



Mary Jean Matsche and Betty Pischke pack grophens for annual sale

Bakers epitomize loyalty

By MARY ANN DEDOW of the Northwestern
Try telling the women of Sacred Heart Parish, Oshkosh, that you've had your share of volunteer work after two, or five, or even 10 years. Try explaining that someone else should take her turn, or even that the church ought to invent new ways of fund-raising.

Sacred Heart women have been making the same doughnuts since 1922. Some of the volunteers are 75 or 80 years old, and they have been standing over hot stoves frying the Bohemian "grophens" for 30 or 40 years without missing a year.

At one time, the women would have begun mixing at 4 a.m. and had their sale at noon. Now they begin at midnight. Tressie Kaufman, 84, is one of those indefatigable people who worked all night to produce this year's batches.

Grophens are a "High-Holder" tradition, and the High-Holder, for readers who are not natives of Oshkosh, are a select group of residents with roots in Bohemia. Their grandparents settled on the south side of Oshkosh around the beginning of the 20th century. Most worked in the lumber mills of the city.

A certain disdain on the part of Oshkosh residents from other nationalities caused the "High-Holder" to close ranks among themselves. They spoke a German dialect and took pride both in their work ethic and in their close family ties.

The best of their traditions, including the breads for which they were famed, have survived to this day.

When the Sacred Heart crew say they have slowed up on the amount of grophens they make, that is an understatement. In June, they deep-fried 1,600 doughnuts, all between midnight and 8 a.m. on the day of the church picnic. Of course, comments Betty Pischke, who is currently in charge of the baking. "One year we made 3,000."

Advertising is strictly word-of-mouth but the grophen tradition is so entrenched that people line

up for blocks waiting to buy a batch. Thirty minutes after the "sale" begins, all 1,000 are gone.

The baking went through a "sophisticated" phase in which the women used an electric mixer, but they have returned to hand-mixing. One batch produces 80 grophens.

"We find the consistency of the dough is better in small amounts and if we mix by hand," explains Mrs. Pischke. It is assembly-line work. One measures ingredients, another "proofs" the yeast, some mix and some cut the doughnuts. There are workers assigned as dishwashers.

After cutting, the grophens are hand-shaped by pulling the edges so that an indentation appears in the center. When the grophens are dropped into hot fat, the edges puff up, accenting the center.

"It's an art when you learn to make them just right," says Mrs. Pischke.

A grophen is a special kind of doughnut. The resemblance stops with "round." It is rich but not sweet, except for the taste of raisins which are always placed inside.

Grophens taste best when warm but, like all breads, can be resurrected to fresh taste by placing in the microwave for a few seconds.

Always place a piece of paper towel or napkin under grophens, or any bread, in the microwave. Breads tend to sweat and will become soggy without the paper to collect the moisture.

All the ingredients for grophen-making are donated by members of the parish. The enormity of this can best be described by listing some requirements for 1,600 doughnuts:

145 pounds of flour, 22 pounds of raisins, 10 dozen eggs, 5 pounds of yeast, 10 pounds of shortening, 100 pounds of vegetable shortening for deep-frying.

Profits from the sales are donated to the parish. Sacred Heart women will hold another grophen sale Sunday, Oct. 26, beginning at approximately 8 a.m. Grophens may be purchased in batches of a dozen or half-dozen.

Improved products aid bread-making art

Yeast baking is certainly an art, but no matter how skillful a person is, the right ingredients are needed to create a success. It also helps to work with an experienced baker.

Betty Pischke, 740 Bismarck Ave., Oshkosh, is now an accomplished baker, but she recalls her first experience in baking bread. She had asked her older cousin to teach her how to make old-fashioned German rye bread. The cousin came to her house and helped her prepare the dough.

"Now I'm going home for about an hour and a half," announced the cousin. "We'll just let the dough sit in this bowl, and it will rise meanwhile."

Betty peered at the dough about every five minutes. Rye dough is heavy, and nothing seemed to be happening. "I decided the yeast must be too old, so I ran to the store and asked for the freshest yeast they had. I stirred up a new batch of dough. Then I threw the first batch in the garbage so my cousin wouldn't know what happened."

The cousin returned, and the dough had risen high above the pan. They baked the bread with great success.

Later that afternoon, Mrs. Pischke's grade-school age son came running into the house. "Mom, there's something growing in our garbage can!" It was, of course, the original dough reacting as it was supposed to.

Mrs. Pischke also recalls a recipe contest she won in the 1960s at what was then Stengel's Super Valu store on Sawyer Street. Her recipe was for Bohemian grophens. The store's bakers thought they would create their own grophens to sell, but after a few unsuccessful attempts, they called to ask if she would come to the store "and show them how."

Mrs. Pischke advises yeast bakers "not to fuss" with the dough. Like pastry, bread dough may end up

today if a person fusses over it and keeps adding flour. The food industry in recent years has offered several improved wares for home bread-bakers. Since the late 1970s, homemakers have been able to buy what used to be the province only of commercial bakers—high protein bread flour.

High protein flour has strong gluten content, and this is essential for the best yeast doughs. Bread flour will not replace all-purpose flour, which is still best for quick breads, pastries, cakes, biscuits and cookies.

However, high protein flour yields a higher, lighter, finer-textured yeast dough than regular flour.

Verna Mikesh, a retired Extension nutritionist who has judged bread for years at the Minnesota State Fair, offers this advice in working with bread flour: People who have always used all-purpose flour in bread-making will have to adjust their techniques. It is necessary to knead the dough for 10 minutes to develop the gluten. This is true whether you are making a basic white bread or richer sweet dough. Too little kneading will produce a coarse, low volume product.

The dough must rise to double its bulk, which can take up to 1 1/2 hours. Dough made with bread flour also needs to rest on the board, covered, for 15 minutes before shaping. In order for optimum rising in the oven.

Yeast is a living organism and can be killed by heat. Therefore, always follow the temperature advised in the recipe for the milk or water which will be used to dissolve the yeast. Usually the recommendation is "lukewarm," which means 110 to 115° F.

The food processor is a handy tool for people who like the idea of homemade bread but not the effort involved.

Several bread recipes inside today's food section utilize these current products.

Photos by Joe Sienkiewicz



Anna Matsche deep-fries grophens

GROPHENS Sacred Heart Women Makes 40 grophens

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1 cup milk, scalded | 1 teaspoon salt | 1/2 cup lukewarm water |
| 1 cup mashed potatoes | 2 eggs, beaten | 4 1/2 cups flour |
| 1/2 cup shortening | 2 ounces yeast | Raisins |
| 1/3 cup sugar | | |

Mix scalded milk with mashed potatoes, shortening, sugar and salt. In separate bowl, beat eggs. Dissolve yeast in lukewarm water. Add eggs and yeast mixture to milk mixture. Gradually add flour, beating to form a soft dough. Add raisins as desired. Turn out on floured board. Knead

lightly. Roll out dough 1/3-inch thick and cut with biscuit cutter (without center hole). Be sure the whole cutter is filled with dough. Stretch sides with fingers to form slight hollow in center. Let grophens rise for one hour. Fry in 375° F. deep-fat until light brown. While warm, shake grophens in

paper bag with sugar. A pinch of nutmeg may be added to the sugar before shaking.

Note: Originally, grophens were made without mashed potatoes, but they would have to be eaten the same day they were baked or would turn hard. The potatoes help keep the dough moist and soft.