



BOB’S
THOUGHTS

BOB BAUM

Stories that continue to inspire me

Over my 40-plus years with The Associated Press, I was fortunate to meet people who succeeded despite major obstacles.

Their stories inspire. Here are a couple of them.

I first heard of Lopez Lomong in 2007 when I read a brief item in the Arizona Republic that mentioned that he was one of the Lost Boys of Sudan and was a talented distance runner at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff.

So I headed up Interstate 17 from Phoenix to hear his story. And what a story it was.

Lomong, a sophomore in college at the time, told of being snatched from his mother’s arms at age six by rebel fighters, who would kidnap boys to train to kill before drugging them and sending them to fight. But three older boys escaped and took him along.

They walked and ran for three days, sleeping only a little. Sometimes the older boys would carry him. Eventually, they were found by Kenyan border patrol agents and taken to a refugee camp that would be Lomong’s home for the next 10 years. The children in the camp were housed 14 to a unit. They lived on corn meal with a chicken at Christmas.

“We’d eat once a day, in the evening,” he said. “We’d play soccer so we would forget while we were hungry.”

While in the camp, Lomong heard of the Lost Boys program in which sponsors in the United States would bring in youngsters from the refugee camp to live with them.

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BETWEEN
THE ROWS

WENDY SCHMIDT

Nothing tops taste of persimmons

Nothing compares to the taste of persimmons. The wild persimmons growing in the Midwest are much more flavorful than the orange ones for sale in local grocery stores, but they all have a good flavor. A ripe wild persimmon can be described as a “sugar plum.” I never knew what that mythical fruit would taste like until my first persimmon.

If I saw a persimmon tree along a country road in Missouri, I would pull over and stop. If I had nothing to put persimmons in I removed my hat and filled that (if I were lucky enough to find that many).

There are many recipes using persimmons. Eating them on their own is best, unless you want to put the persimmon in a bowl and pour a little thick cream on it and eat it with a spoon.

Again, if you are lucky you can sometimes find dried persimmons in an Asian grocery store. Dried persimmons aren’t cheap, but they make a great snack. Even persimmon vinegar might be found there.

Persimmons grow on deciduous trees — Ebenaceae, or “food of the gods” — two species of which are grown in the West and are resistant to oak root fungus.

Japanese persimmon (Dispyros Kami) grows in zones 7-9. We live in zone 5 so it might live here but will not thrive or fruit well.

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Family Cookie-Baking Traditions



E. Jason Wambsgans/Chicago Tribune-TNS

JeanMarie Brownson adds crushed peppermint candies to her family’s favorite brownie recipe to make a holiday treat.

CHRISTMAS CREATIONS

By JeanMarie Brownson
Chicago Tribune

Our family bakes cookies. A lot of cookies. Not so much in number as in variety. Most years we craft more than two dozen varieties. We broke a record in 2018 with 35 different types of cookies on display Christmas morning.

We do a lot of this baking together in my kitchen. For about eight hours every year, the house is filled with my siblings and their millennial offspring mixing, rolling, manning the oven, decorating and cleaning up the sugar. My sisters haul baking sheets, bags of flour, cookie cutters and tins from their house to mine. We were blessed to have our father photographing (and taste testing) all the activity for many years.

Natasha keeps count and frequently bakes a batch or two just to break records. Joseph, a talented baker, outshines us all in making the most intricate cookies. Glen and Marty read, then reread their recipes dozens of times. For Henry, it’s all about the decorating — his sugar cookies look like edible art. Claire delicately sandwiches her peanut lace cookies with orange cream. We count Erika’s but-tery caramels as a cookie. Everyone bakes their favorites.

Each year we add new cookies to the repertoire. Ten years ago, my dad painstakingly gathered many of the recipes, typed them into uniformity and put them into binders. He gave us each a copy. The “Kaiser Krist-mas Kookie Kookbook” definitely contains a sweet chunk of our family history.

Dozens of the 50-plus recipes are made every year for as long as the oldest of us can remember. Christmas would not be Christmas without kolacky, oatmeal thins, blond brownies, shortbread logs and molasses cookies.

We argue about favorites. Dad’s was never in doubt: Cherry bars. I cannot remember a holiday without this bright red cherry, oat



E. Jason Wambsgans/Chicago Tribune-TNS

Cherry bars are a longstanding Christmas tradition for JeanMarie Brownson’s family.

and coconut bar cookie. Mom thinks the recipe originally came from a package of coconut — no one knows for sure. Last year was the first year I made the cookie instead of mom. I was tempted to swap out the maraschino cherries for something fancier. Nope. I’ll always make the recipe the way Dad enjoyed them.

Peppermint says holidays better than any other flavor. No longer content to hang candy canes on the tree, we crush them and add the shards to everything from coffee drinks to cocktails and desserts. The Doyles bake chocolate peppermint stars, the Hansens make peppermint bark. This year, I’m transforming the family’s favorite chocolate brownie into a holiday delight.

Reminiscent of coffeehouse peppermint mocha drinks and candy shop peppermint bark, these are the brownies to make for this season. Rich and chocolatey, with a touch of coffee flavor, the brownies get topped with red and white bits of peppermint candy and a swirl of creamy white glaze.

Crushed peppermint candy is sold al-

ready crushed in small bags in the baking aisle (near the chocolate chips) in large supermarkets during the holiday season. Otherwise, put unwrapped candy canes or round peppermint candies into a small bag. Close the bag, and then tap the candy with a rolling pin or mallet to crush it to small attractive bits.

The Spice House sells a delicious, very fine, espresso powder that simply melts into your baked treats. Instant espresso coffee or Starbucks Via packets work nicely too.

These brownies are best served the day they are made, but they can be frozen. I remove them from the pan and discard the foil used for baking. Then, before cutting into squares, wrap the brownies in plastic wrap and foil. Freeze solid, thaw at room temperature and cut into serving pieces.

Families grow. Some move away to follow their dreams. Fathers leave us legacies. The cookie tradition keeps us all connected. Forever.

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