

T W I N K I E , T W I

LITTLE SUET-FILLED SPO

NOW I KNOW JUST WHAT

BAKING AMERICA'S FAVORITE PROCESSED SNACK CAKE AT HOME



N K I E ,

GE - CAKE

YOU ARE

JANE AND MICHAEL STERN

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s perfect as Hostess

Twinkies seem to most of us, there is a radical coterie of adventurous home cooks for whom off-the-shelf Twinkies are simply not good enough.

You wonder: if factory-made Twinkies are so efficiently manufactured (a Hostess plant can pump 52,000 Twinkies full of filling per hour—*14 a second*), why would anyone care to make one at home?

It can't be the money: they're two for 69 cents at the store. Nor could it be freshness: unsold Twinkies, contrary to popular belief, are removed from grocery shelves after four days.

Nonetheless, restless culinary virtuosos of America's heartland dare, Prometheus-like, to assemble their own. These resolute cooks have a dream: to make meals at home that taste exactly like factory-produced junk food. These are grass-roots confectioners who seem to have little interest in home cooking that is homey. Proletarian cousins of the urbanites who devote their energies to making squid-ink pasta worthy of the finest Venetian restaurants, these Middle Americans' aim is to serve forth fried chicken just like the bucketed brand, burgers identical to the ones served in Styrofoam clamshells,

Photograph by John Dugdale



and snack cakes that resemble the Ding Dongs, Yodels and Ring Dings you can buy at the 7-Eleven. Self-published cookbooks from around the country brim with their ad-lib recipes for Big Mac-like special sauce, Mounds-like candy, Dunkin'-like doughnuts and all manner of Twinkies manqués.

The apologia that Twinkie cooks offer for making the spongy tubes in their own kitchens is that baking homemade ones is more enterprisingly self-sufficient—and therefore morally better—than handing

over your money to the already too prosperous big food companies like Continental Baking Company (manufacturer of Wonder bread and, through its Hostess subsidiary, Sno Balls, Suzy-Q's, Ho Ho's and Ding Dongs). Best of all, baking your own is a way of being "creative." Homemade Twinkies are a challenging do-it-yourself project. Like the sleepy-Mexican-in-a-sombrero-motif bookends and knotty-pine pipe holders that used to take shape on Dad's basement workbench, handmade Twinkies signify not only an artistic spirit but also formidable stick-to-itiveness. It's a Zen accomplishment: you spend three hours mixing, whipping, molding, baking and piping,

and wind up with a platter of imitation junk food.

But not just any junk food. *Twinkies*. Edible Americana. The little brownish-yellow snack cakes filled with white goo were Howdy Doody's favorite petit four (touted on television by all inhabitants of Doodyville, as well as by a cowhand named Twinkie the Kid). Archie Bunker demanded them in his

lunch box on *All in the Family*. To celebrate Superman's 50th birthday, DC Comics gave the Man of Steel a party in New York with an eight-foot-tall cake made entirely of Twinkies, on which Mayor Koch is reported to have feasted. Reviewers have credited singer Tom Jones's seemingly inexplicable success to a bulge in his pants that resembles a Twinkie.

Twinkies are of such iconographic significance that they have been imputed with legal responsibility for driving former San Francisco city supervisor Dan White insane. After he murdered Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey

Milk in 1978, White's lawyers successfully used what jurisprudence now knows as the Twinkie Defense to convince a jury that their client was suffering from "diminished mental capacity" because he had eaten so many Twinkies and candy bars. White got off on a lesser charge and subsequently committed suicide. "Nobody knows what's going on inside of me," he himself said, neither blaming nor exonerating Twinkies for his condition.

On the other hand, a Los Angeles man claimed that he ate nothing but Twinkies and drank nothing but Cutty Sark and lived happily for seven years. He died eventually, but only after being run over by a car. James A. Dewar, who invented and named Twinkies in 1930 when he saw a billboard advertising Twinkle Toe Shoes, ate two a day every day of his life and lived to be 88 years old. "I have 12 great-grandchildren, all of them eating Twinkies," he boasted in 1980, five years before he died of natural causes.

Twinkies have an exalted reputation among zoologists. In Sarasota, Florida, when an elephant refused his normal diet following surgery, the attending veterinarian prescribed Twinkies. The elephant recovered and grew strong. In 1976 in Kings Mill, Ohio, runaway baboons were recaptured with bait of Twinkies and bananas. (Incidentally, the original Twinkie filling was banana-flavored; in the 1940s it was switched to the generic creamoid flavor most of us think of when we think of Twinkies.)

It is easy for us laypeople to take Twinkies for granted. Residents of the Twinkie-less city of Tallahassee, Florida, which by geographical destiny is too far from any Twinkie bakery or Twinkie truck route to get them within the necessary 24 hours after they come off the assembly line, certainly don't. ("We brought 2,000 to Tallahassee last year for a special promotion," a Twinkie spokesperson told us. "The city council declared it 'Twinkies Day in Tallahassee.'") To most of us, however, Twinkies are always there, piled too conveniently on the store counter, ready to be ingested whenever the unwholesome whim for "golden sponge cake with creamy filling" (as they say on the Twinkie packaging) strikes.

You don't have to eat them in their "natural" state. Creative chefs have invented many ways to use Twinkies as the star ingredient in baroque desserts such as "Twinkie Pie" (layer them with custard, whipped cream and chocolate chips). Ourselves, we are proud to claim authorship of a dessert known as Undescended Twinkies, for which they are floated like depth charges in a gelatinized mixture of 7-Up and vanilla ice cream.

In the spirit of cultural anthropology, we decided to undertake this supreme challenge: to make Twinkies at home. To create the as-good-as-store-bought imitation, we turned to three helpmates. The first was a book called *Caramel Knowledge* by Al Sicherman, who devised a Twinkie recipe based on



TWO A DAY...FOR LIFE: JAMES A. DEWAR,  
FATHER OF THE TWINKIE (1897-1985)

**S ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MINERAL OR FOOD?**  
A RIGOROUSLY SCIENTIFIC  
TWINKIE LAB-AND-FIELD TEST

**C** In an effort to clarify questions about the purported durability and unusual physical characteristics of Twinkies, we subjected the Hostess snack logs to the following experiments:

**E X P E R I M E N T**

**E** A Twinkie was left on a southwest-facing ninth-floor window ledge for four days, during which time an inch and a half of rain fell. Many flies were observed crawling across the Twinkie's surface, but contrary to hypotheses, birds—even pigeons—avoided this potential source of sustenance.

**N** Despite the rain and prolonged exposure to the sun, the Twinkie retained its original color and form. When removed from the ledge, the Twinkie was found to be substantially dehydrated. Cracked open, it was observed to have taken on the consistency of industrial-style foam insulation; the filling, however, retained its advertised "creaminess."

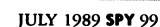
**C O R N E R**

We had high hopes for Hopeless Twinkles. Gloria Pitzer's recipe calls for plenty of sugar, Crisco and evaporated milk but no cream, pastry bags or fancy-pants separated eggs. However, we learned an important lesson when we made Twinkles: the charm



The sight of it made us gag. Our drugstore lecithin had turned the filling a grim beige.

**YUM!**







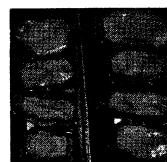
WHAT YOU'LL NEED —  
INCLUDING, IN THE  
FOREGROUND,  
GROUND BEEF SUET



MIXING



PORTIONING



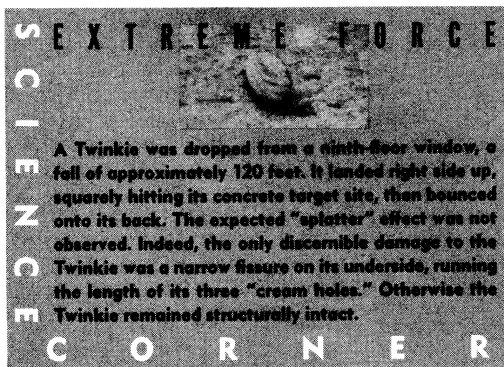
BAKING



FILLING



COME AND GET 'EM!



And we hadn't used enough artificial butter flavor to disguise the aroma of uncooked fat. The flavor was horrifically fleshy, such as only a cannibal could love, but with enough corn syrup sweetness to numb the tongue. Yes, here was a foodstuff truly capable of driving a man to murder, a foodstuff truly fit for sick elephants and hysterical baboons.

We didn't have more than a taste. Were we being too fussy? We imagined the homemade filling bleached white and deodorized by a mechanized corporate bakery; we closed our eyes and held our noses and touched it to our tongues, and sure enough, with our other senses fettered, it at least *felt* like what's inside a Twinkie. Nonetheless, we didn't bother to swallow it, or to inject it into snack cakes.

After some more experimentation, we finally concluded that you cannot make a precisely factory-perfect Twinkie at home. However, if you combine the best elements from each do-it-yourself recipe, you can make a junk food cake for which no apologies are needed.

What follows is a formula for homemade Stern Twinkies, which we call Stinkies, based on Al Sicherman's Binkie cake, Gloria Pitzer's Twinkle filling and the investigative reporting of William Poundstone.

## STERN TWINKIES (STINKIES)

### FILLING

1 stick margarine  
½ cup Crisco  
1½ cups granulated sugar  
¾ cup evaporated milk  
1 tablespoon nondairy creamer  
1 tablespoon vanilla extract

### CAKE

3 eggs  
1 cup sugar  
¼ cup boiling water  
1 cup sifted cake flour  
1½ teaspoons baking powder  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
¼ teaspoon salt

**To make filling:** Cream margarine 5 minutes with electric mixer at medium speed. Gradually beat in the Crisco. After 4 more minutes, gradually beat in sugar.

Mix in milk, creamer and vanilla. Beat into Crisco-margarine mixture and continue beating. "The longer you beat this," Gloria Pitzer says of her version of the filling, "the better it becomes."

Have a pastry bag with small nozzle on hand for when the cakes cool.

**To make cake:** Make ten molds using ten 9-by-12-inch pieces of aluminum foil. Fold each in half, then in half again, yielding pieces about 4½ by 6 inches. Now follow Al Sicherman's precise instructions for making Binkie molds: "Grease one side

with solid shortening or margarine. Bend up the longer sides to form the folded foil into a U-shaped trough (6 inches long, about 1½ inches across the rounded bottom and maybe 1½ inches high). Lift one end of the bottom up and in, then turn the sides together at that end, overlapping slightly. Repeat with the other end, forming something like a little bathtub. Mash the bottoms of the bathtub ends smooth, then fasten the tops of the ends (the head and the foot of the bathtub rim) together by firmly folding the overlapped edge down a little."

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

Separate eggs, putting yolks in a large mixing bowl and whites in a small mixing bowl. Beat yolks until light yellow. Beat in sugar, then boiling water.

Sift together cake flour, baking powder and salt and gradually beat them into the yolks. Beat in vanilla.

Wash beaters well, then beat whites until stiff but not glossy. Stir a spatulaful of beaten whites into yolks to lighten them, then lightly fold in all the whites.

Pour about three heaping tablespoons of batter into each mold (they will be filled about one-third of the way).

Place filled molds in loaf pans or similar containers to hold them snugly (so they don't topple over in the oven).

Bake 25 to 30 minutes, about 1 minute *after* they test done with a toothpick.

Allow cakes to cool a few minutes, then gently remove them from the molds. You may have to peel the foil away to keep the cakes intact.

Before cakes cool completely, use a toothpick or the end of a knife to make three holes in the bottom of each, wriggling the pick around to try to "carve out" space inside without distending the hole itself.

Place filling into pastry bag. Pipe filling into each of the holes.

Eat immediately.

*Note: These cakes do not keep well. After only a few hours, they begin to get crusty.*

## ALTERNATE "CREAMY FILLING" RECIPE

1 cup sugar  
¼ cup corn syrup  
½ cup lard  
½ cup ground beef suet  
(available at most butchers — ask them to grind it for you)  
1 cup Crisco

1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1 teaspoon ground lecithin  
½ teaspoon artificial butter flavoring  
½ teaspoon salt  
Skim milk

Combine all ingredients except skim milk in food processor. Process until thoroughly blended. Gradually add skim milk by the tablespoon until proper "creamy" consistency is achieved.

Observe, but do not eat. ☹

# EVERY WHICH WAY BUT GOOD

SIX CHEFS IN SEARCH OF THE ULTIMATE TWINKIE:

A VERY SPECIAL BAKE-OFF

We recently asked six talented New York pastry chefs to put their reputations at risk in a very special bake-off. Their assignment: to bake cream-filled snack cakes—snack cakes that wouldn't necessarily be slavish replicas of the original Hostess Twinkie but would at least convey a recognizable Twinkieness



THE ENTRIES: MULTIPLICITY. THY NAME IS PSEUDO-TWINKIE

when sniffed, held, squeezed, dropped, tasted and ingested. And so, after weeks of preparation and experimentation, the chefs arrived at the new restaurant Shelby (plug accomplished) with heavily laden platters in tow. They were met by a panel of nervous tasters.

As a kind of orientation, and with genuine Twinkies in hand, we first took the tasters through a checklist of the physical properties that define a Twinkie *as a Twinkie*:

👉 color—the original Twinkies are cast in the same perfectly even, golden hue as Walt Disney's Pluto

👉 smell—a powerful but not quite rankling aroma of artificial butter

👉 heft—a pleasing, enjoyable, just-right physical *gravitas* when cupped in the palm

👉 skin residue—a slippery yet slightly gummy film left on the palm and fingers after handling, best discerned by rubbing together the tips of the

thumb and forefinger

👉 sponginess—the unnatural ability of a Twinkie, when squeezed, to return to its original form

👉 consistency when chewed—arid gumminess of the cake; chalky, sugary grit of the filling; overall oleaginousness

👉 taste—initially hypersweet, with a fatty, gently fulsome follow-through

👉 afterburn—a distinct yet highly subjective quality: for some, a postswallow sensation of curdling in the esophagus; for others, an uneasy, floating ache in the

stomach.

Again, however, we had only asked our chefs to *interpret* the Twinkie, to be as fanciful or faithful as they pleased. Thus, while we hoped that the chefs' variations would leave a skin residue, we didn't require that they leave the exact skin residue of a Hostess Twinkie. And so on. Our bake-off wasn't meant to be a competition. We weren't there to judge; we were there to celebrate, to embark on a joyous communal exploration of the myriad possibilities that are Twinkieness. This was to be a kind of junk food Earth Day, an eat-in with plenty of seltzer.



CHEF MARC HAYMON

And so our tasters set about their task.

The first *faux* Twinkie to be examined was baked by **Marc Haymon** of the Westbury Hotel. Chef Haymon's presentation was particularly impressive — his plastic-wrapped pairs of Twinkie-like logs

came complete with authentic slick-cardboard backing.

"Basically, I tried to imitate the plasticity of [a Twinkie]," Haymon explained. "I started with fresh sponge cake but I screwed it up on purpose. I made it fall, I over-whipped the batter and I added shortening — not butter." Chef Haymon simulated a Twinkie's

three "cream holes" by poking his version with a chopstick. However, Chef Haymon confessed, this method did not allow him to recreate the continuous artery of whiteness extending evenly through the length of a factory-produced Twinkie.

The tasters were thrilled with the realistic look of Haymon's Twinkies. One expert likened the color to "a little prairie dog," while another hailed Haymon's effort as "visually perfect," if a little too large. Upon tasting one, a panelist, who found the cake and its filling "disparate but complementary," summed up the consensus by saying that Haymon's slightly refined entry "comes close but misses the junky Twinkie feeling."

The panel then turned its attention to a pair of elegant Twinkie knockoffs, both presented on silver trays by **Cynthia Peithman**, a pastry chef with Glorious Foods, the caterers. Her first, an iced sponge-cake cylinder with candied orange-peel garnish — a slimmer, tarted-up Twinkie, a Twinkie married into society — was deemed "totally sticky" for its generous finger residue. One taster commented, "Too extreme — requiring multiple Wash'n Dries in lunch box." Chef Peithman's Twinkie was singled out and admired, however, as a pastry that "goes its own way." Its subtle flavors

and squishy textures proved it to be a prankish, truly postmodern amalgam of high and low art.

Chef Peithman's second Twinkie, a simpler, undressed version of her first entry, revealed its ingenuity of structure. In an attempt to mimic the airtight form of the Hostess Twinkie,

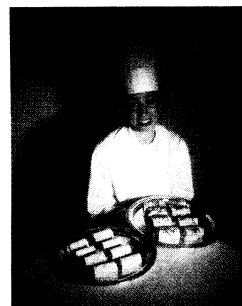
Peithman very cleverly plugged each end of her rolled sponge-cake tube with small, well-turned dowels of cake (after loading the tube with cream). Though one taster commented that Peithman's second Twinkie lacked "oomph," the panel agreed that neither of Peithman's Twinkies would look out of place at a benefit dinner at the Temple of Dendur.

**P. Quint Smith's** Twinkie variant was equally innovative. The chef, who works at Shelby, solved the dilemma of Twinkie form by baking his sponge cake in a floured water glass, then piping in *two* kinds

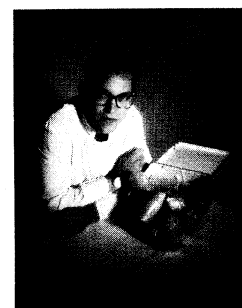
of cream — one chocolate, one orange. A cross section of the dessert revealed that the orange filling had been piped through a circular hole, while the chocolate cream formed a straight line, more or less.

"I made a Winkie, not a Twinkie," Smith explained. "It looks like it's winking at you when you cut it in half."

Chef Smith's presentation — several Saran-swaddled Winkies neatly arranged in an



CHEF CYNTHIA PEITHMAN



CHEF P. QUINT SMITH

**EXTREME COLD**

A Twinkie was placed in a conventional freezer for 24 hours. Upon removal, the Twinkie was not found to be frozen solid, but its physical properties had noticeably "slowed." Its characteristic sponginess reduced, the cake held a dent when squeezed by a technician's fingers, even when only moderate pressure was applied. The filling was found to be the approximate consistency of acrylic paint, while exhibiting the mercurylike property of not adhering to practically any surface. It was noted that the Twinkie had generously absorbed freezer odors.

**EXTREME EAT**

A Twinkie was exposed to a gas flame for 2 minutes. While the Twinkie smoked and blackened and the filling in one of its "cream holes" boiled, the Twinkie did not catch fire. It did, however, produce the same "burning rubber" aroma noticed during the irradiation experiment.

**CORNER**





TAKING SNACK CAKES  
TOO SERIOUSLY?

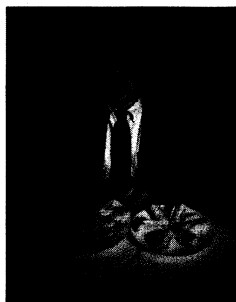
*Empire Strikes Back* lunch box—was lauded by the entire panel (the chef had gone so far as to cauterize the edges of his wrappers in an effort to simulate industrial shrink-wrapping). But one taster found the cake "dry and chalky; a little tame," provoking the panelist to term the entry "a Canadian Twinkie." Most of the other tasters (with the exception of the youngest panelist, age five, who proclaimed the chocolate a "good idea") found the bicolored-cream approach disconcerting.

Nick Malgieri's two interpretive Twinkies were perhaps the most daring entries. The first, a traditional Sicilian pastry called the Dito d'Apostolo, or "Apostle's Finger"—which, for some tasters, evoked unappetizing images of dusty, digit-filled reliquaries—consisted of sponge cake baked in a parchment-paper tube, injected with a custard-type filling and laced

with lemon icing. Malgieri, a dessert expert who teaches at Peter Kump's New York Cooking School, made a claim for the Finger as a putative historical antecedent to the Twinkie—a Pilt-down Twinkie.

Indeed, the Finger was praised for its Twinkie-like heft, but was generally considered too refined and good-tasting to be of the Twinkie phylum, even as a de-evolutionary ancestor. In the oxymoronic phrase of one taster, the pastry resembled a "European Twinkie."

Malgieri described his second creation—accurately—as "sort of a giant crème-filled ladyfinger." "Doesn't bounce back," one judge said of the unusually flat pastry's lack of resilience. "It holds a dent," noted another. By and large, Malgieri's entries were found to be the most edible, if least Twinkie-like, entries. "Nice mutants," concluded one uncomplaining taster.



CHEF NICK MALGIERI

Having already sampled six ersatz Twinkies—plus real ones—the overstimulated panelists circled the final platter with no little trepidation. These last were the Stern Twinkies, created by Jane and Michael Stern. Disconcertingly, the Stern Twinkies were perhaps the least appetizing-looking of all the entries. "Bloodless," said one taster, describing their color. "A retard," proclaimed another. "It does look a little like it was made in a crafts class," admitted Michael. "And we went through three or four versions to get to this," added Jane.

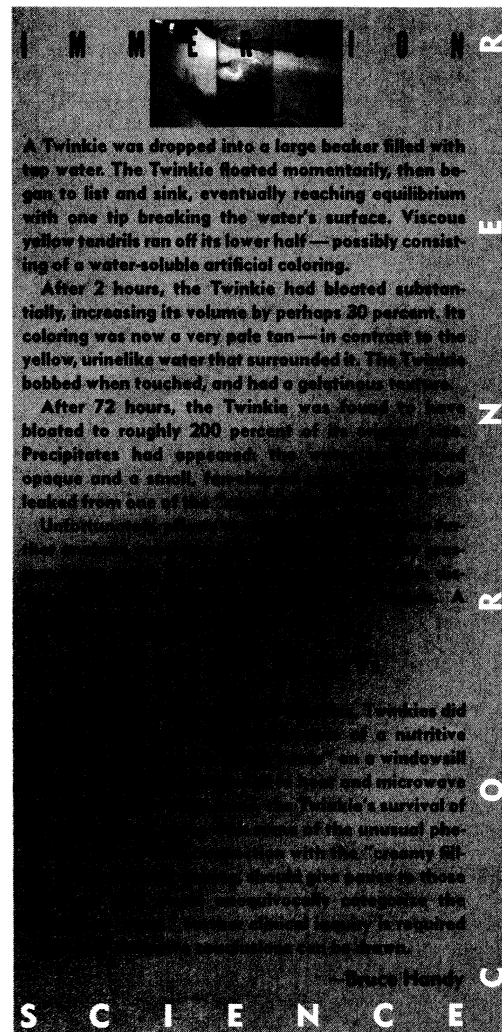
However, upon tasting the Stern Twinkies, the critics suddenly sang an altogether different tune: "Good Twinkieness!" "Almost a Twinkie!" "A little salty, like the real thing!" "Remarkable simulation—the vegetarian's Twinkie!" "Vegetarian, yes; but most decidedly not, it was pointed out, *all-natural*—see recipes, page 100.

And that was it. Eight kinds of Twinkie in just under 20 minutes, ending literally with whimpers.

—Rachel Urquhart



CHEFS JANE AND  
MICHAEL STERN



A Twinkie was dropped into a large beaker filled with tap water. The Twinkie floated momentarily, then began to list and sink, eventually reaching equilibrium with one tip breaking the water's surface. Viscous yellow tendrils ran off its lower half—possibly consisting of a water-soluble artificial coloring.

After 2 hours, the Twinkie had bloated substantially, increasing its volume by perhaps 30 percent. Its coloring was now a very pale tan—in contrast to the yellow, urine-like water that surrounded it. The Twinkie bobbed when touched, and had a gelatinous texture.

After 72 hours, the Twinkie was found to have bloated to roughly 200 percent of its original size. Precipitates had appeared, the water was now opaque and a small, fan-shaped hole had formed in the center of the Twinkie's top.

Unfortunatly, the Twinkie's survival of the immersion test was not enough to save it from being discarded. The Twinkie was found to be inedible.

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