

Baking Is Still Survivor's Livelihood

BY JOHN M. GLIONNA
© 2015, Los Angeles Times

INCLINE VILLAGE, Nev. — Of all the guilty culinary pleasures that Ernie Feld whips up at his tiny pastry shop in the forest, one is particularly bittersweet: the popular poppy-seed strudels.

That's the delicacy Feld made for the Nazi SS officers who held him captive as their personal baker during the final years of World War II, a time when Feld literally cooked for his life, using empty champagne bottles to spread his dough because rolling pins were in short supply.

At 90, he still runs Ernie's International Pastries on the North Shore of Lake Tahoe, artfully preparing the treats he has made for seven decades — his signature strudels, Austrian Sacher torte and lemon Napoleons.

He's a wartime survivor who has kept his sweet, grandfatherly sense of humor, whether he's serving up one-liners to customers or recalling his painful past. While Feld was held at a makeshift German-run airport in Budapest, three dozen of his family members — including his beloved mother, Sara — went to the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

"Most men want a woman who is good in the kitchen, but the German SS needed me because I could cook," he joked, not long before last Thursday's Holocaust Remembrance Day, his voice carrying an Eastern European lilt, with a prankster's playfulness. Then he turned serious: "Baking saved my life. If I wasn't a baker, I'd probably be dead."

Nowadays, Feld is slowing down, except when it comes to fending off the animal invaders. In 2010, he and his wife, Marika, encountered four bears that had broken into the shop in just one season, including a large male Feld met face-to-face in his kitchen. He scared off the bear, and later helped officials catch two others by baiting a trap with his poppy-seed strudel.

"Those bears must be Jewish," he said. "One came in for a meal and went home to tell his family, 'There's very good strudel there.'"

For decades, while Feld baked in the San Francisco



JOHN M. GLIONNA/LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS
Ernie Feld stands in his bakery holding up a photo of himself and other prisoners near Lake Tahoe, Nev. As a young man, Feld was held captive by the Nazis in World War II, serving as the personal baker for a group of SS officers. Decades later, he still makes the same recipes at his tiny bakery near Lake Tahoe.

Bay Area, so many customers asked about his original last name — Ehrenfeld — that he went to court for a new one. "I told the judge I wanted to cut it in half," he said. "By the time I finished telling people about my name, my pastries got burned."

That name signifies a past life that took all of Feld's pluck to survive.

He was born in Lucenec, Czechoslovakia, in 1925 and grew up as Europe edged toward its second continental war of the century. After his father died in an accident, the boy everyone called Ernie watched his mother bake in the restaurant she ran in town. "When I was 14, I was always licking this and licking that, and mother would say,

'Are you eating again? I'm going to send you to baker's school.'"

For three years, he worked as an intern baker attending cooking classes at night. As war broiled and prices soared, his bosses sent him into the countryside atop his bicycle to test the black market for eggs and flour, which were hard to come by.

The episodes were precursors to more sinister shopping trips to come.

In 1942, three years after the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia, Feld was just 17 as Jews were rounded up. As he stood on the train platform, waiting to board with other men bound for a work camp, his mother saw him off: "She

was worried that I had nice strong shoes."

He never saw her again.

Feld was taken to Hungary, where he first worked as a cook at a farm camp. Then a Nazi SS leader heard about the Jewish baker-turned-prisoner. He needed a good chef for a German officer's club at an airport the Third Reich was building near Budapest: "He asked me, 'What can you cook?' He needed someone to make appetizers for the officers to eat with their champagne and beer."

Feld wrote up a list of the ingredients, and the Nazis sent him into Budapest to

his younger brother, Alex. Cousins, aunts and uncles perished too in the Holocaust.

Now Feld sits at a table near the glass display case as Marika bakes, following recipes her husband has taught her over their 22-year marriage. After breaking his leg in a fall five months ago, he often uses a walker and wheelchair. "I used to give her instructions," he said. "Now she orders me around."

It's Feld's job to shake and bake with customers. Some documented their encounters online.

"Did you make these pastries by yourself?" one poster asked.

"Of course. You weren't here to help me make them."

The visitor persisted: "Are the cookies soft?"

"You won't break your teeth on them."

As Feld opened a box of mementos to display faded images of his past, Marika whispered something in Hungarian: "She wants me to say that those Nazis are probably dead, but Ernie is still making his poppy-seed strudels."

Yes, he is. And with that, the baker served up a smile that was anything but bittersweet.

Keeping You Connected To The World

L&S ELECTRIC

New Construction
Remodel
Commercial

1600 E. 39th St., Yankton
Harry Lane, Electrical Contractor

665-6612 • 661-1040
License, Bonded & Insured

Fox Run Quik Lube
2501 Fox Run Pkwy
Your 10-minute oil change center
No Appointment Needed
Tues - Fri 8-5 • Sat 8-2
Next Door to Post Office

\$25 = 15 WORDS 1 PHOTO 1 NEWSPAPERS 1 SHOPPERS SPEEDY SALE!

Get Extra!

Buying or Selling a Car?
Get EXTRA exposure and a Speedy Sale!

Your 15 word, 1 photo classified ad will run for 6 days in the Press & Dakotan, and once in the Missouri Valley Shopper for only \$25!

MV Shopper **PRESS & DAKOTAN**

319 Walnut
605-665-7811
yankton.net

Hy-Vee HealthMarket
Change What You Eat - Change How You Feel
Prices Good April 21 - May 4

EARN 5¢ OFF PER GALLON WITH ANY POUND PURCHASE OF HEALTH MARKET BULK

G.H. Cretors Popcorn New Flavors!
Caramel Corn, Cheese or Chicago Mix Popcorn
\$2.89

Silk Cashew Milk
Chocolate and Vanilla Gluten Free, Non GMO and Kosher
\$2.78

Back to Nature Soups
"Give people turly flavorful, wholesome foods made with simple ingredients."
Reduced Sodium Chicken Tortilla with Red Quinoa Soup
\$3.49

Nebraska Farm Fresh Eggs
\$2.49 dozen

Personal Nutrition Counseling
Come to Hy-Vee for individual nutrition counseling when you need a special diet or your physician recommends you make diet changes.

Kenny Tomek
Hy-Vee Dietitian

Charity Schantz
Hy-Vee Health Market Manager

- Weight Loss
- Heart Disease
- Diabetes
- Gluten-free and other food intolerances
- Other Nutrition concerns

Announcing...

YANKTON CITYWIDE RUMMAGE

APRIL 30TH thru MAY 3RD

\$28.30 for 30 words and \$.20 per word after 30. ONLY ONE ADDRESS ALLOWED IN EACH AD.

Stop By The Press & Dakotan To Place Your Ad OR email classifieds@yankton.net

INCLUDES:

- Your ad (30 words, 1 address per ad) placed in the special Citywide Rummage Sale section published on Wednesday, April 29th & Saturday, May 2nd
- Your ad will also appear on-line at www.yankton.net
- Garage Sale Kit: 2 Yard Signs with Balloons

Sponsored by the: **PRESS & DAKOTAN**

DEADLINE: 5PM, FRIDAY, APRIL 24TH