

Confession: I Secretly Love Passover

By Amanda Bradley

(Kveller via JTA) - I have a confession to make. Not only do I enjoy Passover, I also enjoy making Passover.

For years I hid this fact. Living in a prevailing culture where it was obligatory to begin moaning about Passover cleaning not long after Hanukkah, I felt that enjoying making Passover was a flaw in an otherwise perfect character. I was embarrassed to admit that I really enjoy tipping out the contents of my kitchen drawers and lining them with paper, and that washing down the insides of my kitchen cabinets to a background of heavy rock is a spiritual experience for me.

But I think that I'm old enough now to admit the truth.

The truth is, I love Passover. I love cleaning for Passover and I love preparing for Passover. I love the feeling in the air of possibility and potential, that springtime feeling of beginning a new page, starting over, but with the added depth

of our own special redemption narrative.

At Passover time, I feel a sense of renewal and rehabilitation that I suspect I am meant to feel at Yom Kippur. There is something about springtime that makes it a lot easier to believe in a benevolent God, and a lot easier to believe that you really can be your best possible you. When I clean my home, I feel like I am getting rid of my old negative habits, polishing up my good traits, and bringing out my positive modes of thought. There, I said it.

I have some friends who feel oppressed by Passover and by its laws. They feel overwhelmed by the halachic minutiae of what is chametz, of how much matzah needs to be eaten when, who eats which foods on Passover and who avoids them like they're poison (or the plague — get it?).

They're fearful of getting something wrong, and feel patronized by friends and relatives who keep stricter laws than they do.

They find it hard to relate to a festival that seems to be micromanaged by an OCD cleaning angel.

I also have friends who secretly think that if they do not feel stressed, anxious, and exhausted, they have not fulfilled their obligation in making Passover. It's like they're celebrating an entirely different festival.

I'll be honest again. Call me a slave who is happy with her chains, but I have never been bothered by the halachic minutiae. (The made-up halachic obsessions that people use to harass others bother me, but that's a different issue.) To me, the intricacies of the Jewish legal requirements are part of creating the atmosphere of Passover. Otherwise it would just be a feel-good time of eating matzah and not eating obvious chametz products, which (to me) would not be enough to create such a complete feeling of being in a different dimension, one where you really can achieve your potential. And as a person who only gets things done by the deadline, I know that if the laws of Passover were optional, I wouldn't follow them at all.

I think that like so many things in life, this one might come down to our mothers (I know, I know, if in doubt, blame the mother). Because I have friends who scrub their skirting boards with a toothbrush, but are happy while they do so, and others who do the bare minimum with anxiety and resentment.

A quick Facebook poll has shown that the deciding factor in how people feel about making Passover is definitely the atmosphere in which they grew up. People who grew up with mothers who were happy about making Passover feel happy about making Passover. People who grew up in homes where making Passover was an overwhelming chore or anxious stress factor report that they feel the same way toward the festival. It seems to make little difference if they make Passover in three days or three months, whether or not they have a

Passover kitchen, if they work full time or not at all, or how old their kids are.

I grew up with an excitement about Passover. As a child, I loved the turn-the-house-upside-down unexpectedness of cleaning, the way that long-lost toys and favorite games would resurface, the stir and bustle in the air. I loved the excitement of taking out the Passover dishes and reuniting with my favorite Passover mug. And call me childish, but I have never lost that feeling.

Between you and me, though, can I tell you what I really hate? I hate unmaking Passover.

Believe me, I miss my bagels as much as the next woman (or more, if the next woman is one of the many who's on a gluten-free diet). So I can't wait to rise to the leaven again. But oh do I resent putting everything away. It's a

heavy and wearisome task, with none of the joy of creating a new atmosphere of festivity that buoys me through my pre-Passover preparations.

But I won't depress you with that. Instead, I'll end this article here and go off to put on a Bon Jovi track while I joyfully clean another cupboard (because no one did Passover cleaning before the advent of rock music, right?).

Please don't stone me for being sexist. I know that men also make Passover. But at least in our parents' generation, 95% of the time it was the women who bore the brunt of the preparations. ☆

Kveller is a thriving community of women and parents who convene online to share, celebrate, and commiserate their experiences of raising kids through a Jewish lens. Visit Kveller.com.

Strawberry Almond Mini Muffins for Passover

By Whitney Fisch

(The Noshers via JTA) - Passover and I haven't always been friends. There was a time when I thought about Passover approaching and my mind would be overrun by what I wouldn't be allowed to eat. As a girl who has always loved carbs, the thought of saying goodbye to my beloved noodles and bread, even for eight days, caused me to have a little anxiety attack.

But as the food world has become increasingly creative to help accommodate the never-ending list of folks with food allergies, Passover has become less about what I can't have and more about what I can have by flexing my creative foodie muscles.

The recipe below is a great example. I've made a version of these before for one of my clients who prefers gluten-free food options. I wanted to give my old recipe a seasonal twist, so I added the roasted strawberries, which

are coming out in droves in Miami where I live. The result is a not too sweet but supremely delicious (and healthy) breakfast/snack treat. I hope you enjoy.

Ingredients:

- 3 c. roasted strawberries
- 2 T. coconut oil
- 1/2 c. vanilla yogurt
- 1/4 c. honey
- 2 eggs
- 1 T. vanilla extract
- 2-1/2 c. blanched almond flour
- 1/4 t. sea salt
- 1/2 t. baking soda

Directions:

To make the roasted strawberries:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Toss 3 c. of quartered strawberries with a pinch of salt and 2 t. melted coconut oil or other cooking oil that you prefer. Spread strawberries in a single layer on a parchment lined baking sheet. Roast for 25-30 min. or till juicy and reduced in size. Set aside to cool.

To make the muffins:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Combine all the wet ingredients into a bowl and mix well with a spoon. Add the dry muffin ingredients and mix well. Fold in the strawberries. Place cupcake liners in a baking pan and fill the liners halfway with batter. Note: Feel free to not use cupcake liners, but make certain that you are using a non-stick mini muffin pan. Coat the muffin tins with a healthy dose of butter or cooking spray and sprinkle each with almond flour to ensure the muffins don't stick.

Bake for about 18 min., or till a toothpick placed in the center of a muffin comes out clean and the tops are starting to brown. Allow to cool for at least 15 minutes before serving. ☆

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(Shown is the "Hamsa Seder Plate" by Jessica Sporn for Aviv Judaica.)