

Out of Bounds

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

bread makers



It was the hardest phone call I would ever make. I did everything possible to pretend it hadn't happened, hoping to spare my mother's feelings. But my conscience inevitably got the best of me, and I swallowed hard and dialed. She answered quickly, and I said it equally quickly. "My bierocks," I said, "were better than yours. I mean, it wasn't really even close."

For years, my mom has made bierocks for our Christmas gatherings. For those of you not familiar with the German-Russian treat, bierocks consist of a bread pocket filled with hamburger, cabbage, onions and seasoning, or ham and cheese. They maintain immense popularity in Kansas and Nebraska, which were chock full of German immigrants in the 19th century. Today if you go to any type of community event or fund-raiser in a small, Midwestern town, chances are someone will be selling the doughy morsels of goodness.

The hard thing was that I had to admit to my mom that I had cheated to make the dough. You see, I explained, I had received a bread machine from my in-laws. I continued, "And, seriously, the thing possesses magic powers."

Hyperbole aside, there is something enchanting about these machines that

PRAISE BE FOOD TECHNOLOGY,
EVEN IF IT MEANS MOMMA
COMING AFTER YOU
WITH A ROLLING PIN IN HAND

BY MARK LUCE

will mix ingredients, knead dough, allow the dough to rise and then bake it — all with about 10 minutes of work on your part. There are no rolling pins, achy hands, flour-covered clothes or worries about humidity. The best part: You can snag one of these miracle workers for under \$100.

My fascination began easily enough. I picked up some focaccia at the local grocery. I snarfed loaf after loaf, dipping the cheese-topped, garlicky goodness in vats of balsamic vinegar. I was hooked. I decided that I could make it, so I cockily looked at a recipe. As my kitchen skills remain limited to wicked good toast (setting 7), the occasional grilled cheese (burner on 4), and a mean Kraft macaroni and cheese, the focaccia directions may as well have been written in Italian. I bemoaned this to my mother-

in-law, not thinking much of it.

Come Christmas, there was a giant box with my name on it. Good for her, better for me and my family.

My model, the Breadman Ultimate, couldn't be any easier to use. Put the ingredients into the bread pan in the order they are listed in the recipe book. Plug the machine in. Push the button that says, "START." In a couple of hours, the kitchen smells like a bakery, the bread is done, and guests think you are staff-of-life artisan/wizard as you serve up sandwiches on fresh bread.

Want dough for pizza, cinnamon rolls or focaccia? It does that. How about low-carb white, Challah, corn bread or French bread? It does those, too. And all for about the cost of a regular loaf of bread. I have also discovered that my son enjoys pouring the ingredients in, allowing him to exclaim, "Hey, I made the bread."

If you sprinkle some rosemary, thyme and basil into the machine to craft some basic bread dough, your bierocks will be out of this world.

Just ask my mom.

Mark Luce lives in Lawrence, Kan., where he is perfecting caraway-rye bread and cheese-onion bread. You can contact him at msluce@sbcglobal.net.

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