

The Dickey's Barbecue Story

EVEN THOUGH I WAS PRACTICALLY RAISED BESIDE THE PIT at Dickey's Barbecue in north Dallas, Texas, I never intended to be in the restaurant business. It may come as a surprise to some folks but when I was growing up, I was pretty darn sure that I wanted to be a lawyer. As a child in the 1950s, I contracted polio, spent a lot of time indoors and often was a fill-in at my mother's bridge table. Thank goodness I suffered no lasting effects from polio but while I was laid up and not playing cards, I zeroed in on TV's "Perry Mason." I watched actor Raymond Burr, who played old Perry, strut into the courtroom and tackle all those intriguing cases with the help of his beautiful assistant Della Street.

Looking back, I figure my dad, Travis Dickey Sr., was typical in that he wanted his children to have a better life than he did. Dad only had a seventh or eighth grade education but his business sense was razor sharp. He spent years at Dickey's getting to know lawyers, doctors and other well-dressed professionals who were regulars at the restaurant. I truly believe he wanted that kind of life for his sons. He hoped that each of us would land a job with an honest-to-goodness office and an air-conditioned car. But a traditional career, as such, was not meant to be, although in high school and college my long-range plan was to become a criminal lawyer or a dashing Hollywood agent.

I love talking about Dickey's Barbecue, which now has nearly 250 stores, because it is a true American success story. It all started with the opening of the first Dickey's—store number one, as we've always called it—in 1941 on the eve of the United States' involvement in World War II. Dad was a one-of-a-kind character who was blessed with a gift of gab that took him far and wide. He was born and raised on a farm in east Texas and, in 1917, left straight from there to fight in World War I. After the war ended, Dad—like most soldiers of that era—had to wait for room on a ship to bring him back to the states. As a result, he ended up living in France for several months before he had a spot on a ship. I think his experience in France gave him both a sense of adventure and the courage that

would influence him for the rest of his life. His time in France also led him to eventually open Dickey's Barbecue, although that pivotal moment happened years later.

Dad finally made it back to the good old U.S. of A. and headed West to sow a few wild oats. Can you imagine going back to a farm after you've seen the bright lights of "Paree?" Nope, the farm wasn't the life for my Dad. First, he had to go exploring. For the next decade—those carefree Roaring '20s—Dad worked various jobs in California. Probably the most interesting time for him was the five years that he managed a soda fountain at Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street. I've seen snapshots of Dad taken in those days and I can only imagine how exciting his life was at that point.

Shortly after the Great Depression hit, Dad came down with a bout of homesickness and returned to Texas. My grandparents, meanwhile, had felt the economic pinch and lost the farm. They moved to Dallas and opened a greasy spoon called J.P.'s Café. Dallas became Dad's home base and it wasn't long before he met an attractive secretary named Ollie Rich and was married. For the next few years Dad worked a series of jobs that kept food on the table for him and Mom. He was a versatile guy and was hired to operate a beer distributorship and



work at a convenience store, among other jobs. Deep down inside, though, I think Dad knew he wanted to be his own boss. One day while driving around north Dallas, Dad spotted a beat-up, former beer joint. He really had a vision and reckoned he could make a purse out of a sow's ear, so to speak. The beer joint was at the intersection of Knox and Central, near the old central railroad tracks with dirt roads bordering either side. In later years, the old railroad tracks became the North Dallas Expressway—also known as Interstate 75, one of two major traffic arteries in central Dallas.

Dad knew how to smoke meat so he figured that he would transform that tired looking beer joint into a barbecue stand. He opened the first Dickey's on October 15, 1941, and called it a stand because



The original Dickey's Barbecue in 1946. My dad, Travis Dickey, with my sister, Elizabeth, and my brother T. D.

it was basically a counter with stools. Eventually, he put in a few school desks but never in his lifetime had tables and chairs in that location. For sentimental reasons, we keep a row of the original school desks in store number one.

In the beginning, Dickey's truly was a one-man operation. Dad cooked, waited on customers and cleaned up. Sandwiches were 10 cents, which was about the price of a gallon of gas. Funny how today's sandwich prices also mirror the price of a gallon of gas. Since day one we have had a reasonably priced menu because we know people are always on the lookout for good, inexpensive food.

During busy times, Mom helped Dad by carrying sandwiches to customers' cars. One December day, Mom was running sandwiches outside when a car radio blared out the news about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. She had no idea where Pearl Harbor was but she and the customer figured that it must be in Hawaii. Like a lot of folks, they also couldn't imagine why anyone would want to bomb America.

No doubt about it, World War II changed the nature of Dad's business. Suddenly everyone was working at least one and possibly two jobs, and they had money to eat out. Almost overnight, the country became prosperous. Rationing also began and the amount of meat my father could buy was limited to the rationing coupons he was issued. Turns out, he only had enough food to be open for

five days a week and often sold out of meat. During this boom in business, my parents finally could afford to hire employees. They added two people to the payroll but continued to work tirelessly. They also started a savings account. As a matter of fact, when the war ended, my parents had enough money tucked away to buy the property on which the business was located. All along they had been paying \$50 a month in rent and Dad was satisfied with that arrangement. But, like the true Capricorn and sure-footed business woman that she is, Mom prevailed. My parents paid \$5,000 for the land, which probably seemed like a fortune. Through the years, the property values have increased so much that if my parents hadn't bought that piece of land, they eventually wouldn't have been able to afford to put a Dickey's on it.

Meanwhile, Mom and Dad had three children—my sister, Elizabeth Mills, my late brother, T.D. (for Travis Dickey Jr.) and me. I came along in 1947 when Dad was 50. Thankfully there was no birth control then because if there had been, I may have been just a glimmer in my Dad's eye. Growing up, Dickey's Barbecue couldn't help but be a part of our lives. As a youngster, I made \$1 a week rolling tamales, bussing tables, making sandwiches and doing this 'n that. Yes siree, I rolled more than my share of hot tamales on Saturday mornings at the restaurant. We don't serve



Above: Two original customers waiting for lunch outside the restaurant, 1941. Below: My dad at the original store serving barbecue to the mayor of Dallas.



tamales anymore but the original machine is on display at one of our stores. It's memorabilia like this that gives Dickey's that good old down-home feeling.

When I was a teenager, Dickey's employed a couple of colorful characters named Red and Lee who both carried firearms to work. I guess they thought they'd be ready to shoot it out with anybody who tried to rob the place. After the lunch rush, Red and I would grab a sandwich and a glass of milk or a bottle of Dr. Pepper, and sit in the back of the store where Red would entertain me with stories of the Dallas he knew as a boy.

Of course, I couldn't help but put in my two cents worth. Anyone who has ever met me might describe me as an energetic guy who could probably talk the stripes off a zebra. So, when I was younger, it came as no surprise that I would become a member of the debate team both in high school in Dallas and in college at Southern Methodist University. And when it comes to getting in front of a camera, I'm certainly not shy. I enjoy the heck out of making corny commercials and YouTube videos for Dickey's. I won't ever forget how much fun I had as a guest on "Regis and Kelly" in New York. But going to Hollywood or being in show business just wasn't in the cards for me.

In 1966 I was a student at SMU living at home in Dallas. That was the agreement I had with my parents—they would pay my tuition if I lived with them and worked at Dickey's. Deep down inside, I still wanted to be a lawyer.

I woke up from that dream one day in 1967 when I experienced a real-life nightmare and got the call that every child dreads. Dad was only 69, but had dropped dead of a heart attack while sitting at one of the school desks in store number one. Mind you, Dad never drank alcohol but I don't ever remember him not having a cigarette in his hand. Cigarettes probably killed him because he averaged between 80 and 100 a day. He picked up smoking during World War I when an Army doctor told him it was good for his throat. He tried to quit several times but never kicked the habit. Dad never made a lot of money, but he worked hard for what we had. He simply made a living. It might not be what some consider to be a nice living but we had a home and plenty to eat.

When Dad died, my brother and I stopped what we were doing

and took over the business because we wanted to help Mom. Everything soon worked out for the best, which is how I think things always do. I'm often asked how Dickey's began and I explain it this way: Dad opened the barbecue stand, and my brother and I turned Dickey's into a restaurant and started the business.

I was only the second person in my family to attend college. My brother, T.D., graduated from SMU nearly 10 years before I started. As a freshman I joined the debate team because I had the itch to travel and the team competed in tournaments at other colleges throughout the South. When I was growing up my family had neither the money nor time to take vacations, so the debate team

seemed like my ticket to see other cities. As it happened, the team also was responsible for a blossoming romance between me and a pretty girl named Maurine Petty. She was a junior and I was a freshman so ordinarily she wouldn't have given me the time of day. But I was a debater so I eventually persuaded her to go out with me. After a lot more debating, we were married in August 1967. I was 20 and she was a 22-year-old recent graduate of SMU.

I was still taking classes when Maurine became the breadwinner for our family. She was hired as a social worker for the Texas Welfare Department. For the first few years of our marriage, we lived exclusively off Maurine's \$400 monthly salary. It wasn't until September 1968 when I opened the second Dickey's location with my brother that Maurine and I made more than her pittance of a salary. She literally sup-

ported us in the beginning, which made it possible for me to put everything I had into making a second Dickey's Barbecue work. If Maurine hadn't been ready, willing and able to support us, we never would have expanded the business. (By the way, Big Momma is the affectionate name I use to refer to my wife of more than 40 years of wedded bliss.)

When I was a senior in college, T.D. and I pooled our money, bought second-hand equipment and built booths for our second store, which we opened for a few thousand dollars. I convinced every business connection I had at the original Dickey's to give us just enough credit to get that second location up and running. It was a huge gamble that paid off. With all that going on, I even graduated from SMU in four years.

We chose Garland, Texas, for a second location because I had done



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Top: Roland Dickey doing a radio program for 99.5 Wolf. Above: Roland giving a cooking demonstration with host Rebecca Miller of NBC 5 television.

a little research and knew that it was a town that had a good lunch business. By day, I ran the original Dickey's and at night, I would jump in the car and drive to the second location to get it ready to open. When that day came, we had just enough credit for a supply of a week's worth of food. When the doors opened, it was one of those life-changing moments. We knew that if the gamble paid off we'd be

OK. If not, we were probably out of the barbecue business for good.

On opening day I chopped barbecue, my brother was in the kitchen and Maurine may have been running the cash register. After helping me get started with our second location, Maurine concentrated on her social work career. She went on to run the child welfare program for the state of Texas under Governor Bush. She also is a former chair of the Parkland Health and Hospital System's Board of Visitors, in addition to a long list of other impressive appointments. In 2004 she decided to run for county commissioner of district one in Dallas. She won and is serving her second term as a Dallas County Commissioner. Now, in addition to calling her Big Momma, I refer to her as "the commissioner."

Turns out, in our family, cooking has always been a male effort. Big Momma has made an art of not cooking. In fact, I've never even told her where the stove is. Dad cooked, my brother and I cook, and my oldest son Roland Jr. now runs the company, and likes to grill and make simple foods like I do. My youngest son Cullen, who works for a commercial real estate outfit and handles real estate for Dickey's, is a gourmet cook. He once told me that he was so inspired by my cooking that he became the primary cook in his own family. In Cullen's words: "My father's passion for different ethnic cuisines and tremendous culinary creativity encouraged us to love cooking."

How about that?!

Starting when Roland and Cullen were about seven or eight years old, I would take them to work with me on weekends. I was anxious for both boys to understand the value of a dollar and to develop a good work ethic. After all, as a kid I had worked in the restaurant with my Dad and rolling tamales for a quarter was how I learned the business. On Saturday afternoons, the boys stood on milk cartons in the kitchen to peel potatoes or scrape carrots.

Roland Jr. has always loved the restaurant business and kept his summer job at Dickey's all the way through high school. After he graduated from SMU, Roland knew he wanted to stay in the business but I had a brainstorm. I wanted him to make his own way. I told him he had to go to work for another restaurant and become successful on his own before we'd talk about other options. Roland embraced that idea and, upon graduation, went to work for El Chico, a Dallas-based Tex-Mex chain of about 75 restaurants. He worked his way up from kitchen manager and became El Chico's youngest general manager to date.

When El Chico's offered Roland yet another promotion, it was the right time for me to counter. Knowing that everyone would assume I had "given" him a job, I also made him work his way up at Dickey's. He started out as a general manager of a Dickey's that was

opening in New Mexico. He understood that he had to make that restaurant successful before he could move up in the company. He did and worked in Dickey's operations before first becoming vice president, and finally president and chief executive officer.

Since he was named president, Roland has more than doubled the size of the company—twice. I am extremely proud of his hard work and dedication to making the family business a success. I also am thrilled that he has taken the barbecue business farther than I could have imagined, while also maintaining the integrity of our food.

Roland also has continued another family tradition. He met his wife Laura in Dallas and they married in 2006. Naturally, he's the cook in their household.

Cullen, meanwhile, decided the restaurant business wasn't for him. After he graduated from SMU, he chose commercial real estate as his future endeavor. His first and only real estate boss, so far, is David Little, who has been a fantastic mentor for Cullen. During the 1980s, David was our across-the-street neighbor, so it was great to see Cullen go to work for him. I'm proud as punch that Cullen has become a successful real estate broker while maintaining a passion for cooking and food. He met his wife, Allison, at SMU and they were married in 2005. It's funny. Like most Dickey men, Cullen is chief cook and bottle wash at home.

With Dickey's expanding every day, I was fortunate enough to be able to give my sons a lot more than I had while growing up in the 1950s and '60s. Back then, most people wanted to eventually own a Cadillac. When I was young, my parents never drove anything except second-hand Chevrolets. One of my dreams was to own a Cadillac. In 1971 my brother and I found ourselves making that dream come true. Being good ole Southern boys, we first bought our mother a brand spanking new Cadillac on credit for a three-year payout. In 1974, we traded it in for another new Cadillac for her and two Cadillacs for each of us. I have never felt more

successful as I did when I could afford a new Cadillac. Of course in this day and age, talk like that sounds unsophisticated, but when I was a working-class kid coming up, the definition of success was simple: a new car for Mom and a new car for you. If you really made it, that car was a Cadillac, the car of every Texan's dreams.

Hanging in every one of our Dickey's restaurants is an old photo of my brother, my mom and me standing in front of store number one with those two Cadillacs parked in front of us. The picture was taken the day we bought the cars. We display that photo in all the restaurants because, to us, it truly symbolizes success.

After that, I added a few other philosophies to my list of what I measure as success. After buying a Cadillac, I wanted to get to the point in my life where I would be able to afford NOT to eat leftovers. While growing up, we always had to eat leftovers and we had to eat them until they were gone, even if that meant eating the same thing for two or three days. Now, I'm proud to say that Maurine and I can afford to do away with leftovers. They don't go to waste, though. We give them as treats to one of our three dogs. I know the leftover thing is not a big deal to some people, but to me, not eating leftovers is a real measure of success.

Another way I deem myself as successful is looking at a restaurant menu and not worrying about the right-hand column—where the prices are listed. My parents hardly ever took us to restaurants and, during the first years of our marriage, Big Momma and I would only go out to eat if we had clipped a coupon or if we knew the restaurant had a reasonable special. When Maurine and I finally could go out to eat and not look at the prices, we knew we had truly arrived.

Our family has come a long way and, of course, so has Dickey's Barbecue. Materialistically speaking, not having a lot when I was young, I realized a long time ago just how important it was to make Dickey's Barbecue a good value. My brother and I certainly wanted the

"My father's passion for different ethnic cuisines and tremendous culinary creativity encouraged us to love cooking."

— Cullen Dickey



Roland Dickey with sons Cullen and Roland Jr., at the Brown Derby restaurant in Las Vegas in 2001.

restaurant to be a big hit, but we also wanted it to be a fair deal. We always were looking for ways to add value for the customer, which brings me to another funny story. One time my brother and I were at a fancy steakhouse in Austin, Texas. The servers brought a big block of complimentary cheese to each table for customers to enjoy during the meal. Everybody loved it and that reaction made a huge impression on us. We copied the idea and put out a block of cheese at each Dickey's so each guest could slice their own cheese. The cheese was popular for a few years but local health departments began having second thoughts. Number



Roland Dickey and wife, Maurine (Big Momma).

one, the cheese sat around uncovered, and secondly, people were slicing the cheese with a sharp knife. We had to lose the cheese but ended up offering free pickles and ice cream, not necessarily together unless a pregnant woman had a craving.

Dickey's stores have changed slightly through the years. Store number one is still owned by our family and continues to be open for business. In fact, it is the oldest, continually operating restaurant in Dallas. It has never moved, changed its name or closed its doors. Yep, the menu certainly has evolved through the years. We started with beef brisket and smoked ham on white bread. Pickles and potato chips came on the side and a carton of milk washed it all down. Since then, we've expanded the menu to include eight smoked meats and 12 sides. We still smoke all our meats in a genuine hickory wood pit on-site at each and every Dickey's location. Smoking meats on-site is important because people have tons of different ideas about barbecue. For example, is it better to smoke it over hickory wood, apple wood or cherry wood? Or do you dry rub meat with spices before smoking? The list could go on and on. But, the flavor of meat that has been smoked over wood in a pit or on a grill never can be replaced. Even our highest volume Dickey's never has strayed from our signature way of smoking meats overnight.

Our highest volume store ever was built on what once was considered to be the edge of Dallas. Today that neighborhood is known as the Galleria area of North Dallas. That store, which we owned and operated for nine years, opened in 1975. We lost it in 1984 and I say

'lost' because that area grew so fast, the city of Dallas eventually decided the road near the store had to be widened. In order to do so, the city took in the nearly two acres that we owned—store included—to expand the Dallas North Tollway. Our building was leveled to make way for more people. The city paid us for the land, but there was no way to truly replace that store. That particular Dickey's was one of the city's most popular lunch spots. An odd thing about that store was the bank of pay phones I had put in when we built the restaurant. Naturally, this was long before everyone had even heard of a cell phone so men

needed a pay phone if they had to call a business associate during lunch. The bank of pay phones coupled with the restaurant's location, at the far edge of the city's northward expansion, made this particular Dickey's THE place for lunch in Dallas.

The longer I was in the restaurant business the more I learned about cooking. With the barbecue stand, Dad cooked as much as Mom did when I was growing up. By the time I was nine, I was a whiz at washing raw vegetables, peeling potatoes, scraping carrots and, of course, rolling tamales. I also was quite an expert at seasoning food and smoking meats, but that wasn't until I was ten. By the time my brother and I were running Dickey's I had been looking for better food, more options and new recipes. I think Yuppies would describe me as a "foodie," but I just consider what I do as learning the business. I'm always reading—at least two books a week—and I'm forever developing recipes. I spend a ton of time on the road visiting our stores, attending grand openings and hamming it up on radio broadcasts or TV commercials. I also enjoy visiting other restaurants wherever I go because I love good food.

A few years ago the Dallas Morning News printed an article with the headline, "Wife's Political Career Ends Husband's Cooking Show." Maurine had just announced her intentions of running for the county commission and I was doing a morning cooking segment for a local television show called "Good Morning Texas." Maurine's political contest was heated and the network big shots were concerned that the network's election coverage wouldn't seem fair if they were evaluating her



Travis Dickey II, Director; eldest son, Roland Dickey Jr., President/CEO; Roland Dickey; the late T.D. Dickey; youngest son Cullen Dickey, Director of Real Estate.

on the evening news while I was on in the morning. After the newspaper article came out, a local radio station, “The Wolf” called me. The Wolf had the most popular morning radio show in Dallas and he asked me to do a weekly cooking segment. The show found it hilarious that my wife’s political ambitions had abruptly ended my TV show. I had a howling good time for a couple of years cooking on the show at the Wolf.

“Starring” in so many cooking segments that targeted folks at home really has pushed me to develop recipes that work in a normal kitchen. Those TV and radio segments also have been instrumental in my seeing to fruition the cookbook idea that I have dreamed of for ages. I’ve discovered that cooking in a commercial kitchen with large quantities of food and specialized equipment is far different than what will work in a home kitchen. How many backyards are equipped with a commercial grade gas barbecue pit that smokes 600 pounds of meat all at once? Not many, for sure. I know for certain that the recipes in this book will work because they are based on my personal collection. You’ll certainly see a few items in this book that are similar to the ones we serve at Dickey’s but the recipes aren’t exactly the same.

We serve fast-casual food at Dickey’s. It’s good food that’s not too expensive and fast, and in the pages of this book you will find tips on how to do just that. These days, most every family is on a tight schedule with both parents usually working outside the home. Sandwiched in between Mama and Daddy’s beat-the-clock day are kids’



Back row: Roland Jr., Cullen’s wife Allison, Cullen, and Roland Dickey. In front: Roland Jr.’s wife Laura and Maurine Dickey (Big Momma).

activities like sporting events and practices, music and dance lessons, and everything else. Working parents who usually handle meal preparation for the family simply don’t have an hour or two at the end of a weekday to spend precious time in the kitchen.

I’m a big believer in cooking being fun, not time-driven. So have both a good time reading this book and cooking for your family and friends. Life is too short not to make the most of it. ★



DICKEY'S BARBECUE

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PALATE-PLEASIN'
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AND SALADS

Pickled Shrimp

This dish is so good that my family won't stop eating it. My wife, Big Momma, likes to eat this recipe with crackers as her main course. She doesn't want to waste any time with any other course besides this one. I always buy my shrimp raw, peel and de-vein them myself, and boil them with a little crab seasoning, water, and beer. No matter how you get the shrimp, remember, use Gulf shrimp if at all possible—not imports.

Serves 4, or double the recipe to serve 8 to 10

1 pound raw Gulf shrimp, cooked, peeled, and de-veined
½ cup chopped green onions, tops and bottoms
3 cloves garlic, chopped and mashed
½ cup chopped celery

Marinade

1 lemon
½ cup olive oil
1 tablespoon chili sauce, or ketchup
1 tablespoon Louisiana hot sauce
1 tablespoon white vinegar
1 teaspoon paprika
Salt, to taste
Pepper, to taste
1 teaspoon Cajun seasoning (optional)

Stir together the shrimp, onions, garlic, and celery in a bowl.

In a separate bowl, combine all the marinade ingredients and whisk together. Pour the marinade over the shrimp, place in a tightly covered plastic storage container, and refrigerate overnight.

Prior to serving, drain the shrimp in a small colander to get rid of the excess vinegar and oil. Discard the excess marinade. Set the shrimp out with toothpicks to skewer.



Original Potato Salad

Serves 4 to 6

5 pounds russet potatoes
½ cup mayonnaise
¼ cup sugar
2 tablespoons white vinegar
½ cup sweet relish
¼ cup diced red peppers
1 cup Kraft cole slaw dressing
¼ cup diced celery
Kosher salt, to taste
Finely ground black pepper, to taste

Preheat the oven to 225 degrees F.

Wash the potatoes under cool running water, pat dry, place them on a sheet tray, and bake for 70 to 90 minutes. Remove the potatoes from the oven, place them in a dish towel, and remove and discard the skins while the potatoes are warm. Chop the potatoes into 1-inch pieces and place them into a bowl.

In a separate bowl, combine the mayonnaise, sugar, vinegar, relish, peppers, dressing, and celery and whisk until well incorporated. Add this mixture to the bowl of potatoes and stir well using a spatula, until the salad is mixed but still has small chunks of potatoes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Refrigerate, covered, for 4 to 6 hours before serving.





Chili Con Queso

Yields about 3 cups

- 1 large block Velveeta cheese**
- 4 ounces half-and-half**
- 1 (8-ounce) can Rotel peppers, with juice**
- 1 teaspoon chili powder**
- 1 diced tomato, for garnish**
- Jalapeños, sliced, for garnish**

Melt the block of Velveeta cheese and the half-and-half in a saucepot or double boiler over medium heat, stirring occasionally and being careful not to burn the cheese or cream. Add the Rotel peppers and juice, and continue to heat. Stir in the chili powder and chopped tomatoes. Stir over the heat until all of the ingredients are thoroughly combined and heated through.

Garnish with jalapeños to taste and serve hot with tortilla chips.

You can buy chili con queso already made and all you have to do is melt it. On the other hand, it's extremely simple to make it from scratch.

Mexican Party Dip

This dip is served warm or hot and it's excellent for a cocktail party. Don't bring it out until the last minute before serving. Be sure to have lots of tostados handy. Once the folks start eating this, they won't stop. It's that good!

Serves 4 to 6

2 cans refried beans
12 to 14 jalapeño peppers, sliced
1 pint chili con queso (see recipe, p. 25), or use store-bought
4 ripe avocados, sliced
3 tomatoes, chopped

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Layer a 9 x 13-inch baking dish with 1 inch of refried beans. Cover the refried beans completely with jalapeño pepper slices. Spoon the chili con queso over the beans to cover. Decorate the top with a few more sliced jalapeños.

Bake uncovered for 30 to 40 minutes. Remove from the oven and layer the avocados and tomatoes on top of the chili con queso, and serve immediately.

Note: If you're concerned about this dish being too spicy, you can always serve the jalapeño peppers on the side.

Midori Melon and Ham Salad

Serves 4 to 6

Cook Time: 5 to 7 minutes

1 honeydew melon, husk removed, halved and seeded
4 ounces Midori liquor
3 tablespoons fresh mint, chopped
10 to **15** slices Prosciutto ham, sliced paper thin

Using a 1-inch melon baller, scoop out about 40 melon balls and place them inside a large plastic zip-top bag. Add the Midori and 1 tablespoon mint to the bag and seal. Chill for 3 hours.

Preheat the oven to 405 degrees F.

Place a roasting rack inside a sheet tray, and lay the Prosciutto slices on the roasting rack. Bake the Prosciutto for 5 to 7 minutes, or until crispy. Remove from the oven, let cool at room temperature, then chop the Prosciutto into small pieces.

Remove the melon balls from the refrigerator and push a skewer into the end of each ball to make a “lollipop.” Roll the melon skewers in the chopped Prosciutto to cover. Arrange the skewers on a platter, and sprinkle with the remaining chopped mint. Serve chilled.

This recipe is a lot more sophisticated than the name sounds. It is great to serve on a hot evening as an appetizer or first course.

Idiot Sticks

This goofy name came from a friend of mine that invented this recipe. Knowing him like I do, the name fits. A combination of salt and bacon in your mouth is delicious with drinks. Even people who are not idiots love this goofy appetizer.

Serves 4 to 6

1 (16-ounce) package large salt pretzel sticks, the thickness of a large pencil
12 strips bacon, thinly sliced

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Wrap each pretzel with a strip of raw bacon. Place the pretzels on a cookie sheet and bake for 30 to 40 minutes, or until the bacon is completely cooked and crisp. The time may vary due to the thickness of the bacon and the thickness of the pretzels, so check them often.



A TIP I like to share involves the pantry and refrigerator and what any cook should have on hand at all times. I call it my emergency list because if friends drop in unexpectedly you can throw together an appetizer or even dinner.

For the pantry:

- A carton each of beef stock and chicken stock (Pacific or Progresso brands)
- Canned albacore tuna
- Sliced black olives
- Pitted pimento-stuffed green olives
- Tomatoes, celery, onions and peeled garlic
- Olive oil (unfiltered)
- Pasta
- Fresh lemons

•Canned condensed milk

- Canned tomatoes
- Bread crumbs
- White rice (I prefer Rice-Tec brand, which happens to be grown in Texas)

For the refrigerator:

- Real mayonnaise
- Peeled raw garlic
- Bacon
- Parmesan Cheese

