

*Good Cooks Among Us*

April

1978

**A Passover celebration**

By Jeanette K. Cakouros

BATH — At 6:30 p.m. on Friday, Abraham and Gertrude Kramer will begin the celebration of Passover. They will celebrate it in much the same way as they have for the nearly 57 years of their marriage, in the way it was observed in their childhood homes, as it has been celebrated by Jewish people all over the world for thousands of years.

The ancient festival of freedom is celebrated each year at the time of the first full moon of spring to commemorate the freeing of the early Jews from slavery in Egypt. The Passover, or Peasch, takes its name from the sparing of the eldest sons of the Hebrews on the evening before the flight from Egyptian bondage. The first-born in every Egyptian family was killed, but the destroying angel "passed over" the Israelite houses whose doors had been marked with the blood of a lamb.

The ritual observance of the long-ago events lasts eight days, with the first two and the last two days being sacred. But the highlight of the entire festival is the Sedar service, a family banquet held on the first and second nights.

Sedar is "the family reunion of the year," Gertrude Kramer says, "where the father is king and the mother is queen." The Kramers only daughter and her husband have a grown son and daughter of their own and, with other relatives, they will gather for the occasion.

"It is about an hour before we eat," Mrs. Kramer says of the ceremony at the Sedar table before the actual meal starts. The youngest child present will ask "the four questions." The first is "Why is this night different from all other nights of the year?" The father gives the traditional answers and everybody around the table takes turns reading from the Haggadah, a ritual text of the story of Exodus.

Sedar tables are ornamented with the finest linens and silver the family has. Mrs. Kramer carefully lays each place with dishes for the many courses on the menu. And at each place there is a copy of the Haggadah.

On the right hand of the father, who presides over the ceremony, is a dish containing the symbolic foods — including a shankbone, reminder of the sacrificial paschal lamb, and moror or bitter herbs which "remind us of the bitterness of slavery which our ancestors were compelled to endure," Abraham Kramer explained.

Wine glasses are set out for the wine drunk four times during the ceremony to symbolize the four filled promises which the Lord made to the Israelites: I will bring you forth; I will deliver you; I will redeem you; and I will take you. And there is an extra glass, the silver Eliza cup "for the stranger."

On the left hand of the head of the table is a



Gertrude Kramer cuts a piece of sponge cake. (Don Hinckley photos)

years as well as 21 apartments in the same block.

Mrs. Kramer says she could write a book about running the apartments but "nobody would believe it." During the war when there were three shifts at the Bath Iron Works, they would sometimes rent to one person who would turn around and rent the same apartment to two other people working different shifts.

Passover foods take "loads of time" to make, Mrs. Kramer says. They must be cooked slowly and with no condiments except for ginger, cinnamon or whole nutmeg and all foods must be natural. She is sure she is the only one who spends all the time it takes to make the dishes from scratch. Most people use the ready-made versions available nowadays, she says.

But whether one buys the ready-made foods or the basic ingredients, they must be marked 'Kosher (clean) for Passover.' She goes to a Jewish store in Portland to buy the

one to see if done, should be fluffy. Remove with slotted spoon and put in strainer with dish under to drain. Add to soup like a dumpling.

Another dish is carrot tzimes, a sweet stew made with carrots, sweet potatoes and brisket of beef with potato dumplings added at the end. Asparagus is served to contrast with the orange of the carrots.

There will also be roast capon or turkey, chopped liver, chopped herring, Passover rolls — some call them doughnuts because of their shape — and sponge cake made with potato starch and cake meal.

#### Passover rolls

$\frac{1}{3}$  cup oleo  
 $\frac{1}{3}$  cup water  
 $\frac{1}{3}$  cup sugar  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt or to taste  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon cinnamon  
1 cup matzo meal  
3 eggs

plate of matzoh, the crisp, flat unleavened bread which commemorates the bread which the Israelites ate on their hasty departure from Egypt. Sometimes Passover is called The Feast of the Unleavened Bread. All leaven-made foods are prohibited during the period.

Recipies for the Sedar foods are often prepared differently according to the part of the world from which the cook came, Mrs. Kramer says. She makes the foods the same way as her mother, who came from Russia.

A native of Portland, Mrs. Kramer says her parents were some of the first Jewish people to come to that city. And her father hauled the bricks for the first synagogue there with his horse and wagon.

Abraham Kramer's family also came from Russia when he was only thirteen years old. He vividly remembers their happiness at the sight of the Statue of Liberty because in Czarist Russia "we had some terrible times" where on many days there was nothing to eat and hooligans often killed Jews for sport on Passover night.

For about 35 of the 38 years the Kramers have lived in Bath, he has been president of the Temple Beth Israel congregation. He is not a minister, he explained, but a layman, and on high holidays the congregation has a rabbi come from New York.

The Kramers came to Bath during World War II. He had been a wholesale food salesman, but with gas rationing and shortages of tires traveling was difficult so they bought Steve's Meat Market on Center Street where Smith's Cleaners is now located. He operated the butcher shop for 17

years. He goes to a Jewish store in Portland to buy the ingredients, including the matzo meal used in place of flour.

Her Sedar menu starts with a fruit cup which must be made with fresh fruits unless canned fruit from Israel is used. Then there are hardboiled eggs in cold salt water which are "not so good but you have to have it."

Next is gefilte fish served with beet horseradish. For this she uses a combination of fish, such as haddock and halibut. The raw fish is skinned and boned and the meat removed and put through a grinder. The ground fish is mixed with eggs, onions and seasonings and formed into balls which are simmered slowly in a saucepan along with carrots.

She makes the beet horseradish by grinding the horseradish and putting it in the juice from pickled beets, which she also makes. It is so strong her husband says it will "clear the dust out of your head."

Also on the menu is chicken soup with matzo balls, a fluffy dumpling. The matzo kneidlach may be eaten plain as well or they can be rolled in oil and cinnamon and baked in the oven till brown and crisp.

### Matzo balls

- 3 eggs
- 3 tablespoons oil
- 1 cup matzo meal
- dash cinnamon or pepper, optional
- ½ cup water

Beat eggs and then beat in other ingredients to make a soft batter. Cover and refrigerate about a half hour. Boil water, about two quarts. With wet hands, make balls out of dough. Drop in boiling water. Cover and cook about a half hour at medium heat. Take out



The traditional centerpiece made from fresh fruit into the shape of a bird. Mrs. Kramer topped off the centerpiece with pieces of honey and sesame seed Passover candy.

Mix first five ingredients in saucepan. Bring to boil over medium heat and boil for minute or two. Remove from heat. Add the matzo meal. Then add the eggs, one at a time. With wet hands, make balls of the batter and place on cookie sheet. Dip a finger in water and stick in middle of each ball of dough to make a hole like a doughnut. Bake in a 350 degree oven for 30-45 minutes or until brown.

### **Sponge cake**

9 eggs

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 cups sugar

6 tablespoons lemon juice

6 tablespoons cold water

3/4 cup cake meal

3/4 cup potato starch

Separate eggs. Add salt to the egg whites and beat until very stiff. In a large bowl, beat egg yolks. Slowly add sugar to yolks and beat till light yellow. Add lemon juice and water and beat till very thick. Gradually add cake meal and potato starch, mixing well (it will puff up quite high). With a rubber spatula, fold in egg whites very well. Turn into a large tube pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 60-70 minutes. Turn over to cool as for angel food cake.

Of course there will be tea, wine and matzohs and finally fruit compote made from dried prunes, apricots, apples and pears. There are other foods too, such as apricot stuffed prunes and carrot candy. She makes the stuffed fruit by steaming the dried prunes and apricots separately, then putting the apricots through a meat grinder, rolling them into little balls with nuts and sugar held together with orange juice and stuffed into prunes. She describes the carrot candy as a cross between taffy and fudge.

### **Carrot candy**

3 pounds carrots, scraped, grated and juice squeezed out

3 pounds sugar

juice of 1 lemon and 1 orange

2 teaspoons powdered ginger, approximately handful chopped nuts

Put carrots, sugar and fruit juices in heavy pot and cook over slow fire. Stir often, watching carefully so it doesn't burn. When it gets thicker, add ginger and nuts. Test to see if it is done by putting a little in a dish, cooling and then placing the point of a spoon on dish and drawing through mixture to see if it will stay separated like jelly. Taste to see if more ginger is needed. Wet a cutting board with water. Spread mixture onto board and flatten with a wooden spoon. Cut into diamond shapes and leave to cool. Dip cooled pieces in sugar and store.

After the meal, there is singing. Mrs. Kramer says, "Abe has a family song that has never been written down. It's one of the songs we sing at the end of the meal. It's a very happy occasion."

**Shalom!**



Abraham Kramer reads a portion of the Haggadah, a text of the story of Exodus.