



PineStraw

The Art & Soul of the Sandhills

November 2013

Lords of the Harvest

A Fine Art Lecture
and a
Farmers' Feast
of Gratitude

The Little Amp That Could • Jungle Fever • From Darkness to Light

Passing of the Whisk

Confessions of a gravy addict



By GAYVIN POWERS

Some little girls

dream of wearing a silver tiara; all

I wanted was my mom's gigantic silver whisk that magically transformed mere turkey drippings into a culinary masterpiece known as "perfect gravy."

Every Thanksgiving I'd camp out dangerously close to the hot oven window where the turkey browned and drippings gurgled while cooking. I watched, mesmerized, as my mom's hand methodically swirled her whisk over a large turkey pan that took up two burners, turning those delicious drippings into brown, bubbling bliss. Her toils created a vat of delicious, thick, can't-get-enough-on-my-plate goodness.

To this day, conjuring that image has me practically drooling on my keyboard. I don't simply like gravy; I'm a gravy addict. "Hi, my name is Gayvin. I look like the average soccer mom driving a SUV. Only I have a little secret: I love gravy."

At the age of 4, I desperately wanted to learn to make the gravy myself, but Mom declared I wasn't old enough. I made bread and water soup to prove to her I was. The result is what some people would refer to as prison food because that's what it was: torn-up Wonder Bread in what amounted to little more than warm water. Mom took pity on me. After seeing how committed I was to cooking—albeit refusing to try my prison food—Mom introduced me to canned soup. Victory! Soon, I was an expert at Top Ramen and grilled cheese sandwiches. Despite my consistent cooing, though, I still wasn't deemed old enough to learn the ancient art of gravy making.

My obsession with gravy culminated the year I was 8 and my family went to my aunt and uncle's house for Thanksgiving. My aunt, a stern woman who makes people shudder whenever they use grammar incorrectly, is not to be crossed. Over the years, I've learned she's like *crème brûlée*—a favorite, hard-shelled sweetie with a soft inside. I didn't know this about her back then; I couldn't have understood the complexities of either my aunt or *crème brûlée*.

Instead of letting me camp out by the oven, my aunt shoed me away to play games with my older cousins. "What! You challenge my word?" my oldest cousin, now a judge, asked during Scrabble. She flung open Webster's Dictionary, proving to me that, "Gaudemus" is a word. I win again."

After losing several games of Scrabble and Monopoly, I gratefully rushed to the table when dinner was announced. People sauntered to the table as

my aunt announced, "It's a dry turkey."

"Nothing that a little gravy can't fix," I thought.

Two morsels of turkey and walloping mounds of stuffing on my plate awaited the piece de resistance. The

gravy boat was mine once it hit the table. I heartily poured two-thirds of the gravy all over my plate, making the stuffing look like a drowning chain of Hawaiian islands.

Not more than twenty seconds later, someone asked frantically, "Where's the gravy?"

Where's the gravy, I scoffed. If they'd moved faster, they'd already have their own archipelago of gravy. Now they would have to get some from the other gravy boats or vat in the kitchen.

"It's on the table," my aunt replied as her feet urgently scuttled to the table. "It's right there," she said, pointing to my gravy boat.

"Where'd it all go?" she demanded

Faces searched from plate to plate, until they rested their angry eyeballs on mine. I realized there were no more gravy boats and there definitely wasn't a vat in the kitchen. I couldn't say anything; my stuffing did it for me as it sank under the weight of the gravy.

Thus began the "Thanksgiving of Silence." Oh, there were words spoken directly after the discovery that I'd hijacked the gravy. I'm not sure if I blocked out the words or if I wasn't old enough to understand them—a lesson I'd already learned thanks to Scrabble. I do know that I was in trouble. I offered my gravy to others; it was rejected. They choked down their dry turkey while gravy dripped down my chin.

From that day forward, "The Gravy Incident" became fodder for amusement at future family gatherings. I was banned from my aunt's kitchen, and another cousin was declared official "gravy maker." But the incident was never mentioned in my parent's house.

The very next year, my mom ceremoniously handed me her whisk on Thanksgiving. She never explained why, and instead instructed me on how to make a vat of Thanksgiving gravy. Perhaps she figured I'd endured enough humiliation, or simply felt that if I was going to eat all the gravy, I'd better know how to make more of it.

Many Thanksgivings have passed since then, each one allowing me to further perfect the ancient art of gravy making. Today, I'm the one turning mere drippings into brown, bubbling bliss, and, of course, I do it using my mother's coveted silver whisk. **PS**

Gayvin Powers is an award-winning filmmaker, author and freelance writer. Iona Fay, her young adult fairy novel, will be coming out soon.