The birthday treat

When most kids celebrate a birthday and have a party with friends, you can bet some of the most requested meals are pizza and hot dogs.

Five-year-old Kailey Verlinde has different ideas. Her birthday falls in November when it's cold, so she asks for mom’s specialty — homemade knoephla soup.

“I always make sandwiches and a couple soups for her birthday, and knoephla soup is one I always make,” says Kailey’s mother, Krista. “It’s something we made when I was growing up, and my kids always say it’s one of their favorite things that I can make for them now.”

Eating it is only half the fun, since Kailey started helping in the kitchen.

“Knoephla soup is one of the things I first started having her help with because she could help roll out the knoephla. After I make the dough, I roll them into tubes so they are long and skinny. Kailey has fun putting flour on her hands and rolling them out. I cut them, and then she rolls out the next batch,” Krista describes. “It’s fun to have her do it, and it’s still fun because for me, knoepfla soup was one of the first things I remember making with my mom when I was little.”

Krista grew up on a ranch near Grassy Butte in the McKenzie Electric Cooperative service area. She met her husband, Zach, through mutual friends in Dickinson, and the couple moved to Noonan to help Zach’s parents on the farm, where they are now able to raise their children. An engineer, Zach also works for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Krista works for the USDA Farm Service Agency in Crosby. They are members of Burke-Divide Electric Cooperative.

Some of Krista’s ancestors are of German origin, and Krista grew up eating foods made with dough. She also grew up reading the North Dakota Living magazine, and remembers her mother clipping and preparing recipes.

“I thought the magazine’s pictures were fun to look at and the recipes were fun to read,” she says.

Now, she is a contributor. This month, Krista shares two recipes with North Dakota Living readers: Knoephla Soup and Sauerkraut Bierocks. The recipes were given to her by her mother, who has prepared many family meals over the years that included both of these dishes.

Krista has fond memories of helping her mother make bierocks, or “puppy dogs,” as her family called them.

“I could fold over the dough and cover the meat, and get it ready. Mom would grab a bowl, we would cut the corner and make it look like a half-moon, and fold it over neat and throw them in the oven,” she says. Now, Kailey is helping her mom do the same thing.

Like most kids, Kailey still likes to eat her share of pizza and hot dogs. But nothing compares to the taste of her mom’s thick knoephla soup on a cold day, birthday day or any day.

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KNOEPHLA SOUP

| 1 ¾ cup flour | 1 ½ cups carrots |
| 1 tsp. salt | 1 ½ cups of potatoes, cubed |
| ½ cup water | 1 ½ T. chicken base |
| 1 egg | 1 cup heavy whipping cream |
| 2 T. butter | 2 cups 2% milk |

To prepare dumplings, in a medium-sized bowl knead together flour, salt, water and egg. When mixed, place in fridge to cool. Start water boiling in a separate pot and prepare the other ingredients. In a small saucepan sauté butter, celery seed and onion (to taste). When sautéed, place in a large cooking pot. Slice carrots and cube potatoes. Place both into the large cooking pot and add enough water to cover ingredients. Add chicken base. Bring pot to a boil, then cook on medium heat for 20 minutes. To finish dumplings, while the large pot is cooking, take dumpling dough out of the fridge and prepare work area with a dusting of flour. Taking scoops of the dumpling mixture, hand-roll and slice dumplings into desired sizes. Place all dumplings into the separate pot of boiling water. Cook dumplings until they float, approximately 10 to 15 minutes. Mix ingredients. When dumplings are cooked and large pot of ingredients is complete, drain dumplings and add to large pot. Add heavy whipping cream and milk. Bring ingredients to a boil and cook on medium heat for 20 minutes. To finish dumplings, cover ingredients. Add chicken base. Bring pot to a boil, then cook on medium heat, stirring occasionally, for as long as desired.

Krista’s test notes: I like my Knoephla Soup thick and creamy, and it takes a long time to cook it down. I generally cook my soup for another 20 to 30 minutes. North Dakota Living note: We suggest replacing the celery seed with diced celery sticks, and sautéing with the onions.

SAUERKRAUT BIEROCKS

| 1 lb. loaf frozen bread dough, thawed | 1 T. minced onion (fresh onion or seasoning) |
| 1 lb. ground beef, thawed | 1 14.5-oz can Sauerkraut, drained |
| 1 tsp. garlic salt | 1 tsp. pepper |

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In a large skillet over medium heat, sauté beef until cooked. Add the garlic salt, pepper, minced onion and sauerkraut to skillet, and continue to sauté for 5 minutes. Then, reduce temperature to low. On a lightly floured sheet, slice the thawed bread dough into 12 pieces. Begin rolling each piece until the shape of a small pancake (approx. 4-5 inches in diameter). While the bread is flattened, place a scoop of your beef mixture onto the dough, and pull one side of your dough over the mixture, down to the other side. Use a bowl to cut around the edge to give it a sealed look. Continue process until all the dough has been used. Place all of the bierocks on a greased baking sheet, in the middle of your oven, for approx. 30 to 35 minutes, until golden brown.

Enjoy the memories conjured by family recipes

“I saved the last piece of kuchen for you,” my college roommate announced proudly. She had just returned from western North Dakota.

“What is it?” I asked sheepishly. She looked at me as though I were from outer space instead of northwestern Minnesota. I opened the container and discovered the joy of kuchen.

“I suppose you don’t know what knoephla soup is, either,” she added with a grin.

I looked at her blankly.

I wouldn’t have known what knoephla dumplings were if they nipped me on the finger. I was waiting for a bowl of soup to try.

I know what lefse, lutefisk and rommegrot are, though. A lot of our heritage foods are cream-colored, aren’t they?

Unfortunately, not all of our nostalgic foods get a gold star in nutrition because many are quite high in calories, saturated fat and sodium, which we are advised to limit. In fact, in an early food guidance system (the “Basic 7”), butter was a food group.

Enjoy the memories conjured by the taste, aroma and texture of family recipes, but keep moderation in mind. Eat lots of veggies as side dishes to balance your nutrition. I do not suggest that people alter family recipes, except for home-canned foods. Old canning recipes usually do not stand up to modern safety standards, so you need to use current, research-tested canning methods.

Recently the 2015 to 2020 Dietary Guidelines were released. Are you eating these foods?

- A variety of vegetables, including dark green, red and orange; legumes (beans and peas); and starchy vegetables
- Fruits, especially whole fruits
- Grains, at least half of which are whole grains
- Fat-free or low-fat dairy, including milk, yogurt, cheese and/or fortified soy beverages
- A variety of protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), and nuts, seeds and soy products
- Oils

Until next time, set some goals for good nutrition during March, National Nutrition Month.

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Healthy Hints

To learn more, visit www.ag.ndsu.edu/food.