THAT'S FUNNY, YOU DON'T COOK JEWISH

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From Pitigliano, Italy, classic recipes for the High Holidays

Vesti da Turco a mangia da ebreo is a well-known and ancient Italian adage that advises one to "dress like a Turk and eat like a Jew." We are thus exhorted by the Italians—who created a cuisine that is the delight of gourmets the world over—to become acquainted with the cuisine of the Italian Jews if we really would like to eat well.

My own experience as an Italian Jew, born and brought up in Italy, supports this. During my childhood in Pitigliano, Tuscany, the buying of the choicest and freshest foods, together with the care and fuss in preparing and cooking them, was a matter of great importance, not only for my family but also for the other fifteen or twenty Jewish families then living in my village. The precise memory I have of those days in the early 1930s is that our little dresses might have been very simple but our meals were always first-rate culinary treats.

Pitigliano

During the first period of the Spanish Inquisition, many of those who were able to escape Torquemada's forced conversions, tortures and crucibles sought refuge in the south of Italy. But the Inquisition spread even there, compelling the Jews to migrate north. Some stopped at the first town they encountered in Tuscany—Pitigliano, where there may or may not have already been some Jewish families. In 1595 the Jews were also expelled from Florence, the capital of Tuscany, where some prosperous families had resided since the time of Dante, and, apparently, they also found a safe haven in Pitigliano. Castro, a bordering town in the Papal States, had in the past hosted many Jews. Its complete destruction in 1649 by the troops of Pope Innocenzo X added still further to the Jewish population of Pitigliano.

Time, wars and other destruction have buried the real origins of Jewish Pitigliano. What we do know is that the synagogue was completed in the Hebrew year 5358 (1598). The date is written on the aron kodesh. However, the existence of a much older aron kodesh preserved in the old yeshiva, suggests that the Jews lived in Pitigliano long before 1598 and that they had built, probably on the same site, a house of worship before the present one was constructed.

Pitigliano, unlike the neighboring villages, enjoyed a number of cultural and social institutions then usually available only in larger centers. The contribution of the Jews to their creation and perpetuation was a major one, and Jews and Christians had a long history of peaceful cohabitation and true friendship. But even the depth of shared experiences could not undo the growing enmity engendered by the coming of the anti-Semitic propaganda campaign launched in the mid-1930s.

By this time Pitigliano's Jewry was already showing the first symptoms of its decline, due in part to the departure of young people in search of higher education, in part to the steady migration of entire families to larger cities or, less frequently, to Eretz Israel, but mainly because the majority had almost completely assimilated into the mainstream of Christian life.

By the end of the 1920s the urge to conform was so prevalent among the Jews of Italy that our private schools had closed down to hasten assimilation. The Jewish children now walked to public school with the other children, played and did homework with them, made "best friends" with Jews or Christians depending only on affinities, common interests, and academic capabilities. The only notable difference was that because the public schools were also open on Saturday and because Catholicism, the state religion, was taught to everyone as one of the subjects, the Jewish children,

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upon our parents' request, were excused from school on Saturday and during religious instruction. But this was accepted without question by the gentiles, as was the fact that we had different holidays and worshipping practices.

After the Axis pact between Rome and Berlin, in 1936, things began to change, at first so imperceptibly that hardly anyone could really notice any difference, until the press started a subtle anti-Semitic campaign, which continued in a crescendo over the next two years, and reached its culmination in the promulgation of the first racial laws.

Toward the end of my sixth grade, on Shavuot 5698 (June 5, 1938), I celebrated my bat mitzvah. Roses of all kinds filled the temple and a carpet of rose petals covered its beautiful marble floor. The children's chorus sang *Baruch Haba,* the song sung on festive occasions, while my father escorted me to the *Heichal,* the steps in front of the ark where the Torah scrolls are kept. All the Jews in the village, who had crowded into the temple, wept. Perhaps we were all consciously or subconsciously aware that the beautiful melody of *Baruch Haba* was our "swan song."

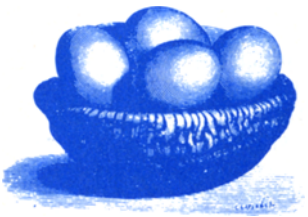
Aside from my dressmaker—a good neighbor and friend who had made my dress in the style of Juliet Capulet—no Christian schoolmates or teachers were present. Tension by now had reached the point that an invitation to any gentile would certainly have been refused, causing painful embarrassment to them and to us.

By the end of the summer of 1938, right before the reopening of the schools, the first law against the Jews was issued and enforced: all the Jewish children were banned from public schools and universities. We heard the news one morning when my mother returned sad-faced from shopping, holding a newspaper. We reacted to the news the way most children would: with jumps and cheers of joy at the idea of no more regimentation. But our

euphoria didn't last long. Immediately, all who had remained good friends up to that moment began to avoid us as if we were suddenly infected with a repulsive disease. When they met us in the street they would lower their eyes. In time they began to avoid us openly, turning their heads in the other direction, leaving us with a painful feeling of rejection and loneliness.

Isolated, rejected, despised, first we were banned from serving in public institutions, then also from private ones, until by the beginning of the war nothing was left to us as a means of livelihood except for commerce and manual skills.

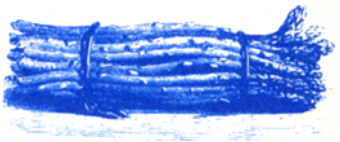
Soon after the war started, the radio—the last of our contacts with the outside world—was forbidden to us and our sets were taken from our homes. Our lives had not, so far, been directly endangered, but September 8, 1943, the day on which Marshal Badoglio signed the



armistice with the Allies, was a fatal day for the Jews of Italy. If, up to that moment, the Germans had chosen to ignore our existence, at this point they immediately made us the scapegoats for the treason of their Italian allies. With the help of the most loyal Fascists, they first confiscated all our property, then in a human hunt hard to imagine, they drove us from our homes and rounded us up to face the same fate as our European brothers and sisters in the extermination camps.

I was then seventeen and, along with two of my brothers and my younger sister, I escaped in time and joined the partisans. My parents and a younger brother were taken to a transshipment concentration camp but eventually, after a succession of fortuitous circumstances, they came back alive.

Thus the heroic saga of the Jewish people of Pitigliano, who had maintained their heritage and integrity for over six centuries, came to its sad conclusion.



My Family, Our Food

Right after the end of the war, the sight of the senseless destruction of Hebrew Pitigliano brought us to despair. But as we slowly and painfully reinserted ourselves into the social life of our village, we restored the celebration of the holidays and traditions in our homes once again, and began to take pleasure in our favorite meals. We started again to cook the traditional foods and prepared them in the ancient ways. By doing so, we regained our self-respect and our identity as Jews. We knew that nothing could ever be the same again, but the continuity of our cuisine helped to reaffirm our faith and made us realize that we had survived, that we would go on surviving, and that we would endure.

Some form of Italian-Jewish cooking has existed for more than two thousand years—or for as long as there have been Jews in Italy. The

complex Italian-Jewish cuisine of today derives from many sources. Bound by dietary laws, Jews modified Italian dishes to make them kosher, often creating delicate and delicious new ones.

While adapting the dishes of their host country to their kosher laws, the Jews in Italy, as in the rest of the world, enriched the local cuisine with their ancestral culinary customs. Obviously, then, many traditional Italian dishes have an unsuspected Jewish origin. It's hard to believe, for example, that eggplant and *finocchio* (fennel), the quintessence of Italian cooking, were originally used only by Jews. Italian-Jewish cooking is, for all its goodness, simple, relying not on exotic ingredients or complicated procedures, but on the right proportion of foods of the highest quality.

Only after I settled in America in 1958 did I find—because of all the modern kitchen appliances and aids available, and the fact that some foods could be bought already prepared—that in order to prepare a good kosher meal, it was not necessary to spend all my time and energy in the kitchen, excluding all other activities, as my mother, and all the other Jewish women in our village of Pitigliano, did.

Jewish life in Pitigliano no longer exists in anything like the rich and vibrant manner I knew it as a girl and as a young woman, but memories of those wonderful, joyous years are still fresh in my mind.

Rosh Hashanah

In preparation for Rosh Hashanah, our house was given a thorough cleaning, including the laundering of curtains, the changing of drapes and bedspreads, the replacing of the carpets and rugs that had been stored away during the hot months.

My father would carefully inspect his three *shofrot* to make sure that moths had not attacked them and made any holes, since even the tiniest hole would make a *shofar*

pasùl (unkosher). He used the wing feather of a huge bird (I now believe it was that of a turkey, but then I thought it belonged to an eagle) dipped in wine vinegar to clean the inside walls. Apparently this operation did something to maintain or improve the sound of the primitive instrument. My father was such a powerful *shofar* blower that when the blasts—especially the prolonged ones—came out of his instrument, even the Christians in the fields could hear them.

The Rosh Hashanah Seder was almost as important as the Pesach Seder. The table was set with our most magnificent hand-embroidered tablecloth, the best crystal, the gold-rimmed porcelain dishes, and the baroque silverware of my

mother's wedding dowry. At one end of the table, near where my father sat, all the special dishes were neatly gathered to be blessed. Closest to him were the wine and Kiddush cup and the beautiful challah breads; in a semicircle around them various dishes were arranged: one with a boiled rooster's head, comb and all; another with fish (usually fillets of salted anchovies well washed and sprinkled with olive oil, but occasionally also bottarga); another with boiled, peeled, sliced beets; and lots of seasonal fruits. At the center of the table there was a dish with a round cake of dried sourdough, or leavening, on which the palm and fingers of our father's right hand had previously been impressed, and with a bunch of fennel weed, complete with stems and seeds, standing in the center.

The Rosh Hashanah Seder was not established to remember or celebrate any historical event. Rather it revolved about the theme of growth and prosperity and sweetness for the year to come. Each of the foods gathered on the table was blessed, and each blessing ended with the refrain, "Grow and multiply like the fish in the ocean; grow and multiply

like the seeds of the pomegranate; like the leavening, like the grain, like the fennel," etc. Sweetness was symbolized by the beets and the sweetest fruits, and by desserts made with honey.

Our typical Rosh Hashanah menu was as follows:

Calzonicchi in Brodo
(Calzonicchi Soup)
Muggine in Bianco
(Jellied Striped Bass)
Insalata Tricolore
(Tricolor Salad)
Pollo in Galantina
(Chicken Galantine)
Sformato de Zucchini
(Zucchini Pudding)
Ceciarchiata, Sfratti, Dolce de Miele
(Taiglach, Honey and Nut Dessert, Honey Cake)
Mele, Fichi Freschi, Datteri
(Apples, Fresh Figs, Dates)

Yom Kippur
The night of the ninth of Tishri (the eve of Yom Kippur) we had dinner before sundown, and even though we were allowed to eat as much as we wanted, we refrained from having desserts or any frivolous foods. The temple was decorated in white to symbolize the purity of conscience, and in addition to the usual Shabbat lights of the chandeliers and the ner tamid, there was one oil lamp flickering for each member of the community who had passed "to a better life" in the past few decades.

The morning of Yom Kippur, my father would leave the house very early, and we children would all climb into bed with Mamma to loaf for a while, it being the only day of the year when she did not have to start her work at daybreak. When the competition for getting to be the closest to her became a little too rough, she would give up, get dressed, and go to temple, remaining there with my father until after sunset, when the last blows of the shofar marked the end of the fasting. If the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur were days of penance, they were more than compensated for by the meal that followed the great fast:
Bollo e Vermouth Dolce
(Bollo and Sweet Vermouth)
Quadrucci in Brodo
(Soup with Tiny Pasta Squares)
Triglie all'Ebraica
(Red Snapper Jewish Style)
Finocchi in Tegame
(Stewed fennel)
Taglierini col Brodo Brusco
(Cold Thin Egg Noodles with Bursco Sauce)
Torzelli
(Fried Chicory)
Polpette di Petto di Pollo coi Sedani
(Chicken Breast Patties with Celery Fingers)
Challa
Borriche Pitiglianesi, Torta di Cioccolata e Albumi
(Cinnamon Turnovers, Egg White Chocolate Cake)
Fichi Freschi, Pere, Uva
(Fresh Figs, Pears, Grapes)

Sukkot
Sukkot, in Pitigliano, meant a great deal not only to us, but also to our Christian neighbors. For the Jews it was the only festival that was closely related to the real life of our surroundings, since Pitigliano depended for its survial almost entirely on its meager agricultural resources; for the Christians it represented the manner by which God would show His divine benevolence or wrath. It was a belief among the gentile peasants that if it rained at least once during the eight days of Sukkot, it was a sign that God had forgiven the Jews their sins and would grant a plentiful harvest that year. Hundreds of years ago, on the eighth night of Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, the Christian farmers of the surrounding countryside would gather in the temple, outside the sanctuary, to join in the prayer for rain that the Jews would recite. This is a traditional Sukkot menu:
Passato di Verdura
(Vegetable Cream Soup)
Scallopine al Marsala
(Veal Scallops with Marsala Wine)
Fritto Misto di Verdura
(Fried Mixed Vegetables)
Cavoli Ripieni
(Stuffed Cabbage)
Maritucci, Dictinobis, Ciambelle di Sukkot
(Sukkot Bread, Doughnuts, Sukkot Bagels)
As a midnight snack:
Masconod
(Pasta Rolls with Parmesan and Cinnamon)

Insalata Tricolore
(Tricolor Salad)

We used to call this salad "patriotic" because of its red, white and green colors, which are those of the Italian flag. It was invariably served as part of the Rosh Hashanah dinner when the three vegetables that compose it are at their youngest and tenderest.

1½ lbs. tender, fresh string beans
6 small beets, greens removed
12 small, new white potatoes
salt, freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1/3 cup olive oil
6 small sprigs Italian parsley

Trim the string beans at both ends. Cook each vegetable separately in a little salted water until tender but still firm (if you have a vegetable steamer, by all means steam your vegetables). Peel the potatoes and the beets. Slice both thin and arrange in a long serving plate with the potatoes at center and the string beans and beets on either side. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle with vinegar and oil and garnish with parsley sprigs. Serves 6. Parve.

Triglie all'Ebraica
(Red Snapper Jewish style)

Triglie all'Ebraica is traditionally served on the night after Yom Kippur. In Italy it is made with triglie, a medium-sized red fish resembling red snapper. Here, triglie is not available and so I substitute small red snapper, which works just as well.

4 lbs. small red snapper
2 teaspoons salt
½ cup olive oil
1 teaspoon sugar
¼ cup wine vinegar
1 cup dark seedless raisins
½ cup pinoli (pine nuts)

Wash fish thoroughly and pat dry with paper towel. Lightly sprinkle over all with salt and arrange in an oiled baking dish in a single layer.

Dissolve the sugar in the vinegar and pour over the fish. Pour in the oil, then sprinkle with raisins and pinoli. Cover with a piece of aluminum foil and bake in 400°F oven for approximately 20 minutes. Remove foil and bake another 30 minutes or until all liquid is gone and snapper is golden. Serves six. Parve.

Sfratti
(Honey and Nut dessert)

The etymology of *sfratti* as the name for this marvelously tasty dessert is a curious one. There was a time when the law that prevailed was the "law of the stick." When landlords could not collect from poor tenants, they would evict them with the persuasive aid of a stick. The same treatment was applied to Jews when they were no longer wanted in a community. In Italian the word *sfratto* means eviction, and *sfratti* look just like the sticks used by those landlords and the enemies of the Jews. *Sfratti* may look unappealing but they taste delicious. They bear an unpleasant name but are traditionally served on the very happy New Year holiday.

3 cups unbleached flour
1¼ cups sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
1/3 cup vegetable oil
2/3 cup dry white wine
1 cup honey
½ teaspoon cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground clove
¼ teaspoon black pepper
dash ground nutmeg
freshly grated rind of 1 orange
15 oz. walnut meats, chopped

Mound the flour on a flat working surface and make a well in the center. Place sugar and salt in the well. Gradually add wine and oil while mixing with a fork until a smooth, stiff dough is formed. Knead for 5 minutes. Place in a bowl, cover with a piece of wax paper, and set aside in the refrigerator. In a large skillet, over high heat, bring the honey to a rapid boil and cook for 3 minutes. Add the spices, orange rind and nuts and cook another 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove the skillet from the heat and continue to stir until the honey/nut mixture is cool enough to handle. Pour onto a floured working surface and divide into 6 equal portions. Using your hands, roll each portion into a cylindrical stick about 13 inches long and push aside. Take the pastry dough from the refrigerator and divide it into 6 equal portions. With a small rolling pin, roll out each piece to form a 4 by 14 inch strip. Place one stick of filling on each strip and wrap the dough around the filling, covering it completely. Pinch the ends closed. Place on a well-floured baking sheet with the seam side down. Bake in preheated 375°F oven for 20 minutes. Remove from the baking sheet and wrap in foil. When completely cool, and just a moment before serving, cut the sticks into 1½ inch diamonds. Six sticks yield 4 dozen diamonds. NOTE: *Sfratti,* wrapped in foil, keep several weeks without refrigeration. In fact, they taste better after they have been allowed to age for a few days.

Sformato di Zucchini
(Zucchini pudding)
1 medium onion, minced
olive oil
3½ lbs. green or yellow zucchini
1 small carrot, peeled and grated or finely chopped
3 shredded basil leaves or 1 teaspoon dried basil
1 tablespoon coarsely chopped Italian parsley
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
4 tablespoons freshly grated parmesan cheese (optional)
2 large eggs, slightly beaten
½ cup fine bread crumbs

In a large pot, over low heat, cook the onion with 3 tablespoons of olive oil. Trim zucchini at both ends and wash thoroughly. Dice and add to onions. Add carrot, basil, parsley, salt and pepper; cook over low heat, covered, for 30 minutes to one hour, stirring occasionally. (Cooking time depends on freshness of zucchini.) If it becomes necessary, add a few tablespoons of water and continue to cook until you have a purée. Uncover and cook, stirring, until excess moisture has evaporated. Remove from heat, add the cheese and stir to combine. After mixture has cooled a bit, add the eggs and stir vigorously. Pour into an oiled ovenproof dish sprinkled with bread crumbs. Spread flat with spatula. Sprinkle with bread crumbs and oil and bake in 450°F oven for 20 to 30 minutes, or until top is nice and brown. Serves 6 to 8. Dairy or Parve.

Scaloppine al Marsala
(Veal Scallopini with Marsala Wine)

1½ lbs. veal scallops, sliced very thin
1 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
½ cup unbleached flour
4 tablespoons olive oil
½ cup imported dry Marsala
½ cup orange juice

Sprinkle veal scallops with salt and pepper; dredge with flour and pat to shake off excess. Heat the oil in a large skillet and lightly brown the veal 1½ to 2 minutes on each side over moderate heat. Add Marsala and cook over high heat until all liquid has evaporated. Transfer to a hot serving plate. Add orange juice to skillet and simmer for a minute or two, scraping to deglaze the bottom. Pour this gravy over the scaloppine and serve immediately. Serves 6. Meat. ✱