

In Big Valley, Half-Moon Pies And Bean Soup Still Made The Old-Fashioned Way

Gail Strock
Mifflin Co. Correspondent

BELLEVILLE (Mifflin Co.) — One of the most interesting things about our world is the diversity — diversity in geography, climate, people, cultures, and food.

Those who travel know the joy of discovering the uniqueness in a given area. But in America, to find the unique flavor, a person needs to go beyond the hamburger, fries, and blue jeans to find maple syrup in Maine, hot peppers in Texas, and Kringle pastries in Wisconsin.

Not only does food vary state to state but also from region to region, and even valley to valley.

Visitors to the Belleville area in Big Valley, Mifflin County, will not find nuggets, fries, and a drink

at a drive-through restaurant. What they will find is good old-fashioned cooking — chicken pot pie, homemade bread, bean soup, bread pudding, and half moon pies. Some of these foods, like chicken pot pie, are found throughout central Pa. Others are not, like half moon pies.

Ethel Yoder of Belleville makes half moon pies the old-fashioned way — the way she learned from her mother who learned from her mother. "We used to bake three to four dozen every Saturday morning. The men came in from the barn after they'd thrown their hay down for the weekend and eat the half moon pies, which were still warm. There weren't too many left 'till Monday morning," Mrs. Yoder said.

In short, a half moon pie is a circle of pie pastry filled with apple snitz, folded over, then sealed and baked. To make the pie dough, Mrs. Yoder uses lard, flour, and water. She takes a ball of dough the size of a large goose egg, rolls it into a circle, and marks holes in half. This will be the top after folded. At this time, approximately three to four tablespoons of apple snitz is placed on the dough. The top half is folded over and the edges are pressed together to seal. Mrs. Yoder uses her pie wheel around the edges for an even finish. The pies are baked for 45 minutes at 400 degrees.

Mrs. Yoder's apple snitz consists of cooked dried apples, sugar, and cinnamon. "I don't measure my sugar. I really don't make mine as sweet as some people," she said.

Mrs. Yoder has been drying her own apples ever since her son J. Loren bought her a food dryer years ago. This dryer sits on Mrs. Yoder's old cook stove — the one she and her husband "started housekeeping with." The eight trays in the dryer hold about 1/4 bushel of apples. "Every morning I get up and fill it. My husband helps to turn the apples (on the tray) and keeps the fire going."

By the next morning, the apples are dry. Mrs. Yoder dried 14 bushels of apples last year.

She said, "My daughter Donna in Juniata County loves the dried apples. Her children take them to school in their lunches."

"I like to cook," Mrs. Yoder states. She went on to explain another favorite food — bean soup. "My mother always soaked the beans, but I use those," she said as she pointed to a 40-ounce can of Great Northern white beans. She heats the beans and a quart of milk, then pours this over bread chunks (about 6 slices). Seasoned with salt and pepper, bean soup was one of her family's favorites.

"When I lived at home, bean soup was always our Saturday dinner. It was always a habit. You'd bake half moon pies every Saturday morning, and eat bean soup for dinner."

Mrs. Yoder and her husband, Harvey, farmed while raising five children. "It's wonderful for a family," she says of life on a farm. "We really liked it. It was a job, but we really enjoyed it — everything about the farm," she said. "I still like to go through the cow stable."

After she and her husband retired from farming, Mrs. Yoder worked at the Friendship Book Store for 10 years, and then cooked at the Charolais Restaurant in Belleville for eight years.

Mrs. Yoder's hobbies include piecing quilts, braiding rugs, gardening, and canning. While her family was still at home, Mrs. Yoder would can as much as 100 quarts of applesauce, 75-80 quarts of peaches, and 50-60 quarts of beef. "I could get 20 quarts in the big iron kettle that I heated wash water in," she said.

Over coffee and sticky buns, Mrs. Yoder discussed the many changes over the years. "The farmers worked hard long ago, but I don't think they had the stress on themselves. I think that's a lot of our problems nowadays. We have all these conveniences, and if one switch goes wrong, we have prob-



Ethel Yoder of Belleville uses a food dryer to make dried apples for apple snitz. Apple snitz is then used to make a local Big Valley favorite — half moon pies.



Ethel Yoder of Belleville uses a food dryer her son J. Loren bought years ago to dry apples for her half moon pies. The food dryer sits on top of Mrs. Yoder's cook stove — the one she and her husband started housekeeping with after they were married. Last year Mrs. Yoder dried 14 bushels of apples.

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As for the microwave, she said, "I'm having a hard time getting used to it. I've cooked for so long one way. But I use it more than I used to."

Maybe Mrs. Yoder's favorite "recipes" could be adapted for the microwave, but for now, she can enjoy her family's favorite foods the way she always has — the good old-fashioned way.



Mrs. Ethel Yoder's Belleville home has both memories from her childhood and modern conveniences. Though the microwave "takes some getting used to," Mrs. Yoder enjoys being surrounded by memories from home, such as the lunch pail her mother carried to school — a tin bucket with blue and white enamel swirled on the outside.



Great-grandson Chase Kuhns looks on as Mrs. Yoder and her daughter-in-law Wanda display a quilt Mrs. Yoder tied. Wanda and husband J. Loren will be taking the quilt to Germany as a wedding present.

*Homestead
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