

Mama's
Kugel



Remembrance
of my mother
Bessie Katz Rieger

by
Ruthe Rieger Karlin
1994
2021

A large, stylized red monogram 'E' is positioned on the right side of the page, partially overlapping a vertical blue rectangular background element. The monogram is composed of flowing, expressive lines.

specially for

Robin Karlin,
first grandchild;
Arvin Rieger,
favorite son;
Ronald & Steven Rieger,
grandsons;
&

all of the great-
grandchildren.

Special thanks to
my cousins
Florence & Paul Seligman

P
otos

Mama from infancy to
old age

Some of her family



Bessie Katz toddler



Mama and
Grandma Rochel
about 1923



Mama in front of our
apartment building,
probably 1945 or
1946





Mama as a young married woman



Wedding Portrait, Mama & Daddy



Grandma Rochel & Grandpa Abraham



Kugel Makers: Grandma Rochel (third from left) and her three sisters, shortly after they arrived in the United States. Rochel was pregnant with Mama, her only child born in the U.S.

Mama died February 4, 1994, 69 years to the day after her mother died. We thought that both women took the secret of the kugel to their graves. Grandma Rochel died suddenly; she was only 52. Mama was then 18, unmarried, not yet involved in domesticity. She mourned her mother's death through most of her life, blaming all of her (very few) domestic shortcomings on the lack of a mother's advice.

One of Mama's great regrets was not having her mother's kugel recipe; she spent many years during my childhood working on recreating it. She had long discussions with older relatives and many afternoons of experimentation. We loved all of the experiments and prized the final result; although, Mama was never quite satisfied. She always said that her mother's kugel had a glaze on it; she couldn't figure out how to do it. She made the kugel for special dinners, only, but any dinner that included Mama's kugel was a great occasion.



Mama wouldn't write down her recipe. She said it required different amounts of the ingredients each time to get the dough exactly right; she really didn't know how to indicate how much of each she used. I always intended to observe her at work and write it down. I never did it. After she died we looked through her recipe box and then we looked through my recipe box. Arvin was certain that Linda or Steven had it and Robin was certain that she had it back in New Jersey. No recipe was found.



Mama's greatest pride was her house and her family. She loved feeding us and keeping the house in perfect dust-free order. We loved Mama's cooking but had several favorite dishes; mostly special things for holiday and company dinners. Three of our very favorite things were the carrot ring, the apple kugel and a cheese cake. Mama also made a wonderful banana cake and a Passover nut sponge cake that I adored. On the following pages you will find the recipes for most of these wonderful things.

*J*he kugel became a huge, unanswered question for me; and a source of some guilt, since I had never bothered to get the recipe. It was different than all of the kugels I had ever eaten, and different from any recipes I found for kugels in the cookbooks I owned. I remember what the kugel looked like and how it tasted. Unfortunately, I have no older relatives left to consult about the kugel. Mama and Daddy were both the youngest children in their families. All of my aunts and uncles and most of my cousins are gone.

*J*did a small research project in my favorite bookstore and found in a newly published cookbook, *Jewish Cooking in America*, a reference to the origin of kugels being shalet, a dish brought from Bavaria or Alsace. Noodle dough was used to line a baking pan, then apples were put on top and the dish was baked. It sounded something like Mama's kugel, although the first recipes for shalets which I found were just noodle kugels.

I bumped into Florence & Paul Seligman one night and told them the story about the apple kugel and my subsequent findings. Paul said immediately that his mother made 'charlottes' and he had seen charlottes referred to in some of Flo's kosher cook books. Florence called me the next morning and reported that she found references to charlottes in Jennie Grossinger's cookbook . I found several references to charlottes in French cookbooks. These were all desserts; puddings or soufflés in special pans lined with white bread or lady fingers. Did these translate to noodle puddings or kugels or did kugels have some earlier origin?

H ow to define a kugel? To call a kugel a noodle pudding is to rob it of half of its identity. Kugel is a light to heavy semi-moist, solid, bread-like casserole-type food that is very popular in Jewish cuisine and is usually kosher. The three ingredients kugels have in common are eggs, a starchy base such as bread, matzos, noodles or potatoes, and some kind of fat. Some kugels have a pie-like crust, more like English puddings. Kugels can be served hot or cold, as a main or side dish, for dessert, breakfast, lunch, dinner or at snack time. They can be sweet or savory and can include cheese or spices or nuts or fruit but not meat and not chocolate or candy.



More research was called for and finally, I went to the great New York City Public Library. They have a wonderful collection of old cookbooks. I found a number of recipes for kugels and schalets. Some of these are very old and use long outdated cooking methods but I have no doubt Mama would have loved to see them and to try out some of the ideas for getting glazed tops on her kugel.



One of Mama's best recipes is for a Banana Cake. I made this one often and always had great results. The most important thing to remember is that the bananas should be really ripe; almost ready to be thrown out. In fact, this is a great way to use overripe bananas. Mama always put chocolate icing on the cake. I didn't keep her icing recipe but any good dark chocolate icing recipe will be good on this cake.

B

anana Cake

1/4 lb. butter or margarine
1 cup sugar
2 eggs
3 very ripe bananas, mashed well
1 tsp. vanilla
1/4 cup milk
Sift together:
1 tsp. baking soda
2 tsp. baking powder
2 cups plus 3 tbs. cake flour

Cream the butter or margarine together with the sugar. Add eggs and mix well. Add bananas and vanilla. Stir in flour mixture and milk, alternating small amounts concluding with milk.

Bake in two 9-inch layer cake pans or a 9 x 13 inch loaf pan in a 350° oven for 25 or 30 minutes. Test with toothpick before removing from oven.



G

his a kind of kugel, not a cake. Mama always served it as a side dish with meat. In our minds, growing up, it competed with the apple kugel as the best dinner dish ever. It was also served primarily on holidays.

arrot Ring

1/2 lb. margarine

1 cup brown sugar, firmly packed

3 eggs

3 cups grated carrots

2 tbs. fresh lemon juice plus grated rind

Sift together:

2 1/2 cups flour

2 tsp. baking powder

1 tsp. baking soda

1 tsp. salt

Cream margarine, brown sugar and eggs together. Add grated carrots (use a food processor), flour mixture, lemon juice and rind. Put in 9" tube pan to allow heavy mixture to bake completely. Grease pan well and coat bottom and sides with bread crumbs. Sprinkle bread crumbs on top of pudding. Bake in 350° oven 45 to 60 minutes. Test with toothpick.

Passover sponge cakes are supposed to be light and airy; Mama's were always the best.

7 eggs separated

pinch of salt

1 1/2 cup sugar

juice of 1/2 lemon

grated rind of one orange

1/4 cup Potato Starch

3/4 cup Cake Meal

Beat egg whites until stiff, adding the pinch of salt and 1/2 cup of sugar as you beat the whites. Put aside. Beat egg yolks until thick. Add remaining cup of sugar, lemon juice, orange rind, potato starch and cake meal. Fold this batter into the egg whites.

Line a 10" tube pan with wax paper cut to fit the bottom. Pour in batter and bake in 350° oven for about 1 hour. Invert pan over a funnel while cooling to keep cake from falling in.

*T*his is one of my favorite cakes; it contains nuts, lemon and sugar, one of my favorite combinations of ingredients. I've never made this cake, myself, but Robin does a great job with it.

*P*assover Nut Sponge Cake

7 eggs, separated

pinch of salt

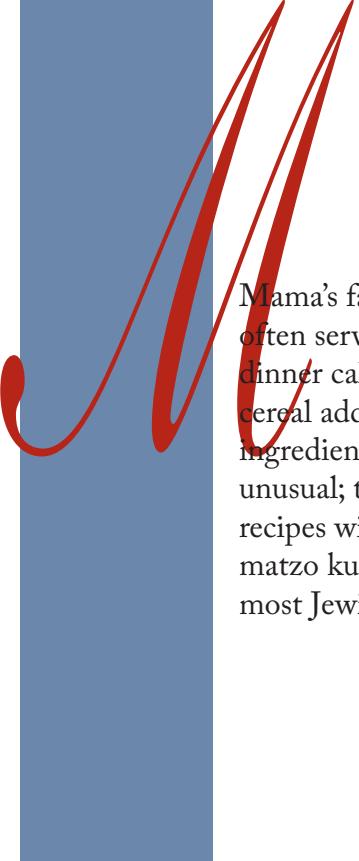
1½ cups sugar

juice and grated rind of one lemon

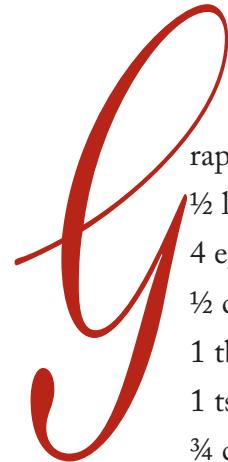
1¼ cup Matzo Meal

1 cup walnut pieces

Beat egg whites with a pinch of salt until stiff, adding the pinch of salt and 1½ cups of sugar as you beat the whites. Put aside. Beat egg yolks until thick. Add lemon juice, nuts and matzo meal. Fold this batter into the egg whites. Line an angel food cake pan with wax paper cut to fit the bottom. Pour in batter and bake in 350° oven for about 1 hour. Invert pan over a funnel while cooling to keep cake from falling in.



Mama's favorite ordinary kugel, often served for Friday night dinner called for Grapenuts cereal added to the other ingredients. This was not unusual; there are many kugel recipes with corn flakes, and matzo kugel recipes are found in most Jewish cook books.



rapenuts Kugel

½ lb. medium noodles, boiled

4 eggs

½ cup sugar

1 tbs. vanilla

1 tsp. salt

¾ cup Grapenuts cereal

4 or 5 tbs. margarine

Melt margarine in 9 x 12 baking pan to grease it. Mix excess butter together with remaining ingredients. Bake in greased pan in 350° oven for about 1 hour or until brown.



Apple shalet or apple kugel recipes from three very old Jewish cookbooks follow.

These are recipes for dishes to be served with meat and were created before dairy free fats were available. The invention of Crisco, a solid vegetable-based fat, was a great thing for observant

Jewish cooks. No longer was it necessary to finely shave beef suet for pastries which would be eaten with or after meat. It also made great pie crusts previously only attainable with the use of lard, which was strictly forbidden to Jewish cooks.



One of the recipes specifically mentions a method for obtaining a glazed top on the shalet. I am particularly intrigued with the recipe that calls for baking the shalet with a cup of water poured over it. This might also result in a glazed top.

R

Recipes for the dough in these schalets tended to be vague because the amount of water used depended to a great extent on the quality of the flour and the temperature and humidity. Flours are more standardized today and temperature in the kitchen more controlled, but a good cook still adds water slowly and judiciously to her dough, stopping before she adds too much.

T

he first recipe comes from *Ausfuehrliches Kochbuch für die einsache und seine Jüdische küche* (1930) printed in German using old German script. Following a reproduction of the original recipe is a translation made by my cousins Flo and Paul Seligman. Paul grew up in Germany and came to Chicago just before World War II.

The second and third recipes are from different editions of The Jewish Cookbook by Mildred Bellin. I have transcribed them exactly as printed in the original books without any editing.

The fourth recipe for apple schalet is from Paul's cousin Margrit. Obviously a modern recipe, it uses butter and even refers to egg substitutes.

1917. Apfelschale oder Apfelschwele. 10 gehäuße Eßlöffel Mehl, 3 Eßlöffel schaumig gerührtes Gans-, Fleisch-, Abhebett oder Palmöl (zu Milchseen 125 gr Butter), 2-3 Eßlöffel Zuder, 1-2 Eier, 1 Gläschen Kirsch- oder Zwetschgenwasser, nach Belieben eine Menge spicke Zimmet werden mit dem noch nötigen Wasser zu einem geschmeidigen, glatten Teig verarbeitet, einige Male ausgerollt und wenn derselbe eine Zeitlang geruht hat, in Stücke verschiedener Größe geschnitten. Zuerst wird der Teig in die Hälfte und die eine der beiden Hälften nochmals geteilt. Ein Kugelkopf oder tiefer, runder, eiserner Löffel wird die mit Gansfett ausgestrichen, mit dem größten Teil des Teigs, den man zu einer großen, runden Platte ausgerollt hat, belegt und zwar so, daß sowohl der Boden als auch die Wände bedekt sind und der Teig noch dämmertreich über die Form hinaushänge. Den Teigboden belegt man einer zweifingerbreit mit fein geschnittenen, stark geädereten Apfeln, welche man mit Zimmet, Rosinen, nach Belieben auch mit Zitronat, Pomeranzensaft und grob geschnittenen Mandeln vermischt hat. Dann zweite, kleinere Teigstücke rollt man zu 2 Teigplatten aus, die gerade so groß, wie der Boden der Form sind. Die Apfel bedeckt man mit einer der Teigplatten, bedeckt diese mit einer Lage Apfel, wie oben beschrieben, auf diese kommt die zweite Teigplatte und nun daran der Rest der Apfel. Das dritte Teigstück wird zu einem runden Dödel ausgerollt, auf die Apfel gelegt, niedergedrückt und dann gut mit dem überhängenden Teigrand, den man nach innen schlägt, verbunden; nach Belieben kann der Teigdedel jetzt mit flüssigem Gansfett bestrichen werden; der Schale wird in den heißen Backofen gestellt und $\frac{2}{3}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ Stunden gebacken; damit der Teig von oben nicht zu braun wird, legt man, wenn er Farbe hat, ein seitlichehriges Papier darauf; dann wird er aus dem Backofen genommen und sorgfam gefürtzt. Da der Teig hineinkommt, kann man auch die ausgestrichene Form mit Zuder und Zimmet austreuen, wodurch der gefürtzte Schale braun glasiert aussieht. Statt der rohen, fein geschnittenen Apfel kann man zur Füllung auch gedämpfte, mit Zuder, Zimmet und Rosinen gemischte Apfel nehmen.
Oder: Teig von 125 gr Zuder, 3-4 Eßlöffel schaumig gerührtem Fett, 1-2 Eier, Zimmet und 250 gr Mehl.

Hefeteig dazu: 15 gr dichtflüssig angerührte Hefe, 3 Eßlöffel Zuder, 1-3 Eßlöffel schaumig gerührtes Fett, Palmöl oder Olivenöl, 1 Ei und 250 gr Mehl zu einem loseren, geschmeidigen Teig verarbeitet und wenn er reif geworden ist, wie oben verwendet.
Englischer Teig dazu: 125 gr rohes, sehr verweigtes Fett, 250 gr Mehl, 2 Eßlöffel Zuder, 1 Prise Zimmet, 1 Gläschen Kirschwasser und 1 Ei. Von diesem Teig wird das Kuwele ohne Zwischenlagen bereitet. Nach Belieben können die Zwischenlagen von Teig auch weggelassen; die Form wird mit Teig ausgelegt und der Schale wird oben bestrichen gebacken. Es können auch noch andere Mürbeteigarten, zu Apfelschwele vermendet und die Form mit Rüg- oder Olivenöl ausgestrichen werden.

#1917. Apple Shalet

10 heaping tbs. flour

3 tbns. goose or meat fat or palmine,(an emulsified fat) stirred foamy (for dairy use 125 grams butter)

2-3 tbns. sugar

1-2 eggs

1 glass cherry or plum brandy

some cinnamon

Work into a smooth supple dough. Roll out and let dough rest. Then cut dough into different sizes. Cut the dough in half and then in half again. Grease a deep round kugel pot heavily with goose fat. Take a larger piece of the dough and roll out to cover bottom and sides, overhanging the pot. Cover the bottom with thinly sliced, heavily sugared apples (2 fingers high), and cinnamon and raisins if you like, also candied lemon & orange peel and rough cut almonds. The second smaller piece of dough, roll out into 2 round

discs as large as the bottom of the pot. Cover the apples with one of the discs, then cover with another layer of apples as above. Put the second dough disc above that and the rest of the apples above that. The third piece of dough fits over the top of the apples and is pushed down and pinched with the overhanging bottom layer. You may cover the top with melted goose fat. Bake in a hot oven 1¼ - 1½ hours. To prevent the dough from getting too brown, place a piece of greased paper on top as soon as the kugel starts to color. Then remove from oven and carefully remove from pan, inverted. Before the dough has been placed in the form, one can cover the greased bottom with sugar and cinnamon so the turned schalet looks good glazed on top.

Instead of the raw finely chopped apple, one can fill with stewed (gedempt) apples mixed with sugar, cinnamon and raisins.

OR: dough made from 125 grams sugar, 3-4 tbs. fat, stirred to a foam, 1-2 eggs, cinnamon and 250 grams flour.

Yeast dough: 15 grams yeast stirred to a thick liquid, 3 tbs. sugar, 1-3 tbs. fat, stirred foamy, Palmine or olive oil, 1 egg and 250 grams flour worked into a loose supple dough.

An English dough: 125 grams raw finely minced fat, 250 grams flour, 2 tbs. sugar, pinch of cinnamon, 1 glass cherry brandy and 1 egg. With this dough, make the schalet without in-between layers. One can also use a meurbe teig dough instead and brush the pan with nut oil or olive oil.

2

Apple Shalet, No. 1

Take one pound of fresh beef heart fat, shave it as fine as possible with a knife. Sift one quart of flour into a deep bowl, add two tumblers of ice-cold water, one tablespoon of brown sugar, a saltspoon of salt, then add the shaved heart fat and work well into the sifted flour. Put it on a pie-board and work as you would bread dough, with the palm of your hand, until it looks smooth enough to roll. Do not work over five minutes. Now take half of this dough, flour your pie-board slightly and roll out as you would pie dough, about once as thick. Grease a deep pudding-dish (an iron one is best), one that is smaller at the bottom than the top, grease it well, line the pudding-dish, bottom and sides, clear to the top,

fill this one-third full with chopped tart apples, raisins, part of a grated lemon peel, citron cut quite fine, pounded almonds and melted drippings here and there. Sprinkle thickly with sugar, half brown and half white, and a little ground cinnamon. Moisten each layer with one-half wine-glass of wine. Now put another layer of dough, rolling out half of the remaining dough and reserving the other half for the top covering, fill again with apples, raisins, etc. until full, then put on top layer. Press the dough firmly together all round the edge, using a beaten egg to make sure of its sticking. Roll the side dough over the top with a knife and pour a cup of water over the pudding before setting it in the oven. Time for baking, two hours. If the top browns too quickly, cover.

The advantage of this pudding is, it may be baked the day previous to using, in fact, it is better the oftener it is warmed over--always adding a cup of water before setting it in the oven. Before serving the pudding turn it out carefully on a large platter, pour a wine-glass of brandy which has been slightly sweetened over the pudding and light it, carry to the table in flames. A novice had better try this pudding plain, omitting the wine, brandy, almonds and citron, moistening with water instead of wine before baking. Almost as nice and very good for ordinary use. Some apples require more water than others, the cook having to use her own judgment regarding the amount required.

Apple Shalet

2 cups sifted all-purpose flour

1/4 tsp. salt

3/4 cup finely chopped suet (about 1/2 lb.)

ice water

3 cups peeled, diced, juicy apples

1/2 cup seedless raisins

2 tsp. finely diced citron

1/2 tsp. lemon rind

1/2 cup granulated sugar

1/2 cup firmly packed brown sugar

1 tsp. ground cinnamon

1 tsp. almond extract

2 tbs. melted chicken fat

Sift the flour and salt into a bowl. Chop the suet as fine as possible, and pack into the cup to measure. Cut the suet into the flour. Add ice water, 1 tablespoon at a time, until the dough will just hold together. Place on a floured board and knead for 5 minutes. Divide dough in half. Roll out half into a circle about 1/4 inch thick, and large enough to line the bottom and sides of a 1 quart baking dish, and extend 1 inch above the rim. Grease the

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dish well, and carefully fit the pastry into it. Combine all the remaining ingredients until well blended, and place half of this mixture over the pastry in the dish. Divide the remaining pastry in half. Roll out half into a circle large enough to fit over the filling. Place this in the dish and cover with the remaining apple mixture. Roll out the remaining pastry into a circle 1 inch larger than the top of the baking dish. Prick in several places. Moisten the overlapping edge of the bottom layer of pastry slightly with beaten egg or water, place the top crust over it, and press the edges together firmly as for a pie. Bake at 325° F for about 2 hours. If the top crust becomes brown before the baking is completed, cover it snugly with aluminum foil. Serve the shalet warm from the baking dish. This amount serves 8.

Cousin Margrit's Apple Shalet

1 stick butter 2 cups flour

½ cup sugar

½ tsp. baking powder

1 egg or egg substitute

1 tsp. vanilla

Beat butter and sugar. Add egg and vanilla. Add flour last. It may have to be worked in by hand at the end. Refrigerate dough for ½ hour. Then remove from refrigerator onto floured waxed paper and roll ¾ of dough into circle to fit spring form pan. Place in pan and build up sides of pan. Fill with apple mixture of sliced apples, raisins, sugar, cinnamon, lemon juice and apricot brandy. Have filling 2-3 inches high. Cover with remaining dough rolled out to cover apples. Prick with fork and bake in 350° oven for 55-60 minutes.





fter months of questions and research in pursuit of Mama's elusive kugel, Robin called me; she found the recipe she had evidently written out while watching Mama make the kugel.



Mama's Apple Kugel

For the dough:

3 large eggs or 4 smaller ones

1/2 tsp. salt (with 4 eggs, a little more)

Beat with egg beater

Add enough flour to knead.

Start with about 1/2 cup.

Roll 1/2 of the dough very thin.

Sprinkle medium layer of fine French
Breadcrumbs over dough.

Grease pan very well with Crisco

Filling:

2-20 oz. cans pie-sliced apples, well-drained

1/2 cup brown sugar, firmly packed

1 cup granulated sugar

4 tbs. all-purpose flour

1/2 tsp. salt

1 tsp cinnamon

1/2 tsp nutmeg

4 teaspoons lemon juice

Mix all ingredients, add lemon juice and apples. Spoon filling onto dough. Put dabs of Crisco on top of filling.

Roll dough around filling, almost like a jelly roll, and transfer quickly to 13" by 9" pan.

Spoon about 6 ozs. of honey over rolls, or a little less.

Baste every 10 or 15 minutes with honey that collects in pan.

Bake at 350°F until brown.

Mama's Kugel was written and designed by Ruthe Rieger Karlin.

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