

Making Lefse

Or *The Presentation of Fried Potato-Flour Mash*
by Chad Bremmon

A few weeks ago, an elephant trotted by and exclaimed, "You, Chad, should learn how to make Lefse." "Lefse?" I say. "Lefse!" he replies and trots off.

I only know one person who knows how to make Lefse, so I called her up.

*"Grandma," I say, "I was wondering,
Do you plan to make Lefse today."
"Not today," I knew she would say,
"maybe we'll make it another day."
I was willing to make lefse any day,
so we scheduled it for the next Tuesday.
She said she would call me when she knew more.
She wondered if I'd be there "The night before."
I am currently unemployed,
but it's certainly not work that I avoid.
Of course I will come to make lefse with you.
Upon it, the Bremmons will faithfully chew.*

So we were organized. The United Bremmon Lefse Fanatics (UBLF.) Since mother had to bowl on Tuesday night, it all worked out just swell. The first meeting of the UBLF was held at 6 pm on Tuesday, 9 Dec, at the home of Eleanore Bremmon, current UBLF president and founder.

A UBLF tradition, the meeting was started with coffee for me and a cigarette for Grandma B. Grandma already had the potatoes boiling. Four and one half pounds, well salted. I am convinced that Grandma boils 4 ½ pounds because that's all that will fit in her kettle.

Grandma went on to explain two things that she had learned from, "... some old lady." (Probably half her age.) First, she explained that the potatoes were half red and half white. It has nothing to do with Santa Claus. White potatoes are too dry--red potatoes too soggy. If you boil up half of each, the lefse turns out just right.

We also discussed boiling potatoes with the skins on. If you leave the skins on, you can cook them longer without them falling apart. "Why," you might ask, "would you not want them to fall apart?" They mash through the ricer easier!

Over the next hour, we drank coffee. We finished the evening with peeling and ricing. Once the potatoes were finished boiling, we ran cold water on them, but not too much. They have to be cool enough so you can handle them. Grandma can pretty much pick

them out of the boiling water. She's got experience, or a lack of feeling in her fingers. As she peeled, I riced. We mixed in ½pound of butter with our potatoes, and put them in the refrigerator overnight. We had another cup of coffee.

To top off the evening, Grandma showed me her recently created candle collection. She explained that she was going to try to sell some of them and give the rest away. This, of course explained to me why all of the pine needles were scattered about, and why there was a bit of wax dripped on the front of the stove.

We had another cup of coffee and then I went away, anticipating the next day.

The second day was scheduled to start around 1pm. Grandma was busy flocking her candles (and the chairs in the dining room as it appeared) in the morning. We were ready to make lefse at 1.

We started with a cup of coffee. As we were drinking the coffee, I asked Grandma, "What are we actually going to be doing today?" She thought I was in a hurry and replied, "Well, can't we finish the cup of coffee first?" I said, "Sure, I just thought we could visit about what we are going to do."

Of course, then she got started before she finished her coffee. I guess she got excited. So we were off and warming our milk.

Now if you remember, we had a pan full of riced potatoes (basically well mashed with butter). Now we need to warm them up a bit so they can be stirred and re-mashed. For warming, we add 1 cup of warm milk. By warm, we mean almost boiling. I stir the milk in along with about 2 Tablespoons of salt.

Once the salt is added, it's time for the re-mashing. So I mash and mash and mash, adding approximately 3 cups of flour to the mash, finally kneading the mixture toward the end. So what we Norwegians call lefse is really "fried potato-flour mash." Couldn't you use that to describe the entire Norwegian diet? "Boiled potato, flour mash" "Just flour mash" "Fish Mash." Ok, you can't mash fish, so we soften it up with lye. What's the difference?

Once potato-flour mash is coagulated properly, I dump it out onto a floured pastry canvas. Now, it's time for the lefse professional to shine! Without further kneading or rolling or patting the dough, Grandma shows me how to cut the glob into 6 "loaf size" rolls. These rolls are placed back into the potato-flour mash pan. The rolls are cut into about 6 pieces each, once they are in the pan.

Now we should discuss the rolling pin and the pastry canvas. According to Grandma, you get pastry canvas at the "horse-store." Donny would probably be able to tell us where to get the right kind of canvas. It might be the kind used on covered wagons, but I don't think grandma's canvas is that old. As far as the rolling pin goes, I don't think you

can make lefse if you don't have a rolling pin like Grandma has. It's got little grooves in it that help you to not screw up while you are rolling out the potato-flour mash.

It is important to keep the lefse dough (aka Potato-flour mash) cool, so we put it in the refrigerator. Around the same time, we started our "Heritage grill." This grill is famous for being round and having no other use than making lefse. Grandma set it at just under 500 degrees.

We were tired, so as the grill warmed we sat and had a cup of coffee.

Next we roll and fry the lefse. First Grandma rolled a couple and demonstrated. I fried them. I learned quickly. The frying part is not, I say again, **not** difficult.

I found frying quite inspiring, but I didn't join the UBLF to learn to fry lefse. I'm more of a lefse roller. I rolled up my sleeves and switched to the rolling role. On my first slab of lefse, I managed to wrap it around the rolling pin. Of course, Grandma says, "You shouldn't do that." Over the next few tries, I did a really good job of re-rolling, tearing, and pretty much screwing up a lot of them. The most difficult for me was flopping the lefse onto the grill without hurting myself and those around me. Grandma had to give me some remedial lefse flopper training. Grandma was happy, because if there was a wrinkle in any of the lefse, she could just say, "Chad made that one." It all gave new meaning to the phrase, "What a flop." There are 5 key steps to rolling and frying lefse: The roll, the flip, the re-roll, the flop, and the fry. If you can get all of these down, you've got it. It is important to get just the right amount of flour in the lefse. Too much flour, and it's tough--too little, and it tears.

After about 4 or 5, I pretty much had the hang of it and was keeping up with the grill. We were making lefse.

Before we finished, Verl Strand called. According to Grandma, she's some kind of a lefse mooch. She considers herself a connoisseur, but that sounds to me like a good excuse to mooch. We had a few cups of coffee.

My dad came in from the farm to try it. We had a few cups of coffee. We took the lefse, buttered and sugared it and said, "It is good." Then we had a cup of coffee.