

INGER D. KENOBI

CHOCOLATE FOR THE MASSES

• YOUR CHOCOLATE GUIDE TO A HAPPIER LIFE •



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First Published in Great Britain 2017
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LET'S FACE IT,

A NICE CREAMY CHOCOLATE
CAKE DOES A LOT FOR
PEOPLE; IT DOES FOR ME.

-Audrey Hepburn





INTRODUCTION

I firmly believe that one of the secrets to staying happy and healthy is to embrace a joyful and adventurous lifestyle while eating irresistible food, like chocolate.

I associate chocolate with happiness, life force, and fun. Even though I've wisely chosen a husband who loves chocolate as much as I do, I can't seem to escape the nuisance of other people commenting on what I eat.

It normally goes something like this:

I'm out dining with some friends at one of the local pubs, and as the dinner plates are being cleared away, I eagerly scan the dessert menu for the word 'chocolate'.

Then suddenly, out of the blue, one of the men leans over and says to me in a hushed, conspiratorial voice, 'I bet that if you ate dessert every single day, your husband wouldn't be too pleased with you.'

Gosh! There is nothing more charming than a man who spews nonsense your way. *Am I right, ladies?*

As I suppressed the urge to throw my glass of red wine in his face, the following questions raced through my mind.

- Was he saying that women who eat desserts are bad?
- Had I given the misleading impression that I'm married to some sick control freak?
- Was he suffering from the delusion that men have a say in what women eat?
- Was this his clumsy stab at being funny?

I was open to all possibilities, but trying to ascertain where this man was coming from felt like too much work. I drew a mental line between us and ate my dessert in peace.





There is a lot more I could say about this interaction. Stuff about body shaming, eating trauma, diets, and all the shifting, cultural hang-ups around what and how we eat. We could spend a lot of time wading through the toxicity of such verbal kryptonite and analyse the dark side and the light side of food, but for me it boils down to this: ordering dessert is not a character flaw.

You can write that down and underline it.

Don't worry so much about what's on someone else's plate. When it comes to food, try coming from a place of love. Love what you eat, and eat what you love. That's what the topic of this book is all about.

I will mix it up for you with funny and personal stories from my past, great recipes, and quick and easy hints and tips.

In many ways, this book is also a celebration and an experience.

It's a celebration of the marvelous cocoa bean and its ability to bring people together in the spirit of happiness and friendship.

Then, by trying out the recipes yourself, you get to experience the joy of baking and the many surprising ways it can enrich your life.

I just think that in a screen-obsessed world dominated by clicks, likes, and swipes, there is something to be said for sinking your hands into a bag of fluffy, white flour. I highly recommend the experience of feeling butter and sugar crumbling between your fingertips. Grab a wooden spatula and gently stir a pot of chocolate; watch the solid pieces turn to liquid velvet right before your very eyes.

Baking is almost like a meditation ritual, a mindfulness session. For every delicious step toward enlightenment, you get to feast on tasty treats.

This makes me excited about the future.

Shall we get started?



Coca Cola Chocolate Cake

*This is the story of birthdays, Gone with the Wind,
and how a Coca Cola chocolate cake saved the day.*

Like many of you, I cherish the idea of being celebrated on my birthday. I don't need a party, but I do need a cake. I'm pretty non-negotiable about that. This is probably rooted in the fact that I'm from Norway, a country where being served cake in bed on your birthday is a national tradition.

At the time of the Coca Cola cake incident, I was in my early thirties and living at a remote Tibetan Buddhist centre in California. Maybe you didn't know that such places exist, but they do. At our centre, there were about thirty of us all together. Thirty people living on the same land and studying with the same teacher. It was like one big loving, complicated family.

Given the nature of our communal living

situation, our birthday celebrations took place in the main kitchen during lunch hour. Everyone would gather around the prepared cake, wait for you to walk through the kitchen door, and then burst into song the moment they saw you. It was a beautiful and heart-warming ritual.

On this particular birthday—without warning might I add—it was decided we were too busy for the whole cake thing. 'But we got you this,' one of the managers said, handing me a brown paper bag. You know, the kind of bag they use in movies for ransom money or to hide the stash of cocaine in. One of those.

I opened the bag. It contained a tiny tub of ice cream. Emphasis on tiny. It wasn't even chocolate flavored. I felt gutted.

Back at my desk I decided I should be able to

go home early. The absence of a birthday cake had made this day unbearable.

Looking back, I realize I was being unreasonably upset and maybe a tad childish. We probably *were* too busy for cake that day. A meditation master was probably visiting, conducting all kinds of pujas and ceremonies. Some of these ceremonies require so much preparation and effort that they can only come together if we all agree to give up sleep.

Even though I knew all of that, and even though I knew I was sort of overreacting, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was sliding backwards, birthday-wise.

Just as I was contemplating taking a nap under my desk, the office door flung open. In rushed one of my closest friends. She was wearing a Terminator T-shirt and carrying an over-sized baking pan and a giant knife.

What was this?

'I heard you only got ice cream, so I baked us this cake,' she said, placing the pan on my desk with a thud. Then she continued, 'The cake is still warm so the frosting might be a bit runny.'

Runny! Frosting! Warm cake!

I grabbed the knife and helped myself to a huge piece. *Yes! Chocolate cake. At last!* It totally hit the spot. It delighted all my senses—mind,

body, and soul. Upon tasting this cake, the universe instantaneously restored its balance, and my birthday was saved.

Even though this cake took me by surprise, I was unsurprised that it was this particular friend who had baked it for me. Why? She's from the South, that's why.

To me, the great thing about having close friends from the South is that they are eager to tell you cute anecdotes from the filming of *Gone with the Wind* (did you know 1,400 candidates were interviewed for the role of Scarlet O'Hara?); they can say *y'all* without sounding like an idiot; and they love preparing mouth-watering food for you: dishes like lemon meringue pie, skillet cornbread, and peach-pecan cobbler.

In this instant, on this particular birthday, my friend had baked me the famous Cracker Barrel Coca Cola Chocolate Cake. Don't be fooled by the playful name. This cake is powerful. It's so rich and sinful that it makes the low-carb, non-fat, soy-infused segment of the population run for the hills.

Tempted to try it?

When you feel ready to embrace your inner Southern girl or boy, or you want to brighten someone's day, follow the recipe below.

Your life will never be the same again.



Coca Cola Chocolate Cake

230g (2 sticks) butter
3 Tablespoons cocoa
50g (2 oz) melted dark chocolate
2 dl (1 cup) Coca Cola
2 big eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
400g (2 cups) sugar
1 dl (½ cup) buttermilk
1 teaspoon baking powder
280g (2 cups) flour

Frosting:

115g (1 stick) butter
50g (2 oz) melted dark chocolate
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
6 Tablespoons Coca Cola
500g (4 cups) icing (powdered) sugar

Preheat the oven to 170°C (335 °F) and line a baking pan (approximately 20 x 30 cm) with parchment paper.

THE BATTER

Melt butter and chocolate together in a pan over low heat, and stir gently with a wooden spoon. Add cocoa and Coca Cola and keep stirring. (It might fizz and bubble a bit, just like a magic potion.) In a separate bowl, whisk together eggs and vanilla; then add in sugar and buttermilk. When that's all mixed together, stir in flour and



baking powder. Last, add all of this to the butter/Coca Cola mixture, and stir until the batter is nice and smooth.

THE BAKING

Pour the batter into the baking pan, and bake in the middle of the oven for 40 minutes.

Rotate the pan halfway through, just in case you have one of those temperamental ovens that doesn't cook things evenly. When done baking, take the cake out of the oven, but leave it in the pan.

THE FROSTING

While the cake is baking, make the frosting. Melt butter and chocolate over low heat. Stir gently with a wooden spoon. Then add cocoa, Coca Cola, and vanilla. Keep stirring. Last, add the icing sugar and stir until it's all nice and even, like velvet.

THE DECORATING

When the cake has cooled down for about 15 to 20 minutes, pour the frosting over it

and spread evenly. Put the cake in the fridge until the frosting has firmed up. Serve and eat! Or, if it's an emergency, like it was on my birthday, serve the cake right away. Just warn your guests that it might get a bit messy.

HINTS AND TIPS

One: This batter will be on the thin side—think light and runny. I'm just mentioning it in case you feel tempted to add more flour. Don't.

Two: While most cake recipes tell you to cool the cake completely before frosting it, that's not what's happening here. The beauty of frosting this cake while it's still a bit warm is that it seals in the moisture and ensures that the cake remains, well, moist. In addition, some of the frosting might seep into the cake. Divine.

Three: Chocolate lovers are an international breed, so please notice that the recipes in this book include both American and European measurements. *You're welcome!*



Chocolate Cheesecake

*This is the story of cheesecakes, sailing to America,
and my first real job.*

The summer I turned eighteen I went from being an aimless student with zero cash to becoming a responsible lady with a steady paycheck. How did I manage that? I got a job. I became a dishwasher at the renowned restaurant N.B Sørensen.

N.B Sørensen was a beehive of award-winning food, cheerful customers, and flirtatious waiters. Everything was fast-moving, fun, and festive. It felt like one of the happiest places on earth.

The venue that lent itself to all this merriment was one of the historic buildings down by the harbor. A century ago it would have been bustling with activities from the growing shipping trade. Goods, passengers, and cargo on the ground floor, offices on the top floors. For those who wanted to catch a glimpse of

the impressive ships arriving from cities like Glasgow and New York, this was the place to be. Grandma used to tell me, 'You knew it was Christmas when the ship from America sailed in. It was the only time of year we could get oranges. What a luxury that was!'

She also told me tales of when her father, my great-great grandfather, boarded one of those ships and sailed to America, the land of opportunities. I believe he was only eighteen at the time. *Could that be right?* The same age I was when I became a dishwasher....?

Suddenly, that chapter of my life seems far less exciting.

Comparisons aside, it *was* a very exciting time for me. Just to be clear, it wasn't that I was super psyched about washing dishes; it was more that I became a productive member of

society who earned her own money. I paid taxes. I stood taller. This job felt like an important step in the direction of *something*. It was also my first exposure to truly great food.

For the purpose of this book, I want to focus in on the cheesecake. It wasn't a chocolate cheesecake; we'll get to that one in a minute, but this cake had gumption. It's like it knew all the secrets about to how to be a cake.

From the corner of my dish-washing station, I observed how the chefs poured the smooth batter into the silver cake pans and placed them in the oven to bake. Once cooled, the cakes would get a thin layer of sour-cream-based frosting. Finally, when ready to be served, each individual slice was decorated with a spoonful of red berry coulis and a peppermint leaf sprinkled with icing sugar. It was possibly the most amazing thing I had ever witnessed.

A few years later, when I asked a friend if he liked cheesecake, he said, 'Well, I like cheese and I like cake.'

I like cheesecake and I like chocolate, so...*drumroll please*...I give you Chocolate Cheesecake!

This cake is a rare combination of looking super impressive while being really easy to make. It's also really, really scrumptious.

Here we go.





Chocolate Cheesecake

For the cake

210g (1¾ cup) Digestive biscuits, or Graham crackers

100g (6 Tablespoons) melted butter

750g (24 oz) cream cheese

2 eggs

250g (1¼ cups) sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla extract



For decorating

100g (4 oz) dark melted chocolate

Preheat the oven to 170°C (335 °F) and line a baking pan (approximately 20 x 30 cm) with parchment paper.

THE BASE

Put the biscuits and melted butter in a food processor. Pulse into fine crumbs, then tip into the baking pan. Press until it makes an even layer. Bake for about 13 minutes, or until the sides start to brown. Pre-baking the base prevents it from becoming soggy when you pour the batter over it.

THE BATTER

Place cream cheese in a bowl and beat it on medium speed with an electric mixer until the cheese starts to look smooth. Stop the machine; scrap the mixer blade and the side of the bowl, and then restart the mixer. Repeat until you have a silky smooth batter. Ever tried a lumpy cheesecake? No, thank you! Don't skip over this step, because once you add



the eggs, it's too late. It's now or never. So mix and scrape, mix and scrape. When happy with the texture, gradually add the sugar, then the vanilla, and finally the eggs, one at a time.

THE PRE-BAKING PREP

Take out one cup of the batter and set aside. Pour the remaining batter over the pre-baked base. Then, melt the chocolate over low heat and mix it in with the reserved batter. Pour this chocolate batter on top of the plain batter in a perfect circle, about 1 inch from the edge of the pan. Got it? Next, grab a soup spoon and drag it through the two batters, creating a beautiful, marbled effect. Just drag the spoon back and forth through the two batters in a swirly manner, like writing on water. Don't be afraid to mess it up; it will look great, regardless.

THE BAKING

Reduce the oven temperature to 150 °C (300°F) and bake the cake for about 50–60 minutes or until it shows signs of puffing up around the edges. Just keep an eye on it. You don't want to overbake it as it can cause the eggs to coagulate too much, causing the cake to pull apart. In other words, your cake will crack and mess up the marble design.

THE POST-BAKING PREP

When done baking, remove the cake from the oven. Leave it in the tin, but run a knife around the edges to release the cake from the sides of the pan. This prevents the cake from cracking during the cooling down process. Place the cake on a cooling rack and put a large, inverted, mixing bowl over it. After an hour of the inverted-bowl treatment, put the cake in the fridge for at least two hours. Be patient, because unless the cake gets to chill properly, it can lose its shape when sliced into individual pieces.

HINTS AND TIPS

One: If you don't have a food processor, do what Grandma Inger used to do. Break up the biscuits, put them inside a sealed, clear bag, and roll over the bag with a rolling pin. Keep rolling back and forth until you have fine, fine crumbs. Put the crumbs in a bowl and stir in the melted butter. If you don't have a rolling pin, use a wine bottle.

Two: When melting the chocolate, keep the heat low and the stirring to a minimum. High heat and vigorous stirring makes for grainy, lumpy chocolate. Always aim for a velvety texture.



Chocolate Oat Cake

*This is the story of the Scottish mafia,
oats, and unexpected treasures.*

What constitutes a perfect cake? Given how subjective taste is, why would I even try to answer that question?

I suppose there are a few cakes that we all can agree are truly spectacular. Like all the cakes at Ottolenghi, for instance. I've seen them in person, and I could not stop drooling over them. If you don't know what Ottolenghi is, no worries. It's a chain of restaurants hidden away in the more chic neighborhoods of London. Everything on the menu is remarkable, even the broccoli. That's not an opinion, by the way; that's a fact.

Then there are all the cakes made by Sookie St. James, the beloved chef from *Gilmore Girls*, played by Melissa McCarthy. All her cakes are basically edible pieces of art. I wonder if there is a *Gilmore Girls* cookbook?

Remind me to check.

And let's not forget about the chocolate mousse cake! More on that one later, but the cake I want to single out here isn't really a cake; it's a cookie. In my fantasy world this cookie is always accompanied by a lovely cup of tea, served by people wearing kilts who have pets called Loch Ness.

I'm talking, of course, about the scrumptious Scottish shortbread cookie. This cookie is more than just wheat, sugar, and butter: it's history, tradition, and culture.

Sidebar: When I was a little girl, my uncle told me that the moment we crossed the border from Norway to Sweden, I would instantly be able to speak Swedish. He was wrong, and I began to cry.

I still think that maybe he was onto something.

Maybe I just hadn't 'done it' right, and maybe that explains why a small part of me believes that whenever I eat shortbread, I should be able to speak in a thick Scottish accent.

Of course it doesn't work like that, and that's a good thing. After all, it's not for nothing that the old saying goes: The Italian mafia gives you an offer you can't refuse. The Scottish mafia gives you an offer you can't understand.

Jokes aside, making perfect shortbread is no laughing matter. It's almost like a science project where, if you get the temperature and texture wrong, the whole thing blows up.

Or in my case, the whole thing turns into oozing lava.

This is one of the truly frustrating things about baking. You study the recipe; you measure everything carefully; and just when you think everything's going according to plan, everything goes horribly wrong.

Remember the movie *The Martian*, when the astronaut played by Matt Damon becomes stranded on Mars and must solve one crisis after another? He has to figure out how to grow food, how to signal to planet Earth that he's still alive, and how to stay brave and not lose hope.

That's exactly what baking shortbread is like for me. What to do?

When baking turns messy and disappointing, you have two options.

Option One: Say f@#%k it! and storm out of the kitchen.

Option Two: Channel your inner Martian and ask yourself: How can I fix this? What haven't I tried yet?

A few years ago, while looking at yet another baking tray with shortbread gone wrong, I chose option two. I shifted into solution-mode and dumped the oozing lava batter into a mixing bowl. Then I added a cup of oats, gave it a good stir, and poured the batter back into the baking pan and put it in the oven.

Then I prayed and waited.

Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, the cookies had now transformed into a gorgeous cake with a beautiful golden hue; there was not a trace of oozing or lava-ing. When the cake had cooled down, I decorated it with chocolate frosting and chopped nuts.

Victory!

This is one of the truly rewarding things about baking: overcoming obstacles and turning trash into treasures. Isn't that what life's all about?

The moment we are willing to drop the plan and surrender to having fun, playing, and



experimenting, amazing things happen. Mistakes turn into miracles. Maybe that can be the title for my new book? *Turn your Mistakes into Miracles!*

Because I've already made all the baking mistakes a person can make, you don't have to. You get to skip straight to the miracle part.

Here is the recipe for Chocolate Oat Cake.

Chocolate Oat Cake

Cake

200g (15 Tablespoons) butter

200g (1 cup) white sugar

280g (2 cups) flour

80g (1 cup) oats

1/2 teaspoon salt

Frosting

100g (4 oz) melted chocolate

56g (4 Tablespoons) melted butter

50g (1/3 cup) chopped walnuts or hazelnuts

Preheat the oven to 160°C (325°F) and line a 10" x 10" baking tray with parchment paper.

THE BATTER

Melt the butter over low heat, and once melted, add the sugar, oats, flour, and salt. Stir with a wooden spoon until you have a nice and even batter.



Pour the batter into the baking tray.

THE BAKING.

Put the tray in the oven and bake for 25–30 minutes. After fifteen minutes, rotate the tray. You know the cake is done baking when the edges start to get a nice golden coloring. When the baking time is up, remove the tray from the oven and place it on a cooling rack.

THE FROSTING

Chop the butter into small pieces and melt in a small pan over low heat. Once melted, remove the pan from the stove and add finely chopped chocolate. Let it sit for two minutes, then gently stir until you have one smooth mixture. Pour this over the cake while it's still

in the pan. Sprinkle with chopped nuts and press them lightly into the frosting.

THE PRE-SERVING PREP

Let the cake cool for about thirty minutes, then cut into big or small pieces (you decide) and serve. It's even better the next day, so you don't have to eat it right away.

HINTS AND TIPS

One: If you are using hazelnuts, you can amp up your game by roasting them first. Roasted hazelnuts are the best. Roasted sesame seeds also work well, surprisingly.

Two: Never be afraid to experiment with a recipe. Make it your own and see what unfolds.



The Perfect Brownie

*This is the story of how I fell in love with
brownies in Beijing.*

Going to China was a big deal for me. This was back in the early '90s when you could still get a hotel room for £3 a night, and Roger Moore was the narrator for the English audio tour of the Forbidden City.

I leapt off the plane, full of curiosity and excitement, inhaling the air and relishing the magical feeling of being new to everything.

I was there for two full weeks with my high school class, and we had the best of times visiting sites like the silk market, the Summer Palace, and the Great Wall of China. Everywhere we went felt like the perfect place to be, and everyone we met was friendly and helpful. Everyone.

But then there was the food.

How can I accurately begin to describe my reaction to authentic Chinese food? That I found it scary and joyless in a creepy sort of way that my brain didn't know how to handle? That it was the kind of food a young Indiana Jones might be forced to eat? Whichever way you slice it, the food was totally adventurous, but it also filled me with dread.

I'm one thousand percent behind trying new things and tasting new food, but I'm a die-hard vegetarian, so the endless stream of dishes prepared with snakes, pig ears, ox penises, and duck feet made me feel like I was secretly dying inside. I didn't grow up with food like that. I didn't know where to turn or how to react.

I loved the green tea though. I drank a lot of green tea.

After a full week of meals like that, I was ready

for something more. . . *familiar*. So when someone suggested we all go to the newly opened Hard Rock Café for dinner, my entire body screamed 'YES!'

Here I got to eat French fries and drink vanilla milkshakes. My body felt safe and full, but the evening wasn't over yet. For dessert I treated myself to a big piece of brownie. It arrived adorned with whipped cream and a cherry on top. Just like in the movies.

The brownie-ness of this brownie can't be described by words; it has to be experienced, eaten, tasted, savored. It's hands down the best brownie I'd ever eaten.

In the years that followed I tried out numerous brownie recipes, hoping to recreate my big Beijing brownie-moment. Despite all my best efforts, they all came out too crumbly, too dry, too cake-like, too boring. Wrong! Brownies are supposed to be chewy, soft, and gooey.

How could that be achieved? What was the secret? Why was this so hard?

I finally discovered three crucial factors. I will now share them with you.

1. Only use brown sugar. Brown sugar holds onto moisture in a way that white sugar can only dream about. Brown sugar equals chewy. White sugar equals cake-like.
2. Only use top-quality chocolate. That doesn't mean you have to restrict your chocolate shopping to Harrods or Belgravia; just don't be a Scrooge. Low-grade chocolate doesn't melt; it turns into a mud-like substance. That's not what we want. We want velvet. When we melt chocolate for brownies, we want the result to resemble liquid velvet.
3. Lastly, and this is important, don't leave your brownies in the oven too long. When testing to see if your brownies are done, the toothpick should come out covered in soft crumbles. All cakes continue to bake for a while once out of the oven, including brownies. Don't wait until the toothpick comes out squeaky clean. Do. Not. Over. Bake.

But enough talk. It's time for you to test this out for yourself. Here is my bulletproof recipe.





The Perfect Brownie

1¼ cups (180g) flour

¾ teaspoon baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

1½ sticks (160g) butter

1 cup (175g) chopped-up chocolate

2 ¼ cups (250g) soft brown sugar

4 eggs

1 Tablespoon vanilla

Preheat the oven to 170°C (335 °F).

THE BATTER

Cut the butter into small pieces and melt in a big-ish pot over very low heat. Once melted, add the chocolate and turn off the heat. Set aside for two minutes, then slowly stir until it's one smooth mixture. Add the sugar, stir, and leave it to cool down some more.

In the meantime, break the eggs into a bowl and whisk together with a fork. Add vanilla and whisk some more. Pour this into the cooled chocolate concoction and stir with a wooden mixing spoon until it's blended together.

In a separate bowl, combine flour, baking powder, and salt. Add one third of this dry mixture to the wet batter and stir well. Repeat two more times.



THE PRE-BAKING PREP

Line a 12"x 8" (or 30 cm x 20 cm) baking pan with parchment paper. With a pair of scissors, make a small cut at all the four corners of the parchment paper and overlap the loose ends. Now the corners will be nice and sharp, which means your brownie pieces will come out nice and sharp as well. Pour the batter into the pan.

THE BAKING

Put the pan in the oven and bake for 20–25 minutes. After 15 minutes, turn the pan around to ensure even baking. After another 5 minutes, insert a toothpick in the middle of the brownie and observe how it comes out. If covered in moist crumbles, the baking time is up. If covered in runny batter, bake for another 5 minutes. The baking time depends on your

oven, how deep your pan is, and all kinds of other factors. Now my brownies only take 20 minutes to bake, but in my previous oven they took 30 minutes. Go figure.

THE POST-BAKING PREP

Once out of the oven, let it cool for a bit, then cut into small or big pieces. Serve them on their own, or with vanilla ice cream, or with whipped cream and a bright red cherry on top, the Hard Rock Café way.

HINTS AND TRICKS

One: For added fun and flavour, sprinkle your batter with chopped-up chocolate and/or walnuts before baking.

Two: These do well in the freezer, so feel free to whip up a huge batch and save for later.





THESE ARE THE FEW OF MY FAVORITE THINGS

Chocolate makes people, and people make chocolate. If the recipe part of this book is starting to get on your nerves, the next few pages will be a nice break for you.

Here I will share with you my list of top-ten favorite chocolates, the kind you buy, not the kind you bake.

Even though I love the idea of having a signature chocolate, the truth is that I have many. As soon as I rest my eyes on an inviting piece of chocolate and try to decide

if this is *the one*, I remind myself that appointing just one favorite means forsaking all others, which feels both unnatural and unnecessary. It feels wrong.

When I think of all the different kinds of chocolates that I love, I feel happier, more sophisticated, and a little kinder. I feel at peace.

The top-ten list I'm about to share with you combines everything I love about chocolate with everything I love about family, friendship, and fun.

01

NEUHAUS

Back in 1912, Mr Jean Neuhaus invented the world's first bite-sized filled chocolate. He named it the praline. I don't know about you, but I can't even imagine a world prior to pralines. So pale, so primitive, so pointless! What I adore about Neuhaus is that they still only use the freshest and finest ingredients. No shortcuts and no cheap solutions. No wonder Neuhaus is the official supplier to the Royal Court of Belgium.

02

GUYLIAN

This is another Belgian classic, but with a twist. Most people know Guylian as the producer of mouth-watering pralines shaped like adoring sea-shells. But who came up with that cute idea? Guy and Liliane did. When they got married back in 1960, they combined their names to Guylian and started producing pralines and truffles. Ah, to be young and run a chocolate empire. What a dream! When I rush through airports, quickly scanning the aisles for gifts for my friends and family, a box of Guylian always seems like a good idea.

03

LINDT

Like all good chocolate, a box of Lindt truffles has the power to save the day and lift you higher.

I had just moved to a new apartment and was busy unpacking all the boxes and settling in. When a dear friend announced she was coming to visit, I panicked. My fridge was completely empty, the kind of empty that only fridges in brand new apartments are. How could I square that fact with the image of myself as the perfect hostess? My friend arrived and handed me a box of Lindt truffles. 'Here, consider this your housewarming gift!' she said. What should I have learned from this? Only that my friends are the best. Even when they don't know they're saving the day, they somehow manage to do just that.



04

IT'S CALLED . . .

I'm eager to tell you about this chocolate, but I have no idea what it's called. I know it came in a red tin; it contained chocolate-covered macadamia nuts, but the rest is shrouded in mystery. The only thing I *do* know is that my friend's father bought this tin abroad, when away on his many business trips. Over the years I've looked everywhere for this tin. It's my White Whale. Maybe it went out of production. Or maybe some things are never meant to be found again. Like Ibsen once said: 'Eternally owned is only that which is lost.'

05

KROKANRULL

This is a cute one. I was hanging out with my friends drinking cheap white wine and listening to Sophie B. Hawkins on repeat. Suddenly the doorbell rang. I opened up the window and leaned out to get a better look. By the front door stood this guy we all knew, wondering if we wanted to hang out. We said yes, but on one condition—that he brought us some chocolate. To show him we were serious, we lowered him a wicker basket, Rapunzel-style. Within five minutes the basket was filled with all kinds of treats, including the beloved Krokanrull.

That was over twenty years ago, and my Krokanrull friends are still some of the most important people in my life. Coincidence? All I know is that no chocolate, before or after, has ever represented a finer group of women.

06

NIEDEREGGER

-with love since 1806

Tipsy on the fact that I was having lunch with a group of Norwegian Royal Protection Officers (long story), I couldn't wait to dig into the picnic spread prepared by the Palace kitchen staff. My eyes zoomed in on a cluster of shiny chocolate wrappers. Because I was raised well, and because I didn't want to come across as some greedy sugar freak, I held my chocolate horses and calmly helped myself to a cheese sandwich. Then I casually reached for one of the

chocolates. Wow! I had never tasted anything like it. Was this the chocolate version of a VIP zone? What other explanation could there be? I looked at the wrapper. It had the word Niederegger written on it. *Nied..*what? Was this a new brand? Or was this brand only sold to royalty? I turned the wrapper around and read the list of ingredients: rose-flavored marzipan covered with soft nougat. All my favorite things, bundled into one treat! I have since discovered that Niederegger is sold in plenty of places, and you don't need a title or a castle to buy them. I simply hadn't noticed them before. I blame the unpronounceable name.

07

LION BAR

Niederegger is a tough act to follow, but who better to do it than the mighty Lion Bar? You should know that I grew up during a time when chocolate and treats were reserved for truly special occasions. No exceptions. Except...

I'm six or seven years old—only a little girl—and mom and I are waiting for the ferry home. Out of the blue she hands me a Big Cat (that's what Lion Bars were called back then. Or maybe that's just what they're called in Norway). *Chocolate? On a weekday!* I peeled back the wrapper and took a bite. The flavours made me feel brave and invincible. That's when I knew: nobody messes with a girl with a Lion Bar. (PS: Did this actually happen or did I make it up? I can't tell you for sure, but it *feels* like it did. In any case, I *love* Lion Bars.)

08

MOZART KUGELN

I know, I know, I know! This is a really weird name for a chocolate. And don't get me started on the wrapper. A demure portrait of Mozart? Once you get over the immediate strangeness though, you will be treated to some of the finest chocolate in the world. Each piece is, and I quote, 'Exquisitely filled with pistachio marzipan, and almond and hazelnut nougat. Enrobed with delicious milk and plain chocolate.' In 1994, music columnist Alex Ross wrote, 'Researchers have determined that listening to Mozart actually makes you smarter.' I think it's safe to assume that eating a Mozart Kugeln or two makes you smarter as well.



09

WALTERS

This is my 'what to eat after a near-death experience' chocolate. My friend and I were crossing the street when a black car sped towards us. I helplessly watched as my friend got hit by the car and fell to the ground. The driver didn't miss a beat and kept on going. Had I just witnessed a hit and run? Sounds pretty scary, right?

It both was and it wasn't. After we realized that neither of us had died, we felt elated! It was like we'd been given a new lease on life! We rushed home, popped a bottle of champagne, and shared a bar of Walters. To surviving! To life! To us!

Many drinks and giggles later, we swore to never eat boring food again. Eat what you love, and love what you eat.



10

CAFFAREL

I have saved the Italian one for last. Eccellenza since 1826. I can easily picture the lovely Medici daughters nibbling on these hazelnut treats, carefully removing their scented gloves as they are about to unwrap yet another truffle. This is not only chocolate, it's delicate art. A tasteful box, elegant script, gold wrapper, and a chocolate that leaves you feeling like you have reincarnated as one of the cherubs floating on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. That's the effect a chocolate containing the exquisite Piedmont hazelnuts will have on you. It's as tasty as it is transformative. In 1869, Caffarel was appointed to be the chocolate supplier to the King of Italy. Italy no longer has a king, but we still have Caffarel.

Chocolate Zucchini Muffins

*This is a story about retreat, Fairy Godmothers,
and my favourite vegetable.*

Does the Dalai Lama eat chocolate?
And if so, what kind? The reason I'm asking is because there is a big part of me that loves the idea of being in a solitary meditation retreat, in a rustic, remote cabin somewhere, maybe in the mountains, spontaneously attaining enlightenment.

However, another part of me suspects that I wouldn't last a day without decent food. By decent I mean chocolate.

My spiritual teacher must have known this about me, because when he suggested that I do a longer retreat, he was quick to add that Sandy, my Fairy Godmother, would come and visit me every week. 'You can stay here in my cabin and she will bring you food.'

Yes, yes, yes! A thousand times yes! Best retreat plan ever!

Sandy didn't disappoint. Call me lucky or call me spoiled (why not both?), but thanks to her generous food offerings my primitive outdoor kitchen felt like the Ritz. While other retreatants diligently ate barley, kale, and tofu (the unofficial meditation diet), I feasted on things like organic yogurt, Swiss hot chocolate, Danish pastries, and fresh fruit.

On one of these weekly visits, Sandy pulled out a giant muffin from a brown bakery bag and said, 'This is your favourite vegetable!'

I looked at her, then at the object in her hand, then back at her again, clearly not getting it. 'It's a chocolate-zucchini muffin!' she said.

Just for the record, I'm not a big muffin fan. I find them too sweet and totally lacking in

character. What's the point of eating something like that? And what would be the point of throwing a zucchini into the mix?

I smelled trouble.

Sandy handed me the muffin, and I took a small bite, just to be polite. Before I knew it I had taken another bite—a celebratory one this time—then another. The combination of rich flavours and the heavenly texture was to die for. And had I done just that, died I mean, I would have insisted on bringing this muffin to the grave with me—just in case it turns out we can bring physical objects with us when crossing over to the afterlife.

Weirdly enough, this muffin didn't taste like a vegetable at all, yet I knew it was in there. Sandy looked at me and said, as if reading my mind, 'The zucchini is what makes it so moist.'

Of course!

But, the zucchini wasn't the only trick this muffin had up its sleeve. It was clearly made from top-quality ingredients, and let's not overlook the generous sprinkling of giant chocolate chips. These chips created a crunchy, irresistible seal. Not only that, but to my great surprise, this muffin wasn't overly sweet. The creator of this recipe had wisely held back on the sugar, letting the other flavours shine through. Did I detect a hint of vanilla?

The bad news is, as far as I know, the only place you can get this muffin is at the bakery





section at the Ashland Co-op. The good news is, if you don't live in Ashland, Oregon, you can bake a full tray of these muffins yourself. Just follow the recipe below.

By the way, this is still my favorite vegetable.

Chocolate Zucchini Muffins

- 2 eggs
- 200g (1 cup) sugar
- 6 Tablespoons melted butter
- 2 dl (1 cup) milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 210g (1½ cups) flour
- 50g (½ cup) cocoa
- 88g (½ cup) chocolate chips, or finely chopped dark chocolate
- 1 zucchini, peeled and finely grated
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 Tablespoon baking powder
- 1 Tablespoon baking soda

Preheat the oven on to 170°C (335 °F) and grease a muffin tray with melted butter. (Use some of the melted butter for the tray, the rest for the batter.)

THE BATTER

Whisk the eggs and sugar together until it looks pale yellow. Gradually add the rest of the melted butter and keep whisking. Add milk and vanilla, and whisk some more.

In a separate bowl, whisk together flour, salt,



baking soda, and baking powder. Add salt and 2/3 of the chopped chocolate. Take the peeled and grated zucchini and add it to the mixture. Stir. Make a well in the bowl with the dry ingredients and pour in the wet mixture. Mix and fold the two mixtures together with a rubber spatula. A word of caution: Do not get carried away with the mixing. Keep it to a minimum; otherwise, your muffins run the risk of becoming too tough and doughy. Less is more.

THE PRE-BAKING PREP

Take a large spoon and scoop the batter into the greased muffin cups, $\frac{3}{4}$ to the top. Depending on the size of your muffin tray, you might be left with a few empty muffin cups. If so, fill the empty ones with hot water. This will ensure that all the muffins bake evenly. Take the rest of the chopped chocolate (or chocolate chips) and sprinkle them on top.

THE BAKING

Put the tray in the oven and bake for 25–30 minutes. After fifteen minutes, carefully turn the tray around.

THE POST-BAKING PREP

When done baking, put the tray on a cooling rack and let it rest there for five minutes. Next, carefully remove the muffins from the cups and put them on a cooling rack. If they don't just pop out, run a small knife around the edge and lift them up.

HINTS AND TIPS

One: If you're not sure when the muffins are done baking, insert a toothpick into one of the muffins. If it comes out clean, the muffins are done. If it comes out gooey, wait a few more minutes and repeat the test.

Two: It's easier to remove the muffins from the tray while they still are a bit warm, so don't wait until they've cooled off.

Three: If you live outside the US, it can be difficult to find proper chocolate chips, which is why I've given you the option of using chopped chocolate instead. However, make sure it's at least 70% dark chocolate. Lower quality chocolate has a tendency to lose its shape during baking, which means that the muffins won't get that fabulous crunchy seal on top.



Chocolate Mousse Cake

*This is the story of the classic mousse cake,
raspberries, and weddings.*

Not all cakes are created equally. I think I speak on behalf of every chocolate lover when I say that the chocolate mousse cake is decidedly in a league of its own. I'm in awe of this creation. It's a classic masterpiece, by which I mean . . . it's effortless.

Paradoxically, a chocolate mousse cake is not particularly eye-catching or beautiful. There is no flashy frosting or filling here; this cake doesn't bother with any of that. It's basically a brown slab of chocolate. But because it's a mousse cake, it stands out and draws you in. When someone puts a mousse cake on the table, you just want to be near it, like a planet orbiting the sun. It's the law of the universe.

Classic chocolate mousse cake characteristics: regal, light, elegant, soaring chocolate flavour, wonderfully soft, and more-ish.

Regular cakes might as well be an old handbag filled with loose change and chewing gum wrapped up in crumpled old receipts.

I grew up knowing next to nothing about food, but by the time I was in my late twenties, I had become an avid baker and no longer had to fake my way around a kitchen. My friend Rio was the one who initially introduced me to a chocolate mousse cake recipe, and when I took the first bite of my own creation, I knew I had reached a new level of existence. I lived abroad; I was learning how to drive, and I knew how to make the perfect chocolate mousse cake. The world was my oyster.

I was so in love with this recipe that I didn't bother with any other mousse cakes until years later when I had dinner at my friend Claire's house.

Claire is a talented artist and my unofficial baking-guru. We've known each other since we were sixteen, back when we both had super long hair and read books by Milan Kundera. I'm so happy to have someone like her in my life. Even though I know how talented she is, and even though I know what an amazing cook she is, I'm always taken by surprise by what she manages to whip up in her cozy kitchen.

On this particular evening she'd outdone herself. For dessert she served a chilled chocolate mousse cake that was the perfect balance of being super laid back, yet unbelievably inviting. It was decorated with fresh raspberries, which complimented all the other flavours perfectly. I immediately wished I'd come up with that.

Now I always serve fresh raspberries with my chocolate mousse cake. It's heavenly.

But back to *my* mousse cake. When Ben and I were planning our wedding, I asked him what cake he wanted for dessert. Without hesitating he answered, 'Your chocolate mousse cake.'

I made it the night before the wedding. The guests loved it. I don't want to assume anything, but I think you'll love it too.

See recipe below.





Chocolate Mousse Cake

280g (10 oz) chocolate, cut into bits

3 Tablespoons cocoa powder

115g (1 stick) butter, cut into small pieces

4 large eggs, separated

1/8 teaspoon cream of tartar

2 Tablespoons sugar

Line a 9" (22-23 cm) removable-bottom cake pan with parchment paper.



THE PRE-BAKING PREP * PART ONE

Take only 30 gram (1 oz) of the chocolate and melt it in a small pot over very low heat. Once melted, pour the chocolate into the bottom of the cake pan and spread it to make a thin layer. It should cover the entire surface of the parchment paper. This little trick will prevent the cake from sticking to the paper. Put the pan in the refrigerator.

THE PRE-BAKING PREP * PART TWO

Crack the eggs and separate the whites from the yolks. Keep the yolks handy, but put the whites in the fridge for now.

THE PRE-BAKING PREP * PART THREE

Get out your standing mixer or electric hand-held mixer. We're dealing with egg-whites here, so mixing by hand won't do. The only people I know who can whisk whites into fluffy foam by hand are either professional chefs or merry old ladies over 80.



THE MAKING OF THE MOUSSE

Melt butter and the rest of the chocolate in a pot over very low heat. Stir from time to time. When melted and smooth, whisk in the egg yolks. Remove from heat and set aside.

Fetch the whites and put them in a large mixing bowl. Add cream of tartar and beat at medium speed until soft peaks start to form. In case you wonder what the cream of tartar is for, I'm happy to inform you that this Russian sounding powder helps stabilize the whites and increases their heat tolerance and volume. Keep an eye on the mixing. When soft peaks start to form, gradually sprinkle in sugar and increase the beating speed to high. Beat until the whites are stiff, but not dry. Dry whites will curdle; stiff whites look smooth.

THE FOLDING OF THE MOUSSE

Gently stir one fourth of the egg whites into the chocolate mixture. This will make it easier to mix in the rest.

Scrape the remaining egg whites on top of the chocolate mixture and fold the two mixtures together until completely incorporated.

Emphasis on folding.

The reason why we fold and not stir or whisk is to preserve the volume of the whites.

Volume equals tall cake.

When done folding, scrape the mousse into the prepared pan and refrigerate.

And now . . . the waiting game.

THE WAITING

The mousse can be prepared up to two days in advance, but can be served after only four hours of refrigeration.

THE SERVING

Remove the mousse from the fridge and dust the top with cocoa powder sifted through a fine strainer, such as a tea strainer. Then rub the outside of the pan with a hot, wet towel. Slip the side of the pan off, and turn the cake upside down on a serving plate. Remove the bottom of the pan and peel off the paper. And don't forget: Serve cold with raspberries!

HINTS AND TIPS

One: If you're new to folding egg whites, check out YouTube videos.

Two: The hot towel treatment in the unmolding process might feel a bit intimidating and/or weird. I get that. But as long as you don't rush it, you'll be fine. All we're doing is helping the mousse loosen its grip on the inside of the pan. However, if that doesn't work for you, you can always drag a hot knife (just hold it under hot water) along the inside of the pan. That usually does the trick.

Three: I don't know why chocolate mousse tastes so much better served on a plate than in a bowl; it just does. However, if you want, pour the mousse mixture straight into a serving bowl, chill, and eat. Be my guest.



Chocolate Lavender Biscotti

*This is the story of Virginia Woolf, the Roman
Legion, and lavender sugar.*

The topic of food is inherently difficult. Is gluten really that bad for us? Should we only eat organic produce? And where do we stand on sugar?

In a world full of vegans, raw foodists, quinoa lovers, and gung-ho meat eaters, it's easy to understand why we don't see eye to eye about this.

Our relationship with food can sometimes feel like an ancient battle field where the borders are blurry and everyone is fighting to protect their territory. Slow food versus fast food. Fair trade over here. Low-carb food over there. Cheap food. Luxurious treats. Pre-prepared meals. Meals created from scratch. Meals inhaled on the go. Locally grown food. Imported food. Meat created in laboratories. Genetically modified food. And what about

portion control? Should we indulge or show restraint? When it comes to food and eating, where do we draw the line between necessity and distraction?

I don't think anyone is immune from finding this confusing, but I do agree with Virginia Woolf who once said, 'One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.'

Amen.

When I get tired of all the conflicting food trends, I like to look to the past. I find it relaxing. What did people in the past eat? Reading about this is a lot more entertaining than worrying about soy versus dairy, plus, I always learn something new and interesting.

For instance, did you know that Queen Elizabeth I always drank strong dark ale for

breakfast (not tea, like I always thought), and that George W. Bush banned broccoli from the White House? And did you know that the delicious biscotti used to be the staple food for the Roman Legion?

Biscotti is Italian for 'baked twice', which means the biscotti is very dry and has a long shelf life, which is why it used to be the perfect army food.

This brings me to my next recipe, Chocolate Lavender Biscotti.

The great thing about biscotti is that you can tweak the recipe and add any flavour you like. Don't like nuts? Add grated orange peel. Passionate about lavender sugar? Add it to the mix. You can't go wrong. You're the boss.

Here is my recipe; but before we start, I want to tell you about the first time I tasted biscotti.

It was during the Christmas holiday, and my best friend's sister had branched out and replaced one of the more plain Norwegian cookie recipes with a scrumptious biscotti one.

Years later, when I first moved into my little cabin by the creek, one of my friends gave me a jar of biscotti as a housewarming gift.

All I'm saying is that when someone serves you biscotti, you know you're in the company of a remarkable person with impeccable taste.

And now, the recipe.





Chocolate Lavender Biscotti

2 ¼ cups (280g) white flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon salt
1 cup (200g) lavender sugar
3 large eggs
3 Tablespoons honey
3 Tablespoons pine nuts
1 1/3 cup (200g) chopped hazelnuts
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
4 oz (110g) dark chocolate

Preheat the oven to 170°C (335 °F) and line a large baking tray with parchment paper.

THE DOUGH

In a large bowl, mix together all the dry ingredients, except for the sugar, and set aside.

In a different bowl, whisk together sugar and eggs. Stir in honey and vanilla. Next, sprinkle the dry ingredients into the bowl with the wet stuff, and fold the two mixes together until just combined. This batter may appear sticky, but resist the temptation to add more flour. We want a light and crisp result—not something dense and heavy.

THE PRE-BAKING PREP

Put the dough on the table and divide it in two. Put the two halves on the lined baking tray and quickly shape the dough into long, thin logs, about 12" long by 2" wide (30 x 5 cm). If the dough is too sticky, coat your hands with flour or use a rubber spatula.



THE BAKING - ROUND ONE

Put the tray in the oven and bake for 25–30 minutes. After fifteen minutes, rotate the tray. The logs are done when they appear golden and begin to crack a little at the top.

BETWEEN-BAKING PREP

Remove the tray from the oven and let the logs cool for about ten minutes. Next, with a wide metal spatula, transfer them to a cutting board. With a serrated knife cut both logs diagonally into thin-ish slices. The slices should be thinner than a slice of bread, but wider than a cracker. Lay the slices on the lined baking tray.

THE BAKING - ROUND TWO

Put the tray in the oven and bake for 5–7 minutes. Turn them over and bake for another 5–7 minutes. When done baking, transfer them to a wire rack to cool down.

THE CHOCOLATE

While the biscotti slices are cooling down, melt the dark chocolate over low heat and pour into an icing bag fitted with a piping nozzle. With the melted chocolate, draw a zigzag pattern on

each slice. It's easier than it sounds, and it looks really pretty. When the chocolate has hardened, place the biscotti on a platter and serve with tea or coffee.

HINTS AND TIPS

One: If you don't have an icing bag, use an ordinary freezer bag or a zip-lock bag. Take your freezer bag and cut off a very small corner. Start small, as you can always cut more off later. Flip the top half of the bag inside out, then fill it with the melted chocolate. Flip the top part of the bag back up, push the frosting down to the corner with the cut opening, making sure there is no air in the bag. Twist it and start piping. If this sounds unnecessarily complicated, I'm sorry. Like with most baking techniques, it's easier to watch someone do it than describe it with words. If in doubt, have a friend show you, or watch a YouTube video.

Two: If you don't have lavender sugar, use regular sugar.

Three: Your beautiful biscotti can be stored in an airtight container for about a month. Enjoy!



Chocolate Moments

Once upon a time...

FUNNIEST CHOCOLATE MOMENT

My funniest chocolate moment can be traced back to my eighth or ninth birthday. That was the birthday when one of my uncles surprised me with an incredible gift: a dog that could poop chocolate pudding. He had made the dog himself, and thanks to a bicycle pump apparatus inside the belly of the dog, you could press a button and out came the chocolate pudding. I was over the moon! I'd never seen anything like it! I wish I still had that dog. It would have been the ultimate ice-breaker.

KINDEST CHOCOLATE MOMENT

My kindest chocolate moment took place at a hospital. I think I've suppressed the majority of my bad hospital memories, but the good ones are forever etched into the grooves of my mind. Like the time when I was discharged from the hospital on a Tuesday, which meant I would miss out on Chocolate Milk Thursday. Quick backstory: every Thursday, and only on Thursdays, the nurses would give us a glass of chocolate milk. This was easily the single most

important event of the week. But because I was leaving the hospital on a lousy Tuesday, I would be missing out. *Not fair!* The nurse/saint/angel on duty must have sensed my disappointment because just as I was about to leave, she handed me a tall glass of chocolate milk and said, 'Here you go. . . since you won't be here with us on Thursday.'

MOST SICKENING CHOCOLATE MOMENT

My most sickening chocolate moment could have been avoided, had I only paced myself. Here's the thing. Every Christmas, mom bakes the most decadent, delicious, and divine chocolate cake ever known to man or woman. This cake is so de-lovely that Cole Porter would have written a song about it had he ever had the pleasure of tasting it. One Christmas I was so thrilled to be reunited with this cake that I ate piece after piece after piece. The result? Going to bed with shooting stomach pains and having freaky nightmares about being force-fed chocolate. I woke up in a sweat and stormed to the bathroom where I puked my guts out. Lesson learned.



BEST CHOCOLATE ADVICE

The best chocolate advice goes something like this: Just because you've started to eat a piece of chocolate or a piece of chocolate cake doesn't mean you have to finish it. Stop when you're full. Eating dessert is not like a military drill where your commander barks at you, 'Don't leave anyone behind!' Go ahead, leave the chocolate behind. It's okay.

WORST CHOCOLATE MOMENT

My worst chocolate moment includes all the times I've bitten into a truffle thinking it's going to be filled with ganache or praline, only to discover it's filled with vile liquor-flavoured goop. It's disgusting. Blindly helping yourself to a piece of unidentified chocolate is like playing with fire.

MOST DISAPPOINTING CHOCOLATE MOMENT

My most disappointing chocolate moment was entirely my own doing. I was ten years old and super excited about the fact that someone had given me a tin of Quality Street chocolate. Even though I like to think of myself as a sunny and generous person, I can admit that in the presence of this tin I became like Gollum from *Lord of the Rings*. I hid my precious tin in my wardrobe and guarded it with my life. When my older sister asked me if she could have a piece, I told her I'd already eaten them all. *Sorry!*

A few days later, when stealthily going to collect the tin, it was only to discover it had been invaded by an army of ants. *No!* High on sugar, the ants swarmed around in the tin like they were practicing dance moves for a wild weekend at Burning Man.

My heart fell to my stomach. I had no choice but to throw the tin away. Overall, it was a very disappointing experience.



MOST HEARTWARMING CHOCOLATE MOMENT

My most heartwarming chocolate moment took place on the morning of February 28th, 1994. Later that day I would be handing in a school assignment I'd spent an entire year on. This assignment was a really big deal, the way everything in school is a really big deal while you're still in school. This might as well have been the morning of my coronation.

There was a faint knock at the door and in walked my older sister. She handed me a tin of Quality Street chocolate and a poetry book by my favourite author, Knut Hamsun. 'I just wanted to wish you good luck today,' she said.

Knut Hamsun once said, "But things worked out. Everything works out. Though sometimes they work out sideways.'

I don't know why I thought of this quote, but somehow it seems right in this context.

SCARIEST CHOCOLATE MOMENT

My scariest chocolate moment is easily the time when a Californian brown bear found and ate my chocolate Easter eggs. Watching him from the inside of my small cabin, I noticed he'd managed to open the door of my outdoor fridge and removed the bottle of milk and the yogurt container without any spillage. I was very impressed. *What a neat and tidy bear!* Now he was helping himself to my box of praline-filled Easter eggs. He ate one egg at a time, savoring each bite. *Noooo! What a rude bear!* These were *my* chocolate eggs! I'd been saving them for later. I wanted to scare the bear away, but how? We're talking about a wild animal here! A big one!

His head alone was the size of a small car. Then it slowly dawned on me that the only thing between me and this massive beast was a thin piece of glass. Oops! It hardly seemed like enough. I tip-toed over to the corner by the door and tried to make myself invisible.

Even though this book isn't by any stretch of the imagination a self-help book, there is one thing I want you to glean from reading about my experiences, and that is this: When you live on a piece of land frequented by wild animals like bears and cougars, do not acquire an outdoor fridge.

And should you choose to ignore this piece of advice, please refrain from filling your fridge with intoxicating treats. It might be the last thing you do.

MOST ROMANTIC CHOCOLATE MOMENT

My most romantic chocolate moment is every time Ben brings me chocolate. (I'm so sorry; please don't gag.) But seriously, if I had to pick just one, it would have to be the time Ben and I went on our first mini-break together. I googled 'romantic getaways in the Cotswolds' and landed on a hotel with a fireplace and antique furniture. We had barely started dating, but when I met Ben at the train station, I thought—perhaps for the first time—that maybe he was the one. I was also excited about the fact that I wouldn't spend another Saturday evening home alone watching *The Wire* or *Gilmore Girls*, falling asleep on the sofa, still finding

it weird to have more than just one room. Ten years of community living will do that to you.

In any case, for dinner Ben ordered meat; I ordered something vegetarian, and we both drank sparkling wine. When it came time to order dessert, we asked the waiter if it was possible to have a plate of chocolate-covered profiteroles sent to our room. It was. Magic! As we stood up from our table to leave, I genuinely felt that everyone in the dining room knew we were the real-life version of Mr. Darcy and Bridget Jones. I quietly congratulated myself on having a top-notch romantic weekend.

BEST KEPT CHOCOLATE SECRET

I'm from Norway, the land of impossibly beautiful fjords and fierce vikings, and in this country—as far as food is concerned—meat is the rhythm track that everybody eats to. As a vegetarian, this makes me out of sync. With that in mind, you can imagine my relief when I moved to California, the land of green smoothies and veggie garden burgers. This is also the land of cookies. Peanut butter cookies, Milano Mint cookies, molasses

cookies, and chocolate chip cookies, to name a few. At no other point in my life had I had the pleasure of eating freshly-baked chocolate chip cookies. However, the first delicious bite was tainted by a flash of resentment. *Why was I only discovering these now?*

No one makes a better chocolate chip cookie than my Fairy Godmother. If I could share her recipe with you, I would, but I can't because I don't have it. And the reason I don't have it is because it's a secret. Actually, her recipe is more a skill than a secret. Meaning, my Fairy Godmother is so skilled at making these cookies that she doesn't need something as mundane as a recipe.

With the diligence and patience of a forensic scientist, I've studied her cookies in great detail, eager to figure out what makes them so special. Despite my best attempts, my own cookies are totally not even close to hers. It is so frustrating to have the perfect cookie in your hand and not be able to replicate it. At the same time, there is a part of me that is incredibly grateful for this cookie enigma. It gives me something to be curious about. Like someone once told me, 'The future belongs to the curious.'



Chocolate Torte

This is the story of childhood cakes, birthday surprises, and doing the impossible.

If it's alright with you, I would like to end this book the same way it began, with a birthday cake story.

The first story I shared with you in this book was about one of my birthdays and how a kind friend made a cake for me. This final story is about my spiritual teacher's birthday and how I was asked to make a cake for him.

Even before I saw this cake recipe, I knew I was severely in over my head. Intuitively, I just knew this would be a complicated process. I mean, why else had my lama's girlfriend asked for my help in the kitchen? A deep wisdom part of me felt that the only reason people ask for help with a cake is when the cake is freakin' impossible to make.

My inner-wisdom being wasn't wrong.

The girlfriend told me that she'd phoned his mother and asked her for the recipe of his favourite cake. His mom faxed it over, and it turned out to be a cake his European nanny used to make for him on truly super-duper special occasions.

Everything about this conversation surprised me for a number of reasons. First, I never thought of my teacher as a person who had a mother. In my mind, all spiritual beings spontaneously appear out of a lotus flower. Second, it puzzled me that he had a favourite cake. *Really?* In my mind, all spiritual beings lived on barley seeds and dew.

I blame this skewed view of reality on all the yogi biographies I've been reading.

But where were we?

After studying the recipe I understood why this cake wasn't just something you whipped up on a regular Tuesday. What I was looking at was a twelve-layered Hungarian Sponge Cake filled with chocolate buttercream between the layers and topped with caramel. Providing everything went according to plan, which I seriously doubted, this cake would take us at least three hours to make. At the very least! But since I'm always up for a challenge, I told his girlfriend, 'Between the two of us,' I said, 'I'm sure we can produce one decent torte!'

'One?' she said. 'We're making it for everyone. We need at least ten cakes.'

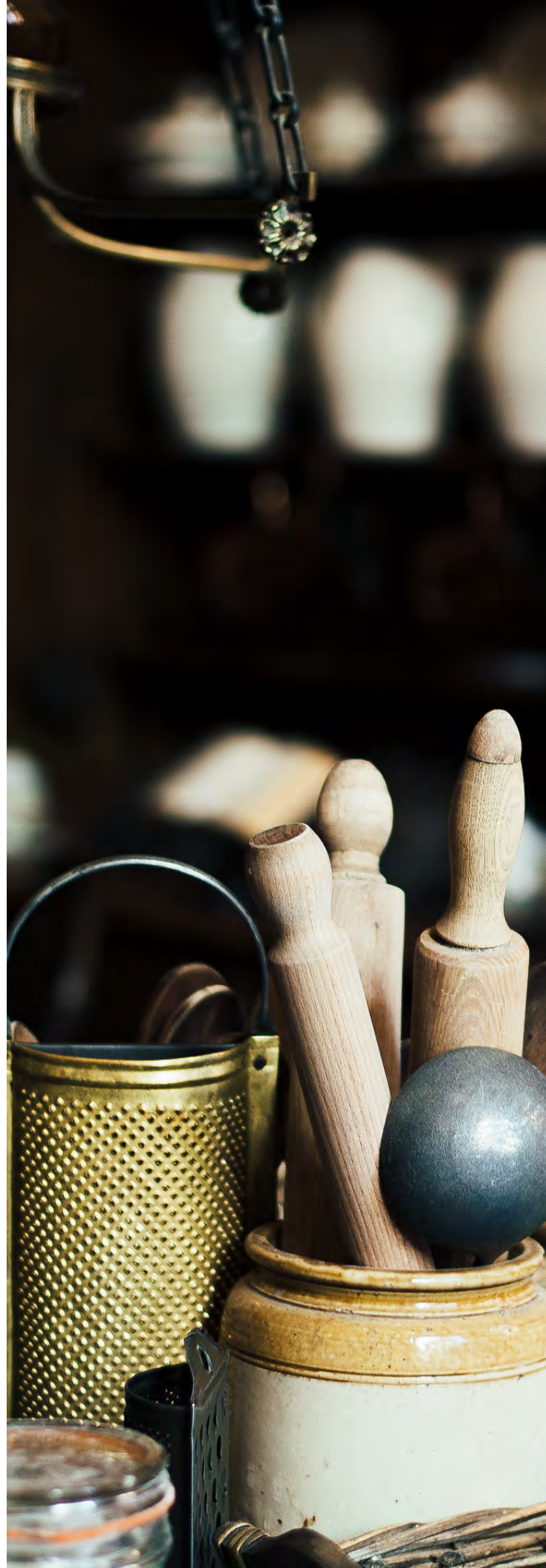
The following Sunday we gathered in the kitchen at 6am and went to work.

Our teacher's sister had gotten a whiff of this cake being made, and she asked if we could please, please, please send her a slice, should we succeed in making it.

It was that kind of cake.

Even now, all these years later, sitting at my vintage desk in the Cotswolds, thinking back to that day, I can't believe we pulled it off. Twelve cakes in sixteen hours. Inconceivable.

How did we pull it off? Well, I can think of at least one explanation. You know that scene in the movie *Ratatouille*, when Remy the rat controls Linguini's every move by pulling on his hair from underneath his chef's hat? As a result, the meal turns out amazing. It must have been something like that.





Or, an alternative explanation could be that when two people come together with unwavering dedication and determination, miracles happen. Yes, let's go with that explanation!

I hope I haven't scared you from making this cake. It really isn't that hard. Not if you take your time, and not if you're making only one!

The recipe below is copied from the fax his mother sent us, but based on my own experiences, I've made a few modifications.

Dobosh Torte

BATTER

5 eggs

½ cup (100g) sugar

1 Tablespoon lemon juice

1 ½ cups (180g) sifted flour

¼ teaspoon salt

FILLING

Mix One:

½ cup (115g) butter

¾ cup (90g) powdered sugar

Mix Two:

2 egg whites

Pinch of salt

¾ cup (90g) powdered sugar

Mix Three

4 oz (100g) dark chocolate

DECORATION

½ cup (100g) sugar

1 Tablespoon water

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350 °F).



THE CAKE BATTER

Beat five egg yolks with wire whisk. Gradually add ½ cup sugar, and with the last sugar, mix in one tablespoon lemon juice. Beat until yellow-colored. Sift together 1 ½ cups sifted flour and ¼ teaspoon salt. Resift into a second mixing bowl. Then, add the egg mixture, mixing gently but thoroughly. Last, carefully fold in five stiffly-beaten egg whites, making a smooth, soft batter.

THE PRE-BAKING PREP

Butter the bottom tins of three springform molds. On each tin, spread 3 to 4 tablespoons of batter.

THE BAKING

Bake each layer for five minutes, or until lightly baked. They should be soft like pancakes, not hard or crispy.

THE COOLING DOWN AND REPEAT PROCESS

Turn baked layers on a cake rack to cool and repeat baking all the layers until all the batter is used. You should end up with 9–13 layers.

THE FILLING PREP

In one bowl, cream the butter and the sugar together until it's all smooth and even.

In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites and salt until stiff, then fold in the powdered sugar.

Blend the two mixes together.

Melt 4 squares of chocolate and fold in quickly to the mix.

THE ASSEMBLE TIME

Place one sponge cake circle on a cake platter and spread with chocolate butter-cream. Sandwich the rest of the circles together with a thin layer of buttercream, one layer at a time. No rush.

THE DECORATION TIME

Dissolve the sugar and water over low heat, stirring constantly until it turns a deep golden-brown colour. Now you have made caramel! Spread the caramel on top of the cake with a hot knife. Mark into portions while still hot. Cool for at least 12 hours. Then, eat!

PS: In case you were wondering, we did send his sister a slice of this cake. Thanks to FedEx Priority Overnight, it arrived the next day.



AFTERWORD

OR, ONE MORE THING

OR, MY LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT



Before you put this book down, I feel I need to tell you something to the effect of, 'It's not like I only eat chocolate, you know! Don't be silly! I eat plenty of greens and healthy stuff too. Go ahead, ask my friends!'

Do I really have to say that? Do I actually have to defend myself?

To be on the safe side, I'll tell you what's currently in my fridge: an assorted selection of cheeses, organic carrots, free-range eggs, salad, half a honeydew melon, milk from the local farm, and a box of medjool dates next to a jar of miso.

I just don't want to leave you with the impression that in writing this book I'm throwing caution to the wind and promoting a devil-may-care lifestyle. Sugar up, baby! YOLO!

So what *should* I leave you with?

Actually, scratch all that.

If you've picked up this book, I am going to assume that you are a happy, smart, and well-rounded person who knows how to take care of yourself. Perhaps you like the idea of taking some of the 'shoulds' and strictness out of eating and replacing it with more fun and flair. Me too!

When it comes to food, I think we could all stand to be a bit more fun-loving.

That's the baseline. That's one of the reasons I wanted to write this book.

The second reason for writing this book has to do with how I'm extremely uncomfortable with unfinished projects. I've been circling the idea of writing a chocolate book for almost eight years now, but it never came together. Every time I thought about it, it never made it past a blog-post or a notebook.

Until now.

There comes a time when you move forward with your projects or you let them go. I didn't want to let go of the chocolate book, so tied myself to my desk and got it done.



The third reason for writing this book has to do with my unwavering allegiance to chocolate. Chocolate is both a treat and a celebration, but it's also so much more than that. It's a feeling, an intention, a magical spell. A full-grown married man once proposed to me after taking a bite of my chocolate-glazed pecan torte. He wasn't kidding. A gay man briefly switched teams after trying one of my chocolate-covered marzipan balls. We dated on and off for about a year. A religious man once popped one of my truffles in his mouth and said, 'Meditation fuel!' He was preparing for an ancient fire ritual.

To my knowledge, a piece of lettuce has never had that effect on anyone.

I'll sign off now, but while I still have your attention, I would like to add that when the time comes to prepare for my funeral, please only serve chocolate and champagne. Consider it an order—my last will and testament.

Lastly, I want to send love and gratitude to my beautiful friends and family members who have shared their recipes with me. Without your kindness and generosity, this book would never have been written.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Inger D. Kenobi is a writer and a certified life coach. Having moved a gazillion times, her CV reads like an enchanting maze. The closest thing she's ever gotten to having a career in chocolate, however, is by writing this book. May all beings benefit. Inger lives in the Cotswolds with her husband and their two cats. This is her second work of non-fiction.

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