

TWIP KITCHEN

One of the most charming Palestinian cookbooks was written by Aziz Shihab, a journalist who was born in Jerusalem and as a young man emigrated to the United States. In *A Taste of Palestine, Memories & Menus*, Shihab mixes recipes with stories and autobiographical anecdotes about life in Palestine in the 1940s and 1950s when he used to roam the streets of Jerusalem's old city. His daughter, Naomi Shihab Nye, has given TWIP the kind permission to publish excerpts from this cookbook, and we are most happy to be able to share them with you, our readers. When Shihab's mother Khadra, at the age of 104 and living in a village in the West Bank, heard of the cookbook, she commented, "This food is my secret to a long life. *Insha' Allah* it will be the same for others." May the recipes serve both your enjoyment and your good health.

As Ramadan – the month of fasting – approaches, we would like to share with you the recipe for *qatayef*, a type of pancake that is filled with unsalted cheese or a combination of nuts, then dipped in *qatr* (sugar syrup) and served at the end of the *ftoor* (breakfast), which is consumed at sunset together with family and friends. If you are lucky enough to spend Ramadan in Palestine, you will find the partially cooked pancakes sold on every street corner, ready for you to fill and bake at home. If you are not so lucky, you can treat yourself and your family following Khadra's recipe.

Qatayef (filled pancake dessert)

2 cups flour
2 tsp baking powder
½ cup cornmeal
½ cup sugar
1 tsp salt
3 cups milk

1 cup melted butter or vegetable oil
2 eggs (beaten well)
1 cup walnuts (finely chopped)
1 tsp cinnamon
2 tbsp brown sugar

Mix flour with baking powder and salt. Add cornmeal and sugar and mix well. Add eggs and milk and mix until you get a smooth batter.

Slightly cover the bottom of a crepe pan or skillet with oil and heat until hot (do not allow to smoke). Pour in a small amount of the mixture and let it spread over the bottom of the skillet, forming a 3- to 4-inch circular thin pancake. Cover and cook over medium heat for a few minutes until slightly brown. Turn the pancake over and cook the other side. Repeat until you use all the batter, adding a few drops of oil or butter to heat the skillet before making each pancake. If the skillet is large enough, you can cook two or three pancakes at a time. Place on a large tray and keep warm and moist.

Mix the nuts, brown sugar, and cinnamon with warm water (some use orange juice. *TWIP: sparingly*). Spread a small amount of the nut mixture on each pancake, fold in half, and press the edges together. Pour *qatr* (hot syrup) over each pancake and serve hot.

TWIP: Use amount of qatr to taste. You can fill qatayef with almonds or coconut shavings or mixtures of nuts or cream. If you have access to the traditional white cheese made from sheep milk, make sure to soak it in water that you change every couple hours for a day (to remove the salt), then boil for three to five minutes (but do not rinse again since it will lose its flavor).

Qatr (hot sugar syrup)

Put 1½ cups of sugar into a bowl and add 2 cups of water and the juice of

half a lemon. Mix. Heat until it begins to boil. (You may add a few drops of rose water or orange flower water or some cinnamon). *TWIP: If you prefer a thicker syrup, increase the amount of sugar (you can use up to double the amount) and boil for 5 to 10 minutes (then add aroma).*

In line with the current issue's theme Humans of Palestine, we would like to share with you Aziz Shihab's account of his early beginnings as a journalist while a student at Rashidiya High School, located near Bab As-Sahira (Herod's Gate) in East Jerusalem. He gives a delightful account of how media were operating during the latter part of the British Mandate period.

Jerusalem Journalist

Falastin Daily was the prominent Jerusalem newspaper of the day. "They read it all over Palestine," its owner, Dawood Al Isa, used to say with pride. He used to get very angry when an owner of a meat shop bought the paper to wrap meat in it for his customers. But other shopkeepers made cone-shaped containers out of the paper and filled them with their products – candy, nuts, spices, or whatever. In villages, newspapers served another useful purpose. They were used as toilet paper. Al Isa was so insulted when he heard this that once he asked truck drivers who delivered the paper not to leave any copies in the villages.

I was only a high school junior when I decided I wanted to become a journalist. I visited the newspaper office one evening and asked the owner to give me a job. He asked me if I understood English and I said of course. I had taken English classes in Rashidiya High School for one year. He named me the paper's foreign editor. My job was to listen to the short-wave radio – especially to the BBC from London – and write down the stories I heard. When there were no English-language broadcasts, I listened to Radio Cairo or Al-Sharq Al-Adna and wrote down some of the news I heard. Radio stations were the newspapers' wire services. Reuters News Agency was the dominant service in the area but it was so expensive, newspaper owners said, that they preferred to get the news free through the radio.

Reporters and editors spent so much time drinking tea and coffee one wondered how any work was done. The chief editor and the owner had their own "coffee boy" who constantly served coffee and tea to their visitors. This coffee boy also served as the weatherman. Every day he climbed on the roof of the building, looked right and looked left, and predicted the weather.

Later I became a reporter and worked under the direction of an old journalist named Rashad Abu-Gharbieh. Rashad loved whisky and every afternoon he'd go into the back room of a store



owned by one of his friends and drink to his heart's content. He was also the correspondent for Reuters and he made me his assistant.

We had little or no advertising in the newspaper, but one could buy a "story" even on the front page. Missionaries who depended on money from back home, especially from America, loved to buy stories accompanied by pictures. So the advertising ran as legitimate stories. And missionaries bought hundreds of copies and sent them back home. I remember one American missionary who gave bread and sugar to poor people in front of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher every Friday. His assistants asked the crowd if they liked what they were getting. The poor raised their hands. The missionary and his aides took photos. Then he bought a story on the front page and asked us to print the photo of the poor raising their hands. We learned later that he sent copies to his church back home in Kansas claiming those were the people he was converting.

Other income for the newspaper came from foreign embassies whose staffs wanted the paper to print favorable stories about their countries. We were not allowed to print one negative word about the British Empire or about British misdeeds, if any, in Palestine. I don't know if this was following orders or if

it was the publisher's way of thanking the rulers for giving him the newspaper license.

Writers, reporters, and editors, and even the combination coffee boy/weatherman – about a dozen staffers all together – were males. I remember a girl named Rahma Nawas, who owned a typing school and used to come and visit with the chief editor. We created all kinds of excuses to go into his office while she was there, and we envied him. After each visit, a story about the typing school appeared in the paper.

I think I earned what was equal to about 25 dollars per month. This was lots of money in those days, especially for a high school student. The owner of the paper must have made a lot more. He owned a huge house and drove brand-new British-made cars. And I remember being treated very generously by many merchants who wanted the names of their establishments mentioned in my stories. They pointed to me when I passed their shops and said, "He is a *sahafi* (journalist)." And so I was a Jerusalem *sahafi*.

I thought the pasha was a pasha,
but
I found out that the pasha was
just a man.

