



HONEST WEIGHT FOOD CO-OP

MARCH SALES & SPECIALS

Alabaster

An inquiry into Quark

“There is no bad weather. There are just different types of good weather”. - John Ruskin

By Gustav Ericson

The late winter storm gets serious as the long afternoon elapses, and there's word that this might well be the “significant weather event” that a few of us hope for. Such storms can be the most treacherous, also the most ravishing. The store jammed up all day, as if on a holiday eve, without the festive air, but with focused and determined shopping, carts filled with every sort of root vegetable and that curious preponderance of yellow fruit that indicates a snowstorm is on the way. I buy eggs and blood oranges. By the time I leave, the avenues are deserted save for the rare character digging out to go home. The windows on the avenue now glow as night sets in. A woman, shivering, tugs at her poodle, which adamantly sniffs the miraculous snow

banks. The dog is so amused and she is so not. Now there are no birds. Have they clustered together in some of those windowless buildings on the way out of town? The city enshrouded, hushed, secret, safe with its provisions. I wonder if people still huddle in doorways and have a swig of something or a smoke on such nights. I don't see any. The snow eddies around the majestic street lamps on the highway, from which the fading city glows a warm and eerie pink. I muse on grander cities to the south and how the lamps of humans can light the night sky in red, magnificent. *You better concentrate on your driving.* Inside the vehicle, the heat cranked, a warm-as-toast cocoon hotter still with the sexy Turkish tunes on the radio. Who choreographs these moments- the whirling snow, the lush, impulsive, driven harmonies, the magnificent white on white on white?

No snowplows are out yet on the bumpy roads closer to home, and few travelers. *Every other idiot's in their house.* The world wiser than I, that's for sure. But they're missing out on the park where the majestic pines in their “Avenue” are heavily and thoroughly



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frosted. Are the pines sighing under the weight? Down to 10 mile per hour, and that's pushing it. Oddly, a black Jaguar races over to the hotel. I turn on my high beams to illuminate the thick torrent of snow as it swirls down through the huge pines. Every twig, bough and needle is covered in a heavy white cloak of clotted snow, as if the angels had over-beaten the meringue and decided to cover the earth with it anyhow.

Finally home. The haven impeccably frosted in ten or more inches. Sadly, there are no lights on, no plodding tracks through the pristine snow. *That's how it is.* Hence to shovel, and bring in some wood, and think about the birds huddled on their dark rafters back downtown. Chow time.

Getting home can sometimes be a major feat, a challenge that deserves some reward. I recommend the German rite of "Gabelfrühstück", or the second breakfast. (Unless, of course, there's someone wonderful at your haven that has made minestrone or roasted a chicken with potatoes. *Ever try using thick slices of yellow onion instead of a rack under you chicken? Put the rest of the onion in the cavity along with a halved lemon and a long branch of rosemary, roast the bird, perhaps slathered in good Dijon mustard, at 400 degrees F. until deeply bronzed, and eat the unctuous, caloric golden onion slices by yourself, with a crusty remnant of ciabatta while the chicken is resting. If you add a piece of Manchego or two you*

might even forget about the chicken, though probably not. Note well the benefits to being the cook). I've been making that polenta with sautéed greens and a fried egg for a couple of years now. You might try it- I will tell you how. A big bowl of farina with butter and brown sugar is good if you can deal with the childhood memories, and I can also tell you how to scramble eggs so that they form a custard to enrobe your sautéed spinach or chanterelles. The second breakfast goes together quickly and can be darn sustaining after you've had a hair-raising



commute and don't need to challenge your digestion with something heavy. There's usually a few eggs and some good bread around the larder, and perhaps some wintry fruits, and cheese of one ilk or another. Lately, at my crib, the cheese of choice is **Quark**. Somewhere in the array of soft fresh cheeses (ricotta, fromage blanc, mas-

carpone, young chèvres, Neufchâtel, et alia) is the relatively unsung quark, or **Topfen**. Unsung locally, perhaps, but revered in Europe, and old enough to be mentioned by Tacitus. In [The New German Cookbook](#), Jean Anderson and Hedy Würz advise us, "Germans are passionate about a thick milk product called quark, and those living abroad where it's unavailable feel deeply deprived. The most acceptable substitute seems to be whole-milk ricotta or finely curdled cottage cheese puréed or sieved with a little crème fraîche, Devon

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cream, sour cream, cream cheese (sic), even yogurt, buttermilk or acidophilus milk.” It’s nice that we don’t have to go through all that anymore. We carry two exceptional quarks these days, and each has its advocates.

I remember a long-ago, late summer supper in the garden with German friends. There was that attentive, “this is how it’s *really* done”

sense in every course: delicate herby crêpes rolled and sliced and floating in the sorrel soup, spätzle tossed in buttery browned bread crumbs, and for dessert, *Topfenknödel*, ethereal quark dumplings in a plum compote spiked with Kirshwasser. There were heavy goblets of sweet, sparkling, icy white wine, and bees still at work in the late yellow roses. *Every culture has its dumpling, thank goodness.* Austrian friends, though they may call it “topfen”, adore quark, and use it everywhere, spreading



it on pumpernickel bread as we do cream cheese, before embellishing it with preserves or honey. For an appetizer or lunch, they choose thinly sliced cucumbers, radishes, or herring upon which dill is in order. *(Is there a better appetizer than some dark bread slathered in white cheese and a ruffle of smoked salmon? Scatter some good quality non-pareille capers over it, or shaved red onion. What more do you need?)*

Austrians use their topfen in their spätzle dough, in their strudel and cheesecakes and in mousse-like affairs to be served with stewed plums or apricots. Quark will not curdle when heated like some other fresh “cheeses”, and is light enough to be whipped with some vanilla sugar to go on your strawberries.

Last winter a hospitalized friend refused to

eat until we took her a tub of Hawthorne Valley’s sturdy, organic Quark, a loaf of substantive dark bread, and her preferred sour cherry preserves. (Plus a little old paperback of Colette short stories). She smiled at the starkly white cheese, the peppery bread, and the shimmering red jam. She ate, witheringly tolerant of me, but with growing enthusiasm for her breakfast. She gobbled up the novellas. She rallied quickly, just like in a 1940’s movie, and is now on her traditional winter so-

jour in Brazil, vibrant as before and perfectly capable of the bossa nova. N.B the salubrious impact of a good breakfast, served at midnight or dawn, by the fire or down a sterile white corridor.

I’ve been making all sorts of quarky little treats with the help and guidance of two local food celebrities. One is Marge Randle, of Argyle Cheese Factory, whose quark is

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everything you want a fresh cheese to be. The Randle Family has been raising Holsteins over at Fairview Farm in Argyle since 1860, and Marge's husband David is fourth generation Washington County. The lactic quality of the Holstein milk is perfect for the production of their smooth, rich quark. Marge dissentingly uses whole milk in her quark, and we savor her iconoclasm as well as her cheese. (We have always carried Hawthorne Valley's leaner version, and will assuredly continue to). When Mrs. Randle brought us a few Valentine's Day quark hearts last month and we paired one with a dab of the raspberry-Chardonnay preserves from the Hunger Action Network folks, we were thrilled. I might never make a *Coeur à la Crème* again.

Louise Frazier, local legend, gastronome and connoisseur of German food, has also graciously fostered our quark education. She knows expressions like "Gabelfrühstück", and is the lady to consult when you need to know about lactic-acid fermented vegetables or what herb goes best with your beets or buckwheat. She uses quark in several simple and delightful presentations. "Quark is a simple milk product similar to cottage cheese, but with a slight sour taste. It has a low lactose (milk sugar) content thereby making it a good protein source for a diabetic or other low sugar diet...Most often it is used as a spread in countries like Ger-

many where it is beloved at supper (Abendbrot) with a good hearty whole rye bread. It can be complemented with savory herbs or fruit preserves- even with honey". Louise's credentials as restaurateur (she operated a vegetarian restaurant in Cologne), consultant, and food writer have made her a local treasure.

The house, cave-like, is soon toasty. The orchids, incongruously in full bloom, provide their special serenity to the scene. The snow continues to fall thickly. Louise Frazier's "Quark Cloud Omelette" (recipe herewith) is a sustaining symphony of white and gold. It's the perfect second breakfast fare: unchallenging to put together- and to digest. I toast some of the omnipresent "No-knead Bread" and silently thank all the angels along the highway for letting me get home for another Gabelfrühstück. Sometime tomorrow the clouds will surge off to the east, and the sun will dapple the sycamore. The pines will slough off their ermine mantles with a *whump!* And tiny birds will emerge for their breakfasts, voracious. Soon there will be safer

travels and hyacinths. Perhaps some of Marge's quark whipped up with vanilla and slathered on local raspberries.

And only eight or so months until we feel this cozy again.



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Here are a few of Louise's quark recipes, printed here with her gracious permission. Ask us in the cheese department for my recipes for quark-stuffed potatoes and Topfenknödel. We wish you safe travels and nurturing breakfasts at any hour.

Quark Topping or Spread

Whip together 1 Cup of Quark, the Juice of 1/2 lemon, 1/2-teaspoon dry mustard (dissolved in the lemon juice) or 1 teaspoon grated horseradish, and 1 Tablespoon tamari or 2 teaspoons salt- or to taste.

For topping, heat slowly over water-don't boil-serve soon!

For dip or spread serve as is and keep covered in refrigerator.

Quark Cream Dessert

Whip together:

1-pound Quark; 1 or 2 Tablespoons maple syrup;

1/2-teaspoon coriander; 1/4-teaspoon allspice and/or nutmeg or mace; 1-teaspoon vanilla; and the juice and zest of 1/2 lemon or orange.

Serve in dessert dishes- either plain or top with fruits of the season. Bananas, berries, apricots, peaches or tangerines are tasty!

Quark Cloud Omelette

3 eggs

1/4-cup quark

3 scallions with green tops

1/4 teaspoon rubbed sage/ 1-teaspoon fresh chopped dill weed.

Lightly sauté snipped/slices scallions in oiled skillet/griddle, turning over as they become translucent. Beat eggs and with fork, fold quark into the beaten eggs, being careful not to fully mix in. (*That's crucial*). Pour egg-quark mixture over scallions to cover surface of pan. As eggs set up, lift from edges and turn one side of omelette over the other. Cut in half and after a few minutes, turn/flip over again. When golden, serve! Delicious with thick slices of whole grain toast. (*I have made this with 3 or 4 egg whites and saved the yolks for a crème Anglaise. The resulting omelette has an even more cloud-like aesthetic and is absolutely delectable, and perhaps easier to digest if you are very late getting home*).

