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Bulgarian bonitsa is a passion for PV woman

By **KEN HEDLER**
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Courier Photo/ Jo. L. Keener ---
Minnie Evanoff has whipped up recipes in a variety of kitchens since the 1930s, and has now taken her recipes online.

PRESCOTT VALLEY - Minnie Evanoff's late sister, Martha, used to poke fun at her hobby by calling Minnie and asking for Julia Child.

And while Evanoff lacks the peculiar voice and hairdo of the late cooking show host, she does not regard her hobby as a laughing matter.

Instead, Evanoff, 83, relishes the ethnic cuisine of her Bulgarian ancestors, and compares cooking to her other creative pursuit - painting. She considers herself a gourmet cook.

"Cooking a meal is like painting a picture," Evanoff said. "You have your meat marinated. You cook it with care. I set the table with silverware and napkins.

"You put it (the meal) together," Evanoff continued. "It only lasts as long as the meal lasts. It's very creative, very fulfilling."

While she usually only cooks for her husband, John, and an occasional small dinner party, Evanoff draws from recipes that she has collected from 64 years of married life. The couple has lived in Prescott Country Club for 28 years.

Evanoff, a retired interior designer, credits her friend, Rose Scott of Prescott Valley, with assembling her collection of recipes into 55 scrapbooks. She said Scott spent five years on the project, which included an index and pages of separate categories for a variety of dishes.

She consults a recipe once a day.

"I use them like a library," Evanoff said. "I cook a full-course meal every day. We eat a lot of chicken, and I like lamb and beef - of course. Pork is a big commodity at my house."

Evanoff also established an online presence through her Web site, www.minnieskitchen.com. Among other things, she posts recipes on her Web site, and promotes the sale of her self-published cookbook, "A Step or Two Beyond Mudpies."

Mud pies apparently allude to her initial exposure to what became a cooking hobby.

A native of Dawson, N.D., who grew up on a family farm with six siblings, Evanoff said that she made pies from mud when she was 4 or 5 years old. She added branches to the mix.

At the age of 7 or 8, Evanoff said she "graduated" to become her mother's helper.

"And so when she would make bread, she would give me some dough and I would make cinnamon rolls," she said.

When she was 9, Evanoff said her mother tended the garden and left her daughter to prepare "noon dinner" for the younger siblings. "If we had dough, I'd give them a little bowl of dough," she said. "They would make little rolls. I put them on a coffee tin and baked them."

Evanoff said that she learned a variety of ethnic dishes from her parents, who left Bulgaria in 1913. Her husband's parents also emigrated from Bulgaria.

She estimated that about 25 percent of her dishes are Bulgarian. One of her staple dishes is bonitsa, a side dish that contains dough, cheese, eggs and butter.

Bulgarian dishes contain spices and garlic, husband John said. He noted that Bulgarians eat a lot of sauerkraut, beets and peppers.

John, a retired real estate agent, described his wife as being a "healthy cook," noting, "I'm not overweight."

However, he teased his wife for her obsession with cooking. After Minnie said that she spends 30 to 45 minutes planning a meal, he cracked, "The rest of the day she watches cooking shows. She complains about my football (watching)."

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