

SUNDAY PANCAKES

Stewart Hendrickson

May 28, 2021, Seattle

It was a gloomy Sunday noon in Seattle, cold, overcast, and windy. I just prepared a stack of buttermilk pancakes for lunch and sat down to eat them alone. Since I moved into my new condo over a year ago, this is a weekly ritual where I relax and enjoy a leisurely meal. A couple of years ago I would be sitting with my wife enjoying this, but now she is being cared for with her dementia in an adult family home several miles from here while I am living alone. I visit her about twice a week.

Pancakes were always a treat for me and my wife on Sunday mornings. She made thin Swedish pancakes, sometimes with a yogurt filling. They were delicious. When her dementia started to develop, I began to do more of the cooking. I had to learn how to cook pancakes myself. The basic recipe is one cup of flour, a pinch of baking powder and soda, one egg, and 1½ cups of milk. Very simple, but it took me a while to master just that. I bought a cast-iron griddle – not the old Teflon-coated one that my daughter made me throw out – and learned how to get it to just the right temperature on our gas stovetop. I just ordered an infrared thermometer to check the preferred griddle temperature of 375 degrees.

In my new apartment I have an electric stovetop, and I needed to get used to a new way of cooking. I started to burn everything because the electric burner takes a long time to cool down. After burning my first pancakes, I learned to start at a low setting, increasing the heat as necessary. Once I mastered that, I needed to work on the batter. My daughter sent me her recipe for buttermilk pancakes – hers are great! Buttermilk makes a thicker batter than one made with plain milk so I had to get used to that. I prefer buttermilk. The pancakes are thicker but they also need to be fluffy. The secret to that is separating the egg, beating the whites until somewhat stiff and folding them in later – it makes a big difference. Learning to make good pancakes is like learning to play the violin – you never reach perfection but, hopefully, you continue to get better.

Now, back to eating pancakes alone on a gloomy Sunday at noon in Seattle, It can be lonely. It then occurred to me that I would enjoy eating these pancakes with other people. Eating should be a communal affair – after a year of pandemic, we need more personal interactions. The work of making a few more pancakes is not great, and I would like to share these with others. I hope that one or two (vaccinated) friends will join me every Sunday at noon. It will brighten up a gloomy day and make a sunny one even nicer.

Buttermilk Pancakes – my recipe (makes about eight pancakes)

Mix dry ingredients:

1 cup flour (I use *Red Mill* spelt flour – a whole-grain primitive form of modern wheat)

1 tsp baking powder

½ tsp baking soda

¼ tsp salt

1 T sugar (optional)

Mix wet ingredients:

1 egg yolk

1 ½ cups buttermilk

2 T melted butter or olive oil

Mix wet and dry together (I use a French whisk – gentle, don't overmix)

1 egg white – beat until somewhat stiff

Fold in the egg whites

Use lots of butter on the griddle

Enjoy!

Stewart Hendrickson (hend@stolaf.edu) is Professor Emeritus (Chemistry), St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN; and Research Professor Emeritus (Chemistry), University of Washington, Seattle, WA. He lives with his cat, Igor, in the Ballard area of Seattle, WA.