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## SAVOR THE MOMENT

BY MILLICENT K. BRODY

# SWEET DREAMS

*In winter, visions of sugar plums—  
and other treats—dance in our heads.*

When I was a little girl, my grandmother Molly owned a grocery store with her sister and brother-in-law on Bergen Street and Renner Avenue in Newark. She lived in a railroad-type apartment above the store, and that's where my dad and I would visit her several times during the week, and on Saturdays for lunch. This sweet lady had a huge Victrola and an enormous stash of records. She also lived next door to a wonderful bakery.

Every Saturday, my grandmother would remove her apron, take my hand and together we'd walk to the bakery. I'd stand in front of the glass cases for what seemed like hours, staring at all of the delectable treats. Yet I always chose a charlotte russe, a slab of cake topped with swirls of whipped cream. They were delicious.

Of course, our Hanukkah celebration always included a visit to Grandma's house. To get to her apartment, we'd have to walk up what seemed like a zillion steps. She'd listen for us, and when we got close to the top landing, she'd open the door with a big smile on her face and welcome us inside.

"It's Hanukkah," I remember shouting, running to her ancient menorah. Grandma would strike a match and together we'd light the beautiful orange candles. After admiring their glow, we'd say a prayer and sing "Rock of Ages." Then, as on every other Saturday, we'd walk back down the stairs to visit the bakery for my weekly charlotte russe.

Just before Dad and I left for home, Grandma would give me my one and only Hanukkah gift. Yes, only one. A tiny net bag filled with chocolate candies covered with gold wrappers. They were called Hanukkah gelt ("gelt" is Yiddish for "money").

I loved Hanukkah, but I also loved the joy of the Christmas season. The night before Christmas, my father (who, though raised in the Jewish faith, always had a Christmas tree as a little boy) would bring home the smallest "Charlie Brown"-type Christmas tree. He would place it on one of my mother's best serving tables, on top of a white blanket. Dad and I would then sit at the kitchen table and make homemade ornaments. Just before bedtime, we'd hang up our stockings (his socks), throw tinsel all over the tree and I'd go to sleep, hoping that Santa would find my house. Of course, I'd always leave a plate full of cookies for the jolly old man, knowing full well the trip would leave him starving.

Holidays or not, our house was always filled with company. Dear friends would stop by after dinner for dessert. My mother would fill a tray with bowls of ice cream, homemade chocolate chip cookies and rich chocolate cake. And the tradition continues. Although I wouldn't dare choose a charlotte russe, I treat myself to a bowl of ice cream every single night. And, not too many nights pass without me pairing it with a couple of chocolate chip cookies too. 🍪

## SPECIAL PLACES TO FIND THE DESSERT OF YOUR DREAMS

### **Balthazar Bakery**

214 South Dean Street, Englewood | 201-503-9717

Beyond-delicious baguettes, croissants, tartlets, scones, hearth breads and so much more. The challenge: Driving home without snitching chunks of the good stuff from boxes and bags.

### **Bovella's Pastry Shoppe**

101 East Broad Street, Westfield | 908-232-4149

Baker Ralph Bencivenga is a wedding cake specialist. He's also the one to see for platters of your favorite Italian confections.

### **Café Hola**

1 Main Street, High Bridge | 908-638-4250

Owner/baker Ellie Espinosa turns out a wonderful mix of empanadas, quiches and egg puffs for breakfast, plus homemade muffins, cookies, apple cups and guava puff pastries.

### **Clove Brook Market**

800 State Rt. 23, Sussex | 973-875-5600

With a heritage in farming, owner/baker Kim Sytsema uses fresh ingredients from local farms whenever possible in creating her delicious pies and other treats.

### **Gina's Bakery**

110 Walnut Street, Montclair | 973-233-1010

Yummy cookies, brownies, muffins, pies and cakes for special occasions.

### **The Bread Company**

113 Walnut Street, Montclair | 973-509-2525

Will and Sally Reinhardt's dedication to quality shines through in this tiny shop full of certified organic, freshly baked goods. Delicious options for those with dietary intolerances too.

### **The Lovin' Oven**

17 Bridge Street, Milford | 908-995-7744

A friendly, cozy stop where everything is made from scratch and the baked goods are so good you'll want to buy extra to take home. Don't miss the chocolate chip-cranberry scones.

### **Made with Love Organic Bakery**

530 Jersey Avenue, Jersey City | 201-714-4651

Celeste Governanti's scones, cookies and other baked goods, a favorite at farmers' markets, are now available year-round at her brand new shop.

### **Riviera Bakery**

124 Ferry Street, Newark | 973-491-9000

You can't walk Ferry Street without a visit to Riviera Bakery. Choose the pastry that speaks to you, order a cappuccino, and don't forget to take home a selection of treats.

### **The Sweet Life Bakery**

601 East Landis Avenue (storefront on Sixth Street), Vineland | 856-856-692-5353

Since opening their shop last year, husband-and-wife team Stephen Wilson and Jill McClennen have been making a delicious stir with hand-made cookies, cakes and other seasonal sweets.

### **Swiss Pastry Shoppe**

1711 E. 2nd Street, Scotch Plains | 908-322-4751

See John Cioffi for the best, best rugalach, the best pastries, and some mighty tasty pies.

### **The Village Bakery**

2 Gordon Avenue, Lawrenceville | 609-896-0036

This gem is a local must-stop thanks to chef Karen Child's artisanal breads, pastries, cookies and cakes—all baked fresh daily.