

Step Into a Theme:

Family



# Bake It Healthy!

## By Miriam Epstein

Today we meet with Les Saidel of Saidels Bakery, in Karnei Shomron, Eretz Yisrael

### Hi, Mr. Saidel. You used to be a computer programmer in South Africa. What made you decide to open a bakery in Eretz Yisrael?

I was not only a computer programmer, I also worked in the fields of system analysis, system management, and web design. In 2008, the company where I had been working for a decade went bankrupt. Even though I had over twenty years of experience in the world of computers and high-tech, companies were searching for candidates who were young and straight out of college, whom they could pay less. After a serious job search for four months I came to the realization that I was no longer going to be working in the field of computers. That's when my wife and I decided to open a bakery!

### Why a bakery?

I've always been interested in the world of baking and the world of food. My mother, whom we refer to fondly as Grandma Phyllis, ran a catering business. From the age of six I was enlisted to help with several activities in the business. My mother was a full partner in our bakery – her specialty was cake and cookie baking. She was active in the business until just a couple of years ago, when her health no longer permitted her to continue.

When I was a bar mitzvah boy in yeshivah, I had a *rebbe*

who was very much into healthy baking and healthy living, and he instilled within me those two passions. One day he gave us a class in healthy baking. From then on, that became a passion for me.

When I realized that I was out of work for real, my wife Sheryl and I decided to take a 180-degree turn in terms of what we had both been doing until that point. Sheryl had been working in the Ministry of Environment before our move to Karnei Shomron. We decided to draw on my passion for a healthy lifestyle and open our own bakery.

### And why did you build a stone oven?

After a four-month job search, we had almost no capital with which to start our business, and we were looking for an economical and efficient way to bake our breads, cakes, and cookies. When I was a child I had always dreamed of being an artisan baker using an artisan oven. It turned out that building a stone oven was the most economically sound option. It appeared that my childhood dream was going to become a reality!

### What does it mean to be an artisan baker?

In artisan baking, fewer ingredients are used to turn out a high-quality, healthful and tasteful bread. While an artisan baker will rely on intuition and experience to achieve

the best results, an industrial baker will rely on chemicals to achieve the fastest results. With artisan baking one can achieve a masterpiece of a loaf of bread from flour, sour-dough yeast, water and salt. Industrial bakers add chemicals to try to achieve a similar result. The appearance may be the same or similar, but the taste and health content are worlds apart.

### How did you know what to do?

After doing extensive research I discovered that Alan Scott, who lived in Tasmania (a small island south of Australia), was the world expert on stone ovens. He guided me through each step of the building via phone and email. The bricks from our oven were over a century old and were imported from Belgium due to their effective heating properties. Luckily I was in amazing shape, otherwise I might not be around to tell the tale. The work was strenuous and exhausting. I also built the bakery myself.

### How often do you bake, and where is your bread sold aside from the bakery itself?

We partially bake the products daily until they are 80 percent baked and then we freeze them immediately. Our freezer is what's called a blast freezer – it reaches a very low temperature of minus 31 degrees Fahrenheit (-35 degrees Celsius). We then finish baking the products on the day of the sale, and they come out as fresh as if they were baked that day. This process is called partial baking or "par-baked." It's very popular in America and Europe.

The products are distributed on Fridays to various locations around Eretz Yisrael.

### What kind of products do you sell?

We sell healthful baked goods. One unique product we sell is called Rambam Bread, which was created based on the writings of the Rambam. It has reduced gluten, added minerals, omega 3, iron, and calcium. In addition to delicious cookies, cakes, and doughnuts, we sell all kinds of breads, including bagels, New York Rye, Organic Whole Wheat, Organic Spelt, Saidel's Sourdough, Spelt Multigrain, Spelt Walnut, Spelt Dried Tomatoes and Black Russian Rye. We also sell all kinds of challahs and quiches.

### Do you have any stories to share with our readers?

When I was in the process of building the oven, I had to cover the dome at the top with aluminum. I didn't want anyone to get wind of what we were doing or copy any of the ideas I had. When the neighborhood kids would ask what I was doing, I told them I was building a nuclear reactor.

Just before Rosh Hashanah, somebody called to ask if our round challahs were actually round. I wonder what shape he thought they might be?

Maybe one day I'll write a book of all of the funny stories that have occurred since we opened our bakery! **H**

