

F

athers' cooking

In Jerusalem, the cooking took place once a week - every thursday evening. Incongruously, the father - stocky and muscular - was wearing an apron and his fast, efficient and somewhat nervous motions conveyed that he simply wanted to get the job done. Being seen in the kitchen was not an easy thing for him; he did it only for a short period of time to help my mother and stopped when he became a vice president of the electricity company of Jerusalem and was too busy to spend time at home in the afternoons. We avoided asking friends over on Thursdays after seeing his obvious discomfort when we did.

The cooking consisted mostly of schnitzels and Viennese meet-balls - with scallions and egg in the mix - which he deposited in tupperware afterwards and stored in the freezer. My mother had problems sleeping at night; she was napping in most afternoons and during that time my father helped her by doing some of the cooking; the nanny who took care of my sister and me was trusted with making breakfast for us in the morning and with preparing sandwiches for school but not with 'serious' cooking of any type. Being Moroccan in origin meant her palate presumed to have been entirely different from ours. My sister and I loved the cuisine of her parents, though - especially, the flat, crispy bread we were always given when we visited her at home. She lived in a small flat crowded with oriental carpets overlooking the valley of the cross in an area that was later demolished to accommodate modern upscale high rise buildings; in their living-room was a lovely, unfamiliar string instrument with a prominent, rounded belly called the Oud.

The Viennese father started cooking on the weekends after the children left home and thus there was no longer a need for a cook. He was making mostly pastries - especially apple- and topfen- strudels. Entering the sunny kitchen you could see the tall bony high court judge deftly manipulating large dough surfaces, holding them high in the air with his long fingers to make the crust larger and appropriately thin. There were always cakes in the house for the celebrated cafe klutch; his children with their highly dispersed life styles still keep the ritual - even today. In the family mythology the apple strudel meant sustenance and survival. After the first world war the stock market crashed, the family lost their savings and moved temporarily to the country-side. For a period of time, the garden supplied them with food and the apple strudels they baked were the main things they had to eat. In their collective memory, the simple joy of an apple cakes meant a ray of sunshine in a cloudy day.