

BY BARBARA REVSINE

In Praise of Chocolate Chips

Nothing can beat the appeal of the revered Toll House cookie



THE BLUE CACTUS RESTAURANT IN Northbrook has two desserts on the menu, both variations on a single theme. Designed for sharing and served in oversized bowls, the layered desserts begin with a warm, $\frac{3}{4}$ pound cinnamon swirl or chocolate chip cookie. A substantial scoop of vanilla ice cream topped with hot fudge or caramel sauce comes next, followed by whipped cream.

"I tell everyone to make sure they get some cookie in every bite," co-owner Benji Rosen says. "It's important, because it's the cookie that makes the dessert really special."

The cookies are a familiar treat for Rosen and partner Peter Weiss. They're made by the mother of childhood friend Jeff Goldman, who, as it turns out, is the Carol in Carol's Cookies, a Highland Park-based wholesale and mail-order bakery.

Carol Goldman says she's been baking cookies "forever," but never considered doing it professionally until she took a batch to her health club 20 years ago. The cookies were a resounding success, and Carol's Cookies was launched shortly thereafter.

With the exception of a copy stashed in the family's safe-deposit box, Goldman's recipes are all in her head. Five days a week — seven during the Christmas season — she gets to work at 3:30 a.m. to mix the dough. The company makes 11 varieties, all of them crisp on the outside and soft on the inside. Chocolate chip is the perennial favorite; chocolate chip with nuts — Carol's favorite — is second, to no one's surprise.

America's love affair with chocolate chip cookies began more than 70 years ago. There are several versions of the story, but everyone agrees Ruth Wakefield made the very first chocolate chip cookie.

Wakefield and her husband Ken owned the Toll House Inn restaurant in Whitman, Mass. On a particularly busy day, Ruth discovered she'd run out of nuts for her signature butter cookies. She took a Nestlé's semisweet chocolate bar, chopped it into small pieces, and then folded the chocolate bits into her cookie dough.

As author Jean Anderson explains in *The American Century Cookbook* (Clarkson Potter Publishers, \$35), Wakefield thought the chocolate would melt when the cookies were baked. It didn't, and the rich butter cookies strewn with pieces of gooey chocolate were an immediate hit.


Wakefield's *Toll House Cook Book* was published in 1930. Her recipe for chocolate chip cookies called for two, 7-ounce bars of Nestlé's semisweet chocolate. When sales of the chocolate bars soared, Nestlé sent a salesman to investigate. Impressed with the cookies, the company began scoring their bars and packaging them with a chopper to make it easier for home cooks to break them into small pieces. Nestlé signed a 40-year contract with Ruth Wakefield in 1939, the same year the now familiar chocolate morsels debuted, complete with the original recipe printed on the package.

Nestlé still has exclusive rights to the "Original Toll House Cookie" appellation, but there are endless recipes for chocolate chip cookies. Gwen Steege's *101 Perfect Chocolate Chip Cookies* (Storey Books, \$9.95), for example, includes recipes made with apples, wheat germ, rolled oats, instant vanilla pudding, coconut, sour cream, potato chips, and zucchini.

The recipes are actually more alike than they are different. Even slight changes, however, affect the flavor, texture and appearance of the finished cookie. Fats are a good example. Butter melts at a lower temperature than either margarine or solid shortening, so cookies made with butter spread more while baking than cookies made with other fats. Recipes with a higher proportion of fat produce flatter, chewier and crisper cookies; those with a lower proportion of fat yield softer and puffier cookies.

Since most chocolate chip cookie recipes yield several dozen cookies, proper storage is important. Carol Goldman suggests leaving out a two- or three-day supply and freezing the rest. After her jumbo-sized cookies thaw, she says they should be wrapped in a paper

towel, microwaved at full power for at least 10 seconds, and eaten warm.

Warm chocolate chip cookies are also popular at the steak house Nine and at R.J. Grunts and P.J. Clarke's in Chicago, where they're served with ice cream and hot fudge sauce. At Masck restaurant in Deerfield, warm chocolate chip cookies are presented as a complimentary after dinner treat. A fresh batch goes into the oven every 20 minutes during peak hours, and chef/owner Kevin Nieman says there have been times when they've run out of cookies, much to their guests' dismay. 

Chocolate Chip Meringue Drops

Preheat oven to 250 degrees
Makes 40 cookies

2 egg whites (large eggs)
1/2 cup sugar
1 tsp vanilla extract
3 tbsp unsweetened cocoa powder
1/2 cup semisweet chocolate chips



1. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. Set aside.
2. In a large metal or glass bowl, beat egg whites on high speed with electric mixer until soft peaks form.
3. Gradually add sugar while continuing to beat until they hold soft peaks.
4. Mix in vanilla and cocoa on low speed, then fold in chocolate chips by hand. Drop small mounds of the mixture onto prepared baking sheets, spacing them an inch apart.
5. Bake for one hour in preheated oven. Turn off the oven. Leave cookies in the oven for two more hours, or until the centers are dry.
6. Remove the cookies from the baking sheets, and store in an airtight container.

All Recipes Tried & True Cookies
(Allrecipes Press, \$17.95)