

## Chopped Herring by Brenda Kerbel (Kaye)

As I stare at the glass of Vita brand herrings in wine sauce, about to become chopped herring served as a starter on Rosh Hashana, my mind goes back to my Grandma Jenny's kitchen in Virginia Ave, Gardens, Cape Town well over 65 years ago.

Jenny was meticulous about her Yom Tov preparations. *Gehakte* or chopped herring is the one dish that stood out for me.

There was a clear family tradition in this process. First, Jenny had to buy the herrings. This she did when the fishmonger blew his horn in the neighbourhood announcing his arrival. My grandmother would rush out to the horse drawn cart to carefully select herrings at about 2 pennies a piece from the huge barrel. They were then brought home to clean and soak in brine for a few days. Once "pickled" they were ready for the next stage. Year after year, Jenny carefully garnered the other ingredients- hard boiled eggs, bread/ matzo meal, onion, chopped apple, vinegar and sugar to taste.

Before she had access to a mincer attached to the kitchen table, she did everything by hand.

I clearly remember her using a large chopper and bashing the herrings. The additional ingredients were added slowly, one at a time. The sound of the chopping reverberated throughout the house. This was labor intensive; but no Yom Tov was complete without chopped herring. And, of course, the perfect accompaniment was *kichel*- a cracker made with eggs, flour, and sugar. So delicious, even on their own they had to be hidden or else they would be devoured before the holiday!

My grandmother's herring had the perfect consistency and taste and each year I try to recreate the dish.

I must admit that had I not the latest kitchen equipment and prepared ingredients at hand, I would not even attempt 'chopped herring'. Over the years I have tried to buy "herring salad" the store -bought variety, but it is a poor imitation and even trying to doctor it up with Marie Biscuits or the likes does not do the trick.

I decided to write this piece as this year I almost made the exact replica of my grandmother's chopped herring.

Granted, I used a large glass jar Vita Herrings in wine sauce and onions to begin with. I drained them and reserved some of the liquid.

I then took out my Cuisinart Blender and using the chopping blade and pulse control activator, added the - eggs, sweet apples, matzo meal, herrings, and onions for the perfect blend.

It is the presentation that gives SA chopped herring its quintessential look. It must be garnished with chopped hard-boiled egg, separated into yellow and white – arranged in rows, circles or even a Star of David on a pretty glass platter. The finish off is with a trim of sliced pickles, tomato peel in the shape of a rose and a sprig of fresh parsley.

After all this, on opening the refrigerator the sweet savory fragrance of chopped herring evokes the very essence of tradition. The memories give me comfort, knowing that my Grandma Jenny is smiling from above. Those hours as a little girl watching her cooking in her compact kitchen were filled with love -the ultimate ‘Vitamin L’!

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**Written by Brenda Kerbel (Kaye) in September 20024**

### **A Word about Brenda**

Born in Cape Town, South Africa, Dr Brenda Kerbel (Kaye) now lives in Newton, Massachusetts, in the United States.

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