

I spent some time over the weekend cleaning out the drawers of our desk. This was no easy task, but everything is nice and neat now. In the process, I also transferred a bunch of recipes I had rubber-banded together. I copied them into a nice little book I'd received last Christmas from Mia in Sweden. "Mina Recept" now holds several recipes for cookies, sweet rolls, breads, salads, vegetable dishes, and a few things in a category called "miscellaneous."

In the process of sorting recipes—most of which I had at least tried out at one time or another—I threw away at least half, and recopied all but one of the rest. That one recipe I taped on a page in the little book.

I wanted to leave the original, because it was in the handwriting of a woman who was a wonderful baker and a person with numerous other exceptional talents. She had written it on a little note paper from the Gwen Frostic collection. There was a red cardinal on the front of the note, and the rest of the paper was filled with Ruth Peterson's distinctive handwriting.

I remember when I asked Ruth for the recipe. She was one of the people who had signed up for an adult education Swedish class that Runo and I conducted several years ago. At Christmas time, we had a little buffet to celebrate the season. The folks who attended the class each brought a treat to add to the table. Ruth's contribution was a coffee cake called "Danish Coffee Braid." It was exceptionally good and equally attractive. I asked for the recipe, and Ruth brought it to our next class.

I have made the coffee cake several times over the years, but not just recently. So, when I pulled the recipe out of my stack that had been confined by a rubber band, I knew that I would keep this one in Ruth's own writing. I also knew that I would very soon make a batch of dough and have some on hand for our coffee breaks.

So, last evening, I mixed up the butter, eggs, yeast, sour cream, and flour into a stiff dough that I covered tightly and stored in the refrigerator. This morning, I combined cream cheese, eggs, and sugar for the filling and brought up a jar of raspberry jam from the fruit cellar. I was all ready to bake Ruth's coffee braids.

This recipe makes a large batch—five good-sized braids. Brushed

with a little beaten egg, they bake up golden and puffy with bits of red preserves and creamy filling showing through the slits in the dough. A little glaze of lemon juice and powdered sugar finishes off the pretty coffee cakes.

We will soon cut one of the braids and arrange it on a plate next to a pot of strong coffee. And we will think of Ruth Peterson when we take that first bite. She has passed away, but eating her coffee cake brings her immediately to our minds again.

It really does pay sometimes to clean and reorganize. Once in a while, one comes across something that—when used—makes the day a little brighter and more special.