

# The Hobo Corner: My Hobo Starter

By Jack Kauppila



Hey Everyone – It's Jack here, from the Hobo Bakery in Vernonia, my new hometown.

I MISS YOU GUYS!

The Hobo Corner has been so quiet these last weeks... I need my people back! And you guys need your sugar cookies! And donuts! Ooh, peanut butter pie! Listen, if you need something let me know and I'll try to make it happen.

Now I don't want to use the V-word, or the P-word, but I will use the F-word – this is an absolute FlourCatsAsstrophy!

Our grandchildren will tell the tale of the dark days of the 20s, and all the stories will start with a hushed voice saying "...and flour was the first thing to go..."

Well, our grandkids will hear the story that way – we were already stocked up on toilet paper!

Shelf after empty shelf staring back at me from store after store. At first my sort of 'hoity-toity' artisan flour were the last things remaining, but soon they

fell prey to the flour-a-demic.

And then it got really real. I had baked every last hobo-bread I could and realized I was almost out of flour! None of it was available anywhere (one website had it for three times the normal cost – hah! That's not hobo!) and I wasn't going to have enough flour TO FEED MY STARTER DOUGH!!!!

Lemme tell ya 'bout my Hobo Starter...

Actually I have 3 or 4 buckets going right now:

- One ancient mother from Italy (I'm not swearing, that's what a healthy starter is called)
- A super-stinky mother from some leftover pizza dough I had so long ago (I can't throw anything away)
- One that I call 'sourdough' that I dip in to when someone wants a more traditional sourdough flavor
- My daily go-to
- A backup go-to in case I have more to bake than I can handle

It's been five years in the making and it's still growing and changing this Hobo Starter. I add a little something from another bucket from time to time, along with the blend of unbleached

white bread flour, dark rye, and whole wheat flours I use to feed my bubbling barrel of yeasties.

I was sure it was never going to work. I tended it daily, monitored temperature, fed it according to schedule, and made all the mistakes I could along the way. Finally, I had a thick, bubbling tub of happy little yeasties and they have been absolutely bulletproof ever since. I can grab a small handful, mix it with some flour, water and in 6 or 8 hours (depending on room temp) I will have a big new batch of starter, ready to build the best bread on earth!

It truly is a process of bringing a life into the world and being responsible for it. Forever. Really, forever and ever. Not to get too personal, but I was not at a place in my life, at any other time of my life, to give sourdough starter the life it deserved. I bow to all those lost yeasties that gave their lives in my random, ungraceful attempts at starter dough.

Hey, yeast are people too! They have DNA. They smell bad when they're working hard. And just try to get them to raise up a loaf of bread when they don't feel like it... it ain't pretty. Wait, am I thinking of teenage boys? Either way, I guess...

And, while I never had the time or patience at any other time of my life, it turns out that so very many of us have that sort of time on our hands right now! And I'm sure we are all tapping in to hidden reserves of patience and tolerance every time we change our little surgical gloves or put our masks back on to go into the store and stare at empty shelves of flour.

So! We all have the time. You've probably got the flour, or know someone who does – someone had to buy all that stuff! Buckle up, let's make some sourdough starter!

There are so many websites and You-Tubeys, and Instapoopers with perfectly fine directions on starting your sourdough. I'm not going to reprint the method here; find instructions that you like and stick to them. I suggest checking out the King Arthur Flour website – it has a great link for starting and maintaining your own sourdough starter, and it is a great place for ideas and recipes on how to use your starter once it's ready.

I would suggest using King

Arthur Flour, as well, by the way. They get their flour from the same place I do, Shepherd's Grain, a cooperative of family-grown, no-till wheat farmers in Washington and Idaho.

Here are some additional suggestions to keep your yeasties bubbling:

- It's a five day process and is going to take some focus. Don't try to cut corners or speed it up; trust the process.
- It's only flour, water, and time. If anyone tries to tell you any different, ignore them.
- Do NOT kickstart it with commercial yeast! The commercial yeast will take over the whole process and you will lose all the lovely, native yeast that came along with the flour.
- Have a plan for what and when you are going to bake with your starter. There's nothing worse than planning a nice garlic bread for your dinner that night, but having to 'bring back' your starter for a day or two after it's been ignored in the fridge for a couple weeks.
- I use a small amount of Dark Rye flour (Bob's Red Mill) and Whole Wheat flour (King Arthur or Bob's Red Mill) along with the White Bread Flour to get some extra depth-of-flavor and because they come with a lot more native yeast than the white, or all purpose flours.
- Choose a schedule for feeding your starter and stick to it. I like to think of it like I'm teaching the little yeasties how to grow and prosper. Again, like teenage boys, if left too long on their own those little yeasties are probably going to do something you don't want.
- Once you have your robust, living, bubbling container of starter you will be part of a rare group of people who have actually gotten to the yeasty promised-land. So feel free to get very prideful, secretive, and a little defensive about your own personal dough.

When someone starts talking about their starter you can smile and nod, secretly sure that your starter is better than theirs.

Well, that's all from the Hobo Corner this month. Even though we are separated by at least six feet let's stay close to each other, all of us, and when our grandkids tell the story, the V-word will be VICTORY and we'll all be smiling over a nice slice of toast from bread made with our own, home-grown yeasties.

Peace and Happy Happy Toasting.

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Vernonia's Voice is published on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday. Look for our next issue on May 21.

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