



*Easter Customs  
& Traditions*

**Danielle Corrie**

# Easter Customs and Traditions

By

**Danielle Corrie**

Every Easter comes and goes, yet, this Easter, being the year 2020, is different. Everyone is quiet. Everyone is at home. No outdoor treasure hunts for the children. No one attending church on two major days of the religious calendar - Good Friday and Easter Sunday or even on the days leading up to Good Friday and Easter Sunday during Holy Week which commenced on Palm Sunday. Church services have been available online (and still are) yet it doesn't cater for those in the community who have no computer or even internet within their home. Unfortunately, this year 2020, the corona virus (covid-19) has left its mark on the world, the whole world. Self isolation and social distancing are two new phrases we have all come to know then of course the main one being Stay at Home. However, there are traditions, customs and culture within each family that need to be remembered even during these hard times.

For me personally, I was baptised in the Lebanese orthodox church and then converted to Catholic in my school years. Both my parents are of Lebanese heritage. My father is Lebanese Orthodox and my mother is Catholic so growing up, and even now, I celebrate two Easters - the Orthodox Easter and the Catholic Easter. At times both the Orthodox Easter and the Catholic Easter fall on the same day each year and other times they are up to 5 weeks apart (like next year 2021 where the Catholic Easter is 4 April and the Orthodox Easter is 2 May). The Orthodox Easter follows the Julian Calendar falling within dates between 4 April

to 8 May while the Catholic Easter follows the Gregorian Calendar falling within dates between 22 March and 25 April. A simple way to figure out the date when Easter Sunday falls (ie the Catholic Easter) is to count four full moons after Christmas. Easter Sunday is the first Sunday after the fourth full moon after Christmas.

As a child going to a Catholic School, I went to mass with my school every year on Ash Wednesday.. During the church service on Ash Wednesday the priest used ash to mark a cross on the forehead of each member of the congregation. Lent is also a time, where, as a family, there were certain days where we were not allowed to eat meat, being on Ash Wednesday as well as every Friday during lent up to Good Friday.

Good Friday brought with it the aroma of hot cross buns. Hot cross buns represent Jesus dying on the cross. On Good Friday my family and I took a walk to the local bakery and purchased hot cross buns to eat. Unlike in today's society where hot cross buns are sold in various sizes and flavours all throughout the year, hot cross buns were only sold during holy week being the weekdays leading up to Good Friday and only available in the traditional flavour being fruit.

Two days later, on Easter Sunday, is the resurrection of Jesus. Our family didn't go to church but acknowledged Easter Sunday as a time of new life and a time for giving. We created our own Easter traditions. As a little girl, instead of giving chocolate Easter Eggs (which is the traditional gift at Easter) the Easter Bunny came and gave me toys and little ornaments for safe keeping. It was wonderful to wake up on Easter morning to find out what little surprise the Easter Bunny had left me - whether it be a toy bunny or a little wheat husk or delf ornament sitting at the end of my bed. Even though as a child I did receive the occasional chocolate Easter Egg, I was allergic to chocolate so found an alternative in candy

Easter Eggs or even carob Easter eggs until as an adult I came to eating chocolate again.

On Orthodox Easter Sunday, which some years fell on the same day as Easter Sunday, as a family we cooked hard boiled eggs and have what is known as "egg fights". Not just any eggs but coloured hard boiled eggs. These "egg fights" symbolise Jesus Christ's resurrection, with the eggs representing Jesus's tomb, and the cracking of the eggs representing Jesus's emerging from the tomb. Traditionally, eggs were dyed red to represent the blood of Jesus; however, more recently, the eggs have been dyed in bright colours. During the weeks preceding Easter when my dad purchased his fruit and vegetables from the local greengrocer, he asked them for additional onion skins to be kept aside for him. These unassuming skins, transformed into a treasure trove, held the secret to our natural food colouring - brown onions imparting earthy tones, while red onion skins creating a regal purple hue.

Our kitchen transformed to a realm of enchantment. Two saucepans were filled with water and onion skins. One saucepan was immersed with the red onion skins and the other with the brown onion skins. Once the eggs were cooked they were scooped out and put under a cold tap to cool down, then they were put in a basket and placed on the table. Each member of the family then selected an egg from the basket.

Once everyone has an egg, we all paired up into two. We all turn the eggs over so each set of pairs have the same end of their eggs facing upwards. One person gently tapped one end of their opponents egg. Then both people turn their eggs over and the opponent has a turn and taps the other end. Whoever's shell was cracked at both ends was eliminated and whoever's shell didn't crack pairs up with others. Whoever is left with an uncracked egg became the winner. It didn't matter whether someone ate eggs or not, it was just fun participating in an activity together as a family and so our family embraced this spirited competition, building

bonds through laughter and celebration.

Besides our "egg fights" going to the Easter Show birthed another cherished Easter tradition upon our family. In the mid 1990s, just before the Easter Show was to relocate from Moore Park to Homebush, my siblings and I as well as a group of friends decided to venture out for a day at the Easter Show. There was about 12 of us in total. Everyone, with the exception of my sister and I, decided to go on the rides. My sister and I decided to explore the quieter realms leading us to the animal farm, the craft exhibits and the bountiful displays of fruit and vegetables. While wandering around the exhibits my sister and I stumbled across a second hand bookshop which held the key to an unexpected adventure.

Right in front of us was a Lebanese cookbook. We said to each other, that if this cookbook has the recipes written in the same way our father and even Sitty (which is grandmother in Arabic) cooks Lebanese food then we'll buy it. Page after page our eyes danced across each recipe, every written word and discovered many of the recipes was written identical or very similar to how we cooked Lebanese food at home. Instantaneously, the decision was made. We bought the book which cost us a mere \$10.

After arriving home we burst through the door and shared our discovery with mum suggesting to her we do a big cook up for dad for Orthodox Easter which was in about 10 days time showing him our culinary skills of Lebanese food. Mum captivated by the idea became our co-conspirator. While dad was at work my mum, my sister and I were on a mission to fill our home with the aromatic essence of Lebanese spices and traditions. Even our uncle (dad's brother) was in on our secret.

Guided by the recipes within our newfound treasure, we crafted a menu mirroring the essence

of our heritage. Trips to the supermarket, the Lebanese butcher, the greengrocer and the Lebanese spice shop were made. My sister being vegetarian cooked the vegetable dishes and I cooked the meat dishes. We made 5-6 dishes each. It was one of the first, if not the first time, that I had cooked Lebanese food without dad's supervision.

On Easter Sunday we put all the food on the table all ready to be served for lunch. My dad's eyes welled up with tears. I had never seen dad with tears. These tears though were tears of happiness and delight. Our culinary surprise had touched his heart, a tribute to the enduring connection between food and emotions .

Inspired by the love infused in our Lebanese cook-up we began a new Easter tradition. Each and every year on the date of the Orthodox Easter, we have a family gathering of homemade Lebanese food with dad cooking as well. Dad decided going forward that he wanted to do the majority of the cooking. So he and mum did. That was before my mum and dad separated and my mum's recent passing in 2015.

So every year in our home Sully Street my siblings and I would keep Orthodox Easter Sunday free and come together for Orthodox Easter lunch. We would start off with "egg fights" and then a banquet of homemade Lebanese food on the table followed by Lebanese sweets and homemade biscuits. Of course there was always enough leftovers to take home as well. Everyone brought a plate to contribute to the table. Celebrating orthodox Easter was a way for everyone to come together and reunite - my sister, my brothers and their families, my uncle, my dad, myself and key people who mean a lot to my family - in particular my dad. Quite often there were about 20 people around the table.

Yet in the year 2020, something major happened that put a shadow upon our cherished Easter

traditions. The family gatherings, familiar aromas of our Lebanese fest halted and were replaced by silence. The echoes of laughter and the aroma of Lebanese delicacies that once filled our home on Sully Street were replaced by something more sinister, a world grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amidst the pandemic grip, my dad's health was on a big decline. He needed to have a permanent catheter inserted otherwise he'd go into renal failure. He had a team of medical specialists watching his health on a continual basis and being in and out of hospital, we as a family didn't know whether he'd pull through so Easter took a back seat. In the end my dad defied all odds and we celebrated his 89th birthday, a testament to his resilience and spirit. However, with covid restrictions in place, and my dad's high risk medical ailments we didn't know what to do about our time-honoured Easter tradition. The threat of fines and the health risks associated with leaving home during the Easter Long Weekend caused our traditional Easter gathering with homemade Lebanese delights sit indefinitely on the backburner.

Yet in the face of these challenges, my uncle and my dad residing together in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney, clung to a cherished tradition we as a family do at Easter being the symbolic "egg fight". The Egg Fight, usually a grand affair with extended family, instead became an intimate exchange between the two of them. However, instead of boiling two eggs and having "egg fights" between the two of them, they had a third egg which represented me. And my egg won. I became emotional. I wish I was there but I knew I'd be there as soon as I was able to.

While Easter in 2020 was totally different to previous years of family gatherings, traditions and Lebanese food, it etched new memories. It showed that in the face of adversity, the human

spirit is capable of weaving threads of connection, creating bonds that endure and traditions that evolve. May these Easter traditions of the past , become a beacon of hope for the future, promising shared joy and brighter family celebrations for years to come.