Cherry-Vanilla Cake

* For the Cake Layers:
* 3-1/3 cups (370 g) sifted cake flour
* 1-1/2 tablespoons (20 g) baking powder
* 3/4 teaspoon (7 g) salt
* 1-3/4 cups (415 ml) whole milk, at room temperature
* 6 egg whites, at room temperature
* 3 tablespoons (45 ml) cherry juice/syrup (from the jar of cherries)
* 1/4 teaspoon (1.75 ml) almond extract
* 2-1/4 cups (450 g) vanilla sugar (or regular sugar)
* 1-1/2 sticks (173 g) unsalted butter, at room temperature
* 3/4 cup (178 ml) finely chopped maraschino cherries
* For the Whipped Vanilla-Cherry Filling:
* 1 cup (2 sticks)(227 g) unsalted butter, softened and cut into cubes
* 2 cups (250 g) confectioners’ sugar, sifted
* 1 tablespoon (15 ml) milk
* 1 tablespoon (15 ml) maraschino cherry juice/syrup (from the jar of cherries)
* 2 teaspoons (10 ml) pure vanilla extract
* a pinch of salt
* a handful of finely chopped maraschino cherries
* For Nanny's Old-Fashioned Frosting:
* 3 egg whites
* 1 cup (200 grams) of vanilla sugar (you can substitute regular sugar)
* 1/4 cup (59 ml) light corn syrup
* 3 tablespoons (45 ml) water
* 1/4 teaspoon (1.25 ml) cream of tartar
* pinch of salt
* 1/2 teaspoon (2.5 ml) pure vanilla extract (optional)

Sift the flour, baking powder and salt into a medium-sized bowl.

Whisk together the milk, eggs, cherry juice/syrup and almond extract

In an electric mixer fitted with the whisk or paddle attachment (I used the whisk), cream the butter and sugar on medium speed until very pale and creamy, about 5 minutes.

With the mixer still on medium speed, alternate additions of the flour mixture and milk-egg mixture, beginning and ending with the flour mixture (3 dry additions, 2 wet), beating after each addition until incorporated. Continue mixing on medium speed for 2 minutes.

Fold in finely chopped cherries.

Divide batter evenly among 3 cake pans, smoothing the surface with a small offset spatula or rubber spatula. Bake until a skewer comes out with a few crumbs only, about 30 minutes. Cakes should be well-risen and springy to the touch.

Transfer the cakes to cooling racks and cool for 5 minutes, then loosen the edges by running a knife around the sides. Gently turn out the cakes, peel of parchment paper bottom, then cool right side up. Bake the third cake and repeat.

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, whip butter for 5 minutes on medium speed (I use “4″ on my KitchenAid). Butter will become very pale & creamy.

Add remaining ingredients, except the cherries, and mix on low speed for 1 minute, then on medium speed for 6 minutes. Filling will be very light, creamy, and fluffy.

Fold in cherries.

Place all ingredients except the vanilla (if using) into a large heatproof bowl that fits snugly atop a medium saucepan of simmering water on the stove (about one inch of water).  Heat until warm to the touch.

Remove the bowl from the saucepan, wipe the bottom of the bowl dry, and place on the counter. Continue to beat until the frosting is cool (or at least just slightly warm) and beat in the vanilla extract, if using.

Trim any doming or top crust from cake layers using a very sharp serrated knife.

Use a cake turntable, if possible, for filling, frosting and decorating. Place a small dollop of frosting in the center of a cake plate or 8″ round thin foil-covered cake board, and place the bottom cake layer on top, top side up (face-up).

Place ~1 cup of Whipped Vanilla-Cherry Filling on top of the cake layer, and spread evenly with a small offset palette knife.

Gently place 2nd cake layer, face up, on top. Repeat, then place your third layer face down.

Put a generous scoop of Nanny's Old-Fashioned Frosting on top, spreading evenly from the top down to the sides until you have smothered the entire cake in the frosting. Use the back of a spoon or small offset palette knife to create the swirly texture.