Tortes in Memory

In her new book, *The Window Shop: Safe Harbor for Refugees, 1939-1972* (www.iuniverse.com), Ellen Miller relays an anecdote told by a Cambridge businessman who in the 1980s dined at the renowned Hotel Sacher in Vienna. “After a superb meal, he ordered Sacher torte for dessert. ‘Oh, sir,’ replied the waiter. ‘I don’t recommend the Sacher torte. The only place in the world you can get a good Sacher torte is at the Window Shop in Cambridge, Massachusetts.’”

Not precisely true. The Window Shop had closed in 1972 and sold its building to the Cambridge Center for Adult Education. By the 1980s, it served Sacher tortes only in memory. Linzer tortes, too. (The center did, however, continue the bakery under a new name until the mid 1990s.)

Miller, a former administrator at the Law School who has a cousin who worked at the shop, tells its story with the help of coauthors Ilse Heyman, a Holocaust survivor and assistant manager of the gift and dress shop for 25 years, and Dorothy Dahl, former president of the board of directors, who initiated the gathering of the oral histories on which this book is based and which form part of the archives of the shop, held at the Schlesinger Library.

A Sacher torte is a wicked and unrepentant Viennese pastry classic made with layers of chocolate cake filled with jam (usually apricot), enrobed in a chocolate glaze, and heaped with whipped cream. A Linzer torte is a nutty pastry filled with raspberry jam; Miller provides a Window Shop recipe for old times’ sake.

Hail, caller: Mason Hammond died in 2002, but in the way of things, a committee appointed to prepare a “memorial minute” about his life for the records of the faculty presented its minute only this March. Yet Hammond, former Pope professor of the Latin language and literature and master of Kirkland House, was in no danger of falling from memory in the interval. Indeed, as Commencement caller, a gowned ringmaster telling the milling throng what to do, he comes to our mind every June. The committee, chaired by the Reverend Professor Peter J. Gomes, wrote: “For more than 50 years, from 1936 to 1986, with exceptions for war service and leaves of absence, Hammond was Commencement caller, his Brahmin bray of a voice organizing the Commencement procession from the chaos of the Old Yard, the voice not only of Commencement but of Harvard itself. It was a source of great personal satisfaction to Hammond to have called the procession at the Tercentenary celebrations, and then, 50 years later, at the Three Hundred Fiftieth anniversary celebrations.”

Your wooden arm you hold outstretched to shake with passers-by.

Olga Schiffer, who had had cooks to serve her in Vienna, helped launch the restaurant in Cambridge. She wore dirndls to give the place some European ambiance.