

CHOCOHOLIC

I have always been crazy for chocolate. It is the nectar of the gods. My earliest memory of chocolate was sharing a chocolate malted with my mother when I was no more than five or six. It was a very special occasion when, on a warm summer evening, we would go to the corner candy store and order a malted and two glasses. The malted was made in a metal container in which the milk, chocolate syrup, ice cream and malt powder were placed. The container was then inserted into the mixing machine, which whipped up the contents, and out would come this absolutely heavenly drink. Frequently, there would still be malted milk left in the container, after both glasses were filled. An extra treat. And all for a nickel. A popular joke at the time: A man walks into a candy store and says, "Make me a malted." The owner responds, "Poof! You're a malted."

When I was older, and had my own nickels, I would go to the candy store and order a chocolate egg cream. It was not as nutritious as a chocolate malted, but it was just as delicious. It also consisted of chocolate syrup and milk but the fizz came from the seltzer that was squirted into the glass and vigorously whipped by hand by the soda jerk. I eventually learned the difference between a chocolate malted and a chocolate milk shake (no malted milk powder), and learned about chocolate sundaes. I also learned that chocolate syrup could be purchased for home consumption, but my mother never did. The popular brand was Fox's U-Bet, and I had friends who would have chocolate milk at home. What luxury!

In Hebrew school, our teacher, Mr. Zinder, would occasionally give us oral quizzes on Sundays. (not sundaes) It was laid back. No pressure. He would ask mostly easy questions and we would raise our hands and call out the answers. When you gave the right answer, he would give you a small section of a nickel bar of Nestles Crunch. The quiz ended when he finished giving away the chocolate bar.

Candy stores in the '30s all had display cases with a large variety of penny candy. I did not care for the paper strips of dots, tootsie rolls, jelly beans, hard candy, bubble gum, or licorice (except chocolate licorice). What I loved was the malted milk balls. I can still taste them. When we visit those phony old fashioned candy stores at tourist attractions, and they carry malted milk balls, I have to buy it.

Penny candy was not limited to candy store display cases. Taking the subway to high school, I frequently frequented the vending machines, which were on the platforms of most subway stations. They were mounted on the walls or the vertical metal girders up and down the platform. There was a small assortment of candies, including miniature chocolate bars. You inserted a penny and pulled the lever and out came your selection. Or it didn't. Which resulted in your banging on the machine, trying to extricate it, just as your train was pulling in.

For years, my favorite dessert was My-T-Fine chocolate pudding. When my mother made it, she let me scrape out the pot of whatever was left, after she poured the hot chocolate pudding into the cups. I continued to scrape out the pot, when I became the

chocolate pudding preparer. The skin on top was the best part, and that was what was left. I never made instant chocolate pudding, just as I never make instant oat meal.

During World War II, sugar was rationed, but that was not a problem for my mother or me. My mother did not bake or put sugar in her coffee, and I did not drink coffee. We gave away our sugar ration stamps to grateful recipients. However, we satisfied our sweet tooth with the new craze: boxes of Barracini's or Barton's chocolates. They were not easy to come by. Stores would run out. When stores replenished their stock, they were inundated. Where today, one brings a bottle of wine as a gift, then it was almost always a box of candy. The Hollywood image of a lady of leisure in the 30's and '40s was a sexy blond in a negligee, lounging on her bed, enjoying a box of bon bons.

I am sure there is still a demand for boxes of chocolate, but the urgency, when it was scarce, has passed. Boxes of Whitman's and Russell Stover crowd the shelves of CVS. I only buy boxes of chocolate at Valentine's Day. As with everything else, there are expensive chocolates, and less expensive chocolates. There are imported, and locally handcrafted varieties. (I love the terms "chocolatier" and "bonbonniere.") We have one just a few blocks from our condo.) I have to admit, I am not a fan of expensive anything, including chocolate, even though some people insist they are "to die for."

There are even expensive chocolate bars: Godiva and Dove. The chocolate bar market is still dominated by Hershey and Nestle. For a while Mars, was a contender, and they sponsored a terrific radio quiz show, Dr. IQ. If a contestant in the audience (I have a lady in the balcony, Doctor) gave the right answer, they won a box of chocolates, which led to the line, "Give her a box of Snickers," and the retort, "What size does she wear?"

Some years ago, I always kept some M and M's in a nearby dish, and had them available for company. (I also delighted in the fact that M and M were the initials of my daughter and son-in-law Martha and Mark.) These days, I have switched. I discovered Hershey's Special Dark Kisses. I am troubled by Hershey's labor policies, but there is something about their Special Dark Kisses that has turned me into an addict, and has managed to transcend my social conscience. I keep a bag in my desk drawer (my secret cache) and dip into it several times a day. When it is on sale, I buy a couple of bags and add them to my collection.

Candy manufacturers recognize that if you cover almost anything with chocolate, people will buy it: raisins, peanuts, graham crackers, donuts, pretzels, and at Passover, matzahs. Ice cream makers have a variety of chocolate and fudge combinations, but to me, nothing beats a chocolate covered ice cream pop. I believe that someone came up with a chocolate fondue, where you could dip fruit into a pot of liquid chocolate, enabling you to create your own chocolate covered whatever. It might be only in my dreams.

Finally, speaking of "chocolate covered," there is one chocolate sweet which actually surpasses Hershey's Special Dark Kisses. It is Joyva's Chocolate Covered Halvah. It is more expensive, once for ounce, and I have never found it on sale, but when I have a craving for Joyva's Chocolate Covered Halvah, money is no object. Where I have no

problem sharing both M and Ms and Kisses, I have squirrelled away the halvah, and share it with no one. Of course, plain halvah, called “a delicious sesame treat,” is certainly delicious, but it is truly transformed when it is chocolate covered. What confuses me is that halvah (which I thought was spelled halavah, which is how it is pronounced) is associated with Jews, but Jews associate it with Turks. In fact, the picture on the Joyva package is of a Turk with a moustache and turban.

And as the singer of “The Big Rock Candy Mountain” dreams of the treats he will find there, I have just come up with the absolute greatest treat that I can imagine: Joyva Halvah covered in Hershey’s Special Dark Kisses Chocolate.

1-24-14