

The True Citizen

Dixie Divas: The Southern Goodness Of Fried Baloney

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Three friends and I were motoring our way from the western edge of Kentucky over to Louisville when someone proclaimed a sudden and immediate need for an orange Nehi soda.

As luck would have it, a Cracker Barrel, which always has Nehi sodas iced and waiting, soon popped up. While Kim purchased her drink and a box of butter mints, we other three strolled around the store. As soon as I saw it, I knew I had to have it.

"Look what I found!" I exclaimed to Martha Layne Collins, the lovely former governor of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. She took the four and a half inch round cast iron skillet in her hand and turned it over, eyeing it carefully and noting it was already seasoned and ready for use.

"I've never seen one so small," I gushed happily. "It's perfect for frying baloney!"

She threw back her blonde head and laughed merrily. "Absolutely. This pan is made for frying baloney."

This is how purely Southern I am: My favorite comfort food is a fried baloney sandwich.

"The things you Southerners will eat," proclaimed one of my refined Yankee friends, squeezing her eyes together tightly and wrinkling her nose in disgust. "Fried bologna. Yuck."

First of all, it's baloney not bologna. If you're gonna fry it, you gotta downgrade it and slang in the language of country folks.

Second of all, nothing makes a bad day better than the treat of a fried baloney sandwich. It's so decadent. And so delicious. It's like thumbing your nose at all the right, healthy things in life. It's a source of power where you can declare, "Na-nana na. I can do whatever I want to. I'm in charge." That kind of empowerment improves a bad day a whole bunch.

There is not one thing healthy about my baloney sandwiches. That, of course, would defeat the degree of decadence and decrease the sense of power.

I buy the thin baloney and I fry two pieces. As soon as it starts to rise up into a little dome, I cut the edges and mash it down flat. I like it fried crispy on the edges, which causes it to dwindle down to not much left at all. Then I put a piece of American cheese on each slice and let it melt down to a goopy mess.

While the baloney and cheese is frying - always in a cast iron skillet - I prepare the bread. Again, nothing healthy there. I use white bread that is sweeter than coconut pie and smother it in full-strength Duke's mayonnaise.

The meal is complete by adding greasy potato chips and a glass of skim milk. We all need to cut back on fat and eat healthier, you know.

One night, after a particularly harrowing day, a friend called while I was preparing my comfort meal.

By the way, Southerners perfected comfort food, which is distinguished by its significant amounts of grease, butter and calories.

"Whatta ya doin'?" he asked.

"Makin' a fried baloney sandwich."

"I love fried baloney," he replied enthusiastically. "Hey, when it rounds up in a little dome, do you cut the edges and flatten it?"

See, there is fellowship between true impresarios of fried baloney. We know it is a Southern delicacy and therefore we treat it with the respect it first earned during the dark Hoover days of the Depression. We also know there are two kinds of fried baloney eaters: Those who cut the edges and those who don't.

"I'm putting it on white bread," I offered to the friend who is normally zealous in matters of health.

"Of course," he agreed. "After all, if you're going to eat fried baloney, don't make it healthy in any way."

Right. Because if it were healthy, it wouldn't be comfort food. Every Southerner knows that.