

# Preface

In the beginning . . . my mother baked once a year with cake mixes during Passover.

My universe of homemade desserts was dark until a wind blew over from Brooklyn bringing the smell of yeast cake and rugelach baked by my grandmother, Sylvia Altman. Back in Long Beach, I had to fend for myself and bake desserts in my Easy Bake Oven, lamenting the choice of flavors, but grateful for the smell of my “kitchen.”

Later, in high school, my best friend Limor invited me to her home for her mother Aliza’s homemade chocolate babka. It was my first glimpse at the potential for great parve (dairy-free) desserts.

After thirty years of eating parve desserts that were the equivalent of sugar-covered cardboard at countless kiddushes *and* in people’s homes, my husband’s work led us to Geneva, Switzerland, where heavenly pastry shops were on every corner and kosher caterers baked delicious parve desserts.

In Geneva, I worked as a legal advisor and speechwriter for a Jewish organization for two years. After I gave birth to our lovely Emily, I returned to work and found my office less family-friendly than I had hoped. I decided it was time to take advantage of the culinary opportunities in Europe. I had always been happiest baking and I thought that cooking school would teach me how to bake better desserts for my family and friends; I was not seeking a new career. I enrolled in the Ritz Escoffier École de Gastronomie Française in Paris, France. There I learned to bake delicious buttery French desserts, but none I could eat after a meat meal. So I worked slowly and scientifically to convert every dessert I learned in school, plus those I tasted on my travels, into a kosher, parve dessert. Someone begged me to bake them a pear tart for a party. The next thing I knew, I was filling seven dessert orders a week for celebrations and dinner parties.

One day, someone asked me to teach a cooking class as a fundraiser for a Jewish organization—in French—and I enjoyed it so much that when I returned to the United States, I started the Paula’s Parisian Pastries Cooking School. Though based in the Washington, D.C., area, I now teach cooking classes all over the country to satisfy the demand for great kosher food and desserts. After gaining some recipe testing and editing experience for two books in the Kosher by Design series, I realized that it was time to write my own book and share my recipes with everyone. To accomplish this, I needed one more ingredient—a publisher. At a Jewish food history conference in Washington, D.C., I had

the pleasure of walking with Shulamit Reinharz to lunch. Shula is an author and professor at Brandeis University, of which I am an alum. Shula was happy to put me in touch with University Press of New England, who publishes for Brandeis, and the recipe was complete.

After having exhausted the few parve recipes in their favorite kosher cookbooks, kosher bakers are always looking for new parve dessert recipes. And they want more contemporary choices, too. Kosher bakeries are selling the same cookies and cakes I have eaten since I was a child!

*The Kosher Baker* brings you over 160 dairy-free desserts for every occasion and holiday—no matter who you are baking for. I've included updated classics, parve versions of your favorite dairy desserts, and some unique creations. There are cookies, cakes, plated desserts, tarts and pies, French pastries, and Passover, gluten-free, and no-sugar-added desserts. There is something for everyone.

I am an avid entertainer, often cooking for large groups, and I have found that what drives my dessert choice for each meal is the amount of time I have. Too often, I've left desserts for the last minute. To help you choose a dessert according to the time you have, I've organized the first three parts of the book (a fourth part is devoted to Passover and no-sugar-added desserts) according to approximate preparation time: part 1, under fifteen minutes; part 2, fifteen to thirty minutes; part 3, thirty minutes plus. Within each of these parts, there are chapters devoted to traditional categories of desserts.

In *The Kosher Baker*, you will find over forty-five desserts that can be mixed in one bowl and ready for the oven in less than fifteen minutes. If you have extra time, you may choose a dessert based on the nature of the event, who you are baking for, how motivated you are that day, or what fruit or other ingredients you have on hand. The organization of this book enables you to choose a dessert based on time, degree of challenge, category, or flavor. It is up to you.

Parve desserts are no longer something less than their dairy counterparts. The age of the kichel and that rainbow-colored sponge cake is officially over. I am declaring a new era in parve desserts. Kosher people are entitled to the same fabulous desserts everyone else is eating. Now you can fool everyone—though the skeptics will always want to be reassured that the delicious dessert you've just served them is really parve. And I say, let them ask!

Paula