

I guess I am channeling my mother today. At least, with a fire in the cookstove on this frosty October morning, I am using that good wood heat to put on the table some of the dishes that enlivened our meals when I was a girl.

It is so much easier to make good homemade cottage cheese when there is a fire in the wood burning stove. That little bit of heat on the side away from the fire box—over the hot water reservoir—is just right for incubating those good bacteria that change plain milk into tangy, tasty cottage cheese.

She usually made cottage cheese in the blue speckled canner, so it was a big batch, though never as much as one might expect after the curds and whey have separated. Little Miss Muffet who sat on her tuffet eating her curds and whey probably was enjoying the shiny white curds more than the copious liquid whey.

After the milk acidified and separated into those two main components, my mother gently heated it to drive yet more whey from the cheese. Then, she squeezed the curds quite dry with her hands, filled a big bowl, salted it, and put it in the refrigerator. When we ate the cheese, I was always sure to sprinkle my portion with coarsely ground black pepper. I still like it best that way.

The cottage cheese I have started will be ready tomorrow. I will probably strain out most of the whey through cheesecloth. I am not as adept at removing the whey with my hands as my mother was.

Merrie's apples from the tree along the road that has the bright red fruit, good to eat and good to cook, are also baking in the wood fired oven. I cut them in half, took out the cores, filled a baking dish with the halves cut side up, sprinkled them with brown sugar and cinnamon, and added a pat of butter to each half. A little whipped cream from the top of that milk that is on its way to becoming cottage cheese won't hurt, either.

Sometimes, when the hurry of harvesting has subsided, I like to have a weekly or even a monthly theme for meals. We have made January the "international dish" month, cooking or baking something from a different country every day. One year, we had a different soup every day for a month. Another time, the goal was to use whatever ingenuity we had to cook or bake something different containing potatoes every day for four weeks.

So, maybe this will be Frances month. I can think of a lot of her standbys that I have not made for some time and there are others that have become regulars in our meals. On my list would be, first and foremost, friedcakes. Guess I will give this month a try. Stay turned for updates.