

## Introduction

We wrote this book to help preserve and document the cuisine of a nearly vanished culture.

We are a mother-daughter team — Gabrielle, or Gaby, the mother, Sonya the daughter. Our background is German-Jewish. Gaby was born in Germany and immigrated to the United States as a baby with her parents in 1939. We are both visual artists, so how did we come to write a cookbook? And why?

We share a deep interest in defining our relationships to our German-Jewish roots, a great part of which — the part that has played a large role in our lives — is the cuisine. We realized the importance food plays within a culture, and that the food of our culture is a vanishing tradition. The foods that we ate at our parents' and grandparents' tables are hardly available any longer. We set out to preserve it as a way to share the good food and to document the traditions of a culture that existed in Germany (and Austria) for hundreds of years — up until the Nazi era eradicated it. We should note that today there are many Jewish communities in Germany comprising people who immigrated post-World War II and brought their food traditions with them. This book, however, is about the Jewish communities that existed for hundreds of years until World War II. We saw an empty space that needed to be filled, a story that needed to be told, and recipes that needed to be shared.

Sonya approached Gaby numerous times with thoughts about undertaking this project, and each time Gaby ran the other way, wanting instead to concentrate on her own work as an artist. She also thought the prospect of working together on this project was a bit frightening. Not only would a huge amount of work be entailed in this endeavor, but also working together as a co-writing team raised the possibility of repeating old patterns of typical mother-daughter squabbles that in this situation would be high-risk. Eventually she consented, and here we are, six years later, with a book in our hands.

Many people repeatedly asked, “What is it like to do this with your mother

(daughter):” There is no simple answer. In between the highs and lows (ranging from laughing fits to slammed phones), we have developed a system of working together. Throughout the process, we have kept our eyes on the proverbial prize, and have risen above the conflicts in order to reach our goal. We have also learned a great deal about each other professionally. One of us likes to work quickly; the other is a stickler for detail. We both make endless lists, but only one of us insists on sticking to what’s on the list to the annoyance of the other, who has a more free-form approach. We both arrived at the same conclusion that Google Docs didn’t work for our editing process. Instead, files passed back and forth over email endlessly, with constant hopes that each version was named properly in order for it not to be lost in the sea of documents. One of us—the daughter, to be exact—is an ardent editor of the mother. She can always find a better way to say something that the mother has written. So be it.

All that, important as it is, relates to the process of writing this book. What this book represents, however, is the perspective of two generations being shared in order to preserve the practices (aka recipes) of those who came before us. These are recipes that we want to document as a way to bridge past generations with future ones.

Both of us are experienced home cooks with eclectic culinary interests and we are open to new influences. At the same time, we are also strongly rooted in the familiar set of recipes that we grew up eating—some on a regular basis, others that we return to on holidays and special occasions. Gaby knew many of these recipes from childhood, when she was growing up in a three-generation immigrant household, where meals were home-cooked on a daily basis by her mother, grandmother, or father. The food her family ate almost completely reflected the food they had eaten in Germany. Sonya, too, grew up eating many traditional family dishes, whether on visits to her grandparents or when Gaby cooked them at home.

It was not only the direct influence of eating traditional dishes, but also something transmitted to us by Gaby’s father (Sonya’s grandfather), Stephen. From as long as we can remember, he regaled us with stories of his idealized childhood in Bamberg, a medieval Bavarian city with a population of a thousand Jews in 1930. His stories included many memories and descriptions of food—the first ripe cherries of the season, fresh walnuts, cakes, dumplings, and, of course, the black radish. For him, it was a connection to, and appreciation of, his past—his culture, the land, and his parents—that he passed on to both of us. We feel a shared connection to both the physical place and the foods of Stephen’s past.

As American Jews, we have made innumerable trips to Germany over the years, for work, pleasure, and visits with friends. These trips run the gamut from

Gaby's first visit with her husband Don in 1960, during which they met former employees of our family's business in Bamberg; to art exhibitions of Gaby's work in Bamberg; to professional mediation trainings (workshops) Gaby has taught; to Sonya's participation in an international magazine-based photo project in Berlin; to cooking classes about German-Jewish food that Gaby and Sonya taught in Berlin in 2015. Our ongoing relationship with Germany—and Germans—is an integral element of this story.

Our food influences include all the elders of our family. While Sonya never met her great-grandmother Emma, she is familiar with her cookbooks—both her handwritten one and the German-Jewish one published in 1900 that she brought with her to the United States. Emma used those books, along with her innate cooking memory. She was an exacting cook who consistently turned out perfectly prepared dishes. Her influence on Gaby continues to this day, many decades later. Gaby's mother, Erna, always self-effacing about her cooking skills, produced her standard dishes with regularity and reliability. Her consistency left an indelible impression on both of us. And Stephen, who enjoyed food and could be considered a gastronome, loved to cook and bake. In addition to subscribing to *Gourmet* magazine starting in the 1960s, he set out to track down traditional recipes of his youth from family and friends, and learned to make them. Sonya recalls cooking and baking alongside him when she was a child. This is a picture of a family of cooks, all of whom had a reverence and respect for food. That legacy, powerful as it was, led to the inspiration to write this book. However, this book is not only about our family's kitchen; it is also about the food of our family's culture.

After the Nazis came to power in 1933, German Jews, in their insecurity, avoided starting families. There were only about ten Jewish babies born in Bamberg in the 1930s, and Gaby was one of them. After Kristallnacht, in November 1938, and her father's almost six-week imprisonment in Dachau concentration camp, Gaby, her parents, and her maternal grandparents were able to formalize their paperwork and flee Germany for the United States, where they settled in New York City. They lived in Washington Heights, a neighborhood in Upper Manhattan that was home to the largest surviving community of German Jews anywhere in the world. Gaby grew up speaking German at home, and eating largely German-Jewish food. When she met, and eventually married, a fellow Brandeis University student, Don Gropman, she was introduced to the foods of his Eastern European Jewish family and immediately noticed the differences.

Sonya grew up eating the foods of both sets of grandparents, German-Jewish and Eastern European Jewish. For a long time, she took German-Jewish food for granted. At some point she became aware that they cooked very different

versions of similar foods—all of it delicious. Further, it dawned on her just how obscure the food tradition of her maternal grandparents was, outside the relatively small number of people who shared her German-Jewish background. It was a vanishing tradition, as well as a delicious one, and there were no cookbooks in print on this cuisine. With a lifelong interest in all aspects of food—growing, eating, cooking, food writing—she raised the idea of co-writing a cookbook with her mom about this food tradition as a way of preserving and documenting it, and sharing it with a wider audience.

We recognized early on that this was a two-person project, that both of our voices would be necessary in order to tell the story and present the recipes from a multigenerational perspective. Gaby brought to the table many important attributes: a memory of many of the people who had practiced the old traditions but who are no longer alive; a taste memory of many of the recipes; a lifelong interest in studying the Nazi phenomenon and its effect on her people; and not only fluency in reading and speaking German but also a working knowledge of reading the old script, in which many of the old cookbooks are written. Sonya brought her own memories of her grandparents' food; a familiarity with current food and recipe writing and cookbook literature; and a deep interest in researching recipes and interviewing people. After Sonya brought up the subject periodically over several years, Gaby finally agreed to participate in the project and we began work in earnest. The majority of this book is written in the combined voice of both authors, while a few individual pieces are written in first person (these are noted with the name of the writer).

For some people, this book might uncover recipes remembered from childhood; for others it might be a discovery of a completely new food tradition. Whichever is the case, we hope that the cultural content is of interest to the reader and the recipes offer gastronomic delight.

### *Why Write about German-Jewish Cuisine?*

Most German Jews who emigrated from Germany to countries around the world in the 1930s and 1940s recreated and maintained the traditions of their former lives in their new homes. However, the next generations—their children and grandchildren—for the most part became unrecognizable as German Jews. The cultural traditions, including the food, simply disappeared from view and are in danger of being permanently lost and forgotten. As Steven Lowenstein noted in *Frankfurt on the Hudson* (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1989), German-Jewish refugees never wanted to draw attention to themselves, partly because they had arrived in the United States just as it was going to war with

Germany and they did not want to call attention to their Germanness. Lowenstein speaks of “the private and inconspicuous nature of German-Jewish culture.” Perhaps that is partly why the cuisine of German Jews has not been presented as the subject of its own cookbook in recent times, either in English or in German. As the scholar Atina Grossmann, a child of German-Jewish refugees, who grew up on the Upper West Side, has written, “The curious thing is that the second generation ended up virtually unrecognizable as anything that might be called German-Jewish. Increasingly I am struck by how often I discover quite by accident that colleagues and acquaintances . . . share some of this background” (Atina Grossmann, “German Jews as Provincial Cosmopolitans: Reflections from the Upper West Side,” in *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 2008, 168).

This story of a vanishing culture would not exist without the Holocaust as a palpable demarcation line. The culture and the food existed in their entirety and in their own habitat before that fateful time from the early 1930s until 1945.

What remains when one’s culture has been swept away? Perhaps the tangible objects from the past, such as furniture, books, clothing, pictures, or documents; the intangible, such as memories—one’s own, those inherited from the preceding generations, or those of the many people who share one’s inherited culture; or, something that falls halfway between tangible and intangible—recipes, which are the blueprints of everyday family life. We recognize and value the power of food, for its taste and nourishment, as well as for its power to connect us to our culture and our past. We have collected in this volume a selection of our culture’s recipes, and stories that accompany them. They represent a sophisticated yet straightforward style of cooking within a complex culture that existed in Germany (and Austria) until the advent of World War II.

### *What Is German-Jewish Cuisine?*

These dishes fall into three categories:

1. *Adapted German Dishes*: Like Jewish cuisines the world over, German-Jewish cuisine reflects the food traditions of the host country—Germany. Many of the dishes are essentially German food that has been tweaked to meet the guidelines of *kashrut* (kosher dietary laws). For example, dairy is eliminated from meat dishes; beef, veal, duck, and goose are the meats of choice used in place of pork; and duck or goose fat is used in place of pork fat (lard) for cooking.

2. *Specific Shabbos and Holiday Dishes*: There are foods for *Shabbos* and holidays that are unique to German-Jewish cuisine, such as *Berches* (ceremonial bread), Greenkern Soup (a *Shabbos* dish), and Emperor’s Cake, a Passover dessert.

3. *German Dishes*: Dishes that were simply German and did not violate kosher laws became part of the Jewish repertoire. Many of these dishes are considered old-fashioned by modern tastes and are not commonly eaten today, either in Germany or in the United States. Examples include Baked Rice Soufflé (*Reisauflauf*) and hand-grated potato dumplings.

We gathered recipes from a variety of sources. Some are family recipes that we both grew up eating. Others came to us from friends, family, and people we interviewed. Yet others were discovered in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jewish cookbooks published in Germany. Typical of cookbooks from that period, the recipes are vague, with no indication of cooking times, oven temperatures, or quantities. That's where the fun began, as we developed, adapted, and tested recipes until they resulted in successful dishes. Even many of the family recipes required tinkering and retesting, as written recipes often differ from how cooks *actually* prepared them. This is where Gaby's taste memory came in, since she was able to recreate a dish her mother, grandmother, or father cooked from her memory of how it tasted.

### *What Makes Food Kosher?*

Kosher is the defining element that distinguishes Jewish food from that of its surrounding culture.

There are numerous dietary rules of biblical origin. The three primary ones address the separation of meat and dairy, the types of animals it is permissible to eat, and the way in which they are to be slaughtered.

*Separation of meat and dairy.* A proscription in Exodus prohibits "cooking a kid in its mother's milk," the interpretation of which states that one must not eat meat and dairy at the same meal. As a result, kosher households have two sets of dishes, one each for meat and dairy, to keep these foods isolated from each other. This rule prohibits dishes such as vegetables cooked with butter if they will accompany meat, or milk products added to a meat sauce. Thus Jewish meals come to the table with a subtle yet significant difference.

*Types of animals it is permissible to eat.* Fish must have both scales and fins to be kosher, meaning all shellfish is forbidden. Land animals must have a cloven hoof and chew their cud (e.g., cattle, sheep, and goats) and only certain parts of the animal may be eaten.

*The way in which they are to be slaughtered.* Animals must be slaughtered by a *Shochet*, a ritual slaughterer, following rigid rules, in order to be kosher.

The prohibition on eating pork created a major difference between the Jewish diet and that of other Europeans. This is especially true in Germany, where

pork was, and is, the predominant meat—and lard (rendered pork fat) was the most common cooking fat. German Jews, in their search for a substitute for lard, turned to fats rendered from poultry, primarily ducks and geese.

In our family, kosher laws have not been observed for four generations, yet many Jewish cooking traditions remained integral to our cuisine throughout Gaby's parents' lives. For example, pork meat was never cooked in the Rossmers household. However, cold cuts and sausages made of pork were eaten at home. While this is seemingly contradictory, it was a very common habit among German Jews. According to Marion Kaplan writing in *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 71–73), “Jewish foodways must be seen as ‘ethnic emblems’ and (kosher) food rules, deeply embedded in daily life, became food habits and could be found in nonobservant families as a ‘nostalgic vestige of a lost tradition.’” Former kosher rules became voluntary habits. In this way, families felt comfortable eating prepared pork products such as ham and sausage, yet they could never imagine cooking fresh pork. This book recognizes the nonkosher past of many, if not the majority of, German Jews during the early twentieth century, while at the same time respecting kosher traditions.

The recipes presented here are based on kosher rules. For kosher readers, every recipe is marked with “P” for parve (a neutral classification for dishes that contain neither meat nor milk; fish is considered parve), “D” for dairy, or “M” for meat. Many dishes have flexibility, in that they can be made either parve, dairy, or meat by varying certain ingredients with no loss of quality (for example, using butter versus oil, or meat versus vegetable broth). Some recipes mention variations in the headnote to reflect how nonkosher German Jews actually cooked them.

### *Old Recipes and Their Ingredients*

While writing this book, we saw firsthand just how much the landscape of food availability has changed over the past hundred years. Many ingredients that were available then—both in Germany and in the United States—are either no longer available or very difficult to find. Our aim has been to remain true to the original recipes, despite encountering this obsolescence. It is in the area of meat and fish that this is most obvious. One such example is veal, which for many years was the most common meat of the cuisine. The perception of veal has undergone major changes over the past thirty years. First, a growing awareness of humanitarian and ecological issues within veal farming led to a severe reduction in its consumption. More recently, an increasing amount of humanely raised veal is available. However, differences exist between the veal of today and that of

previous times. Since humanely raised calves remain with their mothers in the field, as opposed to being penned, the meat is no longer white, but rather a pale red, and is not as tender as it used to be.

Another example of obsolescence is carp, which was the most popular fish among German Jews. A freshwater fish whose natural habitat is rivers and lakes, it is very popular in Germany, where it is typically pond-raised. Today, carp is difficult to find in most fish stores in the United States, with a few exceptions.

The current interest in fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables, nose-to-tail butchery, and charcuterie are some of the trends that ease our task of presenting ingredients that in recent decades had fallen into obsolescence. These ingredients, such as sweetbreads and beef tongue, are regaining popularity and are, we are happy to note, more readily available.

### *A Note on Terminology*

The term *Shabbos* occurs repeatedly in this manuscript. In current Jewish practice the Sabbath is usually referred to as *Shabbat* (with the accent on the second syllable). That is the way it is spelled and pronounced in *Ivrit*, or Modern Hebrew. Ashkenazi Jews across Europe traditionally used the term *Shabbos* (with an emphasis on the first syllable). We employ this term not only because it is what our family has always used but also because it represents the language of the time period to which we refer.

### *Organization of the Book*

We decided that the book's recipes should be organized after the fashion in which the food is generally eaten. Because *Shabbos* clearly determines the kind of foods that are to be prepared on Fridays, and holiday dishes are one of the main distinctions within Jewish cooking, the chapters are categorized as such. Chapter 2 contains weekday meals, and chapter 3 contains *Shabbos* and holiday meals. A short chapter 4 is devoted to sausage and cold cut products, as they are an important element of this cuisine and fall into a category of their own. To emphasize the importance of vegetables within this cuisine, we devote chapter 5 to them. Party food and coffee and cake follow in chapter 6. Finally, we include a small number of the recipes that we consider to be core to this cuisine in chapter 7. These are multifunctional staples that may be used in numerous recipes, or some on their own. We also include notes on ingredients that may be unfamiliar, as well as a resource guide for purchasing some of the less common ingredients and tools. There are two indexes. The first lists all the recipes by dietary cate-

gory for kosher readers, as already noted. The second is a comprehensive index. Among other things, it will allow the reader to find recipes by conventional categories, such as soup, meat, or fish. This is helpful, since chapters have been organized in an unconventional manner.

### *Moving On*

It has been a revelation to learn about historical Jewish food in Germany. There is still much more to be explored, and we hope that this book will be useful for future researchers of both the cuisine and the history, as well as for future cooks of the recipes.

