

{Guest Post} My Jewish Journey – The Joy of Caitlin



Hi Lovely Readers,

I am currently enjoying a trip of a lifetime with my family in Blue Sky, Montana so I asked two trusted foodies to fill in for me while I'm gone. The first post is from my talented sister-in-law, Caitlin, author of the parenting blog, The Joy of Caitlin. The second will be from one of my most favorite people in the world, Jackie. Jackie is THE person who introduced me to the concept of food as art, as something more than just to eat but something you can be passionate about. I am so excited to reflect on this Montana experience next week (gang, there was a food festival. It was epic). In the meantime, please enjoy the guest posts and I wish you a wonderful shabbat,

Whitney

I was on a first date with Mo, the cute guy from my public speaking class. I had been working at a natural bakery in our college town and I was telling an anecdote about a customer asking for some challah. I pronounced it the proper way, with the hard "ch" from the back of my throat, and I think that's when he knew I was the one. The blonde, Irish, hippie girl could stick around. In a funny way I think Mo's reaction to the correct pronunciation was the very beginning of my Jewish

food journey. I realized soon that the cute guy I was interested in wasn't just casually or culturally Jewish like my other friends, he was "Orthodox," raised in a fully observant home, he kept Kosher, and didn't drive on Shabbat. Mo was fully engaged in the secular world, wore regular clothes, baseball caps, and went dancing in clubs. Yet beneath that surface was a deep faith and commitment to values that I had never experienced before.

On our first road trip together, to visit my Grandpa in northern Vermont, Mo pulled over just as we left town. He had packed his siddur (prayer book) in the trunk and wanted to say the Tefilat HaDerech, "Wayfarer's Blessing" as we embarked on our journey. I felt so special, so cozy in the thought that he had a blessing to say for this occasion. I looked through his bilingual prayer book to discover that there were blessings for literally everything. Every kind of food and drink had it's own special words of gratitude. There were blessings for natural phenomena, for healing, I was amazed and smitten. I wanted these secret words woven in my life too. I began to learn about Judaism without discussing it with Mo, afraid he would be worried that I was just doing it because of him, unsure of what he would think.

I finally admitted to him that I was surreptitiously studying Judaism and he was both excited and wary. We went to a few Jewish Renewal services in New York together, and while I was enamored with the guitar playing and Bob Marley songs, he was a bit underwhelmed. We began to occasionally spend Shabbat together, and when Passover came I was sure that I needed to attend a seder. He still hadn't told his family about our relationship, and to arrive in a car in the midst of the two day holiday would have been disruptive and fodder for much disapproval.

I went to a friend's family's seder instead, and I felt a deep sense of purpose, with an underlying sadness. I was sure that I belonged there, yet pained not to be with Mo. For some

reason I decided that night to eat the chicken soup. I hadn't had any meat in seven years, I had been raw vegan on and off for the past three. Something about the occasion, about my longing to belong, made me want to join in fully. It was the same cozy feeling I had experienced when I discovered all the blessings. That one bowl of matzoh ball soup brought me more into the world of Judaism through food, and kick started my interest in the possibility of really creating a Jewish life for myself.

A few months later Mo had decided to travel to Israel for a scholarship in a Masters program in Jerusalem. I was graduating with a degree in English literature and a major itch to get as far from New Jersey as possible. He left in July, I booked a ticket to visit him in October, and spent the summer roaming the east coast, visiting friends, preparing for my first trip overseas. When I finally boarded that plane I left my mom in the terminal with many tearful goodbyes, and set off for the unknown.

The first thing I saw in Israel were the orange trees, the first thing I felt was the heat as I walked through the bridge from the plane to the airport. I heard the guttural sounds of Hebrew and felt excited and lost. I found Mo outside of customs and we loaded my two bags with all my earthly belongings into the back of the airport shuttle. I felt nauseous on the winding ride, amazed at the sprawling rocky hills covered in gnarled olive trees and stone fences I imagined to be ancient. When the van dropped us off at Mo's apartment I was surprised at the dirty dusty streets and the unfamiliar street signs, then felt nothing but gratitude as we descended into his tiny basement apartment where I collapsed on his futon bed and slept dreamlessly.

When I woke hours later it was the afternoon. I was hungry, thirsty, disoriented. I drank some water, threw on my sneakers and we headed out to meet Mo's friend downtown to get something to eat. I will always remember my first meal in

Israel, at a tiny cafe called Timol Shilshom (<http://www.tmol-shilshom.co.il/en/home/default.aspx>). We ordered bread with pesto, olives and labane, everything was fresh and bursting with flavor. Then came the shakshuka, the quintessential Israeli dish Mo and his friend decided I should try, eggs baked in a spicy tomato sauce, eaten with crusty bread. I had spent my college days eating out in Manhattan, trying all different ethnic cuisines from Thai to Ethiopian, but this was a brand new experience for me. It was homey, bright, filling, surprising, and comforting, all at once. From that moment on I was in love with Israeli food, and my Jewish food journey began in earnest.

Read more of my story soon on The Joy of Caitlin!

Mo's Famous Real Israeli Humus

Anyone who has joined us at the Shabbat table has savored the delicious, authentic humus that Mo makes every week. He developed this recipe after extensive tasting in Israel, and testing here in the states. It is one of the few dishes when I willingly give over the kitchen, and just get to enjoy. I hope you like it too!

Ingredients:

3 cups cooked chickpeas

1/2 cup Israeli tehina (can be found at Kosher stores or use regular tahini from any supermarket)

1/2 cup cold water

1-2 cloves garlic

2 tbs olive oil

Juice of one lemon

Salt to taste

Cumin if you like!

How?

Place garlic in bowl of food processor, followed by chickpeas (reserve a handful to put on top at the end) and the rest of

the ingredients. Process until very smooth, adding a little more olive oil or water if needed, and adjust seasoning to taste. Serve topped with chickpeas, a drizzle of olive oil, and a sprinkle of paprika. It makes a great dip for pitas or fresh veggies. B'teyavon!

