



Hi Y'all From Ronda Rich

Hi Y'all,

Sometimes when all hope seems gone - even in the small things in life - you can get such an amazing, unexpected gift. Take, for instance, the case of the Duke's Mayonnaise jar.

Let me explain.

Those of you who have been reading me for years know that I have what has become a "famous" macaroni and cheese recipe (don't email and ask for it. Just Google it as Ronda Rich macaroni and cheese and you will find it all over the internet). My Aunt Ozelle was the first to make the recipe and she said to me - because it calls for a cup of mayonnaise - "I always use Duke's but you can use whatever you like."

For years, I used other mayonnaises but I could never get mine to taste as good as Aunt Ozelle's. I couldn't figure out what was wrong. Then one day, a few years ago, it occurred to me: The mayonnaise! That's what it is. So, I switched to Duke's and let me tell you - it does make a difference. I am a huge Duke's mayonnaise fan and it's all I use. Everyone I have told about it so that they would use Duke's in the recipe, agrees. Duke's is the difference in giving a recipe a unique tang to it. Duke's has a zest to it that other mayonnaises do not. The others are much milder.

The company, which is based in Richmond, uses the advertising tag line: The secret of great Southern cooks. I agree.

As an aside, I was in Dallas for an event back in the spring and they were having a luncheon following my presentation. They had asked for my favorite recipe so that they could put that in gift bags. But, even more special than that, they decided to have the caterer make the macaroni and cheese for the luncheon. Apparently, you can't buy Duke's in Dallas. No one had ever heard of it. All the guests were raving about the mac and cheese and I said, "If you think it's good with whatever mayonnaise they use, you should try it with Duke's. If you have to, order it and have it shipped in to Dallas." Maybe I should set up a wholesale market and sell Duke's like people sell glass bottles of Cheerwine and Nehi grape colas. As much as I brag on it, I bet I could sell a bunch of it.

More than one person has told me that they originally made it with another mayonnaise and enjoyed it so much that they couldn't believe it could be better. But they tried it with Duke's and found I was right. It was even better.

As you know, I've been harping - both good naturedly and seriously - to the executive office at Waffle House - because of my close friendships there - to make a fried baloney sandwich and put it on the WH menu. Finally, after three or four years of my haranguing, they are testing one in their corporate kitchen now and will be test marketing one a bit later. I told 'em, "Listen, y'all need to do a partnership with Duke's and use just Duke's mayonnaise on the sandwich." I cannot stay out of things when I believe in something and believe that it will help those involved. So, back to my original story. The Dukes folks had asked a couple of years ago if they could include my recipe in a cook book they were doing. I said, "Yes but be sure to give Aunt Ozelle credit." So, they did the recipe and called it: Ronda Rich Aunt Ozelle's Glorious Macaroni and Cheese. Aunt Ozelle was proud as punch of her name being in an official cook book.

I have often joked that I am going to be best remembered for a recipe that I stole from Aunt Ozelle. But the funniest thing happened the other day. I was going through Mama's drawers of recipes. I was always an enthusiastic cook, even at an early age. By 14, I was known for my Swedish Meatballs. So, I found a lot of recipes in my young handwriting including - get this - a recipe for that mac and cheese that I had written down, probably 10 years before I got it from Aunt Ozelle. Then, I found her recipe written in pencil in her own handwriting. I plan to frame both of these recipes - side by side - and include a recipe card from the Duke's web site. I'll hang it in my kitchen.

A few months ago, people started mentioning to me that they had seen my name and recipe on Duke's mayonnaise jars. Now, I thought that was pretty neat. I've been blessed to have some lovely things happen to me in life but being on a Duke's mayonnaise jar is one of the loveliest. I started trying to find one of the jars. I went through my jars. No luck. Went to the grocery store. No luck.

I contacted the marketing department at Sauer's, the parent company of Duke's. They searched through all their labels and couldn't find a single one left. Now, I figured if I couldn't get one at the corporate headquarters, that was the end of the story.

Then I had a wonderful surprise.

At Sunday dinner the other day, Janice, my nephew's mother-in-law, who sits next to me at the table, asked, "Did you ever get a Duke's jar with your recipe on the label?"

"No," I said sadly. "I even contacted the corporate offices and they couldn't find one. Really bums me out. I'd love to have one."

She said, "I have one."

It took a moment to sink in. Then, I exclaimed, "You have one? You have one with my recipe on it?"

She grinned. "Yeah, after you mentioned it, I thought I'd check the jar in my refrigerator and there it was."

"Oh my gosh!" I grabbed her arm. "You're kiddin' me!!! This is the greatest news. I had given up hope and out of the blue, I get this news. I'm so excited!"

I went on to give her precise instructions on how to gingerly handle the jar until she gives it to me. "Don't put it in the dishwasher. We don't want to hurt the label in any way. Be tender with it." In my kitchen, I have many vintage bottles and cans so I plan to add the Duke's jar to that display.

Stories like this are parables to me. I feel it's the good Lord telling us in these small stories: Don't ever give up hope. Just when you least expect it, a miracle can happen. And so that's what happened with the Duke's mayonnaise jar.