

Coconut Milk-Soaked Southern Fried Chicken: A Kosher Love Story



Wedding day

As mentioned in my previous post, it was 2002 and I was fresh outta college and outta my first real relationship. The relationship was lovely and sweet and I'm blessed to have had it. It lasted nearly 3 years, which is like 10 years in college time. So when I awoke one morning in Washington, DC, where I was living (and finally in my own apartment. I was staying with my boyfriend when we broke up because my apartment wasn't ready, which meant I had to live with my ex for the first 3 days of our break up. I do NOT recommend that), newly single, what I didn't realize is that I was starting the journey of real world singlehood. Oh. Sh*t. Here's the thing, common sense and 'street smarts', I had a plenty. I had buckets of it. I had traveled to Italy and lived on my own for a summer when I was 19. I had lived and worked in DC when I was 20 and I had studied abroad in Israel and traveled throughout Europe during my Junior year in college. I knew how to live in the world and not only survive, but do it pretty decently. These experiences taught me an immense amount about life. However, during about 2/3 of this time, I had a

boyfriend so dating 'common sense', well, I didn't even have a little sand bucket full of it.



These women are the reason I survived my 20s



And this woman – my Jackie – I spent a large amount of time in my 20s, on the dance floor with Jackie. It was our cardio. (Montreal circa 2007)



When single and 'fabulous', always make sure you travel with a "Jessi(e)". This is one of mine. I love her (Chicago circa 2006).

Thus started roughly 6 years of dating the same dude, different name. I mean, to say I had a 'type' would have been too easy. I was an obvious open book. If you were tall, dark in features and in mood, worked in a nonprofit organization that didn't afford you the time to date and freshly out of a relationship and so obviously not wanting a commitment it was almost painful? Well then, I was in love. There were, of course, special added bonus points for guys who worked in bars and guys who were Jewish but didn't want to have anything to do with their Judaism. And tortured artist? Please, I could

spot an unavailable, tortured artist from miles away and once spotted, chase the crap outta him and force him to date me. Around 2004, I had decided to only date Jewish guys after the break up of first love, who happened to not be Jewish. How not Jewish was he? He sometimes wore a t-shirt that read, "Presbyterians Do It Better". And how could I forget that one time I was once called in to help out his sister who was doing a project on "the Jews" for a high school report. Bless her heart, the only visual she had was of a Hasidic man swinging a chicken over his head during the ritual Yom Kippur *kaparah*. "Just so you know", I casually mentioned, "Not all Jews swing chickens over their heads in an effort for that chicken to pick up their cast-off sins". Oy.

I tell you all this because when I met my husband, the only criteria he met off my checklist of dating doom was that he was tall and Jewish. But when a person spends 6 years unsuccessfully dating, there is a point where that person (read: me) has to recognize that maybe it was me. Maybe I was choosing the wrong type of guy. Could I have a future with the Jehovah's Witness bar-back of the bar I worked night shifts at who couldn't afford a phone? No. Was this because I was an elitist? Possibly. But it was most likely because we had nothing in common whatsoever. But then, when I was 28 and he was 22, I met my husband.

I was sick. I was so so so so so sick and dehydrated that I couldn't cry tears because my body couldn't produce the tears. I had landed in Israel a week before, ready for a year of living my own version of "Eat, Pray, Love", when I contracted something that I have since diagnosed in all my medical expertise as dysentery (if this is sounding familiar, it's because I wrote about that here). One day, my sweet friend, Jessie, had come to take me on a walk so I could buy water. On this walk, Jessie waved to a guy from across the street and called out to him, "Hey Yoni". I thought to myself, "Girl, seriously? I can't function. Let's keep moving". Except we

didn't keep moving because the next thing I knew, this Yoni character was crossing the street on the way to say "hello". Ugh. I was in no mood to *kibbitz* (*chitchat*). I was in no mood for anything other than lying in bed, writhing around in self-pity and watching National Treasure for the 8th time (it was the only movie I had access to). But then, in an instant, Yoni was there and Jessie introduced us. Now, I know this is going to sound cheesy and dangerously close to my own Nicholas Sparks-moment, but please believe me when I tell you that in the moment we said "hello" to each other, I knew this was my man. It wasn't the 101 fever or my extreme malnourishment or dehydration talking. It was Gd. I was meeting my *besheret* (*soulmate*) on the sidewalks of Jerusalem. Gd hand-delivered me my partner. "Pay attention", I thought to myself, "This is your moment. This is the first time in your life when you can say in absolute certainty that Gd is talking to you. Listen up, honey"



Jessie and Yoni (a.k.a. Yonz) at his nephew's Pidyon HaBen, the week we met



Because Yonz was studying in Eilat and I was in Jerusalem, we traveled back and forth every shabbat – sometimes alone but sometimes together. Or, something together but alone. Sleepy head (Eilat – Jerusalem circa 2008)

He was 22. I was 28. He was from New Jersey and I from Georgia. He was raised in a Modern Orthodox family and I was the daughter of a non-Jewish dad and a Jewish mom; raised in a Reform Jewish household. He was in Israel studying to get his Master's degree in Marine Sciences. I was contemplating becoming a Rabbi (that still cracks me up. I became a social worker instead. Close enough). Within roughly 2 weeks of that

moment, we were inseparable.



These limbs are the reason our nearly 1 year old can reach the 3rd shelf of our bookshelf already. (Jumping off the pier in Eilat circa 2008. Don't we look like elegant reindeer?)

After he introduced himself, he helped us carry all our bottles of water back to my apartment, which was in the opposite direction of where he was going. The next day I casually mentioned to Jessie that if he might ask for my number, you know, it'd be cool if like maybe you wanted to, I don't know, give it to him? The day after that, he did ask her for my number. Before he actually called though, I ran into him on my way to meet some ladies for a night out. He was eating ice cream with his dad and brother. When I stopped to say "hi", he winked at me. I distinctly remember meeting up with my girls a few minutes later and telling them, "Ummm, that boy had the nerve to wink at me. I think I'm OK with that. Why am I OK with that?" Even they knew it was only a matter of time. Soon after that encounter he did call me and asked me if I wanted to go out for ice cream (he has since learned that this question need not be asked. The answer will

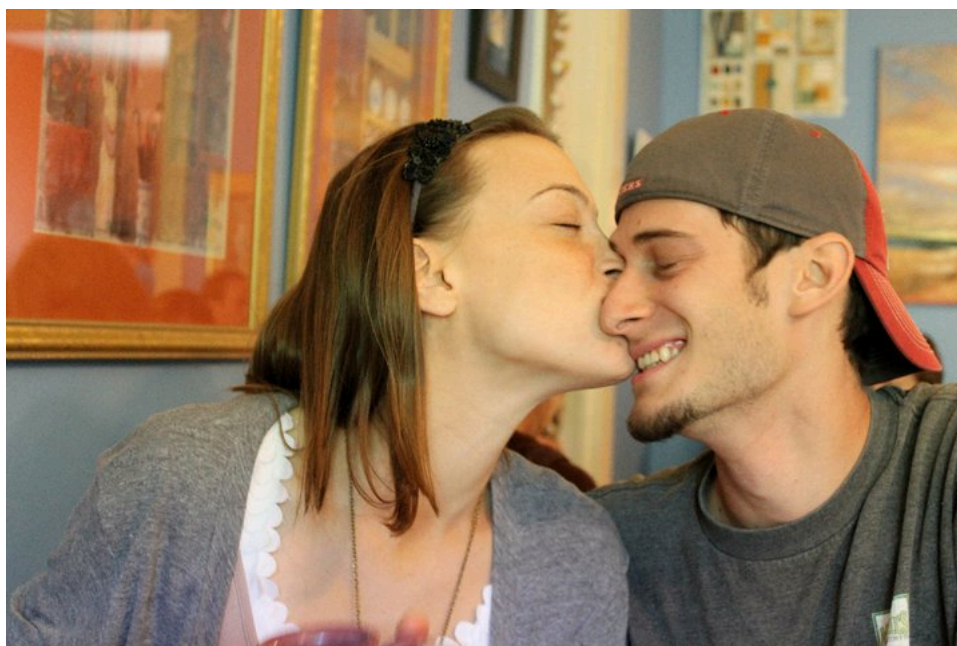
always be 'yes'), and the rest, as they say, is history.



He makes me laugh out loud ALL THE TIME. Who wouldn't love that.

There were a few, mainly on his side, who assumed that I, being the older woman, forced him into this relationship. There were definitely many who thought I pressured him to get married. But this is most certainly not the case and is, in fact, a complete misunderstanding of who we are as a couple and why I knew, after years of dating the wrong person, that this was the right person. Roughly 10 days after we met, my future husband looked at me and with all the confidence in the world, told me that he doesn't date casually. In fact, when he dates its with an eye to the future. When he told me that, I spent about 2 minutes panicking and then got over myself. The panic was of the unknown; I was the child of divorce. I had only one long-term relationship. The only thing I knew was being alone (note: NOT lonely. Those are two very different things. I was never lonely while single and I have my wonderful female friends and family to thank for that) and here was this guy telling me he would be in it for the long haul if I was on board.

Needless to say, I was on board.



Love

When I decided to keep kosher, I catalogued in my head all the meals I would miss because they couldn't be kosher. Of the many items on that list, the top three were as follows:

1. Hot wings dipped in blue cheese dressing
2. Southern fried chicken soaked overnight in buttermilk
3. Chicken Philly cheese steaks

So, OK, the 1st and 3rd items I could get around but how in the world would I make a delicious and juicy fried chicken without the buttermilk!? If I could find the solution, I figured, it would be the perfect representation of my life in one not-so-healthy but not-so-unhealthy dish. And then it hit me. Coconut milk. If I soaked chicken overnight in coconut milk, would there be the same delicious juiciness? The answer was absolutely yes.

Coconut Milk Southern Fried Chicken

Ingredients:

2 Cans of coconut milk
2 Cut up chickens on the bone
Paprika
Garlic powder
Cumin
Black Pepper
Frank's Red Hot sauce
A bunch of cilantro for garnish

****You will need a large brown paper bag for this recipe***

For the Frying:

Vegetable, Canola or Peanut oil (pick your poison)
6 Cups of flour

How:

In a medium bowl, mix all of the dry spices (amount is to your discretion. I do not use measurements here but I would say heavier on the paprika, garlic and cumin). Add chicken and toss until well coated. Let the mixture stand at room temp (if cooking within 4 hours) or refrigerated in a large bowl for one hour. Pour enough coconut milk over the chicken to cover completely and stir in the hot sauce. Refrigerate up to 24 hours. Pour chicken into colander and allow excess coconut to drain.



After an overnight coconut milk soak



Gold

Lay out several paper towel-lined plates to the side of your stove top. In a large brown bag, mix the flour with the same seasoning mixture used for the marinade— season well. One-by-one add the chicken pieces to the bag and shake, making sure they are thoroughly coated with flour on all sides.



The bag of goodness. Every true Southerner shakes her chicken in the bag.

Fill a very large pot or Dutch oven 4-6 inches deep with oil (if you are blessed to have one of those thermometers, my research shows that the temp. should read 325 degrees. I went by dropping a little water droplet in the oil and seeing if it would sizzle).



Pure Gold



I used a baking sheet lined with paper towels to soak up excess oil



With chopped cilantro for added flavor and flare

Using tongs, grab each piece of chicken carefully and slip it into the oil making sure to shake off an excess flour. Make sure to keep the oil at a high temperature while cooking as adding the chicken brings down the heat level. Cook anywhere from 10 – 15 minutes for smaller pieces and 15 – 18 for larger or until golden brown and no redness at the bone, Remove to

plate lined with paper towels to absorb the oil. Once all chicken is done, evenly combine your marinade spices, adding a tiny bit of salt to the mixture, into a small pinch bowl. Once evenly tossed, add the spice mixture to the finished chicken and garnish with chopped cilantro.



Isn't it pretty?

*I enjoy my fried chicken with extra hot sauce while eating. You might too.



I could seriously look at pictures of fried

chicken all day