

Recalling a Sweet Slice of Long Island Life

The Entenmann’s brand meant a great deal to one household.

By DAN BARRY

The tasty crumb of a detail appeared in news accounts last week about the death of Charles E. Entenmann, whose very surname conjures a white-and-blue box with a cellophane glimpse of some baked treat that is both good and bad for you.

It was said that Mr. Entenmann, who died last month at age 92 in Florida — far from the South Shore of Long Island, where he helped his family’s business rise like a baking Bundt cake to become a national brand — did not eat Entenmann’s products.

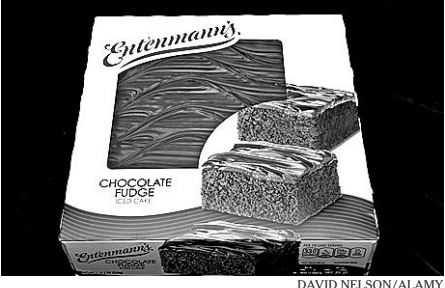
“He just wasn’t a dessert guy,” one of his children explained, no doubt causing Entenmann’s aficionados everywhere to choke on their second secret slice of a Cheese Danish Twist.

As someone who grew up near the old Entenmann’s factory in Bay Shore, N.Y., my first reaction to this revelation is: No wonder he lived to 92.

My second reaction, though, is to say: Forget it, your royal Entenmann’s eminence. The Barrys of Deer Park, and those like them, ate more than enough to cover what you didn’t. You are now excused from the Formica-topped kitchen table of life, with our deep thanks.

Oh, and we promise not to linger too long on the ingredients listed on your boxes as we eat their processed contents. The ingredients, for example, of the Entenmann’s standard, the All Butter Loaf Cake, include sodium propionate, sorbitan monostearate, polysorbate 60 and other components that sound like pharmaceuticals for the odd conditions apparently afflicting viewers of daytime television.

For some self-conscious fans, buying an Entenmann’s pastry may call for a little wink and nod: *The organic bakery was out*



DAVID NELSON/ALAMY

of its locally sourced herb scones, so we thought it’d be fun to have an Entenmann’s, like the ones our grandmother used to eat out of the box in Massapequa. . . .

But Long Island working-class families like mine believed that a box of Entenmann’s conveyed class. It would be on proud display in the kitchen, prominent on the refrigerator or displacing plastic flowers as the table centerpiece.

Sometimes, several boxes would be on exhibit, but not for reasons of ostentation. They merely meant that someone had made the six-mile trip to the discount outlet adjacent to the Entenmann’s plant, an industrial behemoth churning through a million eggs a week. The Entenmann cognoscenti would plan their visits like wartime generals, calculating dates of expiration to determine the best time to attack — that is, to shop.

The Entenmann’s on the fridge was more than a signal of solvent family finances. (Yes, Dolores, we can afford the *Banana Crunch Cake*.) It was a blue-and-white invitation to communion, its contents suitable for weddings and wakes and Communion parties and late-morning gossip sessions with cups of percolated coffee and a Marlboro Light.

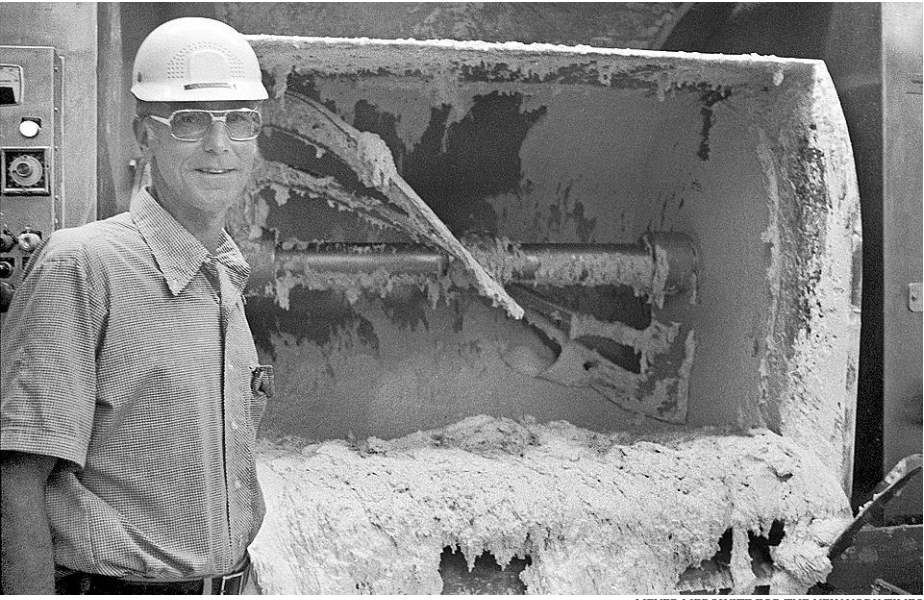
As I look back, Entenmann’s seems more present in my memory than in reality. In my mind’s eye, there would be a Raspberry Danish Twist on Sunday mornings; a slice



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Top, the Entenmann’s factory along Fifth Avenue in Bay Shore, N.Y. Above left, an Entenmann’s box, this one with chocolate fudge iced cake behind the cellophane window. Above, true aficionados on Long Island knew the best times to hit the Entenmann’s discount outlet in Bay Shore. Left, Charles E. Entenmann, the last of the baking Entenmanns, oversaw the automation of the cake line that was integral to the family business’s growth.

of Chocolate Chip Crumb Loaf, wrapped in paper towel, for school lunch; a hunk of Blackout Cake for dessert; and a rush to Good Samaritan Hospital before bed. (Not really.)

I do know that as a boy, we celebrated my birthday during one difficult year for the family with a Fudge Iced Golden Cake adorned with a flickering votive candle. And that as a young man, I often returned late at night from some bar to find my father watching a horror movie, and together we would drink milk and eat Vanilla-Filled Crumb Cake while watching the vampirish Christopher Lee drink a young maiden’s blood.

Nothing stays the same, of course, as Entenmann’s itself reminds us. The family sold the business in 1978 to a pharmaceutical company — *Ask your doctor about Polysorbate 60* — after which it was sold and sold again, no expiration date in sight. It is owned at the moment by Bimbo Bakeries USA.

In 2014, Entenmann’s ended its baking operations at the Bay Shore plant, and the South Shore sighed. Older Long Islanders with finely developed palates will tell you that the taste has declined — become more “chemical” — since the company left. Perhaps this is because Entenmann’s no longer has access to the clear mountain waters running down from Jayne’s Hill, the highest point on Long Island (elevation: about 400 feet).

Then there is the discontinuance of various Entenmann’s products over the years, more than a few of which had been staples in the Barry house: the Almond Danish Ring that could make a wake almost bearable; the Vanilla-Filled Crumb Cake that went so well with late-night horror movies; and the Filled Chocolate Chip Crumb Cake, a personal favorite of my brother, Brian.

Oh Banana Crunch Cake, we hardly knew ye.

Still there are Entenmann’s treats that I enjoy, in moderation; an Entenmann’s box sits on my refrigerator as I write. I’ve learned that a glass of milk washes away any chemical aftertaste, real or imagined, and that a processed baked good can taste like the sweetest madeleine.

Crème de Cassis

For the 21st Century

The black-currant-based liqueur is kept up to date.

By REBEKAH PEPPLER

Eaten fresh, black currants are tart and herbaceous. They pop with an earthy funk, playing musty and acidic on the tongue. When crushed, macerated in high-proof neutral alcohol and sweetened with sugar, the astringent fruit becomes a rich, deep red liqueur with a languid pour. A specialty of the Burgundy region of France (cassis translates to “black currant” in French), crème de cassis has been produced commercially since 1841.

In the mid-19th century, black currants were also grown in the United States, and producers began making domestic liqueurs from the fruit. But in 1911, the federal government banned black currants, which carried white pine blister rust, a fungus that infected white pines and presented a threat to the timber industry. By 1966, disease-resistant strains were introduced, and local governments were given the option to lift the ban, though the berry was slow to reclaim its popularity.

In New York, where Rachael Petach uses the fruit to produce her black currant liqueur, C. Cassis, the ban was overturned in 2003. C. Cassis, sweetened with honey and less syrupy than traditional crème de cassis, is closer in style and application to vermouth.

“Our take is a bit of a contemporary approach to the fruit; it’s a little playful,” Ms. Petach said. “It speaks to my palate for things that are just a little less sweet, a little

botanical.”

Ms. Petach started experimenting with what would become C. Cassis in 2018, intent on bottling the semi-savory, herbal flavor of the fresh black currants she remembers eating directly off the bush while working in France. “It was almost like when a song gets stuck in your head, it was like that flavor got stuck in my head,” she said. Ms. Petach began distributing C. Cassis in 2020.

Ms. Petach describes a fresh black currant as a decidedly unfruity fruit. “It has this really bouncy acidity; it’s a little moody, and it’s not for everyone,” she said. “But for a lot of people, those qualities of the fruit are so spectacular and so unique that it’s fun to bring them to the forefront.”

The classic liqueur is best known for its part in the kir, a 19th-century French aperitif that combines dry white wine with crème de cassis, and the kir’s bubbly offshoot, the kir royale, which swaps in sparkling wine for still. It is also measured into the El Diablo, a spicy-sweet combination of tequila, fresh lime, crème de cassis and ginger beer. Stirred into a split of bourbon and rye, the liqueur helps create a contemporary, brambly take on a manhattan. You can also pour a cassis-inflected spritz by combining it over ice with sparkling wine and soda water, or serve it alongside dry vermouth in a Vermouth Royale.

Or take a bottle entirely out of the bar and into the kitchen. Ms. Petach drizzles crème de cassis over ice cream or tosses fresh fruit in it in lieu of sugar.

If you’re looking to add a classic bottle of the liqueur to your bar, look for those labeled either Crème de Cassis de Dijon



CLASSIC EL DIABLO

YIELD: 1 DRINK

- Ice
- 1½ ounces reposado tequila
- ¾ ounce fresh lime juice
- ½ ounce crème de cassis
- 2 to 3 ounces ginger beer

In an ice-filled shaker, combine the tequila, lime juice and crème de cassis. Shake until well chilled. Fill a Collins glass with ice, strain the cocktail into the glass and top with ginger beer.

(made with black currants grown solely in Dijon, France) or Cassis de Bourgogne, which employs berries grown in the greater Burgundy region. Then, measure it into your next drink to infuse it with a royal hue and a concentrated hit of sweet-acidic fruit. But pour judiciously: As Ms. Petach notes, a little goes a long way.



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CASSIS MANHATTAN

YIELD: 1 DRINK

- Ice
- 1 ounce rye whiskey
- 1 ounce bourbon
- ¾ ounce sweet vermouth
- ¼ ounce crème de cassis
- 3 to 4 dashes angostura bitters
- 1 brandied or maraschino cherry, for garnish

In a cocktail shaker or mixing glass filled with ice, combine the rye whiskey, bourbon, vermouth, crème de cassis and bitters. Stir until well chilled, about 30 seconds, then strain into a Nick and Nora or coupe glass. Garnish with a cherry.