

Eat 'Em and Weep

That's the Way These Cookies Make Her Crumble

Sufferin' synchronicity! I'm talking to the nation's leading authority on tears and crying, William H. Frey II, and he's telling me about the almond cookies he's been able to find only in Siena, Italy: "They were soft and chewy. They were the best cookies I've ever had in my life." The cookies he's talking about are *ricciarelli*, and they're the reason I've called him in the first place. They're the cookies that make me cry.

Frey is author of "Crying: The Mystery of Tears" and research director of the Tear Research Center at Regions Hospital in St. Paul, Minn. In his groundbreaking 1985 book, he explored how, when and why people cry. Basically, irritant tears are caused by things such as onions, air pollution or the IRS; emotional tears are a form of stress relief. "Crying is something we do when the level of stress crosses a certain threshold, whether it's anger, embarrassment or that we're happy or sad," Frey says. "Some people can cry over beautiful music, movies, children, singing in church."

I've welled up over everything on his list. Music is the worst. I cut my cry teeth on summer camp sing-alongs of "Kumbaya," I still melt for musicals, my ducts have been known to dribble at opera and the floodgates open for "Ode to Joy." Now I know why. I've got a low lacrimation threshold.

Frey considers himself a moderate weeper, his eyes misting three to four times a month. He's baffled when I tell him my first bite of *ricciarelli* brought tears of joy, an awareness of the poignant grace in tender almond morsels. "Certainly people cry tears of joy," he says. "I just haven't run into people who've said they had tears of joy from food." Not me. I know people who've felt weepy over peach cobbler, and one foodie friend experienced ocular dew discussing his late father's recipe for beef Bourguignon.

One woman Frey studied did cry during dinner dates. The cause, he recalls, was an



"underlying bulimia." She got therapy and got over it.

Personally, I think my *ricciarelli* rapture might have something to do with being in Italy. Researchers consider Italy a culture that encourages free-flowing tears. But then I've keened over Italian cookies in this country as well, specifically the pine nut-studded *amaretti* at Eagle Rock Italian Bakery and Deli.

"Yes, cry for the *joy-ah*, for the treasure that you find," says the bakery's Gemma Cafarchia, my sob sister. She and her husband, Nick, the baker of these low-mounded miracles, come from Bari, on the southeastern coast of Italy.

"Someone with the same recipe not make the same," Cafarchia explains. Her husband uses almond paste, which he grinds himself, egg whites, sugar, lemon zest and pine nuts. When I ask for the recipe, Cafarchia smiles demurely and says: "*Segreto*."

That's a crying shame. Fortunately, I've found a recipe for *ricciarelli*, adapted here from "A Table in Tuscany: Classic Recipes From the Heart of Italy," collected and illustrated by Leslie Forbes.

Frey promises he'll try it and let me know if the cookies make him cry. —NANCY SPILLER

Nancy Spiller last wrote about tall food for the magazine.

RICCIARELLI

Adapted from "A Table in Tuscany"
(Chronicle Books, 1991)

Makes 2 dozen

- 2 1/4 cups blanched almonds
- 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon superfine sugar, sifted
- 2 egg whites
- 1 tablespoon grated orange peel

Confectioners' sugar

Crush almonds to powder in mortar or grinder, making sure to retain oil. Mix with superfine sugar and rub mixture through sieve into large bowl. Whip egg whites to soft stage. Fold into almond-and-sugar mixture, then add orange peel to form soft, moist paste. Shape into rectangular tiles about 2 inches long, 1 1/2 inches wide and 1/2 inch thick. Dust with confectioners' sugar. Place tiles on cookie sheets lined with parchment paper and leave for 12 hours, unrefrigerated. Bake in oven that is just warm (300 degrees) about 15 minutes. Do not allow cookies to brown—they should remain pale. Cool on wire rack and dust with more confectioners' sugar sifted on to

See Page 36 for Resource C