

It seems that this time of year, even with the extra challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic, our thoughts often turn to the past. Maybe, this is even more prevalent when we are looking back at the trials the world has endured before this time. With a vaccine that will, everyone hopes, at last make it possible for us to imagine a future that is not dominated by this pandemic, we will establish a “new normal.” Those who have continuing or recurring effects of the virus, and those who have lost family and friends to this disease will probably never put out of their minds the devastation that occurred this year 2020. But, as we have hopes for the months ahead, we are in the midst of a holiday season, and that often makes me turn my thoughts to the past.

Yesterday, Emma Anderson was on my mind. She has been gone for many years now, but I don't remember a time in my life when I didn't know who Miss Emma Anderson was. She came from Sweden as an eight year old, as her mother, with Emma and the other children, made the long journey to join her husband, who had worked and saved enough to pay passage for his family.

Emma grew up in our “extended neighborhood,” —not next door, but within what Wendell Berry calls the “beloved community.” Emma went to Chicago as a young woman and worked for years cooking and taking care of a wealthy family. This was the path taken by many young Scandinavian women of that era. They were prized for their culinary skills and their dedication to work.

Later, Emma returned to the farm where she kept the household in tiptop shape while her two bachelor brothers farmed. Later in life, both of them married, but Emma did not, and she continued making a welcoming home for friends and family as long as she lived.

Her pleasant kitchen was a prized destination for friends and neighbors. Once a year, before the holidays, her brother John polished all the copper kitchen goods that stood on a high shelf in the kitchen. That was a sign that we were heading into the Christmas season. In the summer, Emma's delight that once again, Jenny Wren had a nest in the bush outside the kitchen door, framed the warm months.

Sometimes, though, it is a more specific connection to a neighbor of the past that shows itself to be a lasting part of life. Such was yesterday. Because, I baked Emma Anderson's Rye Bread. This isn't just a bread for the holidays, and I make it a few times a year without regard to the season, but I nearly always make a batch in December.

It is probably a “typical” Swedish rye loaf, or *limpa*. It is a rather sweet bread, and I admit that I use less sweetening than Emma did. The bread contains both molasses and brown sugar, and I not only reduce the sugar considerably, I substitute maple sugar for the brown sugar. And, because someone in our household does not like fennel, I leave that out, too. So, in a way, it isn't really Emma's bread these days. But, that doesn't matter, because when I bake it, it is Emma who comes to mind.

I sometimes vary the bread in another way, too. I will divide the dough and in part of it, knead in raisins or dried cherries. That is certainly not in her

original recipe, but it is good, and toasted with lots of butter made from Effie and Lily's cream, it is worth eating. Several loaves of Emma Anderson's Rye Bread are in the freezer now. But, by the time the holidays are over and we are in a new—and hopefully, healthier and more peaceful year—we will eat that last slice and decide that maybe, we need to make another batch.

Whenever that day arrives, that all the ingredients for this bread are out on the cupboard top and I grab that tattered recipe card, I will mentally sit down in Emma's kitchen as she pulls a pan of rye bread from the oven of the woodburning kitchen range. And, I will hope that her recipe will endure for several more generations.