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Teen Writes

My prom as a pilgrimage

By Alexandra Reinecke

I'm a pilgrim in the black sweater my mother used to wear for Thanksgivings, and my friend is radiant in emerald. We sit with a triple-stack of pancakes spread like a Torah between us, and I look at them how one might assess such a text, thinking how it is that prom has been a pilgrimage, or what Wikipedia defines as a journey "to a shrine or other location of importance to a person's beliefs."

A pilgrimage because I learned the holy stations — the chocolate fountain room, the poker room, a maze of windows and stairs — around the room in avoidance of the dance floor. A pilgrimage because I'd eaten buffet food, a forbidden fruit my mother had hitherto managed to steer my childhood free of. A pilgrimage because I'd witnessed emotions clear on other people's faces as on the faces of the saints and sinners who mourn and exult in stained glass.

I start in on the pancakes, thinking how it has been a pilgrimage, also, for its cosmetic rituals: at the nail salon the overheard comment, as I watched my nails dry under pillars of blue light, that "Asians don't go to therapy," at the hair salon, the smell of eucalyptus shampoo, at the MAC counter at Nordstrom's the strange weight of false eyelashes like tiny and jet-black butterflies paused mid-flight.

As my friend begins to cut spongy squares off the pancake stack, I think, also, of the irony which separates our pilgrimage and that pursued by those at Plymouth. How when the Quakers landed, they said "Let your life speak" — a factoid I know only from my friend's supplement to her Penn application — but how we, inversely, instead spoke for our lives, which this particular night, had been less than exceptional enough to have spoken for themselves.

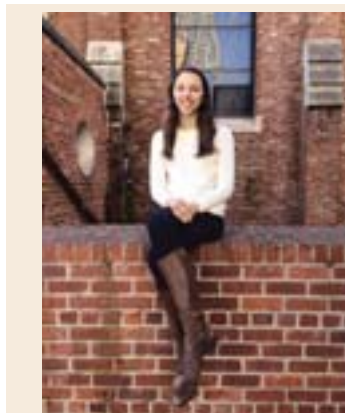
I think of what we spoke, which were things less transcendent than those the Quakers translated silently in wood carvings and butter pads. The directions to a party we ended up not attending. The irony of having to photograph a couple one half

of which I'd liked and whose other half I'd confided in the liking. How the bartender had come to understand my Diet Coke addiction in one night. That we'd relieved the cut-glass bowl beside the spray deodorant of peppermint Lifesavers in little foils.

So, my friend's Toyota is more a confessional than a wooden ship, but it occurs to me there that there is a holiness in it, despite its deviation from its proscribed metaphor. Holy that we, both critical reasoning champions, fail to highlight aloud the constellations we discern as more than isolated dots. That we lie to each other out of a camaraderie that extends, if momentarily, further than our mutual respect for the truth.

So, I'm a pilgrim and I've lost my black sweater somewhere between now and then. So, we eat toast triangles with I Can't Believe It's Not Butter. So, we remove makeup. So, we watch "Gossip Girl" and I think regretfully of a person, across the room, I neglected to speak to.

So, in the morning, when I go home in bare feet and no more or less enlightened than I came, but no more or less enlightened than I had expected to become, I am thankful to have undertaken this journey, this pilgrimage, however strange.



Alexandra Reinecke is from Westchester, New York. She currently resides in Lafayette, where she is junior at Campolindo High school. She writes every morning at 5 a.m. opposite a print of "View of the World from 9th Avenue" and consumes copious amounts of coffee. Her likes include maple-flavored anything and snow. Her favorite animal is a tiger.

Thoughtful Food

Delicious Almond Scones are a fun brunch addition for Mother's Day

By Susie Iventosch



Almond scones

Photo Susie Iventosch

A couple of weeks ago we featured Papa's Favorite Torte, and in the column I mentioned that almond scones are a great way to use any leftover almond paste you may have from that recipe. Even if you have no leftover almond paste to use up, these scones are a great excuse to get into the kitchen to bake, especially for a special

Mother's Day brunch.

This recipe comes from our attempt to replicate scones that we found on a trip to Idaho. My son and I absolutely loved these scones, which were offered in several flavors: almond, apricot or lemon-poppy seed.

Because we entertain a lot in the summer, we wanted to make

them on our own to serve to guests.

The base for the scones all appeared to be the same, and when I went into the store to inquire about the recipe, all the owner would tell me is that there are just five ingredients in her basic scone recipe, which included no eggs, except for the egg wash on top. Armed with this information, I came up with butter, flour, sugar, baking powder and milk (or cream), for a total of five. Next we figured out ingredient quantities, added a wee bit of salt and of course the almond paste and extract for the almond flavored scone, which was our favorite!

This recipe is the result and they are actually very simple to make. We like to use the Odense brand of almond paste, which is a very firm almond paste. I have not yet tried making these with Solo brand almond paste, but it should work just fine. If using the Odense brand, be sure to pick up the one with the blue label. The one with the red label is marzipan and that will not work for this recipe.

Almond Scones –Whole Recipe

(Makes 12 medium-sized scones)

INGREDIENTS

2 cups flour
6 Tbsp. granulated sugar
4 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. salt
1 stick butter, cold and cut into small 1/2-inch cube pieces
1/2 cup cream (or milk)
4 oz. almond paste*
2 tsp. almond extract
1 egg white for egg wash
1/4 cup sliced almond for topping
1 Tbsp. sugar for topping

*I use the Odense brand of almond paste, which is packaged in a foil tube inside a cardboard box. So, before heating the almond paste with the milk, I cut the paste into small pieces. If you use the canned kind of almond paste, like Solo brand, then you will probably not have to cut it into pieces, because it's not quite as stiff to begin with.)

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Prepare a baking sheet with cooking spray or parchment paper.

In a large bowl, mix flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. With a pastry cutter, or your fingertips, cut butter into flour mixture until well blended and butter is reduced to tiny pea size pieces.

In a 2-cup glass measuring cup, or a small bowl, place milk (or cream or half & half), almond paste and almond extract. Heat in microwave for 1 to 2 minutes, until milk is warm and the almond paste is very soft. Remove from microwave and blend with a fork to stir almond paste into milk. It will still be a little bit lumpy —no problem.

With a large fork or spoon, stir milk mixture into flour-butter mixture. Blend well. Form into a ball, and on a floured cutting board, press the ball into a large circle with your hands. The circle should be about 1/2- to 3/4-inch thick. If dough is too sticky, just dust with a little extra flour before shaping.

Cut into even triangles and place them on prepared baking sheet. (Cut into 6 or 12 triangles depending upon whether you use the full or half recipe. Also, make them larger or smaller as you wish.)

With a pastry brush, glaze the tops of the scones with egg white, sprinkle with sliced almonds and sprinkle with sugar. (White, raw or brown sugar ... whichever you like!)

Bake for approximately 10-12 minutes, or until tops begin to turn golden-brown, and almonds are golden brown. Serve immediately, or store in an air-tight container for several days. These scones also freeze well. Thaw and reheat in a warm oven or toaster oven.

Half Recipe

(Makes 6 medium-sized scones)

1 cup flour
3 Tbsp. granulated sugar
2 tsp. baking powder
1/4 tsp. salt
1/2 stick butter, cold and cut into small, 1/2-inch cube pieces
1/4 cup cream (or milk)
2 oz. almond paste
1 tsp. almond extract
1 egg white for egg wash
1/2 cup sliced almonds for topping
2 Tbsp. sugar for topping

Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. This recipe can be found on our website: www.lamorindaweekly.com. If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.



SMC receives \$2.7 Million STEM grant to support Hispanic students

By A.K. Carroll

Imagine you are a young Latina in her first semester of college. You are the first in your family to pursue higher education, the first to dream of the opportunities a college degree can afford. Your parents are proud. Your siblings are impressed. Your community back home is cheering you on.

But after several weeks on campus, your feelings shift from excited to anxious. You're not sure how your loans are being processed or if you need to pay the interest. Your chemistry class is harder than you anticipated and none of your instructors seem to understand how homesick you are. You think of getting a job to send money back home, but you don't know where you'll find the time. You were so eager to imagine yourself as a doctor months before, but now the path from here to there seems too steep to trek.

The barriers to student success are a real and tangible issue for first generation students on college campuses across the country. It's easy to assume that a student who drops out didn't have what it takes or shouldn't have started in the first place, but often that isn't the case.

"When a flower doesn't bloom we don't change the flower, we fix the environment," said Tracy Pas-

cua Dea, Assistant Vice Provost for Student Success at Saint Mary's College.

Earlier this year Pascua Dea collaborated with other SMC faculty and staff to apply for a \$2.7 million Hispanic Serving Institutions Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (HSI STEM) and Articulation program grant. The grant, which was awarded last fall, comes from the Department of Education and will be used to support a new initiative called Caminos a la Ciencias (CALC)—"Pathways to Science." The CALC initiative was designed to supplement and expand the curriculum and resources offered to STEM students at the college, with an emphasis on supporting Hispanic and low-income students.

Why this particular population? There are myriad answers.

"First generation college students are the largest group entering college nationally and they typically overlap with under-represented groups in general, often low income, Latino, or African American; that overlap creates a common goal," said Gloria Aquino Sosa, assistant professor and co-director of SMC's High Potential Program and Program Director of College Stu-

dent Services. "It is crucial that we ensure that they understand what goes into the college process."

Sosa explained that this is often a struggle for students whose parents desire that their children go to college, but who have no firsthand experience of what that process entails.

"I am (first generation) myself," said Pascua Dea, whose parents emigrated from the Philippines. "I relate to a lot of the students who are first generation on campus. Applying for financial aid or scholarships, buying books, etc.—my parents didn't know how this was done so I had to try and figure it out myself."

Part of CALC's goal is to make all of this more feasible. The naming of the initiative is representative of both its structure and purpose. "It's both literal and figurative," said Pascua Dea. "There are different ways to go about achieving a degree in STEM. Let's find the path that works for (each student), as opposed to throwing them all in one path."

The program consists of five major components: The creation of a new STEM center with increased services for STEM students; enhanced transfer articulation and support, specifically with students

from Los Medanos College, a two-year community college in Pittsburg; faculty development, curriculum development and ongoing evaluation and assessment.

In its first year, the program targeted 262 students, including 171 Hispanic and low-income STEM majors and 91 undeclared first-year Hispanic and low-income students who intend to major in STEM disciplines.

"Hispanic and low income are our target populations," said Roy Wensley, Dean of the School of Science and principal investigator and project lead for CALC. "(But) the kinds of things you do for one population of students help and benefit all students."

The new STEM center, for example, which Wensley described as, "a locus for students majoring in science and mathematics," will be open to all 600-some STEM students. "They'll receive help with academic work, but also help with understanding why they are pursuing the field and how to be successful."

The same goes for changes in pedagogy, which will directly impact the whole campus. Such changes are as much about a shift in approach as they are an alteration of practice. "(Instructors) need

to know their audience and know the narrative of the population," said Sosa. "Then they'll be able support the population better."

A major goal for SMC on the whole is what Sosa calls strengths-based institutional change.

"(It's) moving away from deficit-based conceptualizations of our student population and looking at a student from a strengths-based lens. Our students come to us with motivation and a desire to achieve. What causes most students to be unsuccessful is an idea that they can't make it," said Sosa.

Pascua Dea echoed those sentiments. "There's a psycho-social piece that goes beyond academics," she said. "Those questions of, Do I believe I belong here? Do I know what I'm doing? Do I have a network and people to go to? The whole point is to look at the student holistically."

Ultimately, the goal of CALC might be summarized as an institutional shift that will result in increased student success.

"The biggest shift we've done across campus is switching to strengths-based assessment," said Pascua Dea. "We ask what are the strengths the students bring and what can we do to support that?"