

The following article about mom Betty Cassorla's cooking and Sephardic traditions appeared in a local Long island weekly called Bellmore Life on April 19, 1967. Last updated (tweaked!) January 20, 2001.



PASSOVER: The Cassorla family prepares to begin the traditional Seder dinner celebrating the first night of Passover. (Note from Albert: I apologise about the ridiculously poor reproduction! To be replaced soon by a better version.)

Bellmore Life - April 19, 1967

A Traditional Passover -- With A Difference

By Trudy Cowen

A traditional Passover Seder will be held next Monday night in Jewish homes all over the Bellmores. And he traditionally, the dinner will include martzo ball soup, roasted chicken, and wine, as well as the ritual items of Passover platter -- a roasted egg, a lamb shankbone, parsley, radish, and a dish called "charoseth."

In one Bellmore home, however, this tradition has taken on an exotic flavor. Mr. and Mrs. Louis Cassorla of 2495 Marine Place will also have a traditional Passover table, but the dishes served will include Pastel de Carne, Haminado, Biondega, Kifte de Prasa, Favas, Kol, and Boomwellos.

Sephardic Sect

Mr. and Mrs. Cassorla are members of the Sephardic Sect on Long Island. "There are only about 40,000 in all of the United States," Mr. Cassorla says. A few families live in the Bellmores and go to the Sephardic Temple in Cedarhurst for the Holy Day Services. Residents of Bellmore for 10 years, Mrs. Cassorla at one time was president of the sisterhood of a small Sephardic congregation in the area, but eventually the 30 or 40 members joined the larger Cedarhurst congregation.

"Ladino" Spanish

The Sephardim, Mr. Cassorla explains, dates back to the Jews of Spain imprisoned or exiled at the time of the Inquisition. The families settled in Portugal, Turkey, Greece, parts of all the area, and what is now Yugoslavia. A dialect of Spanish "Ladino" is the common language spoken at home, although Mr. Cassorla says, his generation is probably the last to speak Ladino, and even they use infrequently.

"We used to speak Spanish if we did not want the children to know what we're saying" he says, laughing, "but today they learn Spanish at school."

It is not, of course the same Spanish, since Ladino includes Turkish, and Greek words as well as the Spanish dialect. The old people, he says still speak Spanish and he speaks in Spanish to his own parents who came to this country in 1910.

Slight Differences

The holiday observance is Mrs. Cassorla says, are virtually the same as other Jewish families with only slight differences. Sephardic Hebrew, the language spoken in Israel, is being taught in many Hebrew schools here as well, with the slight difference in pronunciation from the Middle-Europe Ashkenasi pronunciation that is more familiar to most Jewish families.

The main difference, however, and food. Mrs. Cassorla has a reputation as a fine cook, and this is evident when she talks about food with great enjoyment. The dishes served at holidays by Sephardim, she says, combined traditional Jewish foods with Spanish, Greek, or Turkish additions.

Passover Dinner

For Passover this year, as she has done for many years, Mrs. Cassorla expects to begin the traditional dinner with a meat pie called *pastel de carne*, which is made with matzo dough and a meat filling. It is served with a hard-boiled egg. "But not just an ordinary hard-boiled egg," she explains. "This is an egg that is cooked for 24 hours!" The egg, called Haminado, is cooked all day until it is a light tan outside, and brown and soft and fluffy inside.

"With a little lemon," she says, "it is a real delicacy."

This is followed by chicken soup with motzo balls. Here again there is a difference, Mrs. Cassorla explains, since she makes "two kinds of motzo balls, the Ashkenasi soft and airy ones which most people know, and the Sephardic kind, which are small and firm and can be made with variations including chopped nuts."

Meat-Leek Patties

The main course is chicken, roasted and potted, Mrs. Cassorla says, because, she says, she likes chicken that is not dry when served. The ritual accompaniment for the chicken is a meat patty cold shift to get process. The meat patty, made of any ground meat, also has as a main ingredient, ground leeks, which she has a local supermarket order especially for her. Favas, a lima bean-like vegetable, is also served with the chicken.

"Hot" Salad

Following the main dish, Mrs. Cassorla serves her special salad, "Kol," made of cabbage. In preparation, she marinates hot green and red peppers in a dill sauce for a month. The juice is then used in the salad as a dressing with wine vinegar and garlic. "It should be very hot," she says, "and when the family sees it being prepared, they know Passover is on the way." The Cassorla family and friends are so fond of this dish, Mrs. Cassorla says, that she makes "many gallons of it" to eat for weeks and give to friends and neighbors.

Going to Israel

Traditionally, there is an interval in the Passover dinner between these main courses and the desserts. Here too, Mrs. Cassorla explains, there is a difference. The tradition in many Jewish families is to hide a piece of the and have the younger children search for it at this time. Whoever finds it (with broad hints, usually the littlest child can manage to find it) receives a small special small present of a coin or a candy. "In our family, we have continued a tradition that my own parents had every Passover," Mrs. Cassorla explains. "The youngest boy is given a piece of matzo covered with a star and he says he is now going off to Israel. Everyone waves good bye to him and wishes him well as he tells what he expects to find when he gets back there. Then he comes back and announces he has returned and everyone greets him and welcomes him back. The youngest always look forward to this moment -- such a great fuss is made over them!"

3 Platters

Dessert for the Passover meal is served on three platters. One contains varieties of melons and grapes, another contains walnuts, almonds, filberts and perhaps shelled peanuts. The third however is the real highlight. This is Boomwellos, a special assortment of small cakes fried with nuts, matzo meal, and with a lemon-orange coating.

"They go so fast." Mrs. Cassorla says, "you have to make many, many of them. But there's one advantage -- they keep for a month, so we can give them to our friends and say 'Buenos Dias -- Happy Passover.' For weeks after Passover, we are still sharing a little bit of the wonderfulness. What could be better than that?"

Mrs. Cassorla's Boomwellos

Beat one dozen eggs by hand in a large bowl. Fold and slowly three-quarters glass of matzo meal, add 1/2 glass water, mix well. Let make stand in refrigerator for one hour.

While batter is refrigerating, take three glasses sugar, 4 glasses water, 1 lemon, 1 orange. Squeeze juice of lemon and orange into bowl, and other ingredients plus remains of the fruit. Bring to a boil, let simmer to a thin consistency, until the syrup turns a deep yellow color.

To fry, use a special pan similar to a Dutch Oven, which is especially made for Boomwellos with pockets to hold the oil. Put oil in each pocket, drop batter with a tablespoon into each pocket and let fry to a golden brown. When brown, use a fork to loosen each full and lightly turned. The ball should be around and high.

Oil may have to be added from time to time to cook all the little cakes.

After each goal is fried, dropped into bowl of lemon-orange syrup while still hot and remove quickly as soon as the cake is lightly coated. Arrange the cakes on a platter and when cool sprinkle chopped walnuts all over to serve. Cakes can be kept fresh for two weeks.

