Rupjmaize (Black Bread)

This was the bread we ate day-to-day. It was not available in stores; so, Latvian ladies baked it frequently. It is a sourdough bread; this means that a portion of the dough, with the sour yeast, has to be saved for the next bread. It was joked that this kept the Latvian community together. Whenever there was a disaster, and the cook forgot to save the sourdough (ieraugs), she had to call others and beg for a portion.

A number of my non-Latvian friends liked my mother’s version of this bread and wanted to make it. My mother did not use recipes. In order to replicate her bread it was necessary to watch her make it. One friend tried to bake the bread from verbal directions. She had difficulty determining when to stop kneading; when the texture of the dough was ‘just right’. Also, she only later found out that ‘a handful of salt’ was the heaping teaspoon my mother put in the hollow of her hand. We sometimes suspected that my mother, always competitive, didn’t really want anyone else to be able to make bread quite as well.

1 heaping teaspoon salt 2 pkg yeast dissolved in
6 cups lukewarm water 1 cup lukewarm water and 2 tsp.
sourdough culture sugar
2 1/2 lb bag dark rye flour 1 cup sugar less a little bit

Day 1 – Mix the first three ingredients. Then add the rye flour. Cover bowl with a dry tea towel. Place in a draft-free place and leave overnight.

Day 2 – In the morning, taste the mixture to see whether it is sour. If it is sour, proceed as follows:

Prepare yeast, water and sugar mixture. Set aside for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, add the cup of sugar to the dough mixture. Add caraway seeds, whole wheat flour and finally the yeast mixture. Knead for about 6 minutes. Smooth the top of the dough with a wet hand. Mark with a cross. Cover with a tea towel. Let rise in a draft-free place for 1 hour.

Grease 3 loaf pans. Divide dough and place in pans. Save some dough to start the sourdough next time. Smooth loaves with a wet hand. Let rise in pans for about 1/2 hour.

Meanwhile, pre-heat oven to 375 degrees. Bake for 1 1/2 hours.
When done, take out of pan and let cool on a towel. Cover with a damp tea towel covered with plastic. (This keeps the crust from getting too hard.)