

At this time I want to extend my warmest regards and appreciation to my good friend, Jane Garcia who is the chairperson for the luncheon. I would also like to express my appreciation to everyone who is involved in making this organization so effective. I wish LA SED continued success.●

JULES AND HELEN RABIN

● Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I rise today to say a few words about Jules and Helen Rabin who are long-time, respected Vermonters. Marcelle and I are proud to call them our friends. The Rabins exhibit what so many Vermonters have: a sense of what is valuable and important in life. With hard work, dedication, and a great deal of patience, Jules and Helen have built up a successful family bakery, serving the needs of their community. Over the last 20 years they have become masters of their craft. Recently, one of our local newspapers wrote an excellent article about the Rabins and their bakery. I ask that the article be printed in the RECORD so that all Senators may read about this fine family.

The article follows.

[From the Rutland Herald and the Sunday Times Argus, Mar. 8, 1998]

IN SEARCH OF SOURDOUGH—A VERMONT BAKER SETS OUT TO FIND—AND MAKE—THE PERFECT LOAF

(By Kathleen Hentcy)

When you bite into sourdough bread, your teeth meet with a worthy substance: Crackling hard crust, the bread inside chewy almost to the point of toughness, a sour tang. And once you've chewed and swallowed a few times, a satisfaction that few other breads deliver.

Real bread, for my money or effort, must meet this test. And it must proudly withstand toasting and slathering with sweet butter, not in the least smashed, or lessened in its big-holed texture. It should produce a clean crunch when bitten, and when chewed, remain substantial food, not melting into a gooey mash.

Overall, bread must take effort to cut, and time to chew and digest. It must, truly, be the "staff of life."

But buying good sourdough bread can eat up the grocery budget; the loaves typically cost more than \$3 each. Besides, I find baking bread to be an almost spiritual experience. And eating fine bread that you made yourself, listening to friends' compliments, is gratifying.

I've baked bread since my teen years. Some of what I make is outstanding. Some loaves I give to the sheep.

Lately, I've returned to baking sourdough. Sourdough, made with only the wild yeasts that choose to set up home in a culture of water and flour you provide, is wild, unruly bread, its flavor distinctive to the region where it is made. You don't know how the bread dough will behave from baking to baking, since the leavening agent—the sourdough—is very sensitive to atmospheric conditions and room temperature. From my experience, I'd say the baker's temperament is included under "atmospheric conditions" and can greatly influence the outcome.

I've made attempts at sourdough breads before, keeping a liquid starter in the refrigerator for months. I'd use it for a while, then forget about it and later find a dried-up mass that I'd have to throw out, jar and all. But

the loaves I made from those starters never compared to the bread I found at the local food coop.

THE SEARCH GETS SERIOUS

Last fall, I was bitten by a new ambition: To bake the ultimate "peasant bread." Sourdough French country bread. Pain de Campagne. Those lordly loaves with chestnut-brown crusts that crackle, the trademark large-textured chewy centers, and the sour tang.

This bread, and all French sourdough, is made using a doughy sourdough starter rather than a liquid. Once the starter is prepared and a batch of dough is made up, the baker takes off about a cup of dough—called levain, from the old French word for rise, or leaven—to store in the refrigerator. That piece, allowed to warm to room temperature and refreshed with flour and water, provides the basis for the next batch of bread, and so on as long as the baker doesn't forget to take the levain from subsequent batches.

Can making that bread be difficult enough to warrant a price of \$3 a loaf? If peasants baked these glorious loaves in wood-fired ovens with no refrigeration for the starter, surely I ought to be able to figure this out. Look at the ingredients: flour, salt, water. Some note "sourdough," which, technically, is only more of the first and last ingredients, flour and water. Adding commercial yeast to sourdough is sacrilege.

So I got out my bread books, and read about sourdough. I read magazine stories about sourdough. I bought many loaves of sourdough made by several different Vermont bakeries. I made sourdough starter and baked loaves of bread on a baking stone. I didn't feed it to the sheep, but I didn't give it to friends, either.

I went back to the books, and finally, to two bakers nearby who make five wonderful kinds of sourdough. I'll tell you what I learned up front: good sourdough bread is definitely worth \$3 a loaf. But baking it is worth more.

IN THE BAKERY

In a small building in the backyard of Helen and Jules Rabin's house, the Rabins continue the tradition of baking the community bread. Helen pulls large hunks of dough off a slouching 75-pound mass on the wooden counter. She places each chunk on a scale and adds enough to make the scale level out at one and three-quarter pounds, then drops the measured blob onto the counter, and starts the process anew. Once she has six or so lumps of dough, she kneads them one by one, shaping them into slender loaves about eight inches long. These are "French white sourdough," or batards, the shorter, fatter version of the popular baguette. In little more than an hour, she will have weighted and shaped 65 batards.

Helen and Jules have done this work nearly every week, two days a week, for 20 years. While she mills the grains, mixes the dough and forms the loaves, he builds the fire that heats the oven and eventually bakes the bread.

The Rabins began baking bread in 1978, shortly after Jules was laid off from his job teaching anthropology at Goddard College in Plainfield. Five years earlier, after visiting friends who were trying to recreate the lives of 19th-century peasants in the south of France, the Rabins decided to build a massive stone wood-fired oven like those that once dotted the European continent.

The Rabins' oven is large enough to bake 250 loaves a day. They bake two days a week, producing 500 loaves out of 750 pounds of dough. When they started making sourdough bread, they had no competition.

"We had an easy ride when we began—people around here had not had such bread,"

Jules says. That meant when they delivered their first loaves, which were dense, unrisen and hard, people still snapped them up. The taste was good, and slowly the texture improved.

A FEW SECRETS FOUND

"It took over five years to develop our loaves," Jules told me during an earlier visit. This gave me great hope. These people, who routinely make excellent sourdough bread, had once produced loaves similar to what I started with.

"Sourdough is very tricky stuff to work with," Jules said, making me feel even better. "To get even, well-raised loaves is very difficult with sourdough."

But did they seek out instruction in books or from other bakers? No. They figured it out themselves.

"We set ours elves the challenge to bake without yeast," he said.

The Rabins got their ideal for the kind of bread they wanted from European breads, and Helen once spent a night in a French bakery, watching. But she received no instructions.

"We fiddled and mixed to arrive at what we have today," Jules said. He credits Helen with all the brain work in the operation, from building the oven to figuring out how long the bread should rise.

And so, on a mild March day, I stand inside the bakery, careful to stay out of the way, and watch, much as I imagine Helen watched those French bakers many years ago. I'm allowed questions, but I avoid direct queries regarding the secrets of sourdough. Not only are the Rabins offering Upland Bakers for sale, and so have to protect their system, but I want to figure out at least some of this process for myself.

My time with the Rabins revealed two important lessons. The first is that baking good sourdough requires time. Let the levain warm for a few days after refreshing it, and before mixing the dough. Then, allow the dough to rise for four to six hours, punch it down and form the loaves, and allow those to rise for another four to six hours. The variation in rising times has to do with those atmospheric conditions, and you will know only by trial and error when to bake at four hours and when to wait for six.

The other important detail I learned is that sourdough does not have to be babied like yeasted bread dough. The risen loaves can be picked up and placed on the baking surface without worrying about flattening them. Go ahead and slash the tops deeply, to allow the loaf to expand as the hard crust develops.

These may sound like trivial details, but on my counter this morning sit the two best loaves of sourdough I have made to date. I haven't yet developed quite the sour tang I like, but the texture and volume of the loaves is beautiful. Toast and tea this morning was especially pleasing.

And the Rabins "refreshed" this lesson for me: Having the answer as quickly as possible isn't always best. Sometimes it's the process of looking that is the most fun.

CBO COST ESTIMATE FOR THE IRS RESTRUCTURING AND REFORM ACT OF 1998

● Mr. ROTH. Mr. President, on April 22, 1998, the Finance Committee filed Report 105-174 to accompany H.R. 2676. At the time the report was filed, the required Congressional Budget Office statement was not available.

I ask that the Congressional Budget Office statement that I have recently received be printed in the RECORD.