

When I was in the fifth grade, either 1994 or 1995, I was assigned to make a Greek dish for my World History class's International Food Festival. I never understood these assignments as it's always the parents who end up doing all the work.

Now unfortunately I'm about as Greek as a penguin. I have no idea what Greek food looks like. I'd never heard of Baklava or Hummus or Gyros. So I did what I always would do when I had any sort of homework that took over 10 minutes to finish. I went to my mother for help.

This school year, I had already asked her to:

- Create a diorama of a Native American hut.
- Make a sandwich that included the Four Basic Food Groups (remember those?) Mine was voted "Scrumdiddleyumptious" by the class.
- Invent and build an item for our Invention Convention, where I took a drawer handle from her salon station and never put it back.
- Design and build a wooden replica of Rowley's "Old Nancy" cannon (props to Dad, too!)
- Create a costume for a skit on nutrition. I was a pack of Starburst.
- Make another diorama depicting the main characters of the Chronicles of Narnia.
- Carve the Sphinx out of a bar of soap.
- Bake some sort of Mesopotamian bread.
- Make a Shepard's costume.
- And any time I had to do something remotely artistic, she would trace it in pencil and I would color it in.

"Can you think of some Greek food for school?" My mother gave me the look that bemoaned, "Not again..." and thought for a bit.

"That's a good question for Nonno," as my grandparent were currently visiting from Las Vegas.

That evening, I put him on the spot. "Nonno, Mom told me to ask you for a Greek recipe for school."

Nonno squints at my mother, leans back in his seat for a moment then turns back to me before deadpanning, "Minyattes La Va."

"Nonno, what's Minyattes La Va?"

"The Italians made Minyattes then the Greeks stole the recipe and added olives, so it's an ancient traditional Greek recipe! Minyattes La Va!"

Later that week we held our International Food Festival where we handed out samples to other students and parents. We were asked questions regarding our recipes and quizzed by our teachers. On the recipe card in front of me, I had to list the ingredients: baked spaghetti, olives, an egg and American cheese. Obviously, a very Greek concoction.

To this day I remember the strange looks, especially from Melissa Apostolos' parents, when I explained how "Minyattes La Va" was an ancient Greek recipe orally passed down through the generations yet somehow only known to my Sicilian grandfather.