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Lotte's Meringue Cookies

Yield: Makes About 36 Cookies | Prep Time: 20 Minutes, Plus Cooling Time | Cook Time: 2 Hours 5 Minutes

While I never met my great-grandfather, I grew up with his brother's wife, my great-great-aunt Lotte. She celebrated pretty much every holiday with us, arriving each time with a Tupperware of her famous meringue cookies in hand. They were packed with chocolate chips and chopped walnuts, and I was enamored by the way this crisp cookie melted in your mouth the second it touched your tongue. They were my absolute favorite, and she knew it, and she always baked enough so I would have leftovers to snack on for days.

It wasn't until Lotte passed away in 2019 at the grand old age of ninety-seven that my sister and I first learned of her upbringing in Germany. She was our kind, meringue-scooping aunt, but we never knew of her experiences searching for education after being turned away from school for being a Jew, having to wear a yellow Jewish star on her sleeve, escaping to England to work as an underpaid maid, and eventually learning that most of her family had perished in the Holocaust. After so much pain and hardship, Lotte helped build a family full of so much love, one that I'm proud to be a part of.

I've tweaked her meringue recipe over the years, swapping chocolate chips for chopped bar chocolate to add a little more gooeyness and combining her French meringue with a hot cornstarch slurry for extra gloss, a genius technique I learned from my friend and pastry chef extraordinaire Miro Uskokovic of Gramercy Tavern in NYC. But at their core, these will always be Lotte's meringues. And while they may not be inherently Jewish, the story of her perseverance, which eventually led to me having this recipe, brings me more pride as a Jew than any traditional confection, and that is the sweetest part of all.

3 large egg whites

¼ teaspoon cream of tartar

1 cup (200g) sugar

2 teaspoons corn starch/potato starch

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

5 ounces dark chocolate (70 percent cacao), chopped (1 cup)

1 cup walnuts, coarsely chopped

1. Preheat the oven to 200°F. Line two half sheet pans with parchment paper.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whip the egg whites and cream of tartar on medium speed until frothy. Then, with the mixer running, stream in the sugar and whip until white in color and beginning to grow in volume, but not yet able to hold soft peaks.
3. Meanwhile, in a small saucepan, whisk the cornstarch with ½ cup water. Cook over medium- high heat, stirring continuously, until thickened, about 2 minutes.
4. With the mixer running, slowly pour the hot cornstarch slurry into the egg white mixture, followed by the salt and vanilla. Raise the mixer speed to medium-high and whip until the mixture holds stiff peaks, 10 to 12 minutes. Gently fold in the chocolate and walnuts.
5. Spoon 2-tablespoon mounds of the meringue mixture onto the prepared sheet pans, spacing them 1 inch apart. Bake for 2 hours, then remove from the oven and let cool completely.
6. Serve once cool, or store in an airtight container lined with paper towels at room temperature for up to 4 days.