



# The Bialy Eaters: The Story of a Bread and a Lost World

*Mimi Sheraton*

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## **The Bialy Eaters: The Story of a Bread and a Lost World** Mimi Sheraton

A famed food writer tells the poignant, personal story of her worldwide search for a Polish town's lost world and the daily bread that sustained it.

A passion for bialys, those chewy, crusty rolls with the toasted onion center, drew Mimi Sheraton to the Polish town of Bialystok to explore the history of this Jewish staple. Carefully wrapping, drying, and packing a dozen American bialys to ward off translation problems, she set out from New York in search of the people who invented this marvelous bread. Instead, she found a place of utter desolation, where turn-of-the-century massacres, followed by the Holocaust, had reduced the number of Jewish residents from fifty thousand to five.

Sheraton became a woman with a mission, traveling to Israel, Paris, Austin, Chicago, Buenos Aires, and New York's Lower East Side to rescue the stories of the scattered Bialystokers. In a bittersweet mix of humor and pathos, she tells of their once-vibrant culture and iconic bread, reviving the exiled memories of those who escaped to the corners of the earth with only their recollections--and one very important recipe--to cherish.

Like Proust's madeleine-inspired reverie, **The Bialy Eaters** transports readers to a lost world through its bakers' most beloved, and humble, offering. A meaningful gift for any Jewish holiday, this tribute to the human spirit will also have as broad an appeal as the bialy itself, delighting everyone who celebrates the astonishing endurance of the simplest traditions.

"On a gray and rainy day in November 1992, I stood on Rynek Kosciuszko, the deserted town square of Bialystok, Poland, and was suddenly overcome by the same shadowy sense of loss that I had felt in the old Jewish quarters of Kazimierz in Cracow and Mikulov in Moravia. To anyone who knows their tragic history, these empty streets appear ominously haunting, especially in the somber twilight of a wet, gray afternoon. The damp air seems charged with echoes of silent voices and ghostly wings and the minor-key melodies of fiddlers on rooftops.

"As a slight chill went through me, I had vague intimations that I was at the beginning of an adventure. I could not guess, however, that what had started as a whimsical search would lead me along a more serious path that I was unable to forsake for seven years. Even now I am not sure my quest is over, nor that I want it to be.

"The story began with my passion for the squashy, crusty, onion-topped bread roll known as a bialy and eaten as an alternative to the bagel. Widely popular in New York City and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere in the

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