



One daughter's search for the recipe of a beloved but elusive Sicilian pastry. **Page 4**

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## GOOD EATING



For two Americans wandering in Morocco, Passover was the occasion for an invitation to lunch, and conversation over glasses of mint tea led to new friendships.

ZOE GUTTERMAN/PHOTOS FOR TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS; BOBBI TULL/PHOTODISC ILLUSTRATION

# Kindness of strangers

An invitation to Passover meal leads to Moroccan feast

BY PEGGY WOLFF  
Special to Tribune Newspapers

FEZ, Morocco — Morocco had not yet invited us in.

We were two Americans traveling through Morocco, no tour, no guide, my daughter Zoe and me in the back seat of a wild-man driver who aimed to pass every car in front of us for the nine hours from Marrakech to Fez. He swerved, he sped, he called it magnificent driving. "Driving safe is like art," he bragged. "You know? Like painting."

We slid down low in the rear seat and, thanks to Zoe's iPod and episodes of "This American Life," sweated out the ride.

Landing in a city with no discernible center of town, where the main roads were slivered like alleys and the alleys were nothing but halved sidewalks, we dodged stray cats and clusters of smokers with live rabbits for sale. We took refuge in doorways when scooters fumed by.

This made it all the more unusual, and so all the more uplifting, to receive a call the following morning at our hotel from a woman who invited us to her home. It was Passover, and we had no plans.

The caller was Danielle Mamane, Sephardic cookbook author of "The Scent of Orange Blossoms." Weeks before, I'd emailed her co-author, Kitty Morse, to see if Kitty still led culinary tours of her homeland. She did not. But that's how Danielle knew we were American Jews traveling to Fez, and that we were staying at Riad Le Calife. I'd never met either woman.

Although she was hosting 18 for a second night Seder that evening, Danielle said how rude it'd be to know there were Jews here in Fez, sent by Kitty Morse, and though it was such a busy day of the year she just had to invite us, even if it was for lunch. "And don't bring anything."

A Moroccan host prepares all the food. There is no potluck meal — my custom at home — so Danielle hired extra help for the day.

Her wildly printed blouse and large black glasses are still etched in my mind. As well, the tidy salon where she served glasses of mint tea with orange blossoms and platters of sauteed fava beans sprinkled with a pinch of cumin, a characteristic spice of North Africa.



BILL HOGAN/TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS PHOTO; CORRINE KOZLAK/FOOD STYLING

The meal would have been enough even without Moroccan meatballs with the slowly unrolling flavor of liver.

### Feast

Elements of a Moroccan Passover meal: fried fava beans, candied oranges and harissa. **Page 5**

This was a Sephardic home. The Jews from Spain, Portugal and the Middle East permit eating beans during the holiday but the Ashkenazic Jews do not. They are strict about legumes because they puff up and grow when water is added to them. The table was set for seven: Danielle's husband, Jacques, and their daughter Helene, who had come from Paris with her 3-year-old and 8-year-

old. And us. The air was drenched with the aroma of freshly picked orange blossoms.

A dozen little tastes made me fall for this lunch: Egg souffle with spinach and herbs. Baba ganoush. Tomatoes with lemon, beets, cucumber, carrots and lettuce. A phrase from our Haggadah ran through my mind: It would have been enough. But an entree followed. Meatballs with the gradually unfolding distinct taste of liver. A side of peas and carrots. Matzo from Holland.

The cake with poppy seeds was smothered with candied oranges that were pressed and flattened, cooked with pounds of sugar until a dark amber syrup was released.

Bittersweet, my weakness.

Our conversations skidded through how we teach Hebrew to talk about modernist cuisine. They wondered, did we like molecular gastronomy? Why shouldn't food look like it is? What is meatloaf? CSAs (community supported agriculture)? You guarantee the farmer his income? What's a cookie sheet? Oh, and what is Spandex?

And so it went for the next three hours. Strangers from two continents forging a new friendship, crystallizing what it is that makes traveling and the kindness of strangers so memorable.

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### Moroccan meatballs

**Prep:** 20 minutes **Cook:** 1 hour  
**Makes:** 8 servings, about 40 meatballs

This recipe, adapted from chef Ayelet Danino, comes from her Moroccan mother-in-law. You can grind the liver in a food processor (or use 2 pounds ground beef if you prefer to omit the liver).

#### Sauce:

- 5 to 7 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 ounce chicken bouillon cubes
- 1/4 teaspoon chili powder
- 2 tablespoons sweet paprika
- 1 tablespoon hot paprika
- 1 can (28 ounces) tomato puree
- 2 cups hot water
- 1 teaspoon salt

#### Meatballs:

- 1 1/2 pounds ground beef
- 1/2 pound ground calf's liver
- 3/4 cup matzo meal
- 1 cup chopped parsley
- 1/2 cup finely diced onion
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 large clove garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon each: paprika, ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- Vegetable oil

**1** For the sauce, cook the garlic in the oil in a Dutch oven over medium heat, 1 minute. Add bouillon cubes, crushing them in the pot. Add chili powder and the paprikas. Add tomato puree, water and salt. Heat to a boil; lower heat to a simmer. Allow to simmer while preparing meatballs.

**2** For the meatballs, combine beef, liver, matzo, parsley, onion, water, garlic, paprika, cumin, salt, turmeric and cinnamon in a bowl, mixing with your hands. Add eggs; blend well. Shape mixture into 1-inch balls.

**3** Heat about 1/4 cup oil in a skillet; brown meatballs, in batches without crowding. Gently slip meatballs into simmering sauce. Cook, partially covered, over low heat until meatballs are cooked through and sauce is thick, 45 minutes.

**Nutrition information per serving:** 360 calories, 18 g fat, 5 g saturated fat, 123 mg cholesterol, 24 g carbohydrates, 27 g protein, 1903 mg sodium, 4 g fiber



## FROM THE COVER

# More Moroccan dishes to flavor a Passover meal



As the table was cleared after our Passover meal in Fez, Morocco (see today's cover story), and more glasses of mint tea poured, I thought of a Torah story of Abraham, who was known for his hospitality in welcoming guests into his tent that opened on all four sides. This was our host, Danielle Mamane. She welcomed strangers from another continent to her table.

We realized she had given us all the cooking and baking in a small amount of time, and she had done this with absolutely no expectation of anything in return. That's all. A kindness received when it was most needed and certainly least expected.

— Peggy Wolff, special to Tribune Newspapers

## Harissa

The hot sauce called harissa is a staple of North African cuisine. The piquancy depends on the variety of peppers you select. For more intense heat, substitute 2 pounds chilies, such as guajillos or anchos. This recipe is adapted from "The Scent of Orange Blossoms," by Kitty Morse and Danielle Mamane.

**Prep:** 25 minutes **Cook:** 20 minutes  
**Makes:** about 1 cup

- 2 pounds red bell peppers (about 5), seeded, cored, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 10 cloves garlic
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 teaspoons white wine vinegar

**1** Combine the peppers and garlic in a blender; process until fairly smooth. Transfer to a colander; drain, 1 hour.

**2** Place the pepper mixture in a saucepan over medium heat. Cook, stirring, until any liquid evaporates, about 10 minutes. Add 5 tablespoons oil, salt, lemon juice and vinegar. Cook, stirring, until the moisture disappears, 10-12 minutes. Remove from the heat; cool.

**3** Add the remaining 1 tablespoon oil; blend in a blender or food processor until a smooth paste forms. Let stand overnight at room temperature. Seal in a jar; refrigerate. Keeps up to 2 weeks.

**Nutrition information per teaspoon:** 22 calories, 2 g fat, 0 g saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 1 g carbohydrates, 0 g protein, 49 mg sodium, 0 g fiber



To make candied oranges, start by gently grating the zest from each orange, using a fine grater.

## Fried fava beans

**Prep:** 5 minutes **Soak:** Overnight  
**Cook:** 3-5 minutes per batch **Makes:** 8 servings

Adapted from "A Biblical Feast," by Kitty Morse (Ten Speed Press)

- 2 cups dried, peeled fava beans
- 2 cups vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 teaspoons cumin seeds, toasted, ground, see note

**1** Place the fava beans in a large bowl; cover with 4 inches water. Soak overnight. (Many will split open.) Drain; pat dry.

**2** Heat the oil over medium-high heat to 350 degrees in a deep saucepan; deep-fry the beans a handful at a time until they turn golden brown, float to the surface and are crispy, 3-5 minutes per batch. Remove beans with a slotted spoon to a paper towel. Pat dry.

**3** Sprinkle with the salt and cumin; serve at room temperature. Fried favas will keep for a week in an airtight container at room temperature.

**Note:** Toast cumin seeds on a baking sheet in a 300 degree oven, 6 minutes. Cool completely. Grind with a spice grinder or mortar and pestle.

**Nutrition information per serving:** 160 calories, 4 g fat, 0 g saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 22 g carbohydrates, 10 g protein, 587 mg sodium, 9 g fiber



After removing the zest, place the fruit in a large bowl of water and soak for two hours; then drain and allow to cool.



BILL HOGAN/TRIBUNE PHOTOS

After boiling in water and cooking in syrup, the oranges are flattened and transferred to a glass container. The warm syrup is added.

## Candied oranges

**Prep:** 20 minutes **Cook:** 2 hours  
**Soak:** 2 hours **Makes:** about 1 quart

From "The Scent of Orange Blossoms," by Kitty Morse and Danielle Mamane (Ten Speed Press)

- 4 large unblemished oranges, about 2 pounds
- 2 pounds granulated sugar
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup water
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

**1** Weigh the oranges. Weigh out an equal amount of sugar.

**2** Gently grate the zest from each orange, using a fine grater. (Save zest for another use.) Place the fruit in a large bowl of water. Soak, 2 hours; drain.

**3** Heat a large saucepan of water to a boil; boil the oranges, 10-12 minutes. Drain; allow to cool. Pierce each orange in four places.

**4** Combine the sugar,  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup water and lemon juice in a large saucepan over low heat; cook, stirring occasionally, until no grittiness remains, 15-20 minutes. Do not let the mixture boil. Add the oranges; cook, turning them over every 5 minutes, 30 minutes. Skim off the foam. Gently press on the top of each orange with a wooden spoon to flatten it and let the syrup penetrate it. Cook, turning the oranges every 15 minutes and gently pressing on the fruit until it acquires a translucent appearance and the syrup turns dark amber, 1 1/2-2 hours. (Cooking time will vary depending on the size of the oranges.)

**5** Transfer the oranges with a slotted spoon to a glass bowl. Pour the warm syrup over the fruit through a fine-mesh sieve to remove any trace of foam. Cut into wedges for serving. Store in a 2-quart glass jar at room temperature, up to 6 months.