

# MEET HERMIONE'S FIRST BORN

That beautiful bubbling source of nourishment is my beloved sourdough starter, affectionately known as Hermione. Her name comes from her father Herman who sadly died years ago when I neglected feeding him for over a month. I plan to take no chances with Hermione. She is well fed, well rested and ready to get to work. I've spent hours watching and re-watching Apollonia Poilâne's bread making Masterclass, and I think I'm ready to make her sourdough wheat loaf.

I would like to say that I created Hermione totally from scratch, but I have to admit, I did use King Arthur's sourdough starter to get things going. I meticulously followed the instructions and fed Hermione twice a day for five days. I even bought her a nice home—a 1.5 liter Weck Jar from Amazon. It has a nice wide opening so that it's easy to stick a spatula inside and mix the flour and water around without half of it ending up on my shirt.

□It is day six, so Hermione should be more than ready for Apollonia's recipe. Everything seems to be going along fine. As I mix the ingredients together, I notice the dough seems a bit tough, but what do I know? Eventually I put it aside to rise after ten minutes of arm aching kneading.



On the video, after the first rise, Apollonia lovingly lifts the dough out of the bowl as it gently stretches out towards the table so that she can fold it upon itself. When I lift

mine, it doesn't move, locked in its own glutinous mass. What did I do wrong? Was Hermione too young to use? Did I not knead it enough? Did I knead it too much? Did the weather affect my flour to water ratio? Did I leave out a cup of water inadvertently? At this point, according to Apollonia, I should trash the whole thing. But, not wanting to be wasteful, I persevere.

□The second rise seems to have done the dough some good. It's gone from a hard mass to a slightly lighter hard mass. It's time to get it ready to bake, but not before my favorite part—scoring the loaf. I'm addicted to YouTube videos of people slicing all sorts of beautiful designs into bread. I have a traditional lame and I make a nice deep cut going down the center. According to Apollonia, if my bread hasn't risen quite enough, a deep cut will help. I then make some light cuts on either side with hopes a nice leaf-like design will emerge.

□After fifty-five minutes, I realize I probably should have kept a better eye on it. The top has burnt a bit, but it doesn't look too bad. I'm sure Apollonia would drop kick it out of the window, but after schmearing a few slices with some French butter, no one in my house seems to be complaining.