



PHOTO: ISTOCK.COM/JATRAY

## Sam and Lil

KATHY HARRISON SHARES A CHERISHED FAMILY RECIPE

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE? They don't have the cachet of Bonnie and Clyde, the searing romance of Anthony and Cleopatra, the pathos of Romeo and Juliet. Sam and Lil. They sound like characters from Damon Runyon or an old TV series like "Gunsmoke". Yet Sam never toted a gun, never wore cowboy boots, or even owned a jacket he wouldn't pair with a shirt, tie, and the pocket handkerchief he meticulously folded into four points. He had a thick head of hair, wavy and white. He stood tall—five feet, four inches. Lil was shorter by four inches. She had straight dark hair, only wore dresses, and always wore pumps with shapely heels. They'd never make it in the wild West.

Sam and Lil are characters in the video of my life, one I play on demand. Sam and Lil ... my mom and dad. He was a lawyer, and before he left for work each morning, he and my mom would have breakfast at a tiny table in the kitchen. He had corn flakes with a banana every single day. It never varied. She had toast.

The percolator was plugged in first thing every morning and unplugged at night. They had coffee with every meal. That too never varied. I can only imagine that their nighttime brew must have had the viscosity of mud.

When we were in grade school, my brother and I walked to school, then walked home for lunch each day. I can't remember what we ate for lunch, but I do remember that there were usually cookies or a cake my mom had baked that morning. The house smelled like cinnamon or chocolate. I wasn't impressed and would rather have had Oreos like Donna's mother served, or the saltines with butter and jam that Judy had each day. Bobby, whose dad headed an ice cream company, had a freezer stocked with all sorts of frozen delights. Nirvana!

I never paid attention to anything that went on in the kitchen. We ate dinner every night at six, and by seven, I was outside with my friends if it was summer or talking to them on the phone if it was cold outside. For our birthdays, my brother and I



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*KATHY HARRISON is a Barrington Hills resident who teaches the fine art of cooking. For more information, call 847-381-4828.*

had a whipped cream cake from a bakery called Dressels. Otherwise, we ate what my mom baked.

I was reading a magazine at the nail salon (What? How else would I know if Jen was or wasn't pregnant, and who Angelina's new boyfriend was) and someone was quoted as saying her father was Santa Dad. Wait a second! That was MY dad. I never remember him denying us anything, or asking for something for himself, with one exception. His birthday was January 16, and he requested lemon meringue pie. We had it every year on that day. It never varied.

Eventually, I got married and moved out of state. I surely didn't know how to cook anything, having never spent one second in the kitchen with my mom. We had a lot of frozen food, and I followed the directions on the package. No excitement, but no traumas, either. Five months later, it was my husband's birthday, and he said he didn't want a present, only a lemon meringue pie. Who knew it was his favorite? I wished he had wanted a sweater.

Well, of course I was on the phone calling home, whining or crying or shouting about that impossible request. Probably all three. In any case, my folks flew out to California in time for my husband's birthday, and we had that pie. It was delicious. I didn't make it. I watched and wrote the recipe on a piece of orange paper. I still have that orange paper. It's the only recipe I have of my mom's. I always thought there would be time to get others, and suddenly there wasn't. But every year on Mother's Day, I remember her making that pie, and on Father's Day, I thank my dad for requesting it. 🍋

## Lil's Lemon Pie

### Pie Crust

#### INGREDIENTS

- 1 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 stick unsalted butter, chilled and cut into cubes
- ¼ cup ice water



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#### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place the flour, sugar, and salt in the bowl of a food processor. Add the butter and pulse until the mixture resembles coarse meal. With the machine running, add the water through the tube and process just until the dough clumps together, not until it spins around in a ball.
2. Remove the dough from the processor, form into a disk, wrap in plastic, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Roll the dough out on a floured surface and fit into a 9-inch pie plate. Crimp the edges.
3. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place a sheet of foil on the bottom of the pastry, fill with pie weights or dried beans or rice, and bake the crust for 15 minutes. Remove the foil and weights, prick the crust all over with a fork, and return to the oven for 5 minutes. Cool.

### Pie Filling

#### INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup sugar + 10 tablespoons for the meringue
- ½ cup cornstarch
- Pinch kosher salt
- 3 cups boiling water
- 3 eggs, separated plus 2 extra egg whites
- Zest of 1 lemon
- Juice of 3 or more lemons
- ½ teaspoon cream of tartar

#### INSTRUCTIONS

1. In the top of a double boiler (or a heatproof bowl), set over simmering water, combine the 1 cup of sugar, the cornstarch and salt. Slowly add the boiling water, stirring until smooth. Cook over simmering water, stirring constantly, until the mixture has thickened, about 8 minutes. Cover the pan or bowl and continue to cook over simmering water for 20 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, separate the 3 eggs, being very careful not to get any yellow into the egg whites. After 20 minutes, stir a small amount of the hot cornstarch mixture into the egg yolks to temper them. Stir the egg yolks back into the cornstarch mixture and cook for 5 minutes, without stirring, over the simmering water.
3. Remove from heat and stir in the lemon zest and lemon juice, adding more lemon juice to taste. Place a piece of plastic wrap or waxed paper directly on the lemon filling and cool to room temperature.
4. Reduce oven temperature to 375 degrees. In the bowl of an electric mixer with the whisk attachment, beat the egg whites, cream of tartar, and a pinch of salt until the mixture forms soft peaks. Reduce the mixer speed to low, and very gradually add the 10 tablespoons sugar. Increase the speed to high and beat until the meringue forms stiff peaks.
5. Place the lemon filling in the crust, smoothing the top. Top the filling with the meringue, making sure the meringue comes all the way to the edge of the crust. Swirl or make peaks of the meringue. Sprinkle with a bit of sugar, if desired. Bake in the center of the oven until the meringue is golden, about 10 minutes. Watch to see that it doesn't burn. Remove from oven and cool to room temperature. Eat it and swoon. (\*The crust recipe is mine. It's better than the one my mom made with vegetable shortening.)