

Bread

Shalom, I'm Deb Filler.

I asked my father for his extra special challah recipe, not long before he died.

He said, "You take a sack of flour,
10 dozen eggs, about this much yeast...".

He gave me the recipe for 100 loaves!

For those of you who didn't know my dad, he was an incredible baker. Not only did he bake the best chocolate leamington's, custard squares, chocolate squares, ginger squares, apple squares, apricot squares, chocolate eclairs, round doughnuts with fresh cream and a dot of jam, Madeira cake, meat pies, sausage rolls, savoury mince pies, bacon and egg pies (sorry Rabbi) Sally Lunns, fruitcake, mince pies, filled rolls, sandwiches, date scones, jam rolls, Anzac biscuits, meringues...

...he also made cream buns, currant buns, raspberry buns and hot cross buns...

This was my dad at Passover!

He also baked the world's best challah bread and supplied the community with Hanukkah donuts or sufganiot.

Dad inspired me to make Challahs and tell stories about our family and his family, who perished in the Shoah.

He never did give me the recipe for one challah, so...

My grandparents on my father's side, Gedalia and Ruchela Filler, whose names are on the memorial in the Holocaust Memorial garden in the Auckland Hebrew Congregation, were both bakers. Guedale's father was a baker. His brother Leib went to Mexico where he built Pan Fiiller-Filler's bakery which sells rye bread and crackers and Matzo and Matzo meal throughout Mexico.

(Jingle: Pan Fiiller, Pan Fiiller — Es muy Delicioso! Pan Fiiller, Ooooooh!

(My mother Ruth's family were all excellent bakers. Anybody who had my mum's cheesecake will never forget it. Or her hazelnut or poppy seed cake.)

But one of the stories from Dad that is so prominent in my mind is the day he was liberated from Terezin, in the Czech Republic, May 10 1945.

Dad had been on the Death March, via Buchenwald, enduring unimaginable starvation, thirst, brutality, pushing human endurance to the very limit.

When the wretched few remaining prisoners of the Death march arrived at Terezin, they knew the end of the war was near. The Germans had left, and returned. When they left again, they threatened the Czech guards to keep the Jewish prisoners locked.

Dad hadn't eaten in five days, hadn't drunk water in three days. He heard tanks rumbling down the streets. He climbed out of the third floor window of the barracks they were locked into, he showed me where it was when we went there, and ran past the Czech guards.

There, standing on a tank, a Russian Major surveyed the unimaginable sight, ghost-like prisoners barely able to stand.

“Please”, Dad said, “can you give us bread?”

The Russian Major said he didn’t have any bread.

Dad said, “Listen, you got flour, you could bake bread.” The Major said he couldn’t spare the men. Dad looked at the columns of POWs, marching with their hands on their heads and said, “Okay, give me two German prisoners, they’ll help me bake the bread.

The Major said, “You would bake bread with the guards who did these things to you?”

And dad said. “Listen, you’re hungry, I’m hungry, they’re hungry.”

So, they baked the bread.” Side by side they worked, my Dad and two former German soldiers, only too happy to not be fighting any more. They baked bread for everybody.

And I understand something very deep from that incredible story my father relayed. Bread is not only something you break with other people, something healing, it’s about forgiveness, and moving on.

With everything we’re going through right now, all of the incredible difficulties around antisemitism we are facing, currently at the highest peak in our lifetime, my Dad’s example of being able to move forward after such extraordinary trauma sets a high bar — and it’s something I very much aspire to.

