

Mullen knits and bakes Irish

By Barbara Richmond
Herald Reporter

Dressed in a beautiful Irish knit sweater she made herself from yarn she bought when visiting Ireland last year, Norma Mullen of 131 Pine St. served me freshly baked Irish soda bread. It's hard to believe that it's her husband's family that's Irish — not hers.

"Over in Ireland it's not referred to as soda bread. They call it tea bread. Their soda bread is very similar to our English muffins," said Mrs. Mullen, who visited Ireland with her husband, William.

The recipe for the soda bread, she explained, is one given her by her sister-in-law, Edna Penny, mother of Manchester Mayor Stephen Penny.

The bread has a better texture if the egg, buttermilk and raisins and melted butter are mixed and left to stand overnight or at least for several hours. "I found this out quite accidentally when I was making the bread as part of a course I'm taking at Manchester Community College. I was going to do a lecture on making the soda bread so I had to do some of the preparations ahead of time at home," Mrs. Mullen explained.

Before baking the soda bread, cut across the top of the dough in both directions, she advised. These are called farels (quarters) and keep the bread from cracking. "I've forgotten to do it at times and the bread still doesn't seem to crack," she added.

After the soda bread is baked it should be allowed to cool and then should be stored in a plastic bag.

The potato bread is excellent fried with bacon and eggs, she said.

Mrs. Mullen works at the Manchester Early Learning Center on Waddell Road.

THE HOUSE she lives in on Pine Street was bought by her husband's parents when they first came here from Ireland. Mrs. Mullen said her husband's parents bought the house in a Cheney auction.

The soda bread is good served with Irish stew, though Mrs. Mullen admits she rarely makes it — she can't stand the smell of lamb stewing.

She suggests not to try to double the soda bread recipe "because it's very difficult to mix."

Another of her bread recipes, Irish Bran Soda Bread, and one for Potato Bread came from Mrs. Penny's relatives

in Portadown, County Armagh in Northern Ireland.

What's an Irish dinner here without corned beef and cabbage? But in Ireland it's not considered as a typical Irish meal, she said.

"They serve a lot of vegetables but not a lot of meat. Meat is very expensive. They do serve fish and chips, though," Mrs. Mullen added.

She said while in Ireland she'd be served as many as six potatoes she'd be plate at one time. She wonders why she didn't gain more weight.

EVEN THOUGH Irish stew is made with lamb in this country and she saw "millions" of sheep in Ireland, they serve very little lamb there. "They must use the sheep for the wool," she said.

"I was surprised when we stopped at a restaurant and I ordered mince meat pie figuring it was a dessert—but found out it was more like a hamburger pot pie. It was very good, but not what I expected," Mrs. Mullen added.

She will be making the soda bread with the young children at the learning center in observance of St. Patrick's Day.

White Soda Bread

3½ cups flour
3 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon baking soda
½ cup sugar
1 cup golden raisins
1 egg
1 tablespoon melted butter
Buttermilk (about 2 cups)

Beat the egg and melted butter and enough buttermilk to make two cups. Sift the dry ingredients together. Add the raisins to the egg and milk mixture and stir in the dry ingredients and knead lightly on a floured board. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Bran Soda Bread

1 cup bran (bran buds are good)
3 tablespoons molasses
2 cups buttermilk
1 cup raisins
3 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt

Soak the bran in the molasses and buttermilk for 10 minutes or more. Add the raisins and sift the dry ingredients together and add to the bran mixture. Mix well and turn out onto floured board. Knead a few times and pat into a 9-inch pan or cake pan. Bake for 1 hour at 300 degrees. Wrap immediately in waxed paper until cool.

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Potato Bread

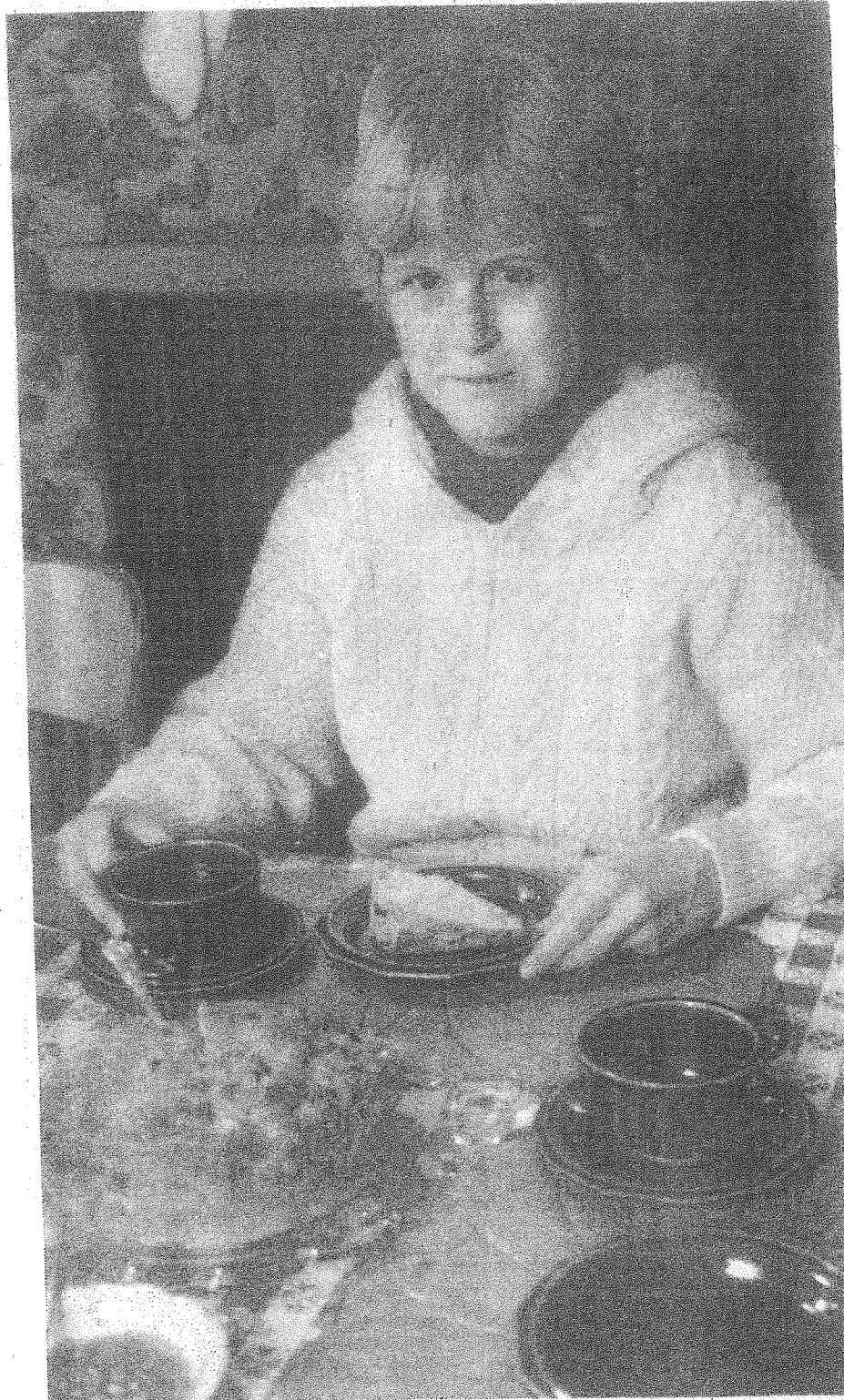
8 oz. mashed potato (no milk)
Teaspoon salt
Pinch of pepper
2 ounces butter
2 ounces flour
Little milk (to make stiff dough)

Roll the dough to ¼-inch thick and cut into eight pieces. Cook on a hot plate or griddle, browning on both sides.

Irish Coffee

Irish Whiskey sugar
Hot coffee
Whipped cream
Confectioners sugar

To make one serving, put hot coffee in a sturdy wine goblet, to about ½-inch from the top. Pour in one shot of Irish Whiskey, about 1 teaspoon sugar. Whip the cream with confectioner's sugar (to taste). Put on top of whiskey and coffee mixture and then pour on a bit of creme de menthe if desired.



Herald photo by Pi

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Wearing an Irish knit sweater she made, Norma Mullen of Pine Street serves some of her favorite Irish soda bread and a cup of tea in the cozy kitchen of her home.