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Baking up some boyhood memories

To describe someone who has "moved around a lot," the French have an interesting saying that translates roughly as "eating more than one kind of loaf."

Certainly, one doesn't have to travel far to experience the amazing diversity of bread. During my earlier life as a corporate executive involved in international business, I encountered loaves of all different types - often reflecting different climates, cultures and traditions.



Give Thanks
Gerald Mathes

DELIVERING THE BREAD

But prior to those experiences, I remember as a boy growing up in a small village in England how the baker came to our house each week. He parked his van at the end of our long driveway and trudged up to our front door with a big basket on his arm, full of different loaves, each one beckoning to be bought.

He had a floured-top farmhouse round; a caraway-encrusted long loaf of pungent rye; a black treacle bread (actually an Irish specialty); a pan loaf of white milk bread with which tea sandwiches (cucumber, watercress or tomato) were made, and a little loaf of brown bread with the name Hovis in relief along the side. That was my favorite.

Later in life, in my teenage years, I spent summer vacations in Germany. There I fell in love with a profusion of rye

breads. In color, they ranged from light brown to pitch black. Many with a crust studded with whole grains. We enjoyed them for breakfast with cheese and various types of wurst, again at lunch time with a mixed salad, and at dinner with the entrée.

Each time, bread was central to the meal. It was a simple but celebrated component.

My favorite German bread was the Schwarzenwalder Bauerbrot, or Black Forest peasant bread. It usually came as a huge seven-pound loaf and we would cut off hunks to eat with hearty Bavarian soup. To this day, Germans have a passion for flavorful breads.

The same is true in most of the countries of Europe. And I was amused when I read the other day that Darko Milicic (the Yugoslavian basketball star who may well soon join the Detroit Pistons) said to a reporter that he loves the idea of playing in the United States, "but I do miss real bread."

Speaking of sports, I remember a while ago sportscaster Frank Beckman came by our bakery in downtown Rochester and his eyes lit up when he saw that we make authentic Volkornbrot.

Beckman told me that when he came home from school as a boy, his grandmother made little sandwiches with this dark, dense rye bread - sprinkling sugar on the buttered squares. He looked forward to re-creating that treasured memory. (And it should be noted that Frank has grown into a strapping fellow!)

WONDERFUL BREADS

In terms of my own experi-

ences, a school trip to the Loire valley gave me my first love affair with some of the wonderful breads of France.

I still have a photo of myself at 14, looking very English in a school blazer and tie, holding a baguette over my shoulder like a rifle (unrealistically thinking I could pass as a Frenchman!)

Later on I would return to France on several occasions - discovering the awesome array of shapes, textures and tastes of regional breads. In every town, magnificent golden loaves - indigenous to that area - contribute to the great culinary heritage of France. At The Give Thanks Bakery we create some of these, from time to time, to add to the visual appeal of the loaves we make every day.

One of the most majestic of the regional breads is the couronne, which originated in the Bordeaux region. Noel Black, our head baker, skillfully makes the couronne by shaping eight or nine equal-sized rounds of dough, attached to form a ring.

In the center, a thin collar of dough covers half the rounds creating a lovely contrast in color.

When baked, it's a beautiful example of the baker's craft and snapping it apart yields a collection of dinner rolls, guaranteed to win admiration.

If you'd like to enjoy a couronne, head for Bordeaux. Or downtown Rochester. Given a little notice, we'll be happy to make one for you.

Gerald Mathes is the owner of Give Thanks Bakery in Rochester. Visit the bakery's Web site at www.givethanksbakery.com or call (248) 601-1542.

Wild rice on the side or as main dish

WILD RICE ATHENA

This mouth watering, Mediterranean-inspired recipe makes a delectable side dish or a light, meatless main dish.

- 3/4 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1/2 cup California wild rice
- 1/2 cup jasmine or other long-grain white rice
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced or pressed
- 1 6.5 ounce jar marinated artichoke hearts, chopped, reserving liquid
- 1 tablespoon minced, fresh oregano or 1 teaspoon dried

- oregano
- 2 teaspoons finely grated lemon peel
- 1 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 1/2 cup thinly sliced green onions

In a 4- to 5-quart saucepan, bring broth to a boil over high heat. Add wild rice; reduce heat to low and cover tightly. Simmer until grains begin to open and feel tender to bite, about 45 minutes. Stir in white rice. Cover tightly and simmer until tender to bite and liquid is absorbed, about 20 to 25 more minutes. Whisk wild and white rice cook, heat olive oil in a 10- to 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat.

Add onion, garlic, artichoke

hearts, oregano and lemon peel. Stir often, over medium heat, until heated through, about 5 minutes. When rice is done, remove from heat and gently stir in onion-artichoke mixture, feta cheese and green onions. Serve immediately.

Makes 6 to 8 side dish or 4 main dish servings.

Nutritional information per serving: 247 calories; 8.1 g protein, 34.2 carbohydrates; 2.3 g fiber; 9.1 g fat; 19 mg cholesterol; 565 mg sodium.

Recipe courtesy of California Wild Rice Advisory Board.

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