

Behold, the Biscuit.



by Joquita Burka

JUST A HINT. That's all I needed. The lady said it was a "biscuit." But what had happened to it? It was concrete-hard and assumed the same flavor and texture. Apparently it was a "scone" travelling under the name of biscuit. I can't blame it for changing its name. But beware... a scone by any other name is still a rock.

Any good Southerner will tell you quick. A biscuit is a thing of beauty. And we South Carolinians take our biscuits seriously. A good biscuit is a cloud of delicate white deliciousness under a honey-gold crust. It is a bit of heaven with a side of bacon. And making the perfect biscuit is an art. True, it's not the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. But Michelangelo would have dropped his brushes for a well-made biscuit. Not that I have that firsthand.

But, if you happen to be one of those folks who thinks a biscuit can be popped from a can or that it's some form of a

bagel with an identity crisis, let me introduce you to the biscuit. Flour as it was meant to be.

Biscuits, in one form or another, have been around for centuries. One of the earliest records dates biscuits in second-century Rome. In fact, the word comes from the Latin *bis coctum* which means "twice baked." This so-called biscuit was a hard, thin, unleavened wafer with very little water content and, I would guess, very little taste. In fact, these things were so tough they could be sealed in a tin and shoved into the hold of a ship where they'd stay for months. This constant diet could explain some of the more violent wars at sea.

Today, however, better ovens, fewer galley ships and more refined tastes have led to much better biscuits. There are almost as many biscuit recipes as there are biscuit makers. You'll know when you've found the product of a great recipe—

the cook won't share it with you.

You can spot a good biscuit maker from his or her apron. There should be a definite flour line across the belly just the height of the worktable. Flour's a' flying when biscuits are made. These dough artists also have "the touch." That means they know just how long to knead the dough—too long and the biscuit's tough (think scone). Too short and it's goeey (think matzo ball). And like a skilled craftsman, they will have their favorite brand of flour, biscuit cutter, bread board and pan.

If you ever have the joy of sitting at the table of one of these talented bakers, don't question their technique or their recipe. Just sit back and enjoy the results. Soon, you will find out why so many folks around here smile when they just hear the word. Biscuits.

Feel lucky? Here's a basic biscuit recipe that can start you on the road to biscuit perfection.

Biscuits

2 c. all-purpose flour
4 t. baking powder
1 t. salt
2 T. shortening
2/3 - 3/4 c. milk
1 t. sugar

Preheat oven to 450°. Mix and sift together dry ingredients. With knives or pastry blender, blend in shortening until dough has the appearance of small balls. Add the milk slowly, stirring with fork until a soft dough is formed. On a lightly floured board, roll out the dough until 1/2" in thickness. Cut with biscuit cutter. Place on ungreased baking pan. Bake 12-15 minutes. Yield: 12-15 biscuits