

The only recipe my grandma could make



my grandma, my sister, my cousins and me at xmas 2014

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Some people grow up with grandmas who cook a lot of delicious food for them, my grandmother was a terrible cook. When we were over for dinners we usually got oven fries and bockwurst with ketchup, such an unperfect meal. The only recipe she could make was Vanillekipferl, the most classic and easiest Christmas cookie recipe on earth, honestly, there aren’t even my favorite Christmas cookies but connected with some of my favorite memories.

Vanillekipferl

- 300g flour
- 250g butter
- 125g honey
- 3 eggs (only the yellow part)
- 125g grated almonds and walnuts
- fingertip cinnamon

mix all the ingredients and shape moons out of it, by roll out the dough and cut out half moons with use a glass, baked them in the oven by 180 C until they are light yellow, and roll the hot cookies in vanilla sugar

the recipe

My Grandma used to say, “I have four grandchildren, all girls”. That was her favorite phrase. It was the only sentence she could remember at the end. When I was eleven years old, my grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's at age 63. Unfortunately, I don't remember much about my grandmother before the dementia diagnosis, about the old grandmother, about the grandmother without the forgetting, confusion, and absence. But when I think of Vanillekipferl I remember my grandma again. The recipe of Vanillekipferl, we called them moons, because of their shape, is originally from Vienna in Austria. It is an almond and walnut dough and when they are still hot and fresh out of the oven you soak them in vanilla sugar, so they get a vanilla flavor. It is a pretty easy recipe, nothing fancy just a classic Xmas cookie, but for me, it is so much more, it is a memory of my grandma.

My Oma (Grandma) Ulli was a funny, creative, and very loving person. Her favorite hobbies were dancing and sculpting. She definitely passed her passion for dancing on to us, because my sister, mom, aunt, cousins, grandma, and I all danced at one point in the same ballet school. She sculpted until she no longer knew what the tool was, or she forgot from one second to the next what she wanted to do with glue or a piece of wood. She also loved playing with us. My Grandparents have a huge living room, with a huge couch table, which was the perfect height for us four grandchildren, when we were younger, where we could sit and play. Our favorite game was playing traveling agency because Grandma and Grandpa had old computers and these old telephones with rotary dials. So we were our own travel agency, and Oma Ulli always played a customer with a crazy story for which we should plan a trip. She also loved to perform with us. Our number one performance was “lakkukaratcca” She gave us those little rattles and the four of us danced and sang her “lakkukarattca” song. With her we could do what we wanted, it was even allowed to watch TV and drink hot milk in her bed. She loved playing, singeing and being with us. The four of us wore her jewelry and her much too big dresses and suits and usually, she joined in with everything as if she were still a child herself.

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And then day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year our loving, funny and crazy grandma left her body. She was not herself anymore. Without dementia, she was the most empathetic person, with dementia she started to scream at us or asked what the hell we were doing in her room with her stuff. She lost her best characteristics. Sometimes she was back but often she was more like a ghost who was around.

But with the smell of nuts, cinnamon, and vanilla she was Oma Ulli again. It means something to me that those simple and kind of dry cookies made her smile again, made her remember again. We were again her four grandchildren, all girls, you could see in her face the pride, the love, and the empathy for us, it melted my heart, every time you could see on her face that she remember again. It must have been so hard for her to realise that she slowly forgot who we are because we were everything to her. So we tried at the begging to recreate all the happy moments, like our big Christmas cookie-baking parties or the singing and dancing battles with her but from day to day, and week to week, she also forgot these moments.

So we started experiencing new funny moments. For example, when we were on a trip to the Netherlands, her favorite destination, she randomly said to the waitress that she is Dutch because she loved the country so much. From then on we all always joke about her “Dutch citizenship”. Or when she ordered alcohol-free water and explained to the waitress that she really needs the affirmation that their water is without alcohol because she is unfortunately not allowed to drink alcohol because of her pills. So from that day on Oma Ulli always ordered alcohol-free water, alcohol-free juice, and even alcohol-free milk, just to be sure. But I guess the most hilarious moment was on a day when family friends were in town and we were out for a walk, and suddenly she was away, that is not the funny part, the funny part is, that she was collected by the police, who then drove her back to us, and while the police car drove up, she waved to us from the back seat as if she were a superstar and she enjoyed it.



vacations in the Netherlands in 2008

For me, my grandma was a superstar and I am pretty sure, if she were still alive and had never had Alzheimer's, she would be doing Tik-Tok dances with us today, talking about her wild times and being the crazy and loving grandma she was before the diagnosis. And even though in the end she forgot our names, her husband, our memories together, her own name, and even her beautiful life, we will never forget her. And her laughs, her love, and her cookies, the only recipe she could cook. So when I think of Vanillekipfel I think of Oma Ulli and when I close my eyes I could see her smiling saying I have four grandchildren all girls.