

CONTACT US
Erick Bengel | Features Editor
 ebengel@dailyastorian.com

WEEKEND BREAK

FOLLOW US
 facebook.com/
 DailyAstorian



Courtesy
 Gail Henrikson
 Kolachkies

THE PIES THAT BIND US

Kolachkies bring the taste of Christmas

By **GAIL HENRIKSON**
The Daily Astorian

Now that we are at the crest of the tinsel tsunami known as “The Holidays,” it seems only appropriate to dab the cooks with blobs of honey. Fa la la la la la la la la.

Seriously, visions of sugar plums and wassail aside, I do want to salute the many cooks who year after year produce the sugary confections that define our family holidays — that one special sweet without which a holiday would be just another awkward and stressful meal with your family.

These are the desserts that unite generations, extinguish political arguments and relegate intrusive questions about potential partners and future grandchildren to the corner of the room. These are the pies (and cookies, cakes and tarts) that bind us.

Growing up in a rural town in central Wisconsin, I experienced Christmas as a fairly low-key affair. Presents often consisted of underwear and socks, with one or possibly two non-utilitarian gifts.

One year it was a teddy bear (which I couldn’t cuddle, because I was covered in chicken pox). One year it was a high chair for my doll. We won’t talk about the year my mother took a sewing class and made matching pajamas for my brother and me.

As a family, we leaned more toward the Kranks than the Griswolds. However, even if we didn’t install eye-popping, neighborhood-annoying spectacles of sound, light and mistletoe, we had one tradition that was the epitome of the season: my mother’s kolachkies.

Ah, the kolachkies ... slightly flaky pieces of dough, gently swaddling a fruit filling, dusted with powdered sugar as fine as new-fallen snow. Nothing more than bite-sized morsels, they encapsulated the taste of Christmas.

At the moment of Thanksgiving and Christmas, my mother would take a day to make dozens and dozens of these holiday treats, working industriously while my brother and I were in school. We would one day come home to find a large platter of the delightful dainties on the dining room table. They were always carefully stacked in circles on a



Courtesy Gail Henrikson

“Kolachkies: The Next Generation.” Gail Henrikson and her daughter, Athena Kifah, create memories and tasty treats in 1994.

special green glass platter and covered in plastic wrap. It was always a challenge for me to see how many I could sneak without my mother catching me. Oftentimes, my brother would tattle on me, a wound from which I am not sure I have ever recovered.

Through marriages, deaths and births — through times of closeness and times

and when our family ships seemed to be passing in the night — my brother and I, our kids, and our various spouses and significant others have always agreed on the fact that my mother’s kolachkies are the best. That their presence is demanded at every family convening testifies to that.

As our familial diaspora grew, tins of kolachkies would arrive in Florida,

BERNIE’S KOLACHKY RECIPE

- 1 pound margarine (softened)
- 2 packages cream cheese (softened)
- 4 cups flour
- 1-2 cans Solo pastry filling

Mix margarine and cream cheese until smooth. Add flour, 2 cups at a time, until dough is pliable but not sticky.

Roll dough to approximately 1/8 inch to 1/4 inch thick and cut to desired diameter. Place a small teaspoon of pastry filling in the middle of each circle and folder over edges of dough.

Place on an ungreased cookie sheet and bake at 375 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes or until dough is a light golden brown.

Optional: Dust with powdered sugar once cooled.

Pennsylvania and California — boxes of fruit-scented memories. The preparation changed as well. Gone was the prune filling, ousted by almond and apricot. Cherry made an occasional appearance, but only on rare occasions. Powdered sugar? Dismissed as easily as the last flurry of spring snow.

Interestingly, the little treats that were once barely as wide as two fingers, have grown over the years to almost the size of a computer mouse. My mother will freely confess that this is due to laziness on her part, as larger kolachkies take less time to make than the smaller versions.

As you pass from gingerbread house to gingerbread house this holiday season, remember to thank the bakers and cooks who create the memories that outlast the toy of the year or the ugly sweater from your Aunt Matilda.

In particular, I want to heap praise on my mother, who continues to bake these treats for our family and for various leukemia fundraisers in memory of my niece. Her recipe is based on a recipe from her mother, which has now been handed down to three successive generations of Stremplewski women. Enjoy!

When not designing ads at The Daily Astorian, Gail Henrikson can be found up to her elbows in flour in the oddly painted kitchen at her home (aka, the “Astoria Mystery House”).