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A modern Jewish mom writes a guide to Shabbat, which this year coincides with the beginning of Hanukkah.

Friday Night Lights

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By JEFF HOUCK The Tampa Tribune

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Meredith Jacobs can still remember the smells and tastes of Hanukkah and Shabbat celebrations from when she was a little girl.

The ketchupy, sugary aroma of well-cooked brisket. The yeasty odor of challah loaves baking in the oven. The flavor of grape juice she would drink. For her and others, food is an emotional touchstone as well as a symbol of Jewish history and how the religion was formed.

"My mother always said, 'It smells like **yontif**,' which is Yiddish for holiday," she says.

Jacobs has become an accidental expert on all things Jewish. After volunteering as a "Shabbat mom" at her family's synagogue in Rockville, Md., she went on to teach workshops there so that others could rediscover the intimacy and power of celebrating their faith at home.

Shabbat is the weekly day of rest prescribed in the fourth commandment, observed from sunset Friday until sunset Saturday during which specified types of work may not be performed.

Hanukkah, also known as The Feast of Lights or Feast of Dedication, is celebrated for eight days to celebrate the Maccabees' victory against the Greeks and the miracle that one night's worth of oil burned for eight.

The workshops became so popular that she was urged to write a book. The result is the newly released "The Modern Jewish Mom's Guide to Shabbat" (Harper, \$16.95). She also founded the Web site ModernJewishMom.com.

"The book doesn't focus so much on [the fact that] you're commanded to celebrate the Sabbath," Jacobs says from her home in Rockville. "It's more about: Let's use this time to talk to our children, let's use this time to really connect with our spouse. Let's be with friends and family on a regular basis. Use it as an excuse to just be together in a meaningful way."

Part of that meaning is found through food. And with the eight nights of Hanukkah starting on Shabbat this Friday, the meal holds extra importance.

"What's the joke? That every holiday is: 'They tried to kill us. We won. Let's eat.'" Jacobs says. "That's Hanukkah! That summarizes every Jewish holiday."

On the first night of Hanukkah, Jacobs plans to make a cranberry brisket and potato latkes for her husband and two children. Why?

"Because it's supposed to smell that way," she says. "I don't love chicken soup, but I will make it so the house smells that way. There are certain smells that just trigger memories of being a child and having the holidays, and I want my children to experience that."

Jacobs shared these other tips from the book:

Breaking bread: "The key food is the challah, which represents when the temples were destroyed in Jerusalem and we became a religion of synagogues and rabbis instead of having one big temple with the priests and sacrifices. A lot of what happened in the temples changed into traditions in the home. So when you bake challah, you're actually supposed to remove a little bit of it and burn it. That symbolizes the burnt offerings the priests used to do."

Bread menorah: Traditionally, two loaves of challah are on the table during Shabbat to represent the double portion of manna that came down from heaven so that no one had to work on the Sabbath.

"I have a really fun project on my Web site that was actually suggested by a friend of mine," Jacobs says. "I make challah every Friday. It's really, really good. But I shape it

like a menorah. There's no law that says that it has to be braided. It's just a fun way to bring Hanukkah and Shabbat together with a challah menorah that the kids can pull apart.

A different flavor: "I put honey on top of mine. One day I was baking [challah] and I didn't have enough eggs to do an egg wash. So I got honey out and squeezed it on top. It is so good like that."

Tastes like chicken: "A lot of people think you have to have chicken soup or chicken during Shabbat," Jacobs says. "That's all in how you were brought up. There's no meaning to chicken. If you have to have pizza, have pizza. Chicken doesn't make it Shabbat. You're supposed to have a hot meat meal."

Making brisket edible: "I used to make horrible brisket," Jacobs confesses. "My mother used to say, 'You have to cook it and cook it and cook it to make it soft,' and it just got drier and drier. Then I learned how to make this cranberry brisket. The cranberry sauce makes it really sweet, and it's perfect with potato latkes and the kids love **love** potato latkes."

Thanks, Aunt Bev: One of the recipes in the book is for Aunt Bev's Brisket, so named for Jacobs' aunt. "It's the brisket that every grandmother makes, a bottle of ketchup and brown sugar. I got it from my Aunt Bev, who's in her 70s now. It was hard translating the recipes because my grandmother would say, 'Add sugar. You'll know when it's enough.' That's the way they cooked then."

Latke tips: "There are three secrets to really good latkes," Jacobs says. "You have to hand-grate the potatoes. Don't put them in a food processor because they'll get too mushy and soggy and not as crisp. You also hand-grate the onions, so everything will have the same consistency. Then you want to soak the potatoes for at least five minutes in ice water to separate all the starch, so they don't get gummy. Then when you put them in the pan, you use 2 tablespoons; you scoop the batter with one spoon and use the other to press it flat. And I use canola oil. That makes it the perfect thickness when you do it that way." (To see her technique, watch the video at modernjewishmom.com.)

Candle dilemma: "Hanukkah starts this year on Shabbat. There's always one night of Hanukkah that will fall on Shabbat because there's eight nights. What I learned through my research with the book - because this is a question every year, "Which candles do we light first?" - once you light the Shabbat candles, they're considered an object of work. You're not supposed to light any other candles. So on Hanukkah, light the menorah first and then light the Shabbat candles."

SHABBAT SPEAK

The following Hebrew and Jewish words relate to food. (The letter **k** is used to represent the letter **koof**; pronounce the **ch** as you would in **blech**. **Sch** is read like **shhhh**!)

Besamim - Spices

Challah - Braided loaf of white bread

Fleishchig - Meat (flesh)

Hachnasat orchim - Inviting guests to your house (a mitzvah)

Kashrut - Jewish dietary laws

Kiddish - Blessing over the wine

Kosher - According to Jewish dietary law (kashrut)

Milchig - Dairy

Pareve - Neither meat nor dairy (i.e., fish and margarine are both considered pareve.)

Schmaltz - Chicken fat; as an adjective it is schmaltzy, as in overdone, corny, dramatic.

Schmear - To spread; use a small amount of cream cheese for a bagel as opposed to a huge glunk.

DORI'S BREAD MACHINE CHALLAH

1 cup warm water

1/4 cup vegetable oil

3 eggs

Honey (just squeeze in a big glug)

4 cups flour (bread flour or one labeled "special for bread machines" is best)

1 packet (2 1/4 teaspoons) yeast

Egg wash

Sesame or poppy seeds (optional)

Dump all the ingredients into the bread machine. Set the machine for "dough only." After kneading by the machine, let the dough rise for several hours. After rising, take the dough out, braid it, apply egg wash and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes.

Makes 2 challah loaves.

AUNT KAREN'S APPLE AND RAISIN KUGEL

1 pound egg noodles

6 eggs

1/2 stick margarine, plus extra to grease the pan

1 cup applesauce (chunky works well)

1/2 cup white sugar

1/2 cup brown sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla

1 cup raisins

Cinnamon

Cook noodles as directed. After you drain the noodles, combine with remaining ingredients. Pour into a margarine-greased pan. Sprinkle cinnamon on top. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour.

Makes 12 to 15 servings.

CRANBERRY BRISKET

3 pound brisket

Salt and pepper

3 tablespoons olive oil

2 yellow onions, chopped

4 carrots, cut into chunks (you can also use a 1-pound bag of baby carrots)

3 smashed garlic cloves

6 whole garlic cloves

2 cups cranberry sauce

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Season the brisket with salt and pepper. Saute brisket in a heavy pan with olive oil until it's brown. Remove the brisket to an ovenproof baking dish or aluminum foil roaster. (Metal roasting pans may dry out the brisket.)

Add onions, carrots and all the garlic to the pan. Saute until vegetables are soft (onions should be golden and you should be able to easily pierce the carrots with a fork). Remove the pan from the heat and add cranberry sauce to the vegetables. (Meredith Jacobs sometimes finds a cranberry sauce with oranges.) Pour sauce over brisket. Cook brisket 2 hours, covered. Remove from oven. Allow to rest 10 minutes before serving.