



TWIP KITCHEN

Jack's Palestinian Comfort Food: Snack Attack!

By Jack Rabah

For those days when nothing seems to work right, I usually turn to food to distract my mind. It's no wonder that, with the times we are going through, I can't seem to lose any weight no matter what I try.

Like many around the world, diving into a tub of ice cream often does the trick, especially when it's Ramallah's milk-white ice cream made with gum arabic. Although this type of ice cream is part of Syrian and Turkish traditions, Rukab Ice Cream and Baladna have become main destinations on Ramallah's Main Street for locals and foreigners alike. But if you don't want to consume so many calories, a few slices of watermelon with salty Palestinian white goat cheese works too!

I guess what counts for me as comfort food changes with the season, or with what I can find inside our fridge late at night. During cold winter days, or when I end up catching a cold, my absolute favourite is a nice bowl of chicken soup. Not just any chicken soup, but my favourite is simple Palestinian soup made from natural chicken broth. Quite often the simple things in life are the most rewarding. What makes this soup so special for me is also quite simple: a handful of white rice and a good sprinkle of freshly and coarsely chopped parsley leaves. Finally, a few drops of freshly squeezed lemon juice make it just perfect.

To make this wonderful soup you start with preparing chicken broth. You don't want to cut any corners here if you want to get a thick soup full of flavour. Preparing the broth is fairly straightforward. Drop a about 1 kg of cleaned and cut chicken pieces with bones into a cooker with 3 litres of water, a peeled whole onion, a few black peppercorns, a cinnamon stick,

a couple bay leaves, and salt to taste. Slowly bring to a boil; reduce heat. Skim foam. Cover and simmer for 2 hours. Set chicken aside until cool enough to handle. Remove meat from bones and discard the bones; save meat for another use. Strain broth, discarding vegetables and seasonings.

To prepare the soup, pour the strained broth back into the cooker. You can add the chicken pieces if you like. Bring the broth to a boil then add half a cup of rice. Cook until the rice is ready. Just before you turn off the stove, add two tablespoons of coarsely chopped parsley. This will make sure the parsley stays green and fresh looking. Serve hot with a squeeze of fresh lemon juice on top.

Watching the news of our brothers and sisters in Gaza taking shelter at the schools and the difficult conditions of refugees in Iraq and Syria due to ISIS attacks, I can't imagine how even the simple comfort of a home-cooked meal is out of reach! I pray for this craziness to end so that they can all return safely to their homes.

Here's another simple hearty recipe I enjoy on evenings when I feel like having a light snack: I pour a good amount of Palestinian slightly sour yogurt into a bowl, cover it with a layer of extra virgin Palestinian olive oil, and sprinkle some salt on top. I toast a piece of taboun bread and use it to scoop up the yogurt and olive oil. A cup of tea with fresh mint leaves is the icing on the cake.

If I keep going I won't be able to stop! There are just too many of these simple, yet amazing snacks to write about in one piece. I guess this is my motivation to write more columns for *This Week in Palestine*.