

Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View

Dear Listener:

Thank you for stopping by for a visit at Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View podcast! To make it easy, you will find a transcript of each episode. I hope you enjoy the visit!

Episode 72 - Baking Bread as a Relationship

We are very familiar with what it means to have relationships. If we know a person, we have some type of relationship with them. We have parents, siblings, nephews, cousins, and other familial relationships. Some of us have spouses, children, and grandchildren. Most of us have friends, bosses, co-workers, and neighbors. With all of these we have some type of 'relationship'.

But did you know you can also have a 'relationship' with baking bread? I was in the kitchen one day, my hands kneading the dough, when the Country Boy walked in. He just looked, and then said, "I hope one day you love me as much as you love making bread."

He was kidding, of course. He knows just how much I love and adore him. But it did get me to thinking, and in that thought process, I realized I did have a strong 'relationship' with baking bread.

I'm willing to bet very few of you have ever considered baking bread as a relationship. But if you really think about it, when you learn to bake you are doing just that – building a lifelong relationship with something you love.

Baking can easily be compared to the dating process. At first, it's just a simple matter of a friend inviting you to go to a party.

For me, it all began in Aunt Dot's kitchen when she invited me over to learn how to make her homemade hot rolls. When it comes to a relationship with bread baking, I would consider that as the 'Join the Party' step.

From there, she explained the terms I would learn, the equipment I would need. In my mind, I dubbed that the Meet and Greet. During the First Date, we talked about the ingredients, and on the second date, we worked our way through the steps of the recipe.

I then added the other parts of the dating process: Second Date, The First Six Months, Is This Getting Serious? And Saying I Do.

With each of these steps, I compared the actual dating process to how it could fit with baking bread. It turns out there are 8 steps in all.

Let's look at each one, and how the dating process compares to baking bread as a relationship.

First, you have an Invitation to Join the Party. While there, you are introduced to many new people. Faces blur, names are forgotten. But then...

There is one face and one name that catches your interest. And by all indications, you have caught theirs, too. For the rest of the evening, you smile, nod, and laugh a little with each other. You establish a bit of ground with simple questions. And just as you are about to leave, the excitement moves up a notch and phone numbers are exchanged.

When it comes to baking bread, the moment you get your invitation – someone else mentions how much they enjoy it, or you step into a bakery and smell that wonderful fresh bread aroma. At first, you may be slightly hesitant. But for some reason, you think it sounds like fun, and decide to take the plunge. I mean, after all, if you don't like it, you don't have to do it anymore, right?

And then comes the Meet and Greet. When you first meet a potential someone at the party, you learn a little bit about them to see if the interest is worth pursuing. A few general questions are asked – who they know at the party, how do they know the person who introduced you, where they work, things like that.

When you 'meet and greet' baking bread for the first time, you check out a recipe or two, look at a cookbook, or ask questions of your bread baking friends. Once you have your general questions answered, you then decide it may be worth trying. This is the point where you learn the terms and make a list of the equipment you will need to get started.

Next Comes the First Date. On most first dates, you usually go somewhere neutral – meet for coffee or go to another party at a friend's place. This is the time where you get to know each other a little better. You observe their personalities. More questions are asked. Stories are shared, and opinions are offered. By the end of the evening, a decision is made – Will you go on a second date, or just shake hands and part ways?

When baking bread, the equivalent to the first date is when you take a closer look at the ingredient list. You may take it slow with a basic recipe. But you still want to know what the potential for future loaves will be. The best part of ingredients – as opposed to a person’s personality traits – is you can use the ones you love, experiment with those you have never tried or heard of, and completely avoid the ones you dislike.

The second date is a repeat of the first date, but with a little more depth. At this point, you are trying to decide if you really like who this person is. Is there any depth to them? Do your priorities, beliefs, dreams, and ideas mesh? Are there some personality quirks you love, or do they leave a bad taste in your mouth?

Most people think of ‘baking bread’ as mixing yeast, flour, and some kind of liquid in a bowl, kneading it into submission, and popping it in the oven. But there is more to bread baking than that. To truly learn the art of baking bread, you need to start small, and wade in at the shallow end for a bit. In this case, that means learning the art of making delicious muffins and quick breads.

Now we come to the First Six Months. When dating, the first six months are usually when you begin doing more and more together. Your schedule is adapted to include more dates. There may be day-long festivities or weekend excursions. You move from dipping your toe in the water to the shallows, and eventually to a deeper level. By this time, you know you want to learn more about this person on a progressively deeper level.

When you are at the ‘first six months’ point in baking bread, the natural direction to go is from quick breads and muffins to making biscuits and scones. These take a bit more...’finesse’, shall we say, to get them to come out right. Baking a light and fluffy biscuit takes practice.

In my case, I would not have been surprised if a structural engineer had come to me and asked if they could use my first biscuits as the foundation blocks for a new skyscraper. Yes, they were just that hard and inedible. But over time, I learned the tricks, and now baking biscuits and scones is almost second nature.

At some point in the dating process, you start thinking about whether or not this can be a long-term commitment. This is what I call the ‘Is This Serious’ step.

You have learned the basics, asked the questions, watched, and studied this person you are seeing. You decide you like them, and think being in a serious relationship works well for you. It is also the point where more serious things are discussed, priorities considered, and you learn if this is someone you can live with for the rest of your life.

Learning how to make bread using yeast is definitely the equivalent of deciding if you are serious or not about bread baking. First, you truly need to know the basics, how dough acts and reacts according to the ingredients, and why a soft hand and finesse is needed.

Yeast breads can be tricky, so knowing how to use four of your five senses – touch, smell, sight, taste – goes a long way to creating the perfect loaf. It also helps to have patience. Just as in dating, there will be disagreements (the temperature is too hot or too cold), hurt feelings (the dough didn't proof), and the silent treatment (the loaf comes out of the oven burned on top and raw in the middle, or becomes the structural engineer's dream building material).

But with time, patience, and being willing to try again, you will eventually be able to create the perfect loaf that surrounds you with that knee-weakening aroma and the mouth-watering flavor you have been dreaming about.

Saying 'I Do' is a big step in both the dating process and in a relationship with baking bread. You successfully made it through the first date and kept going. Yes, it is serious enough to accept the proposal and the ring. Now you are planning the wedding.

With baking bread, the 'wedding' equivalent is learning how to make sour dough bread. These all begin with a starter. There are several different types of starters, and choosing which ones work best for each type of bread, and how to make them is your first step down the aisle.

Now, if you were counting earlier when I said there are 8 steps to both the dating process and baking bread as a relationship, I'll bet you only counted 7.

But in every relationship, just like there are in fairy tales, you come to the 8th step – the Happily Ever After. In the dating process, you have come to a point when the wedding is over, the honeymoon was great, and now you are ready to settle in for a lifetime of marital bliss. All you have left to do is combine households and move forward with your lives together. And learn how to handle all of it – the good, the bad, and the indifferent.

If you have made it this far in your bread baking relationship, you probably have quite a few loaves of bread in your freezer. Just like a good crop of zucchini, your friends may be avoiding you, as they now have a freezer full of your 'dating' experiences.

But you don't have to figure out how to cram another loaf of bread in your freezer or alienate your friends. There are other things you can do with all that bread – such as French Toast, croutons, breadcrumbs, and a favorite you can find baking in most Southern kitchens and on the menu in most restaurants across the south – bread pudding. No matter what flavor or style of bread you bake, there is almost always something you can create from it, other than slicing it and adding a good slathering of butter.

Baking bread really is a form of relationship. It has its beginning, a learning process, trials, missteps, and successes. And when you fall in love with it, you are almost guaranteed to say I Do and live happily ever after.

Are you ready to start your own relationship with baking bread? Then let me issue the invitation to the party. Head to your kitchen, find a good beginning recipe, and start having fun. It may end up being one of the best relationships you can have!

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If you have questions or just want to stop in for a visit, you can do that through email at thevirtualporch@gmail.com. And be sure to subscribe – you don't want to miss a single conversation. I'll be sitting on the porch every Monday morning waiting for your visit!

Thanks again for stopping in. I will see you next week on Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. And while you are waiting for the next episode, grab that glass of refreshment, pull up a rocker, and sit back for a while. It's time to relax and enjoy.

Relax & Enjoy!

Julie