**Food Ways Assignment: Blueberry Vareniki**

**Written by Tyler Holland**

For this assignment I interviewed Andrey Volynets. He was born and raised in Ukraine until he was 6 years old, and then he moved to California. He still lives here today, and is now 20 years old. I then asked him the following questions, and his answers are included:

**a. What is the name of the dish? Country of origin**  
 The dish is called Blueberry Vareniki, and it originated in Ukraine. There are many different ways to prepare vareniki, but all that changes is the filling that is inside. I chose blueberry because it is easy to make and it is my favorite, and blueberries are good for you. **b. Who eats the dish (ethnic group, social class, region)?**  
 It is a very common dish that most people in Ukraine can cook. It is fairly simple and the ingredients are easy to find everywhere, so mostly everyone in Ukraine eats it. It isn't really a special dish to any one ethnic group or social class, but it is unique to Ukraine as far as I know. **c. What time is this dish eaten (special holiday, breakfast, etc)?**  
 The most common meal to eat it for is lunch or dinner, but it is not a holiday dish. The fruit filled ones can also be had as a dessert as they are very sweet. It is not tied to any specific holiday though. It's just another common meal. They can also be frozen and reheated very quickly which also makes them good snacks.

**d. What type of situation is this dish eaten (family gathering, everyday, wedding, funeral, etc.)?** It is an everyday dish. Again, it is not tied to any specific event, it is just a common thing to eat whenever. I have had it at a few family gatherings, but it is not considered a special dish or anything.  
**e. Are there any particular customs associated with the preparation or consumption of this dish?** Not really, you can eat it with jam or sour cream depending on what it is filled with. We use a fork to seal the edges of the vareniki, while other people do it by hand. I find the fork allows for a tighter seal and it is much less messy. Other than that there aren't any special customs we go through when preparing them. We just cook them as we would any other meal, just follow the directions and then eat.  
**f. What was your favorite food as a child? Who prepared it and how?** My favorite food was crepes, especially strawberry ones. My mom would always prepare them on most weekends. She would make normal crepe batter, and then for the filling she would use strawberries lightly coated with sugar, and then either chocolate syrup or whipped cream. She didn't do anything special for the preparation, just the normal method of circling the batter around a pan until you have a large, thin pancake-like thing, and then wait for it to brown and then eat.   
**g. What foods were either fished, hunted or gathered by you as a child?** I fished a few times as a child and gathered fruit and vegetables out of our garden at home. I definitely didn't do any hunting. As far as gathering goes, we had strawberries and lettuce growing in our backyard, so I would pick those sometimes. I would also use those strawberries in the crepes I talked about as my favorite food. That probably contributes to why the crepes were so good. But that's all I did, fish a few times and pick stuff out of the family garden.

**h. What was your typical meal as a teenager?** As a teenager my typical meal consisted of usual food like chicken, pasta, pizza, salad, etc. At this point though I had already moved to the United States, so my eating habits were less Ukrainian I guess. My family would still eat vareniki fairly often for dinner, since they are so easy to make. A typical meal that I would make for myself as a snack (because my parents cooked the other meals) was blueberry vareniki. They were easy to make and I froze them to eat as snacks, and that was a pretty typical meal for me that I made myself. Other than that we just had typical American meals like salads and chicken dishes mostly.  
**i. What foods do you eat when sad, lonely or depressed?** I do not change my eating habits depending on how I feel; I eat the same things as always. I'm not sure if that has to do with me being from Ukraine or not, but I was raised this way. I feel like changing your eating habits based on how you feel can be very dangerous and unhealthy, so I don't do it. The closest thing I have to "comfort food" are strawberry crepes, but I will eat those at any time regardless of my mood.  
**j. Name one food that is typically only eaten on special occasions in your culture? (an example for America would be cranberry sauce)**  
 A traditional food only eaten on special occasions is Paskha. This is basically a sweet cake that is only eaten for Easter. It has a unique mold that is shaped like a truncated pyramid, and is usually marked with religious symbols. It also sometimes includes candied fruits and almonds folded into the sweet cake.  
**k. What foods do you celebrate with on special occasions?** Nowadays I have adopted most celebratory food from American culture, such as birthday cakes and Christmas cookies. One thing I still do from Ukraine is eat poppy seed cake on Christmas eve, a tradition brought over from Ukraine. Also, bread is often used on special occasions, I'm not sure what types are used when but I know there are many different types of bread to be used in certain occasions such as weddings or funerals.  
**l. What foods do you avoid because they are bad for you?** Coca-Cola and other sodas, frozen dinners, and candy. This is more from what I have learned over the years and not specifically what I know just from living in Ukraine. I mainly avoid these foods because of the high calorie and sugar amounts, and frozen dinners usually have tons of preservatives which can be very bad for your health so I try to stay away from them.  
**m. What foods do you eat when sick?** I do not change my diet when I am sick besides drinking more water than usual. I guess this also relates to me not changing my diet based on my mood. Keeping your diet stable is a lot less dangerous than binging/fasting when you are sick. I like to just let my body take care of itself, drink a lot of water, and I normally eat lots of vegetables which provides the vitamins and minerals I need.  
**n. What foods do you eat that are good for you?** Fruits and vegetables. My favorite fruit is definitely strawberries, because they were a big part of my childhood and they just taste awesome. Although they aren't the best fruit for you, they are fruit nonetheless. My favorite vegetable is broccoli, and it is one of the better vegetables for you too, so that works out nicely in my favor.

**Additional comments (from Tyler):**

Throughout the interview, I noticed that there weren't that many differences between Ukrainian culture and American culture. Although there are a few unique Ukrainian dishes that I hadn't heard of before, most of the other foods Andrey ate were common to me. I think that American culture accepts a bunch of different foods from other cultures, such as crepes. Also, our views on healthy eating were very similar, which makes sense to me. The basics of eating healthy shouldn't vary too much through cultures, fruits and vegetables are good, pure fat is bad.

**Recipe for Blueberry Vareniki**

Dough Combine all the ingredients in the bowl of a electric mixer with the dough hook in place. Mix for 1 minute at low speed, then raise the speed to moderate and beat for 2 minutes; the dough should be well blended, smooth, and elastic. However you knead the dough, form it into 2 balls, dust lightly with all-purpose flour, completely cover tightly with plastic wrap, and allow to rest for 30 minutes or more in a refrigerator. (Over night is best)

**INGREDIENTS**

* Dough 3 cups all-purpose flour
* Dough 1 teaspoon salt
* Dough 3 egg yolks, save the whites
* Dough 1/2 cup cold water
* Filling 3-3 1/2 cups blueberries, fresh
* Filling 1/2 cup sugar
* Filling 1/2-1 teaspoons cinnamon
* Filling 3/4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
* Filling 1-2 egg whites, lightly beaten (for sealing the vareniki)
* 2 cups sour cream for dipping

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Roll out dough about 1/8 inch thick and cut into 3-inch circles with a glass or a cookie cutter.
2. Just before filling the rounds, lightly toss the blueberries with the sugar and cinnamon. Spread on a plate and dust with the flour.
3. Fill each round with a scant tablespoon of blueberries. Fold, seal ( put egg whites lightly beaten on the inside edge to help seal the vareniki )( I also fork the edge myself)
4. Prepare the pan of boiling water for cooking the Varenikis. and cook in pot of salted boiling water as soon as you can (they are done when they float) gently remove from pot with a slotted spoon.. Cook in as needed.   
   Serve HOT with sour cream for dipping.