, stirring until blended.

Add carrots, reduce heat to medium low, cover and simmer 10 minutes. Stir in apricots, cover and cook until carrots are tender, five to eight more minutes. Remove from heat. Stir in cornstarch mixture. Return to heat and cook, stirring constantly, until thickened.

**Honey Bonbons**

Yields 6 dozen honey cookies

*The giving of honey is a long-standing tradition that symbolizes the wish for prosperity and the universal hope that our lives will be sweet in the New Year. It is also a reminder that family members, especially at holiday time, are together, if not in person, in spirit and thought.*

- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 cup honey
- 1/3 cup peanut oil
- 4 cups unsifted flour
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda

Beat eggs until light. Gradually add the sugar, beating well after each addition. Blend in the honey and peanut oil. Sift together the flour, cinnamon and baking soda. Add to the honey mixture and blend well. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto oiled baking sheets. Bake in a hot oven, 400 degrees, for eight minutes.
Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the holiest and most solemn day of the Jewish year. It is a day of fasting and repentance for sins. The fasting begins at sundown and lasts until the first stars appear the following night. No food or drink, including water, is allowed, and the entire day is spent in prayer.

Food is not associated with a day of fasting, yet the food served before and after the fast is very important. Designed to minimize thirst and discomfort during the fast, the food served before it is delicately spiced, with less salt and other seasonings than most meals.

New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 20, 2001

Memories

In our household .... It was a way to break the fast known mainly to Southern-born Jews, who some claim are a breed all their own.

You see, we had Pearl – our cook/housekeeper/nanny, all rolled into one. She came as a teenager from a small town in Mississippi to seek her first job in the big city. She found us. We found her. It was an alliance that lasted 40 years.

Grandmother took Pearl under her wing, and soon Pearl knew as much about cooking kosher as anyone. But she blended some innate knowledge of down-home, Southern soul cooking into the Old World recipes. So, waiting for us after services was Pearl’s feast.

First there were ice-cold Coca-Colas for everyone. We alternated year to year from dairy to meat and if we had dairy, there was Creole cream cheese and Pearl’s cheese grits alongside Grandmother’s pickled herring and noodle kugel. If there was meat, it was Pearl’s fried chicken and a large bowl of potato salad alongside Grandmother’s brisket roast, sliced thin with rye bread on the side.

The long, braided challah, which on Yom Kippur is symbolic of the long ladder to heaven, lay beside the French bread Pearl thought was a necessary accompaniment to a roast. The meal was always the best of both worlds – a mix of Southern soul and European dishes. We Southern Jews know it is a combination that doesn’t get any better.

New Orleans Times-Picayune, October 2, 2003
Vegetarian Cholent

Serves 8

Cholent is a hearty stew served on the Sabbath, also a day when no cooking is allowed. It is a slow-baking dish that is ideal for Yom Kippur, one that can be waiting for you at the end of the fast day – warm and ready to serve. Many cholents are made with meat. This is a vegetarian one made with a pareve (meatless) chicken-flavored soup mix and herbs so the meat is not missed.

3 cups (about 1 pound) dried large lima beans
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
4 garlic cloves, minced
3 large onions, thinly sliced
6 celery ribs, thinly sliced
4 large potatoes, peeled and quartered
4 carrots, peeled and thinly sliced
2 bay leaves, crushed
3 tablespoons instant (pareve) chicken-flavored soup mix
8 cups hot water
salt and pepper to taste

Soak the beans overnight in water to cover; then drain.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. In a large heavy Dutch oven or pot, heat the oil and saute the garlic, onions and celery until tender. Add the potatoes, carrots, beans and bay leaves. Dissolve the soup mix in one cup of the hot water and add to the vegetables with the remaining hot water. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Cover tightly; bring to a boil over medium heat, then bake in the oven for 30 minutes. Reduce the heat to 250 degrees and cook overnight.

Smoked Whitefish Spread

Makes about 6 servings

Smoked fish is a favorite food on the break-the-fast table. This spread is a perfect topping for bagels, rye bread or crackers.

8 ounces whipped cream cheese
1/3 cup flaked smoked whitefish
2 teaspoons chopped fresh chives
2 to 3 tablespoons sour cream
freshly ground pepper to taste
cayenne pepper to taste

Mix cream cheese with whitefish and chives in a small bowl. If spread is too stiff, stir in sour cream, a tablespoon at a time. Season with pepper and cayenne. Refrigerate until ready to serve.
Sour Cream Coffee Cake

This recipe for a light-as-air coffee cake has been passed down from one generation to the next. It’s a dessert worthy of ending any dairy meal.

- 2 1/2 cups sifted cake flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- pinch salt
- 1/2 pound butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 eggs
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon lemon extract

**Topping**

- 1 cup finely chopped pecans
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 cup sugar

Mix pecans, cinnamon and sugar together and set aside.

Sift the dry ingredients together and set aside.

With electric mixer on medium speed, cream the sugar and butter together until thick and smooth. Add one egg at a time to the batter; add sour cream and mix well until blended. Gradually add the sifted dry ingredients and then the flavorings.

Grease a 9-by-13-inch pan. Pour one-half of the batter into the pan. Sprinkle one-half of the topping over the batter. Pour remaining batter over topping, spreading it carefully to even out (this is a thick batter). Sprinkle rest of topping over top. Bake at 375 degrees for one-half hour or until toothpick comes out clean.

When cake cools completely, cut into squares while still in the pan. Remove squares and place into paper baking cups if desired.
Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, is the Jewish autumn harvest festival. It is the most joyous and the longest of the Jewish festivals and is quite a relief after the solemn celebrations of the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

Sukkot is a time when Jews suddenly become builders. Old and young join together to drag lumber, hammer nails, gather branches, hang fruits and vegetables and erect a Sukkah, a booth or hut, which represents the temporary dwelling the Jews lived in during the time they wandered the desert and lived in tents.

The foods eaten during Sukkot reflect the bounty of the harvest. A wide variety of casseroles, rich stews and filled pastries featuring autumn vegetables and fruits are typical fare.

New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 23, 1999

Memories

I’ll never forget the first Sukkot we decided to build our own backyard Sukkah.

Now, my dad was a tailor with manicured nails and “golden” hands that were capable of sewing such small stitches you could barely see them. That should have been a clue that he was no carpenter. Yet, every year we heard the same argument from Mother. “I can’t understand why you can’t build a simple Sukkah. We already have two lattices stretching across each side of the yard for my mirlitons. All you have to do is place some beams across the top, cover it with palm branches, have the children hang some fruits and vegetables, and VOILA – a Sukkah.”

However, according to Dad, a Sukkah wasn’t all that simple to build. And we children weren’t too thrilled with our assigned chores either. But, we all caved in, as usual, and thought we had done a darn good job (although no one wanted to mention the one side that seemed to lean a bit). That done, we anxiously awaited our first night in our own little tabernacle.

Then the rains came. Since we hadn’t constructed Noah’s ark, we were ill-prepared. You know the ending of our little saga. Yes, the roof caved in, and the branches fell to the ground crushing the water-logged fruits and vegetables.

Mother took control once more. There were still two days before the holiday actually began. A carpenter was hired. One with unmanicured nails and rough, calloused, knowing hands, who turned our backyard disaster into a gathering place for our family and friends.

At meal’s end we offered our thanks. With friends in mind, Mother and Dad lifted their glasses with a proposed toast: “From this Sukkot hence – you build, we cook.” We all drank to that.

Cabbage Soup

Serves 8 to 10

The combination of meat and vegetables makes this hearty soup a welcome dish as the fall season brings its first hint of color.

3 tablespoons oil
2 large onions, sliced
1 large garlic clove, minced
2 to 3 marrow bones
1 1/2 pounds stew meat, cut into 1-inch cubes
1/2 teaspoon caraway seeds
3/4 teaspoon pepper
8 cups water
1 small head cabbage, shredded
3 bay leaves (optional)
2 teaspoons salt

Using a five-quart Dutch oven, heat oil and sauté sliced onions and garlic over medium flame about five minutes until tender. Add bones, meat, caraway seeds, pepper and water. Cook covered over low flame for one hour.

Remove bones and add shredded cabbage. Bring to a boil, then lower flame. Add bay leaves, if desired, and salt. Simmer, covered, for an additional 30 minutes over low flame. If using bay leaves, remove before serving.

Beef Stew Casserole

Yields 6 servings

Beef stew in a casserole is an ideal dish to bring from the kitchen to the outdoor Sukkah table.

1 pound beef stew meat, cut in chunks
2 tablespoons vegetable shortening
3 1/2 cups diced tomatoes
2 cups diced celery
1/2 cup diced green pepper
3/4 cup sliced onion
1 clove garlic, minced
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1 tablespoon sugar
1 cup water
1/2 cup raw rice

In large skillet, brown meat in shortening. Add all remaining ingredients, except rice. Bring to a boil and pour into a 2-quart covered casserole. Stir in rice. Cover and bake in 350-degree oven for 50 minutes, or until rice is tender.
Apple Strudel

Serves 4 to 6

*Apples are at their best in the fall, and they remind us of the autumn fruit harvest. Turn them into a strudel and you have a favorite holiday dessert, made easy with phyllo dough.*

2 Granny Smith apples  
1/4 cup sugar  
1/4 cup raisins  
2 tablespoons chopped nuts  
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon  
grated rind of 1 lemon  
4 sheets phyllo dough  
1/3 cup nondairy margarine, melted  
1/4 cup fine dry breadcrumbs  
confectioners’ sugar

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Peel and core the apples. Combine apples with the sugar, raisins, nuts, cinnamon and lemon rind.

Take one sheet of phyllo dough and spread out on a dry board. Brush with the melted margarine and sprinkle with one tablespoon of breadcrumbs. Place a second phyllo sheet on top. Brush with margarine and sprinkle with breadcrumbs.

Place half the apple mixture at the end of the phyllo sheets, leaving a one-inch border. Starting with that end, carefully roll, jelly-roll fashion, ending with the seam on the bottom. Brush the top with more margarine and place on a greased jelly-roll pan.
Hanukkah, an eight-day holiday known as the Jewish Festival of Lights, commemorates the re-dedication of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem by the Maccabees after their victory over the Syrians. It also celebrates a miracle during the Maccabean revolt, from 165 to 167 B.C., when the Maccabeans recaptured the Temple and found only one vial of oil, enough to burn for one day, but the oil miraculously burned for eight days.

Hanukkah is a time of sizzling potato latkes [fried in oil to symbolize the oil that lasted for eight days]...carrots cut and cooked to resemble gold coins, [Hanukkah gelt, or chocolate coins wrapped in gold foil]...Hanukkah doughnuts and cookies. Soofganiyots are widely served in Israel at Hanukkah time. They are very much like French beignets.

 Memories

In my family, grandmothers and mothers have often spent an entire week side-by-side preparing the traditional dishes of Jewish holidays including Hanukkah.

So a recent call from the program director of a Jewish organization proved quite interesting. He asked for a “family oriented” cooking demonstration of latkes for a Hanukkah event.

I suggested a generational demo, presenting a sort of evolution of latke-making whereby a member of each generation could show how they make their latkes. With no hesitation, he approved. Now all I had to do was persuade the other generations in the family to participate. To my delight, all agreed.

There we were, three generations, each preparing latkes for Hanukkah, but in different ways. I brought out the old standing hand grater with four different shredding sides, all guaranteed to provide at least one skinned knuckle. Each potato was grated by hand, as were the onion and carrot. Truly a tedious and time-consuming method, but one that never failed to produce those crisp, light latkes.

My second-generation son and daughter-in-law, whose work schedules limit their time in the kitchen, pulled out the food processor with the shredding blade. In nothing flat, vegetables were shredded, mixed with the flour and seasoning, and were ready for frying. Amazing, I thought, especially after tasting and admitting they were as good as anything that came from the hand grater.

But it was my third-generation granddaughter who won the most approval and applause. Confessing to very little time between studies, she emptied a box of latke mix in a bowl, added water and some grated carrots from a cellophane bag, stirred it together for about 30 seconds, dropped the batter into hot oil, and -- voila! -- the best of all the latkes came out.

I wonder if a fourth generation will top that?
Apple Latkes

Makes about 3 dozen

The traditional potato latke is often served with a topping of applesauce. Here we have a latke with the apple in the batter, much like an apple fritter.

- 2 eggs, well-beaten
- 1 1/2 cups orange juice, or milk
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- dash salt
- 1/4 to 1/2 cup sugar, depending on taste
- 3 medium apples, peeled and coarsely grated

Add the dry ingredients to the egg mixture along with the grated apples.

Heat a thin layer of oil in a skillet. Allowing one tablespoon of batter for each latke, drop into the hot oil. Cook for about two minutes on each side, or until slightly brown. Drain on paper towels. Mix the remaining half cup of sugar and cinnamon together and sprinkle over hot latkes and serve.

Cajun Hanukkah Latkes

Makes about 2 dozen

When serving a dairy meal, try this variation – a latke with a Cajun twist.

- 1 1/2 cups yellow cornmeal
- 1 cup unsifted all-purpose flour
- 1 cup grated American cheese
- 1/4 cup minced onion
- 2 tablespoons chopped pimento
- 2 tablespoons chopped green pepper
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup milk
- 1 egg, beaten

Combine cornmeal, flour, cheese, onion, pimento, green pepper, salt and baking soda. Stir in milk and egg. Beat until blended. Drop by teaspoonfuls into deep hot fat (375 degrees). Fry until golden brown on both sides. Drain on paper towels.
Sufganiyots

Makes about 4 dozen

Hot homemade sufganiyots (doughnuts) may be an Israeli specialty, but they are truly reminiscent of our own New Orleans beignets, especially when sprinkled with powdered sugar. It's Hanukkah at its sweetest.

1 cup water
2 tablespoons margarine
1 tablespoon grated lemon peel
1 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
4 eggs
vegetable oil for deep frying
sifted powdered sugar

In a large saucepan, combine water, margarine and lemon peel; bring to a boil. Boil for one minute. Remove from heat. Add flour and one-half teaspoon salt; beat well.

Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until mixture forms a large ball. Remove from heat. Let stand for 10 minutes to cool slightly.

Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Continue beating until smooth. Drop from a rounded teaspoon, about six at a time, into deep hot oil (365 degrees); fry for three to four minutes or until golden. Using a slotted spoon, remove from oil; drain on paper towels. Serve warm, sprinkled with powdered sugar.
Mildred with friends and family -- from left to right, ca. 1930, 1960, 1957.
Purim

It’s more than a holiday. It’s more than a festival. I call it a feast-a-val. What with a Seudah (a festival meal) and Shalos Monos (trays of goodies), it doesn’t get more feast-a-val than that. It’s Purim!

Why such festivities and feasts on this day? Thanks goes to a lady known as Queen Esther who was chosen by King Ahaseurus of Persia to be his wife. Legend relates that she risked her life when she begged the king to disregard the evil plan of his advisor, Haman, who wanted to exterminate the Jewish people. Through her intervention, Haman was hanged, and the Jews rejoiced.

Although this is a solemn story, it is celebrated with much levity. Purim is a holiday of gaiety, games, costumes, all manner of sweets, and most notably hamantaschen, the cookie shaped like Haman’s hat.

New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 13, 2003

Memories

Add the Jewish Holiday of Purim to the long list of festivals in Louisiana. There will be music, singing, parades, costumes, even kings and queens when this holiday is celebrated.

A family-oriented holiday, Purim is one that everyone, regardless of race or religion, can relate to. It begins with the reading of Megilla (the Book of Esther) in synagogues and temples. The excitement builds as children shake greggars or drehers (Purim noise makers), and finally gifts of food called Shalos Manos are distributed to family, friends and to those in need.

When the Shalos Manos plates are prepared and wrapped, the children participate in distribution of the gifts. The act of distribution symbolizes the unity of the family working together to achieve a common goal.

New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 20, 1997
APRICOT HAMANTASCHEN

Makes about 30 pastries

*Dried apricots add color and make an especially delicious fruit filling for hamantaschen.*

**Pastry**

1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar  
3/4 cup margarine  
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder  
1 egg  
1 egg white  
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract  
2 3/4 cups all-purpose flour

Combine sugar and margarine; beat until creamy. Add baking powder. Mix in egg, egg white and vanilla. Add flour, mix to moisten. Chill dough for one hour.

**Filling**

1 cup dried apricots  
3/4 cup water  
1/2 cup sugar

Bring apricots, water and sugar to a boil. Simmer slowly, uncovered, for five minutes. Cool for a half-hour. Puree the mixture.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. To assemble, roll dough on floured surface to one-fourth-inch thickness. Cut out 3-inch circles. Spoon a tablespoon of filling in the center of circles. Fold dough partially over filling in three places to form a triangle. Pinch points to seal dough. Bake for fifteen minutes on greased cookie sheet.
Chickpea Croquettes

Yields about 3 dozen

_Besides hamantaschen, the delicacy of the day is a lentil called “nahit”, also known as chickpeas, garbanzos or “ceci”, depending on where you live. The lentil symbolizes the coarse meal Esther ate in the palace, as she refused to partake of heathen food. An interesting and delicious way to prepare nahit is in the form of a croquette, fried to a delicate brown, and served crisp, hot and sizzling._

4 cups canned chickpeas  
salt and pepper to taste  
pinch marjoram  
pinch thyme  
1/4 cup bread crumbs  
4 eggs, beaten  
4 tablespoons melted vegetable shortening  
additional oil for frying  
additional bread crumbs for coating

Drain chickpeas and mash to a puree. Season to taste. Stir in bread crumbs, eggs and melted shortening. Mix well. Form into croquettes about three inches long and one inch in diameter. Roll in additional bread crumbs. Fry in deep hot fat until nicely brown. Drain and serve hot.
Poppy Seed Cake

Makes 10-inch cake

*Poppy seeds are a must for Purim. Plentiful and impossible to count, they symbolize the determination of the Jewish people to remain as numerous and countless as the seeds themselves.*

3 large eggs  
1 1/2 cups milk  
1 cup vegetable oil  
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract  
1/2 teaspoon butter flavoring  
1/2 teaspoon almond extract  
3 cups all-purpose flour  
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder  
1 1/2 teaspoons salt  
2 1/4 cups sugar  
2 tablespoons poppy seeds  

**Glaze**

Yields two-thirds cup

3/4 cup sugar  
1/4 cup orange juice  
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1/4 teaspoon butter flavoring  
1/4 teaspoon almond extract

Combine all ingredients in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer for one to two minutes.

Combine first six ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Combine flour and next four ingredients; add to egg mixture. Beat at medium speed with an electric mixer for one to two minutes. Spoon batter into a well-greased and floured 10-inch tube pan. Bake at 350 degrees for one hour or until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean.

Cool in a pan on a wire rack for 10 minutes; remove from pan and place on wire rack. Immediately brush warm cake with glaze and let cool completely.
Passover

Celebrated with a feast called the Seder, Passover is the most ritualistic and cherished of all Jewish holidays, bringing large gatherings of family and friends to the table.

Passover is observed with symbolic foods, such as the sacrificial lamb (Pesah), unleavened bread (matzo) and bitter herbs (maror). Its rituals are set forth by the Haggadah, a kind of guide book that relates the Jews’ exodus from Egypt and the beginning of freedom for the children of Israel. The Hebrew word “haggeyd” means “to tell,” and the Haggadah plays a central role at the Seder. The Haggadah does not dictate or limit Passover recipes, however. Although the basic observance of Passover remains the same wherever there are Jews, dishes vary according to ancestry. Now, with more ingredients available to cooks than ever, a variety of dishes is adaptable for the Seder meal.

New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 17, 2003

Memories

Of all the holidays, Passover was the most confusing in my child’s mind. Shortly after Purim, the holiday preceding Passover by about four weeks, Grandmother began her ritual of cleaning.

First she cleaned the kitchen pantry, then the cabinets and then the drawers. Familiar pots and pans were moved from sight. Leaven foods such as pastas, rice and beans began to dwindle and finally vanish from the pantry shelves. Soon all the cookies in the cookie jar were gone. Not much later, the jar itself was gone. Grandmother was preparing, albeit way in advance, for Passover when none of these foods is permitted.

In the process, boxes of matzo replaced the bread. Matzo meal stood where the flour canister used to be. Potatoes, onions, carrots, fish and special meat were purchased, and boxes of special glassware and silver were stacked in the hallway.

All was in preparation of the big meal called the Seder when all of my aunts, uncles and cousins would come over and sit at Grandmother’s long table with the beautiful lace tablecloth that had the stain from the glass of wine that I spilled. Grandpa would sit so proudly at the head, eager to preside and reveling in the fact that we were his captive audience.

Before we ate, we took turns reading from the little blue book Grandpa called the Haggadah. He would pass around pieces of horseradish, and I would gasp and grab my water to wash it down. He explained the story of the Israelites as slaves in Egypt and their eventual freedom and the symbols that help us recall.

Most of all I remember the special dishes that were prepared to celebrate this special holiday. I can still [see] Grandmother holding sway over her bowl of matzo meal and her black cast-iron frying pan, turning out mouth-watering pancakes by the dozen. We ate them as fast as she could make them.

New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 17, 1997
**Matzo Brei**

Serves 2

Also known as the “Holiday of the Unleavened Bread,” Passover is symbolized by unleavened matzo, the bread of slavery and the bread of freedom. During the flight from Egypt, there was no time to allow bread to rise so unleavened bread was the Israelites’ only provision. They placed the dough atop their heads, and it was baked by the sun.

- 2 eggs
- salt and pepper
- 2 whole matzos, broken into small pieces
- 2 tablespoons butter or non-dairy margarine for frying

Lightly beat the eggs with salt and pepper. Soak the matzos in cold water for one to two minutes, until it softens; then drain and gently squeeze out the excess water. Drop it in the beaten eggs and mix well.

In a frying pan, heat the butter or margarine until it sizzles and pour in the mixture. Cook on low heat for about two minutes, until the bottom sets; then turn and brown the other side. Serve hot.

Accompany this with sour cream, if desired, or sprinkle with a little sugar mixed with cinnamon. Also jam, honey, a fruit preserve or compote make delicious toppings.

---

**Passover Potato Kugel**

Makes 8 servings

- 6 medium baking potatoes, peeled (about 4 pounds)
- 1 large onion, peeled
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- 6 tablespoons (2/3 stick) non-dairy margarine, melted
- 2 tablespoons matzo meal
- 2 tablespoons non-dairy margarine

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Grate the potatoes and onion in a food processor with the shredding disk or with a hand grater. Place in a colander and drain well, squeezing out excess moisture. In a large bowl, whisk eggs, salt, melted margarine, and matzo meal. Stir in potatoes until well-combined.

Place two tablespoons margarine in a 9-by-13 inch baking dish. Melt in oven; tilt dish to coat evenly. Pour potato mixture into dish and spread evenly. Bake, uncovered, at 400 degrees for 15 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 375 degrees and continue baking for 45 minutes more, or until top is crisp and brown. Cut into squares.
Chicken Argentina

Makes 8 servings

*Looking for a new way to prepare your Passover chicken? Go south of the border – do it the Argentine way.*

1/4 cup oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon paprika
1 (5-to-6-pound) chicken, cut into pieces
   1 cup matzo meal
   2 bay leaves
   4 cups chicken stock
   2 onions, cut into quarters
   4 large carrots, cut into chunks
   2 large parsnips, peeled and thickly sliced
   4 small potatoes, unpeeled and halved
   1 pound squash, peeled and cut into chunks
   salt, freshly ground pepper
   1 egg

Heat oil in deep, large pan. Add garlic and paprika and saute for a few minutes. Dredge chicken pieces in matzo meal, shaking off excess, and brown on both sides. Add bay leaves and chicken stock. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 30 minutes. Add onions, carrots, parsnips, potatoes, squash and season to taste with salt and pepper. Cook about 30 minutes.

Beat egg in small bowl and add two cups hot stock, stirring vigorously. Return to pan and stir. Add additional salt and pepper to taste. Discard bay leaves before serving.
The word Shavuot means “weeks” and is the holiday occurring seven weeks after Passover. It harks back to the period when Jews began to live off the fruit of the earth and to observe the agricultural seasons of the year.

Shavuot is a holiday of many names: “The Holiday of the First Fruits,” “The Holiday of the Giving of the Torah” and “The Festival of Revelation.” Shavuot also celebrates the wheat harvest. In the days of the Holy Temple, the cereal harvest began on the second day of Passover. The farmers would bring an omer (an ancient measure) of barley to the temple, and seven weeks later the wheat would ripen and be ready to cut.

It is traditional to eat dairy foods on Shavuot to celebrate the land of Israel, which is described as flowing with milk and honey, and to remind ourselves of our agrarian past. It is the time of year when cows’ and ewes’ milk are most abundant and in many countries is a time to eat milk dishes and those made from uncured cheeses. Since Shavuot is also regarded as the harvest festival of fruit, all kinds of fruit puddings and cakes are eaten.

Memories

It was the women in our household who made my childhood memories of Shavuot. Preparations for the Jewish holiday began with a trip to the old Cloverland Dairy on Carrollton Avenue for the freshest milk and cream. Grandmother always made sure the cream rose to the top of the milk bottle – a glass bottle, where you could clearly see that the cream was slightly darker than the milk on the bottom.

The greatest treat for me was ice cream scooped from a cold bin and dropped into a wafer cone. I can still feel it dripping down my chin. When we returned home and grandmother removed the cardboard cap from the milk bottle, she always gave it to me so I could taste the sweet cream that clung to the underside.

Keeping with the custom of serving dairy dishes on Shavuot, the cooking and baking began when we returned home from the dairy. Kugels, creamy sauces, cakes and, oh, those cheesecakes, especially the ones with the glazed fruit toppings. These dishes reflect the meaning of Shavout, which commemorates the handing down of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai.

It is a holiday when the women of Judaism play an important part, for it is said that before Moses received the Ten Commandments, he was told to explain the precepts first to the women. If they accepted it, the men would follow.
**Easy Quiche Lorraine**

Serves 6 to 8

*Quiche Lorraine may sound very French, but with so many dairy products, it's perfect for Shavout.*

1/2 cup coarsely grated Swiss cheese  
1 (9-inch) baked pastry shell  
4 eggs  
1 1/2 tablespoons cut chives  
1 1/2 cups creamed cottage cheese  
1/3 cup half and half  
1 1/2 teaspoons salt  
1/8 teaspoon pepper

Sprinkle Swiss cheese over bottom of baked pastry shell.

Combine chives with cottage cheese. Add eggs and beat until mixture is smooth. Add half and half, salt and pepper; beat until blended. Pour into pastry shell. Bake in moderate oven, 350 degrees, for 40 to 45 minutes, or until a silver knife inserted in center of pie comes out clean. Cool slightly before serving.

**Southern Blintz Souffle**

Serves 8

*Blinzes, considered standard Shavout fare, are likened to the French crepe. Both can be fruit-filled. However, for Shavout the blintz is filled with cheese.*

12 frozen cheese blintzes, defrosted  
1/4 pound butter  
4 eggs, well-beaten  
1 1/2 cups sour cream  
1/4 cup sugar  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Melt butter in two-quart casserole; place blintzes in casserole in one layer. Blend other ingredients with well-beaten eggs and pour over blintzes. Bake for 45 minutes in 350-degree oven until top starts to brown. Serve with fruit topping or additional sour cream.
Salmon Bisque

Serves 6

This bisque has become one of our favorite dairy dishes and can be served throughout the year.

1/4 cup butter
1/4 cup finely chopped celery
1/4 cup finely chopped onion
1/4 cup finely chopped carrot
1/4 cup flour
3 cups milk
1 cup light cream
1/8 teaspoon ground marjoram
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper
1 cup finely flaked fresh cooked or canned salmon

Melt butter in saucepan. Stir in celery, onion and carrot. Cook slowly, stirring occasionally until vegetables are tender. Add flour; mix well.

Pour in milk and cream all at once; immediately stir vigorously over moderate heat. Continue to cook until thickened, stirring constantly. Mix in marjoram, salt and pepper. Fold in salmon. Heat gently, stirring occasionally.
Memories of Life Lived around Food  
(by Mildred Covert as told to Susan Tucker, 2001)

I was born here in New Orleans, April the fourteenth, 1927. I was raised here in New Orleans, Uptown New Orleans, and as an adult, I also lived mostly Uptown.

Now, my earliest food memory -- I think my earliest memory was always that pot of chicken soup on the stove. And in that pot of chicken soup, which I still can recall eating, there were chicken feet, the feet of a chicken, plus other parts, and I’m sure parts of the chicken itself. But I remember the feet because I used to chew on them. I used to love them …. But until there were no longer any butchers who would ritually kill -- and keeping a kosher home, animals had to be ritually killed -- I think until at least the late forties, early fifties, you could still get a live chicken. After that, forget putting chicken feet into the chicken soup. But I can still see that. As I talk I can actually visualize those toes. I think that was probably my earliest memory.

And then, I remember there was a great big round wooden table in the middle of my grandmother’s kitchen. I remember a dark door, like a closet or a pantry, and when you opened that door, I can still smell it. The salamis were hanging there drying and the garlic, the big wreaths of garlic. Always the garlic wreaths and that salami in there. I remember a stove with big legs, and I think my grandmother just worked miracles with that old stove. There certainly couldn’t have been real thermostats in those days, and the pies and cakes came out. I don’t know how she knew when to take them out, but she knew.

But it was just a great big room with chairs. And there was a rocking chair. My grandmother loved to sit in the rocking chair. And there was a special crib that she put my little brother in and cranked up and it would swing by itself. Then there was a sink in the corner, with the exposed pipe, where they would wash the dishes. And that was it. But there was always something on the table, and, this I think she picked up down here, there was always a pot of coffee on the stove. And she put condensed milk in her coffee. I mean you could almost cut it with scissors when you popped open that can.

But since I was born here in New Orleans, I think that my grandmother and certainly my mother and father, who were business people, adapted very quickly to Americanized food here in the city. We ate just about what everybody else ate. We had, of course, the black cook that was there. My grandmother Millie supervised to make sure that the ingredients that we used were kosher, and everything that was prepared was prepared in the proper manner. I grew up with fried chicken and red beans and rice, we just didn’t use pork to make it. There were special foods of course, but most of it was around holiday times where there are symbolic foods that are prepared for all of our holidays. And those, I’m sure, were brought from my grandmother and God knows, I guess from my grandmother on down: ritual types of food, but everyday food. The same thing everybody ate here: meat, potatoes, rice, beans, a lot of fresh vegetables. There wasn’t anything really, really special, other than on Friday night or Saturday on the Sabbath.

Then I do remember the Sabbath meals we always started with what they call the gefilte fish, which is a stuffed fish, and a soup. And I remember the briskets and what I call standard fare: potatoes, carrots. We weren’t too much on sweet, sweet desserts. I remember my father always liked his compote, his stewed fruit. But I don’t think there was anything out of the ordinary, except at holiday time.
Family Group, 1944
Hindeestar Kleinfeldt, center
Mildred, kneeling on right
My grandmother came from Poland. At that time it was under Russian rule, but when I think of the kind of food that she cooked in comparison to some of my other friends, whose background was also from the upper Russian area, I suspect that, at that time, the town that she came from was closer to the Austrian border. And the reason I say that is because my grandmother had a tendency to make things sweet, even fish. When she made homemade gefilte fish she would throw sugar in it. Or the kinds of pies or the cakes that she made were not that heavy, what I call that Jewish-Russian food. I don’t ever remember eating things like borscht, which is a big, heavy beet soup. That was more, I think, further up into Russia. Of course the town that she came from was obliterated years ago, but that’s why I suspect that she was closer to the Austrian border because of the way she cooked and the ingredients she used.

She came over here in the mass immigration of most Jewish people. The way I can figure it was in 1909 or 1910, judging by the age that my mother said she was when she came here. It was a typical textbook case. My grandfather, on my mother’s side, came here first as a shoemaker, stayed a year or so, made enough money to send for my grandmother at that time, and she came over with five children. There were three more born here in New Orleans. Now, they never settled in New York. I don’t know why or how my grandfather got down to New Orleans because I think you had to know somebody that was able to employ you. In a very strange coincidence, which I didn’t know until I was ready to marry my husband, it was my husband’s grandfather who sponsored my grandfather. A real, real interesting story, very coincidental. He was a shoemaker, and that’s how they came over.

In the meals that I can remember as a child at my grandmother’s house – not at my mother’s and father’s – I don’t think I ever saw a really formal table set. Everybody ate at different times. With eight children like that, whoever came in, one came in at five, he ate, one came in at six, he ate, one came in at nine, he ate. So I don’t remember really sitting at my grandmother’s table with a complete family around.

My mother’s house, yes – My father sat always at the head of the table and my mother on the side. And then we sat there, and my father was very, very insistent that we were not allowed to come to the table with our hair in curlers or in a robe or in pajamas. He was very particular about the table, not only the appearance of what was on the table, but the appearance of those that came to the table. He loved holiday time where he ruled the roost, so to speak. It was a big thing, especially because we’re talking about the time of year that brings back an awful lot of memories and deep religious meaning because we’re very close to our Passover. And at the time when my father conducted the Seder we used to tease him and say, “Dad, I think you’re a frustrated cantor,” because, boy, he would sing out loud those cheers. I used to love the way he would tell us, you know, “Just read and pray. God understands all languages.” And then he would be reading in Hebrew, and then he would call on us, and we’d read in English. And you don’t think for one minute he meant what he said because he’d go back over it again in Hebrew, and we’d think that we would never, never end the services. But those were very formal meals.

For the important meals, we were with the larger family. During what we call our New Year, our Rosh Hashana, we have symbolic foods. We have, of course, a certain kind of challah bread, the twisted egg bread, that’s twisted round for that time of year, where we’re hoping for a very round, no beginning, no end sort of symbolic thing. And we use a lot of honey to sweeten our year. With the foods that we use at that particular holiday, you’ll have honey cakes; you’ll have carrots with honey in it, anything that’s sweet. You start off with the fish, like some of the Sephardic Jews serve a fish head because they want this to represent the head of the year. And they will serve the whole head of the fish. If you get into the Passover, there, of course, you’re not allowed any breads or anything with leavening in it. Matzo, its like a large cracker, is the main stay, and here you’re not allowed any beans, any rice, any pastas. We eat a lot of potatoes. We use a lot of what they call matzo meal and cake meal made from the matzo.
Now, I’ve had people tell me, “If you can’t eat wheat and you can’t have flour, matzo is made with flour and water so it doesn’t really make sense.” Well, it comes into the baking. Of course the matzo represents the unleavened bread where, at the time of the exodus, the Jews fled in such haste the bread didn’t have time to rise. That’s the story. But when you bake matzo, it is very, very carefully watched. There is a maximum of fifteen minutes in which to bake matzo. Anything over eighteen minutes, the flour and the water begin to react and it would begin to rise. So that there is a very careful, rabbinic watch over the baking of these matzos…..Most people think of Passover matzo ball soup, which I make by the ton. [But others won’t serve matzo balls during Passover.] And their explanation is that if they put the matzo ball into a liquid it could possibly change the consistency. It’s a real technicality, but that’s their belief. Most orthodox Jews do not go quite that far. But this is the big holiday, and, of course, you have certain symbols on what they call the Seder plate that are very important in the Passover Seder itself. We have grated horseradish which we have to taste on the matzo which brings tears to your eyes to remember the bitter times. There’s the parsley that’s the representation of the spring and the whole new beginning of freedom. The Pascal lamb bone and various symbols like that; we have something called a haroses, which is a chopped apple and nut in a wine mixture with cinnamon, and as it darkens it is supposed to represent the color of the bricks that the slaves had made at the time in Egypt. So Passover is a very symbolic and special type of food festival for eight days.

Now, by being in New Orleans, there are certain changes. Most of the time, even the reform Jewish people -- and some of them who are really far removed from a lot of these rituals -- come back to it during the Passover because that is not only their feeling, but that’s their identity. That’s my personal opinion. It has changed, not only in New Orleans but worldwide, to the extent that when I think of the limitations that we had forty to fifty years ago, there was no margarine that you could use, there were no boxed things. Today you pick up all of these boxed things and you add water and you mix it with an egg or something. The gefilte fish is in a jar already made. The cake mixes are there. In fact, sometimes when I see what they have at the kosher delicatessens for Passover, it doesn’t even seem like Passover. They’ve put out cereals now and cold cereals for kids to eat. We didn’t have anything like that when we were growing up. I can still remember that at my grandmother’s table the matzos were on the table, and there was a small paintbrush and also melted schmaltz, which is chicken fat with a little salt. Sometimes there was a little onion. And this is what you brushed on the matzo, and this is what we would eat. Well, it wasn’t really symbolic. There was no butter then for Passover. You had to have special milk. In fact, in those days I can remember going over to the Cloverland Dairy where they had livestock in the back. And the rabbi would go at least six weeks before Passover and choose a certain milk cow and separate it from the rest of the cattle. This cow would eat only certain foods so that the milk was strictly for Passover. Today a rabbi tells you if you just buy the milk a week or so before Passover you can use it.

You have to go with what you have sometimes. The Jewish community is comparatively small in the number of people that really keep Passover; it is even almost infinitesimal compared to other groups within the city. Only one kosher delicatessen, and if he doesn’t have it…In fact, I ran into that problem this year. I have a daughter living in Miami, and I called her on the phone. I said, “Susan, you have to get me such-and-such. Whatever it costs send it to me.” Well, when I found out that she spent eight dollars just on postage I said, “Next year I think I’ll go down to Miami just to get it.” So, it’s very different from what you did forty to fifty years ago. There were still chickens that could be slaughtered. There were still kosher butcher where you could get fairly fresh meat. Today everything is flown down: New York, Chicago. It’s frozen, but it’s for Passover. And there are special foods for Passover.

There were here, in the past, kosher butchers in the city. There were several of them because we have to slaughter our animals in a very special manner. They call them shochets. And when an animal was slaughtered, first of all they were inspected for any kind of flaw at all. If there were sores on it or there was
a wing that was broken on a chicken, it was not considered kosher. And that was mostly because if blood got into a certain part of the body, this was not considered kosher. And when the animals were slaughtered, if you can call killing humane, this is what we considered a humane type of killing. The slaughterer had to be trained, almost like an intern or a doctor, and it had to be one clean slit across the jugular vein. And the animal, whether it was a chicken or a calf, was hung and almost all of the blood drained from that jugular vein. The animal was never hit over the head. This is another reason why even though we can eat things like a duck, or something like that, because of the manner in which they’re killed, we can’t eat them. Because, for example, in the case of wild ducks they were shot. Otherwise, a duck can be kosher, but it can’t be if it isn’t killed ritually. Even if the cow is killed in the ritual manner we still do not eat the hindquarter of any animal. That goes back to the Bible and Jacob with his dream when he was in the thigh.

The butchers used to be located off around Dryades Street. There was quite a bit of Jewish community there anyway, not only commercial merchants, but they had a delicatessen. I can’t give you an exact address because I really don’t know. I do know that my grandmother did go down to the French market and buy fish. And she would go at night so she’d have her fish for Friday. The fish would come in on Thursday. And my grandmother was very short, almost as wide as she was tall, without the stereotypical Jewish nose. And I can still remember that some of the fisherman thought that she was Italian, and they would speak Italian to her. I can still see her picking up those gills. Because grandmother’s family was so large, she bought a lot of things. She didn’t buy a half-a-dozen oranges, she’d buy a crate, a sack of potatoes, a sack of onions.

With some butchers it was not a very nice experience. They would take your order and literally throw the meat wrapped in some kind of paper on your front porch. My grandmother made sure she got down there. “Never mind throwing my meat on the floor,” she’d say. “I’ll go down and get it.”

Now people speak about Rampart Street being the predominant early Jewish area, but those were mostly business people, retail business. But I don’t believe that there were any kosher bakeries or groceries or anything like that. What’s happened is that the Jewish community, particularly in the culinary field, does not go back the way the Irish and the French and the Spanish until the 1700s or 1800s. With the Jewish, it’s more like the 1930s, which makes it a comparatively new community. New York and those places had whole districts that began long before they came down South. But here the community was so predominantly Christian that the Jewish community, being as small as it was, had to do almost everything themselves. They either had to do without or do with what they could.

And in other ways, we were just like everyone else. As I said, my father liked to be at the table. When I was growing up we sat at the table. And even with my children, we sat at the table and we ate. There were no TV dinners in those days, but even so, they weren’t snacking all day. We sat down at the table. And to this day, Dave, my husband, will not use a paper napkin, not at home anyway. I mean we had the linen napkins on the table and a salad fork, if there was a salad. So that we sat down as a family and ate.

I don’t remember going out to eat as a child. About the only thing I remember eating out as a child was maybe getting an ice cream cone or something like that. Now, I don’t know whether it was religious purposes, which I feel its ninety percent of that, or also, maybe, they couldn’t afford to take me out to eat. But as I got older, my father began to eat out. My mother never really ate out because she wanted to keep kosher. And, yet, she was very active in the business community, and any time they would serve her fresh fruit salad she would eat it. She would go to restaurants occasionally. I can still remember the excuse she used to use. Sometimes she would go to these meetings downtown because she was active in the women’s business association, and quite often she would say, “I almost forgot I had this appointment, and I ate just
before I left the store.” She got around it that way. But my father, as religious as he returned in his later years, loved to eat out. His business was right around the corner from Kolb’s. I can remember he loved to go to Kolb’s. And there was Gluck’s restaurant. He used to like to go there because there were solari’s. One of his favorite spots was Galatoire’s, and he introduced me and the rest of the family to it. To this day that’s one of my favorites. And he also did Delmonico’s because my father would eat turtle soup. I don’t know whether he told my mother he ate it or not.

I don’t remember him really eating ham. My father liked the seafood, and he liked being served. He liked good food. I guess today you might call him a “dandy”. I mean even his clothes, with the tie that had to match the handkerchief and the pocket. I think that part of his personality went over, even, into eating and food because he enjoyed being out, being seen, being waited on. He liked being waited on. He was waited on at home too, not quite as elegantly as when he would go to Galatoire’s.

Now my mother’s kitchen wasn’t really her kitchen. My mother was a businesswoman. My mother worked with my father. My father was in the fur business, and he had a store on Canal Street. So my mother and father were in business, which is why, I imagine, I was with my grandmother so much, especially as a child. I was the oldest granddaughter. Of course as time went on there were maids to take me. But I was always, I think, closest to my grandmother. Even when I came to Newcomb my grandmother lived on Palmer Avenue, right off of Feret, and I’d spend five days a week with her and walk to campus. Weekends I’d go home because, even then, I knew grandmother was grandmother, and if I had a date she wouldn’t let me stay out until 12:00 at night. So this is why I have such memories of my grandmother. Whenever there were holidays or whenever there were dinners, I would help grandmother do it or my mother would purposely send me over. I don’t think my mother really got into the kitchen until after they retired and my father died. She was in her seventies already. I mean she knew how to cook a little bit, but this was not where she spent her time. She had the maids, who my grandmother supervised. Grandmother would make sure that they did it properly, not mixing up anything that was forbidden. But my mother was not the cook in the family.

Now, we had what we call the Shavuot, which comes about six weeks after Passover. It commemorates the giving of the Ten Commandments. This is supposed to be dairy food that’s served at that time, and I know that my mother never put a meat dish on the table during the two days of Passover. It was either fish or blintzes or it was something with milk or cream. She did observe that holiday.

Speaking about dairy, my grandmother loved K&B ice cream. In those days they delivered it. And I don’t think she cared what kind of ice cream it was, she just loved ice cream. Now, my mother-in-law was one of those that ordered that Creole cream cheese ice cream. Now, I didn’t eat as much ice cream as some other kids because I did develop a lactose intolerance. But I remember just walking to corner drugstores, whatever corner drugstore was around. It didn’t necessarily have to be a K&B. As I got into my teenage years, Walgreen’s was a big place to be seen, with the banana splits and everything. Even though I hardly ever ate that because of the ice cream, I can still see those bowls with the kids that I was with, with the bananas and the whip cream and the cherries and the nuts. How did they ever stay thin in those days? I don’t know.

These were also the days when milk was delivered to the house. And I do remember my grandmother picking up a bottle of milk off the back steps and looking at it. And, boy, if that cream wasn’t that high, on the top of the bottle, and these were all glass bottles where you could see it, that milk went back. So, I don’t know just how great all these additives and preservatives are today when they talk about the calories and the cholesterol. She lived to be ninety-four years old, eating all of this cream and sugar and chicken fat. And died with all her senses in her bed. There was no stroke. There was no high blood
pressure. She’d just had enough, and that was it.

In one of my books we made up a Creole Rosh Hashana menu instead of a chicken soup. You know there is nothing written in stone that says you have to have chicken soup for this particular holiday. And we did a Creole onion soup that you could serve during Rosh Hashana. I mean, you can use the symbols but still not stick to the old way. I think that’s part of adapting to New Orleans. I mean there was nothing in our religion that said you couldn’t eat red beans and rice on Monday, and that’s what we did.

In terms of seasonal food, too, we were the same as everyone else. You know, strawberries are out now so you eat your strawberries. If you didn’t have that, you had your apples and your oranges. Meat was available all year round. Milk was available all year round. The only thing that I can remember that was seasonal was a long bean we used to call *bokesoff*. And that was the only time we ever went to Central Grocery Store. I think they called it a St. Joseph’s bean. When you broke it off, it had something almost the size of a big butter bean inside of it. It was hard and dry, and we would chew on this. I didn’t like it. I think that’s only at a certain time of year that you can get that. But even our Passover foods, if you want to buy them they’re available all year round. So I can’t think of anything really seasonal.

Certain foods, of course, we had to go to certain places, like meats or other kosher foods. But otherwise, again I’m going back to my childhood, my grandmother in those days lived off of Esplanade on DeSoto street. And about six blocks down on Esplanade there was an old Hill Store. I can remember walking down there with an aunt because on a certain day bread was, instead of a nickel a loaf, it was six loaves for a quarter. And my aunt needed me to help her carry two extra loaves of bread. So that would lead me to believe that she bought her groceries like anyone else. Or I had one uncle that could drive a car in those days. I remember that big car that you would pack up. And I imagine that, whenever he could take her down, that was when she would go to the French Quarter and buy in big lots because of the size of her family. But other than buying meat or certain specific foods that you had to have that were kosher, she bought her food any place because we ate regular food.

The only thing I can ever remember being delivered was the milk and, occasionally, the meat. Other than that, she went shopping like everybody else.

Jewish people are not known to be agricultural, although a lot of our biblical ancestors began as farmers and landowners. But we’re not really agricultural people. So that we didn’t have any backyard farms. I don’t know anything about farming or raising. If my grandmother had a tomato bush it was by accident, believe me. Even today, I’m not a gardener or an outdoor person. I say, “Don’t put me out there in the yard. I’ll be in the kitchen all day, but don’t put me in the yard.” As I remember as a child, after all my uncles and aunts were adults already, they had to go out and work. They didn’t have time to garden or to write recipes down.

In fact, to this day when I think about my grandmother, where I basically learned my culinary skill, when it came to kneading dough she would say, “Feel it.” When she would make matzo balls, which are classic Jewish food, she would say, “Take a half a shell of water and mix it in.” And it wasn’t until I was an adult that I tried to figure this out. I said, “Well, how do you know that half a shell of water would work each time?” But then I figured if the egg was bigger, then the shell was bigger. It all evened out.

…[I]t was very interesting when I was working on the *Kosher Southern-Style Cookbook*. The premise of the book was taking different states, and we started with the Confederacy. We tried to go back to some very, very old journals, which were the only things that you had then, and we saw that people used walnut shells then to measure butter; what they called “teacups”, whatever size that might have been, to
measure liquids. So there were all these strange types of measurements. Nothing was written down. First of all, my grandmother did not write English, and did not really read English, except for numbers. So that would have been impossible. And no one bothered to write down anything.

Now, my mother-in-law was an excellent cook. And when I first got married my husband did not come from quite as religious a family as I did, so he was not really used to a lot of the kosher cooking. So for a while there I had to almost stop keeping kosher to try to please him, which is what you did in those days. And his mother was very, very generous with her recipes. And she would tell me over the phone how to fix a gumbo, and I might have written down what ingredients went in. The only things that I think I ever really wrote down were a few things for baking. But, otherwise, it was hit or miss. As I look back, I must have just had the touch to do it, or the taste. But nothing was written down.

On the other hand, I did find cookbooks at my mother’s house. I had one aunt who used to buy cookbooks. In fact, I can remember she was probably the one who encouraged me to cook, without even knowing it. So there were cookbooks and methods of cooking around that, evidently, my grandmother’s children picked up. There were what I would call Jewish cookbooks, as far as having recipes for certain holiday fare and certain baking goods. One of these was Jenny Grossinger’s cookbook. I think her book is still around somewhere. You know, it wasn’t like going in to Betty Crocker or Better Homes and Garden or Southern Living.

The important recipes though were really unwritten. The only thing that I wish had been written down, even though I really don’t make it from scratch, is gefilte fish. My grandmother used to make gefilte fish from scratch, and of course now you buy it in a jar or can. I remember seeing her make it. The ingredients I know, but the exact measurements I wouldn’t know.

And the other one I wish I had written down is for kreplach dough, which is the equivalent of the Italian ravioli. It’s pasta dough, or noodle dough as we call it, that you cut into either rounds or squares and stuff with a meat filling. We eat it in soup. The reason I remember that is because I used to have to help my grandmother roll it, and she would say to me, “The dough fights you.” It was a very elastic type of dough, and sometimes you’d roll that dough out and it would roll right back. It was a very difficult dough to work with. And that’s one of the few that was not written down. I don’t think there was any water in that dough, just egg and flour. I remember she used that same recipe. I can still see that dough that was thrown over a kitchen chair to dry, and as it started to dry she would cut it with a knife into strips. So you had to work quickly, not only because of the stretching but because the dough would begin to dry.

I had a telephone call a few months back from a very prominent businessman here in the city. He called me saying that somebody said I would be the only one to know. He wanted pickled tongue, kosher pickled tongue. And he wanted a recipe for it. It could not be found in the city. I mean, you can find cold cuts, but they did not have pickled tongue. I said, “I will find you a recipe, but it is quite a deal.” He said, “Fine. Send it to me,” which I did. In fact, I sent him three different versions … it is quite a deal because you have to treat it like a corn beef, with the brine, the crock, the whole bit. So I would have to say that that would be something that you probably couldn’t get here, that I know you could get in New York or any of these places where there are large Jewish communities and maybe large delicatessens: Miami, Chicago, Los Angles.

But we have something special here. Even though I came from an orthodox home and I consider myself pretty steeped in Jewish tradition, I am a born New Orleanian, so that even in a kosher home I eat New Orleans food. I eat red beans and rice, jambalaya, chicken and sausage gumbos, things that my ancestors never even heard of. So, again, comes that word, my favorite word: adaptation. You adapt to your surroundings. You adapt to taste. You adapt to peers, to people that you know.