

*She started a fire in her parent's kitchen when she was 12. She has no formal culinary training. Yet she's won four James Beard awards honoring the country's top culinary masters. She's not fond of labeling great tasting food 'decadent' – "It has a slight touch of guilt." Her new book, Dorie's Cookies, includes obscurities like gozinaki, biarrritz and little rascals. And with her new hashtag - #cookiesandkindness – she's asking you to share your recipes to "make the world a sweeter place." Though she splits her time between New York, Paris, and Westbrook, where she feels a distinct calm, Dorie Greenspan still considers herself a home baker. Coastal grabbed an hour with her as she was embarking on her current book tour.*

**How did you become a baker?**

I would say by accident but really by desire. I didn't cook or bake until I got married. I got married very very young; I was a college student. So I had to learn to cook. And you know no meal is complete without dessert. So I learned how to bake and I really loved it. I really love to bake. I was very lucky when I started focusing on food and got a job at ELLE magazine. It had just about all the greatest French chefs at the time and I worked with them. So I feel like I had a great apprenticeship.

**Do old family recipes influence your recipes today?**

I wish they did. My grandmother was a good baker and a good cook. But I have no recipes from her. I don't remember my mother baking except a couple of baked apples occasionally. So I have no family recipes. I have some wonderful recipes from my husband's family. Other people give me their family recipes. Always when I travel I look for recipes. I love recipes that have history. I like to put recipes in context and tell a story about it.

**Are there any ethnic influences?** I grew up in Brooklyn at a time when there was a bakery on every block; primarily German, Austrian, Polish and eastern European. My mother didn't bake but she bought, so I had that.

**Tell us about your new book** - In dealing with this book, I started to think about holiday recipes. And you know, Christmas = cookies. But then I realized I had other holiday recipes and added some of them. (Pointing out in her new book, *Dorie's Cookies*) This is called hamantaschen. It celebrates when Queen Esther saved the Jews. It's this wonderful soft dough and it's filled with dried fruit. I loved it as a child.

**Do you think cookies serve a higher purpose?** Even though I've been baking for years, I can't find any justification for baking other than pleasure. You can't make a case for sweets other than the pleasure that they give to the person who bakes. I find working with my hands and making something with my hands a pleasure. And the pleasure it gives when you share what you made. So when you bake and when you share - and baking is pretty much always shared - and cookies for sure - it's an act of kindness, it's an act of love, it's an act of caring. I would never have thought to say that cookies serve a higher purpose, but I think they do. Thank you for that.

**Do you have a favorite dessert for the Christmas/New Year's holidays?**

I love the cookie on the cover (of *Dorie's Cookies*). This is the World Peace Cookie, which we need now more than ever. It's a twist on a chocolate sable, which is the French word for shortbread. And then another that's very plain but I love it is the Christmas Spice Cookie. It's very traditional with ginger and cinnamon and cloves and allspice. It's a great holiday cookie.

**Does Dorie Greenspan have any guilty indulgences?** I don't believe in guilty indulgences; I believe in indulgences. Everything in moderation - including moderation, as Oscar Wilde said. Guilty and eating shouldn't be in the same sentence. Just don't overdo it. Just enjoy it. Don't deprive yourself of something you really love. I don't think of food as guilty.

**You get a surprise visit from friends on the spur of the moment. You're pressed to whip up a dinner and a dessert. What advice do you have for people in that predicament?** Oh, it's always more fun to eat at home. Maybe I would just make a big pot of soup. So we'd have soup and warm bread and cheese and salad. Something cozy. Pasta is an option. There's always pasta in the house. And for dessert, there is like a miracle cookie - the Almond Crackle Cookie. Sugar, egg and almonds, only three ingredients. I stir it with my fingers. It takes longer to preheat the oven than it does to make the cookies.

**Is there a secret to perfect meringue?** The egg whites should be at room temperature. Your utensils should be completely totally grease-free. You want to use a tiny little bit of salt and something acidic - either a little lemon juice or white vinegar - in the meringue. A tiny little bit. And you want to add sugar really slowly - a tablespoon at a time. Meringue takes an electric beater. You can do it by hand but it takes an electric beater and patience.

**Every home baker seeks the perfect piecrust. Can you share any tips?**

Cold ingredients is the most important thing. Make sure everything is really really cold. I make my crust in a food processor - it goes so quickly that way. I use cold water, cold eggs, really cold butter. Sometimes I use frozen butter.