



First Helpings

A WIGGLY TRADITION



IN MY WORK FOR THE SFA, I often read stories in which the author lovingly recalls the Southern foods of his or her childhood—homemade biscuits, collard greens, chicken and dumplings. Usually the author recalls a mother or grandmother preparing these dishes, scooping bacon grease from a tin can by the stove into a generations-old cast-iron skillet.

I have few such memories from my childhood, and I turned out just fine. It was the 1980s, and then the 90s, in Raleigh, North Carolina, at least a decade before the Triangle got hip. (I was away at college and many years too late before I learned that a young Ryan Adams had spent those same years gigging at Sadlack's Heroes, a

crusty, beloved dive bar on Hillsborough Street by the N.C. State campus. Maybe we were hip all along, and I just didn't know it.) We ate at home six nights a week, and my maternal grandmother usually joined us on two or three of those nights. We went through a baked spaghetti phase, a grilled-chicken-sandwich phase, a turkey burger phase.

During those years, my parents maintained some culinary traditions from their own upbringings—country ham biscuits for special occasions, Brunswick stew on cold winter nights, black-eyed peas on New Year's Day—while others fell to the side. I bet your family did, and does, the same. In graduate school, I read an academic explanation for this common-sense practice: Traditions are not accidents. They are those rituals of the past that we choose to carry forward with us. More recently, I heard SFA board member Francis Lam tell an assembly of SFA folk the same thing. Which brings me to congealed salad (a topic you'll read more about later in this issue).

Every Christmas Eve, my mother serves a congealed salad. She fills individual dome-shaped tin molds with cherry Jell-O, chopped nuts, and fruit cocktail. When it's time to set the table, she turns each mold out onto a bread-and-butter plate lined with a leaf of iceberg lettuce. Had I stopped to think about it when I was younger, I might have guessed that this tradition belonged to my grandmother, and that my mother continued the practice out of respect. Now, a dozen years after my grandmother passed, the dish lives on. It doesn't matter whether anyone actually eats the congealed salad, but it wouldn't be Christmas without it.

As we celebrate our first wedding anniversary, my husband and I are

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forging our own food traditions. (It turns out that I'm more like my mom than I thought, and Kirk takes after his own mother, a talented and joyful home cook.) I hope the New Year is a time for you to reflect on your own food traditions, to revive the ones that you love, and maybe to implement something new. —Sara Camp Milam

I'M WITH THE BRAND

GENERIC TRADEMARKS IN THE KITCHEN

When we adopt a brand name as the common name for a product, a generic trademark is born. Many of these reside in your kitchen: Crock Pot, Tupperware, and—believe it or not—TV Dinner. Generations of Southerners recognize Coke as a generic trademark for soda.

Tabasco® has waged several trademark battles to defend its status as more than a generic term for hot sauce in popular use. When we want gelatin, we say Jell-O, but Kraft owns the Jell-O brand. It has also entered the vernacular to describe sore, tired muscles: "I was so tired from walking from store to



store looking for gelatin that my legs turned to Jell-O." Jell-O was an aspirational food in mid-century Kentucky, writes Lora Smith in her article on page 14.

Another generic trademark served as the icon for our 2015 programming theme, Pop Goes the South. You've probably noticed the bright pink image we feature alongside the words. And you might want to call it a popsicle, but the Popsicle company wishes you wouldn't. It's a frozen ice treat on a stick, thankyouverymuch.

Tip Number 58

It's time to update your SFA membership! Join or renew for 2016

to keep receiving Gravy. In 2016, we explore the Corn-Fed South, from bread to syrup.