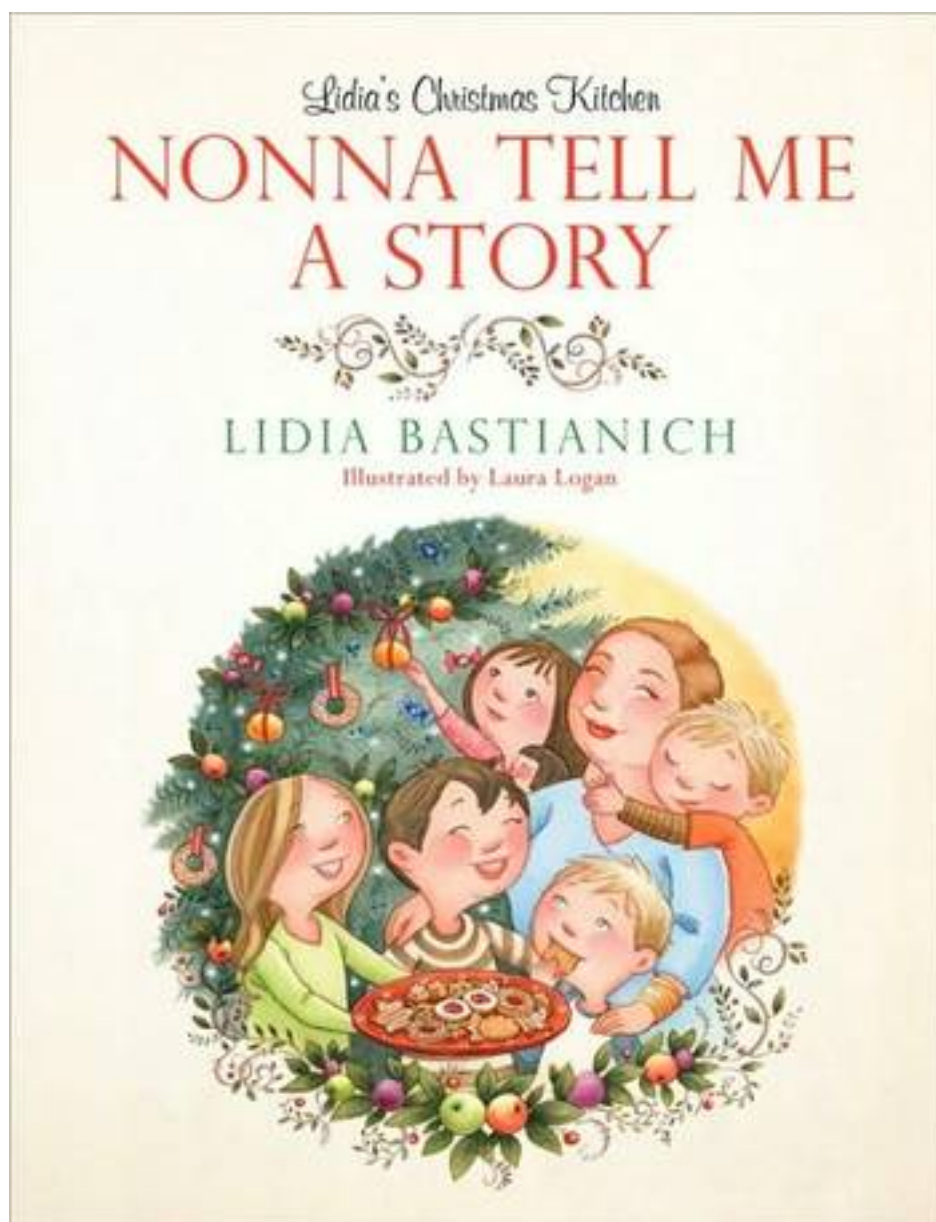


Lidia Bastianich Writes a Christmas Story

Michele Scicolone (December 08, 2010)



Acclaimed chef, author and television personality Lidia Bastianich has written a Christmas story for children with recipes.



Lidia Bastianich is a chef, restaurateur, cookbook author, and the host of one of public television's most popular cooking shows, the Emmy-nominated and James Beard Award winning *Lidia's Italy*. Now Lidia has a new achievement. Her latest book, [Nonna Tell Me a Story](#) [2], just published by Running Press Kids (\$15.95), is a warm and charming Christmas story for children and the adults who love them, guaranteed to get everybody feeling the Christmas spirit.

In the book, Lidia, with a little help from her mother, Erminia, known as Nonna Mima, tells her five grandchildren -- Olivia, Lorenzo, Miles, Ethan and Julia -- about her memories of Christmas when she was a child growing up in Istria. These were the post WWII years and the family did not have much. The "Christmas tree" was nothing more than a little juniper bush from the forest, and the decorations were fresh pine cones, nuts, small fruits, and homemade cookies. Lidia and her brother, Franco, would seek out the best juniper for their father to bring home and would make wreaths and garlands from bay leaves and dried figs. But Lidia's favorite part was the tiny candies in sparkly paper wrappers that she and Franco would hang from the juniper, although sometimes, the naughty siblings would eat the candies first and replace them in the wrappers with a nut or even a pebble!

When the time comes to decorate their own Christmas tree, Lidia's grandchildren, inspired by her true story, decide to make the kind of homemade decorations she remembers from her childhood instead of the store-bought glass balls and colored electric lights that are today's holiday ornaments. They bake cookies, make fruit tea, string wreaths, and hang fruits and nuts on the tree. All of these scenes are charmingly illustrated by the artist, Laura Logan.

The book concludes with a handful of recipes perfect for the holidays, plus a few of Lidia's decorating ideas. Some of the recipes, like the Crostoli fried cookies or Fruit Tea are traditional, while others are contemporary.

As I read this warm and delightful book, I felt like rushing to the kitchen. Let's bake cookies and decorate the tree! The easy Cookie Crumbles (Fregolata) are fun to make with kids and perfect to munch on while stringing the bay leaf wreath. The Chocolate Star Cookies and Simple Sugar Cookies would be ideal to hang from a Christmas tree or just munch on for dessert. The hot Fruit Tea sounds like just the thing to warm you up on a cold winter's day.



As Lidia says in her introduction, “The holidays are all about family, food, and love.” [Nonna, Tell Me A Story](#) [3] conveys that message loud and clear.



“Ugly but Good” Cookies

Brutti ma Buoni

Yield: 4 dozen cookies

8 large egg whites

Pinch of salt

2 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted

2 cups shelled hazelnuts, toasted, skinned and coarsely chopped

Preheat the oven to 275 degrees. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. Beat the egg whites and salt in a bowl with an electric mixer with the whisk attachment until foamy. Continue beating, adding the sugar gradually, until all of the sugar is incorporated and the egg whites hold stiff and shiny peaks. Scrape the beaten whites into a wide, heavy saucepan and set over medium-low heat. Stir in the hazelnuts and cook, stirring constantly, until the batter comes away from the sides of the pan and is light golden brown, about 20 minutes. (The batter will deflate quite a bit as it cooks) Remove the pan from the heat. Drop the batter by rounded teaspoonfuls onto the prepared pans. Bake until golden brown and firm to the touch, about 30 minutes. Remove and cool completely before serving. Store at room temperature in an airtight container for up to 1 week.

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