

AN ODE TO FOOD, FAMILY, FRIENDS AND HOME COOKING

When it comes to food, I am the all-around guy that has mastered the arts of determination, dedication and disasters! When I say disasters, let us just say that I am not one who should ever be in the kitchen telling someone HOW to cook, let alone cooking myself. It wasn't long ago when I tried my hand at making dough from scratch for some pepperoni bagel bites. I had everything necessary from the mixing bowl to the instant yeast to make my dough rise to the occasion.

Perhaps I did not mix the yeast in the water properly, but it looked close enough to the image that I had seen on YouTube and so I continued trying to make the dough. Things seemed to go smooth until it was time to remove the dough from the bowl and place it in my mixer, at which point my sticky bun dough did not settle the right way and I had the nastiest looking super dough balls that one could imagine.

After the time spent to remove all my sticky dough from the mixer and every single part that the dough had stuck to, I tried to ride that horse once again. The second time was a better attempt, but again, as with anything, practice makes perfect. I always like to say that food is the universal language, and over the years in my travels I have met and dined with a number of interesting minds.

My family is close knit and come Thanksgiving, you will find yourself surrounded by wisdom right on down to the young ones in the family. We will all be sharing what we are truly thankful for as the scent of the cinnamon escapes from the candied yams or the subtle calling of being down south graces the

table with its presence within the greens, cornbread, ham, black eyed peas, baked macaroni and cheese and chicken.

You are in for quite a treat when the family is full of stories, but what is most important is the time spent and the time shared with those who you have not seen for a while. Have you noticed that good food is often part of the foundation within a good family? You can be at a family cookout and everyone knows to ask who made what. We all have our favorite foods prepared by various family members. So you look for that person at these functions and ask where their famous meal is located, for people simply love to be connected to good food at the end of the day.

What stands out about a home cooked meal is that you can actually taste the LOVE and preparation in these dishes. My Aunt Lisa is known for just about all of her dishes at our family gatherings, but I look for her Collard Greens. She makes them with a nice little kick, and when I speak of a kick I am talking about the spice level. Nothing too crazy, but among the pork fat saltiness broken down to a softer level for the chew and soaked within some tasty juices that help her collards maintain moisture, you are always in for a special treat with every bite.

My mother has held me down for YEARS when it comes to food from the heart. She is as hard a working woman as any. But, when I was young, after a long day on the job, my mother would come home tired as can be but still make time to stay up in a hot kitchen and whip up some of her BBQ Ribs. More times than not you would think they were smoked on a grill the way that meat would fall off the bone. It was often pointless to pick them up with your hands unless you wanted to sit there and suck on the bone. She did not stop there, her baked macaroni and cheese is what held it all together.

At first sight, you would see the crusted top of bread crumbs. The moment you cracked a spoon into that pan and took a scoop, you were pulling on cheese for days with steam exploding from each scoop as if a volcano was about to erupt!

Her sweet potato pie is always a sweet bite of delight. Remove that slice and catch the aroma of cinnamon and nutmeg about to dance around upon your taste buds, as the sweet and rich bite reminded you of everything right with life. She always used just the right amount of sugar so as not to make her sweet potato pie too sweet. There is no taking just one slice. Once you finish the piece in your hand, you run back in hopes something is left from a family that has just experienced the same sensational taste.