

Yorkton Stories

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Food we love

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The food we love. Ah, yes, food. Long one of my favorite interests, and it shows. But consumed in moderation, that's okay. Or so I tell myself. My interest in food goes back to my years as a boy in Netherlands, where standard fare is much like what we used to say about English cuisine. Boil everything till it's mush, throw out the cooking water which has all the good stuff in it, and enjoy. Yes, there were some dishes that I still crave. We were eating kale in the 1950s before anyone in North America got on that bandwagon. It was boiled so the leaves were tender, then chopped very finely because whatever variety we had at home was akin to shoe leather and toughness, and then mixed with mashed potatoes. It was always eaten with smoked sausage. Kale in Dutch is boerenkool or farmer's cabbage. Smoked sausage is boerenworst or farmer's sausage, obviously made for each other. And there was the complete antithesis to bland food, Indonesian dishes, consisting mainly of a well-spiced rice dish in our house, which also included cubed pork roast, egg, and a dried veggie mix, which included spices and was reconstituted in boiling water before being added. We also ate it with shredded cabbage and onion, which was fried for several hours, by which time the liquid had long evaporated and the cabbage and onions were well fried, providing a mild antidote to the spices.

Why was Indonesian food so prevalent in the Netherlands? Well, Indonesia was a Dutch colony until the Second World War. And after the war, most of the Dutch who lived there, including a spinster aunt who was a nurse there for decades, came back and brought the recipes and food with them. It was popular then and still is. If you go to the Netherlands, you will find a restaurant in almost every town that serves rijsttafel or rice table, your table literally loaded with nasi goreng, the fried rice, and multiple small side dishes and meats.

In Yorkton, I was introduced to German dishes made by my mother-in-law, Anne Liebrecht, and carried on by her daughter, my wife Faye. Anne and August were of second or third generation German background, farmed at Rhein, and made the kind of food that most mothers handed down. Nothing fancy, but dishes intended to feed many at low cost. They were from farm backgrounds in Germany, with August's family having moved from what is now southern Poland and Ukraine, then the southern part of the Prussian Empire, to Nebraska in the mid-1800s, and from there in the very early 1900s to what is now the Rhein area of Saskatchewan, where land was free for homesteaders.

August's father and uncle, Faye's grandfather and great uncle, made the trek from Nebraska to this part of the country in the spring, cross-country with a horse and wagon, no roads, no landmarks to guide them. When they arrived in the Rhein area, a half hour northeast of Yorkton in

present-day Saskatchewan, they built a sod house because once you staked the homestead, it had to be occupied. One of the brothers stayed the winter. The other went back in the fall so he could bring the rest of the family the following spring. The two brothers were 13 and 14 years of age at the time.

Our connection to German food also came from Herb and Amy Windt, who in the late 1970s and into the 80s and 90s owned and operated the Gladstone Inn on the corner of Broadway and Gladstone and Yorkton, now long closed after the last occupants, a Sushi restaurant, moved out. Amy was the cook, and Herb looked after the front of the house, later joined by their son Axel. The Gladstone Inn may be the last really fine dining room that Yorkton had. Not to play down the food available in Yorkton these days, but there is a difference between really fine dining, accompanied by very personal service and dishes not available elsewhere, and the good food available today. I suspect that decline is a result of the cost of providing both the food and the service, and the gradual fading of the old dining tradition, replaced over the years by more common and more standard dishes and bar food, and the need for speed as people don't linger for an evening over dinner.

Back in my newspaper and freelance days, I also wrote a regular food and recipe column for several of the local weekly newspapers. That is now 30 or more years ago, but I still get the occasional comment about a recipe someone saved all those years and still uses. In this podcast, we will talk about some of our favorite dishes, both family food and local recipes collected over the years. Depending on response, this may become a semi-regular topic because we have quite an extensive recipe file. All the recipes we talk about here can be found, downloaded, or printed at www.yorktonstories.ca in case any of them strike your fancy and you want to try them.

Butterballs or butter dumplings. Or as best as I can do in German, butterklosse, little balls that we put in noodle soup.

First, butterklosse or butter dumplings, which in our family have always been known as butterballs or butterglaze. In Netherlands and still now, we often make chicken noodle soup with small meatballs in them, basically chicken stock, thin noodles, and meatballs. But equally tasty and filling are butterballs. Kind of the poor man's meatballs, I guess. Simple ingredients, but a bit tricky to make.

Butterklosse is basically breadcrumbs, melted butter or margarine, boiling milk, eggs, and seasoning. That is all mixed together and formed into small balls, which are then used immediately, or when a big batch is made in our home, put on a baking sheet and individually frozen to be transferred to a big bag so as many as needed to be taken out anytime. The tricky part of the making is that the amount of egg that goes into them needs to be just right. Too little, then they fall apart and you end up with breadcrumb soup, which, by the way, is also a thing. Look it up online.

Towards the end of the mixing process, eggs are added one or two at a time. A few balls are made and dropped into boiling water to make sure they hold together. When the mixture is right, they will hold, keep their shape, and float to the top to indicate that they are done. Once they pass that test, the rest of the butter balls are formed. The recipe on our website will make 150 to 200 of

them, depending on size. Feel free to adjust the ingredients in the proper proportions to reduce the quantity. But don't take any shortcuts with the making of them.

And making them really isn't that difficult. Our seven-year-old great-grandson learned to make them last year from great-grandma. And this summer, on a visit, he was joined by his almost three-year-old brother. The older one and his classmates, then in grade one, were given a project at Thanksgiving last October to draw a picture of what they are most thankful for. His was a stickman drawing of him at the table with a soup bowl in front of him and a scribbled and totally misspelled caption that he was most thankful for butterglaze. If his little brother was talking at the time, he would have totally agreed. The torch has been passed to another generation.

A word of caution, though. Because her granddaughter only eats gluten-free food, we tried to make the butterballs with gluten-free breadcrumbs. It was a no-go. In fact, it was a disaster. The gluten-free crumbs, while they may work for some purposes, do not absorb the butter and milk and egg as regular breadcrumbs do, and they will not hold together. Sorry, those who are gluten-free, but we have not found a way to make that work as much as we want it to.

Gladstone Inn house dressing. A salad dressing a little different than most, in that it blends in boiled eggs, unlike mayonnaise, which is made with raw eggs.

The Gladstone Inn, which I mentioned, made a very distinct house dressing, unlike any we had had before, and which we still make. It is a salad dressing, but our grandson-in-law also uses it on his steaks. The recipe originated with Jeanne Milliken, then the wife of a local lawyer, and she passed it on to Amy. Amy, understandably, guarded it closely because it was their signature salad dressing. But we did eventually receive the recipe from her son, Axel. It's easy to make, but you need a blender. If my memory is correct, the herb that was in the original recipe was tarragon. And I don't know when it was changed or who made the change, but we have long made it with basil. I would suggest that you can't go wrong with using whatever your favorite herb is, or use a mixture of several.

Kroketten or Dutch meat croquettes. Deep fried, savory, good for a meal, good as an appetizer.

Meanwhile, back in Netherlands, they were and still are cranking out kroketten or croquettes. They are cylinder-shaped or round, filled with a very stiff seasoned white sauce and meat, then rolled in flour, egg, and breadcrumbs and deep fried. You may want to try them in the air fryer. We haven't, and I can't guarantee that it will work, but it might be worth a try.

In Netherlands, kroketten are widely available in vending machines in train stations, downtown areas, anywhere there may be hungry people. Insert your coins or credit card, open a little window, and take out your kroketten. They now also come in varieties with added spices and herbs, but we stick with the basic ones for which the recipe is provided.

In case you're wondering, we have also tried to make these with gluten-free flour and crumbs, with the same disastrous results as the butterballs.

When made in cylinder shape, about four inches long and an inch in diameter, they can be eaten out of hand and usually dipped in Dijon or coarse European-style mustard. I like mine with a

mixture of mayonnaise and Dijon. Or they are split in half the long way and eaten on a slice of good bread. The round version is called bitterballen in Dutch, which has nothing to do with the taste we call bitter. In Dutch, bitters are cocktails, alcoholic drinks. The bitterballen are served as appetizers with bitters or beer. No idea why that shape, the round shape, is for appies, other than you can make more out of a batch, so they go further.

Irish soda bread. This may be the easiest bread you've ever made. It may also be the best bread you've ever made.

In the late 1980s, among about six Yorkton businesses we owned or co-owned at the time, was a bistro style restaurant on Second Avenue in the space now occupied by Wanders Sweet Discoveries, a very good bakery offering European-style pastries as well as light meals, coffee, and tea.

Our restaurant was called the Yum Yum Tree, and with every meal we would provide a slice of Irish soda bread. And there were often requests for extra slices. There's really no bread more easy to make than Irish soda bread. Throw everything together, don't overmix, bake, and done. Slice it, toast it or not, spread it with butter and or whatever else you like. Good Seville orange marmalade is my favorite, and that's it. Make it in a bread loaf pan for slicing, or make it in a flat baking dish for dishing out chunks. Either works, but you may have to reduce the baking time, which is given for a loaf pan in the recipe on the website. Of course, just stick in a toothpick, and regardless of what pan you're using, if it comes out clean, it's done.

Sulawesi pork, from an island in Indonesia, part of the Indonesian food that we love to make.

And now Indonesian food. Indonesia, located south of the Philippines, between Malaysia and Australia, is a vast country consisting of more than 18,000 islands, about a third of them inhabited, with a population of almost 300 million. With a population and landmass that spread out, it is no wonder that many parts of the country have their own cultures, including the food they eat.

I first heard of the island of Sulawesi, north of the main island and just east of Borneo, when I was learning about Southeast Asian food. In the 1970s, I subscribed to the Time-Life Foods of the World books. Each month I would get a book loaded with photos of food from a specific part of the world, together with a spiral-bound recipe book. I read them cover to cover, read all the recipes, and tried those that sounded like they might be to our taste. We no longer have the books. They went out the door somewhere along the way, likely when we downsized for a move to our condo 13 years ago. We still have the favored recipes, including this one.

This recipe is for Sulawesi pork. Sulawesi is a large island, part of Indonesia, and these days Islam is the predominant religion, followed by Protestant Christianity and Hindu. I don't know if Islam was the main religion back in the 1970s and 80s when I first ran across this recipe, since Muslim people don't eat pork, or perhaps only the non-Muslim population ate this particular recipe. We make this in large batches. Feel free to reduce the recipe on the website proportionately, and then freeze it in portions to be taken out in barbecue season or put under the broiler in the oven in winter.

Like all recipes, you may want to tweak this to your taste. If you're not a fan of hot peppers, don't worry about the jalapenos that are included. They don't lend a lot of heat to the final product, but are important for the marinating and the final taste. You want to use pork shoulder, as called for in the recipe. It has a coarser grain and more fatty, which allows the marinade to work its way into the meat. We have tried it with denser cuts of pork, like pork loin or leg roast. It's not the same. Pork shoulder, which is also generally cheaper, is by far the best choice. And don't trim off all the fat. It too will be marinated and broil or barbecue nicely, ending up a bit like marinated piggy puffs.

Limes and salt are the essential ingredients here, since they infuse the meat and basically start the so-called cooking process before you actually cook it. You'll know that the proportions of marinade and meat are right when, after marinating, the meat has started to turn whitish, as if it was cooking. The salt and the acid in the limes do that, while the limes, onion, and fresh ginger root add tons of flavor. But be sure to do the marinating in a large glass or plastic bowl. The salt and acid will attack any metal bowl, changing both the bowl and the flavor of the meat.

A pocket of dough with a filling of cabbage, onion, and meat. A meal all in one package.

And finally, for this podcast about food, bierocks, B-I-E-R-O-C-K-S. Pockets of bread or bun dough filled with fried cabbage, onion, and ground beef. Or, I suppose, any other meat of your choice.

Every culture in the world has a food that is contained in pastry or similar, eaten out of hand, supplying basic nutrition. All of those, including bierocks from what is now Germany and Eastern Europe, grew out of the need for people to have an all-in-one food item that they could take with them on travels or work or farming or herding cattle that wouldn't spoil because it was already cooked and baked and could be eaten hot or cold. Think of Italian calzone, think of Spanish empanadas, think of Czech kolaches, think of South Asian samosas, think of Jewish knish, think of Mexican tamales, think of Greek spanakopita, and more.

Bierocks are in the same category. We provide a dough recipe but use any favorite dough recipe, whether it be bread or sweet bun dough. Try to avoid refrigerated or frozen pre-made dough, which is much harder to work with. It just doesn't roll out and hold its shape as well, we find, but the choice is yours to experiment with.

As in many of our recipes, if you're going to go through the work of making dough and the filling and stuffing and baking the bierocks, make a large batch and freeze them. Warm them up slowly in the oven, preferably not the microwave, cut into them, slather them with butter, and enjoy.

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Butterballs or butter dumplings

German: butter kloss

8.5 cups very fine breadcrumbs
1.5 cups melted butter
3 cups boiling milk
2 tsp allspice
2 tsp salt
8 eggs (or more or less)

This will make 150 to 200 butterballs. Adjust the recipe proportionately for other amounts.

If making breadcrumbs from your own dry bread, make sure it is very dry. Best to toast the bread pieces in a slow oven or toast slices of bread in a toaster.

Make the breadcrumbs very fine, best done in a blender or food processor. Do not use panko breadcrumbs. If bought breadcrumbs are used and they are coarse, process them to make them very fine.

Mix the breadcrumbs, melted butter, boiling milk, allspice and salt.

Let the mixture cool completely.

Mix together five or six eggs and add to the dry mix.

Make a couple of small balls, about one inch (2 cm) in diameter, and add to a pot of boiling water. If the balls fall apart in the water, add one or two more mixed eggs to the mixture and incorporate well.

Test again in boiling water, and continue this process until the balls hold together in boiling water.

Make all the mixture into small balls, which can be placed on a baking sheet covered in parchment paper and frozen, then stored in a bag or container to be used as needed to make soup.

Add the butterballs to hard-boiling noodle soup, or any broth-based soup of your choice. Simmer the soup until the butterballs are cooked. They will float to the top when ready.

Gladstone Inn house salad dressing

2 hard-boiled eggs
1 clove garlic, chopped or sliced
1/2 tsp ground pepper
1/4 tsp salt
1 tsp basil
1 tsp Keene's dry mustard
1/4 cup vinegar
3/4 cup canola oil
1 or two onions, thinly sliced

Place boiled eggs, garlic, pepper, salt, basil, dry mustard and vinegar in a blender and blend until completely combined.

With the blender running, drizzle in the oil so it coagulates and creates a thicker dressing.

Place the dressing in a container and add the sliced onions.

Let stand overnight or longer, and serve with or without the onion rings, depending on taste.

Will keep up to two weeks refrigerated.

Kroketten

Dutch meat croquettes

Meat

1.5 cups of finely crumbled and cooked hamburger or finely chopped cooked roast beef

White sauce

3 tbsp butter or margarine

3 tbsp flour

1 cup milk

Coating

Flour

Egg

Breadcrumbs

Oil for deepfrying

The meat should be very finely crumbled or chopped. Make a basic white sauce as follows, or use your own recipe and judgement.

Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat.

When the butter is melted, add the flour.

Stir to combine, and keep stirring to form a smooth roux.

Cook the roux, while stirring, for several minutes over medium-low heat to get rid of the raw flour taste, but take off the heat before the butter separates from the roux.

Warm the milk in the microwave or on the stovetop until warm, not boiling.

Still stirring the roux, slowly add the milk while stirring to combine the two; continue until all the milk is incorporated.

Turn up the heat and allow the sauce to come to a slow boil.

Continue to cook the white sauce while stirring until it is smooth and very thick.

When the sauce is ready, add salt and pepper to taste, and a pinch (no more than 1/8 teaspoon) of nutmeg.

Add the meat and stir to combine.

You should have a mixture that is approximately half sauce and half meat.

Cover and let the mixture cool to room temperature.

Spread the mixture in a pan or dish large enough so it makes a layer about an inch or so thick. Cover with clingwrap and refrigerate until cold, several hours or overnight.

Heat the oil to 325 degrees F.

Prepare three plates: one with flour, one with a beaten egg, one with breadcrumbs.

When cold, scoop up enough of the very stiff mixture to form a roll about four inches long and an inch in diameter.

Roll it in the flour, making sure it is coated all around, then in the egg, then in the breadcrumbs.

When all the kroketten are been made, fry them two or three at a time in the heated oil, until the outside is nicely browned. They do not have to cook inside, they just need to be heated through.

Serve with Dijon mustard or other favourite condiment.

Variations:

- The small log-shapes are called kroketten. They can also be formed into small balls about 1 to 1.5 inches across, called bitterballen, a Dutch word that refers to "bitters", or drinks, with which they are traditionally served.
- If you prefer, substitute finely chopped cooked chicken for the beef.
- You can also add a bit of curry powder to the sauce instead of nutmeg, for a completely different flavour.

Irish soda bread

3 cups whole wheat flour
1 tsp baking soda
1 tbsp baking powder
1 1/2 tsp salt
1 3/4 cups buttermilk
2 eggs
3 tbs canola oil

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F.

When the oven is hot, mix the dry ingredients in a large bowl and make a well in the middle of the mixture.

In a separate bowl mix together the buttermilk, eggs and oil.

Pour the liquid mixture into the well in the dry ingredients and combine quickly and lightly into a batter. Do not overmix.

Oil and flour a standard loaf pan, or line with parchment paper or it will be very difficult to get the loaf out of the pan. Spoon into the pan and smooth the top.

Bake for 70 to 80 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the centre comes out clean.

Sulawesi pork

3 kg boneless pork shoulder roast
4 jalapeno peppers, seeds removed
2 large onions
2 3-inch pieces of fresh ginger, peeled and chopped
4 whole peeled limes, or cut the limes in half and use all the juice and pulp
4 tbsp kosher salt
1/4 cup water

Cut pork shoulder roast into strips or cubes, about 3/4 to 1 inch thick, and place in large plastic or glass bowl.

Blend together the peppers, onions, ginger, limes, salt and water.

Pour the marinade mixture over the pork pieces and mix well so all the meat is coated.

Cover and let stand at room temperature for at least four hours, or overnight in the fridge. When ready, the meat will have started to appear cooked or white as the result of the marinade action of the limes and salt.

Preheat the barbeque or the oven boiler.

With your hands, remove as much of the marinade as possible, but do not rinse.

Barbeque or broil the pieces separately or on skewers, depending on size.

The meat will appear crispy or burned in places from the marinade that remained on it, but that is the best part.

Notes:

- The amount of salt may be reduced, and the amount of lime may be increased to taste, depending on diet and personal preference. But the combination of those two ingredients is what tenderizes the pork so both are essential to the recipe.
- If the mixture when blended is not liquid, add a bit more water.
- The jalapeno peppers assist the tenderizing but do not make the meat taste "hot".

Bierocks

Dough

1 cup milk, warmed to 80F
1/4 cup white sugar or Splenda
2 1/4 tsp active dry yeast (1 package)
4 cup unbleached all-purpose flour
2 tbsp salted butter, melted and cooled
1 egg, beaten
3/4 tsp salt

Or use your own favourite dough or bun recipe.

Filling

1/2 lb ground beef (85-90% lean)
1/2 onion, diced
3 cup shredded cabbage (about ¼ of a medium head)
1/4 tsp salt
1/4 tsp ground black pepper

1 tbsp milk

Dough

In a large mixing bowl, mix milk and sugar to dissolve the sugar. Sprinkle yeast over the milk mixture and let stand for 5-10 minutes, until the yeast softens and starts to foam.

Whisk the mixture to combine and whisk in 2 cups of flour.

Add melted butter, egg, and salt. Whisk to incorporate.

Stir in the remaining flour a quarter cup at a time, using only as much as you need to get the dough to come together. Turn the dough onto your counter and knead, for 10 to 15 min, until a soft, smooth dough forms, adding flour as needed. (Your finished dough should be tacky, but not stick to your hand or your kneading surface.)

Shape dough into a ball, place it in a greased bowl, turning to coat the dough. Cover the dough loosely with plastic wrap or a damp towel and place in a warm, draft-free place to rise until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.

Filling

While the dough rises, make your filling. In a large non-stick frying pan, brown meat over medium-high until mostly cooked, 5 to 7 minutes.

Drain as much of the grease from the pan as you can, while not losing the meat from the pan. Return the pan to the heat and add the onions. Cook 2 to 3 minutes, until they begin to soften.

Add cabbage and cook 7 to 10 minutes or longer, until cabbage is tender. Remove filling from heat and season with salt and pepper.

The filling can be made in advance and cooled, which makes it easier to work with.

Assembly

Knock back the risen dough and turn it onto your work surface.

Divide dough into 8 balls (roughly 3 oz each). Flatten each ball to a circle 4 to 5 inches in diameter. (If the dough springs back, flatten as much as you can, cover, and let the dough rest for 3 to 5 min before attempting to flatten further.)

Alternately, roll out the dough into a large rectangle or square and cut into eight equal-size squares.

Spoon 2 large tablespoons of filling onto the center of each piece of dough, leaving the edges clear.

If using round dough, lightly moisten the edges, fold over and seal. If using squares of dough, moisten the edges and bring each corner into the middle and seal.

Place the shaped bierocks on a greased baking sheet and let rise, covered 30 to 45 minutes, until roughly one and a half times their original size.

During the last 10 minutes of rising time preheat your oven to 375 degrees F.

Brush the bierocks lightly with milk and bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until golden brown and hollow sounding when tapped.

Remove from oven and let cool on a wire rack.

These rolls freeze well after baking. To eat, just take them out of the freezer in the morning and they will thaw by lunchtime. Warm them in the oven to heat them through.