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Cupcakes Under Glass

By Elena Ferretti - FOXNews.com

Screw these...closed, and throw them in your purse.

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Thanks to "Sex and the City," if you ask Tiffini Soforenko if she has Elvis in a jar, the answer is yes. Ditto for Arnold Palmer. Open "Elvis" and you'll find a peanut butter cupcake frosted with chocolate banana butter cream, sprinkled with chopped nuts. "Arnold Palmer" is an iced black tea and lemonade cupcake frosted with iced black tea and lemonade butter cream. Just as the "Sex and the City" didn't intend to create a national cupcake craze when its characters commiserated over now iconic Magnolia Bakery cupcakes, Soforenko of Los Angeles' Yummy Cupcakes isn't trying to spark a trend by putting "Elvis" and "Arnold" in a jar. She's acting out of necessity.

"I wanted to send cupcakes to friends and relatives and when I tried, it was a humongous mess," says the incessantly innovative Soforenko, who also enjoyed eating cupcakes while driving, also creating a humongous mess. "I thought, 'I wish I could just throw the cupcake in my purse.'" Then she remembered the Mason jars her grandmother used to fill with her homemade jams and jellies and thought they'd be perfect for shipping cupcakes.

The final version is not a cupcake version of a miniature ship in a bottle. An appealing, idea, but like the ship, a mess to extract. Her cupcake-in-a-jar looks more like "Trifle," the English desert presented in a clear glass bowl with a foot, layered luxuriously with fruit, cake, custard and whipped cream. Soforenko slices her cupcakes into thirds and layers them with frosting and toppings. You eat what you want, save some for later and "throw it in your purse or backpack," she says.

"All cupcakes, all the time" is a way of life for Soforenko who is constantly creating things like "Figgy Pudding" a vanilla bean pudding-filled cupcake, topped with fig butter cream frosting, freshly grated nutmeg and a slice of fresh fig. She's like "a mad scientist" in the kitchen, says her mom and partner, Brogan Faye. And when she takes a break from conjuring up new flavors she turns cupcakes into things they've never been.

She makes "Cupcake Biscotti" by twice-baking a cupcake, slicing it and dipping and drizzling it with chocolate and toppings. Cupcakes, frosting and ganache are blended to form the base of "Cupcake Truffles" which are double-dipped in chocolate and sprinkled with nuts, sugar or cocoa. "Cupcake on a Stick" is also double-dipped and rolled in sprinkles, nuts or chocolate chips. She tosses warm-from-the-oven, frosting-free "Cupcake Mini Bites" in plain or cinnamon sugar. "I keep paper and pen by my bedside because I come up with ideas at all times," says the mother of Logan, 8, Madison, 5 and Bailey, 15 months.

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Soforenko got into the cupcake business because of her children. She had been director of operations for Universal Studios theme parks. "I started at 18 and stayed for 16 years. It was all I knew and I loved it." She wanted

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more time with Logan and "more control over my life, my time and my future." So she left Universal and stayed home for a few years. On a trip to New York she bought "one of the most expensive cupcakes" she had ever had, and realized that there wasn't anything comparable in L.A.

"I've always baked. I'm a foodie but not fanatical," she says. Yummy Cupcakes wasn't borne out of an "extreme love for baking. It was, 'Wow, I think I can do this well, I think this would be good business.'" Her husband Nik and her mother became her partners.

Soforenko had only one competitor when she started baking just a few years ago. She now has 42 employees, offers 185 flavors, 47 vegan varieties and 19 daily flavors which can be mixed and matched to-order in her Burbank and Santa Monica bakeries. She supplies the Disney Soda Fountain Studio Store at the El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood and is opening a Brentwood bakery in early May.

Just about everything inspires Soforenko from single ingredients like the chilies in her "Chocolate Chili" to eponymous tributes to pop-retro classics like "Devil Dogs" and "Snowballs." "Old School" is a decadent homage to chocolate Hostess cupcakes and come in orange as well. Remember those? She and Logan share Elvis' birthday. "Arnold Palmer" is for her Mom, an avid golfer. And former bartender Nik advises on cocktail- cupcakes like "Hurricane," "Cosmopolitan" and "Fuzzy Navel." "Tomato Soup Cake" is for her grandmother, "Monkey Love" and "Pumpkin Doodle" for her kids.

Her flavors fire the imagination but Soforenko says her ingredients make the difference. "Most people are used to cakes and frosting made with oil and shortening. That's what's in most cake mixes," she says. "If I'm charging \$3.25 I'm going to give you a cupcake that's better than anything you can make at home." She says they use the best chocolate, only real butter, ranch-raised eggs and no preservatives.

The United States is so cupcake-obsessed that it's hard to believe that they're virtually unknown elsewhere. McDonald's introduced cupcakes to Germany just last week with four varieties, chocolate, vanilla, strawberry and cappuccino.

When you're trying to impress the people who invented Black Forest Cake and Stollen, ho-hum chocolate and plain old vanilla may not impress. Perhaps one of Soforenko's vanilla, maple, and cinnamon "French Toast" cupcakes, or a hearty Guinness-infused cupcake with a stout glaze and stout whipped cream would be more suitable. Surely Germany's bakers would give us mad props if these were our cupcake ambassadors.

Especially if we shipped them in jars.

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