

The Carrollton, Georgia, kitchen of Ms. Sandy Pollard is always filled with the inviting smells of traditional Southern cuisine. Unlike most contemporary mothers and grandmothers on the go Ms. Pollard continues to cook regional favorites. Sandy is enrolled as a graduate student at the local university, and she successfully balances the demands of her busy class schedule with her personal chef service as well as an active church membership. Overtime, Pollard has mastered the art of baking “light and fluffy” biscuits and adapted to perfection her ex-husband’s family tea cake recipe. Although the convenience of modern restaurants, groceries and bakeries have altered the diets of many Southerners Ms. Pollard continues to observe tradition by cooking the “old Fashioned way.” Sandy Pollard believes the extra time required to bake homemade southern foods like pound cake and banana pudding produces a delicious tangible product, but also an unspoken message of love that nourishes the soul.

Interview of Sandy Pollard
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DW: Oh, ok. Alright and uhm, can you describe how you would eat biscuits so to speak, with jam or jelly or . . . ?

Sp: Well you always have to have butter as far as I am concerned, a biscuit is wasted if it does not have butter on it. [Laughs] And I don’t mean margin, I mean real butter cause, we, it had to be, uhm, I generally split my biscuit with a knife spread it with butter and then put either honey or homemade jelly cause my mother makes real good jelly or uhm, sorghum too. I like biscuits and sorghum. I do know if you ever had that before. Ha ha ha [laughs]

DW: Uhhh, I never had that before. Alright and uhm, how, how would you eat cornbread?

SP: I, well, again hot, if it was made in pone, in a cast iron skillet, you could cut a wedge of it out and I split it in half, butter it and then eat it when it’s really hot, I like it that way. I don’t ever eat sweet stuff on my cornbread. I save all that stuff for biscuits. Ha ha ha [Laughing in the room]

DW: Oh, ok. An’ uhh were there certain types of food that you always served with cornbread?

SP: Yeah, uhm, if we had greens or fresh vegetables, by fresh vegetables I mean stuff out of the garden, green beans, squash, crowder peas, things like that, you know we had uh sliced tomatoes and uhm, you know corn on the cobb and stuff like that. It was always those types of country vegetables that we served with cornbread.

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DW: All right, what time of day do you do the bakin’? When you go out and prepare . . .

SP: It's generally in the afternoons uh whenever I cook for my clients, it's in the afternoons, generally, after I get finished with class. And then I do uh some cooking at home an' deliver that to uh clients also. So, I have clients I cook in their home and then I have other clients who I cook here a my home and take it to 'em an' I generally do, the first part of the afternoon is spent cooking in someone else's home an' getting enough meals prepared for the week. And then I come home an' do the same menu, one particular entree an' usually a salad or a starch and a vegetable for several different clients an' then deliver that to them about six thirty or seven o'clock at night.

DW: Oh, ok. What types of flours or meals do you use?

SP: Uhm, for my biscuits I like to use White Lily uh self rising flour. It's made out of winter wheat an' it's a softer textured wheat, 'cause I like soft biscuits. Some people like real crunchy, hard biscuits, but I don't, I like high, soft, lovely biscuits that will melt in your mouth.

DW: Yeah, yeah.

SP: [Laughs] And for my meal I, I try to get stone ground cornmeal uhm an' uhm I do mix it with a little bit of flour though when ever I make my, make my cornbread so it's not just, just meal, but of course I use winter wheat flour with my biscuits.

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DW: Ok, ok. Uhm, describe how you measure the, you know, the ingredients for baking?

SP: I do measure mine, my uh uh biscuit ingredients uh cornbread I don't do so much, I just dump it a bowl until it looks right.

DW: So you've been doing it for a while . . .

[Both talking at the same time]

SP: But the biscuits, I don't like th' uh if you get too much shortening an' too little flour in biscuits you have crunchy biscuits an' my rule of thumb for each half cup of self-rising flour that you put in the bowl you add a tablespoon of shortening so an' two cups of flour will make six or seven good size biscuits an' that's all we need, so I dump two cups of uh uh flour in my bowl an' then cut in two tablespoon-, no four teaspoons of shortening an' then like I said I don't measure my buttermilk after I cut in my shortening I, then I add the buttermilk gradually until it looks right.

DW: Ok, do you have like a certain client that likes their bread a certain way?

SP: Uhm, I have, I have a client that likes country food and yes they do like th', they like their biscuits homemade, the way I make 'em. Uhm, and then I have one client that likes sweet cornbread and I have another client that doesn't like any sugar in their cornbread so thank-, thankfully their on different days so I cook one one day and one another day [inaudible].

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RH: Hello and welcome back. This is Ricky Hall now. Uh, we're gonna continue our interview. Uh, does your family love teacakes?

SP: No, my family didn't but my husband's, that I was married, his family was well know for their teacakes an' especially his grandmother.

RH: What kind of teacakes?

SP: Just plain ol' teacakes. Uh, I make 'em now for my clients, but I make mine slightly different than his grandmother made her's. So, but mine are just uh little cookies.

RH: Could you describe what ingredients your family used to make teacakes and the class system of the teacakes?

SP: Yes I can do that. Let's uh, ok, their, you use self-rising flour an' butter an' eggs an' sugar an' you melt 'em. An' now some people use plain flour or all-purpose flour an' add some bakin', they use bakin' powder an' salt. But, whenever we make teacakes you cream, the butter, an' sugar well, an' then you add your eggs an' then uh then you add the flour in gradually an' make a soft dough an' the trick to makin' teacakes – you have to roll 'em out with a rollin' pin on a floured surface an' then cut 'em with whatever you want to cut 'em with. Then, you slide 'em onto a baking sheet. And so they're, now whenever I make teacakes, that's, that's my husband's grandmother's, I mean, my ex-husbands grandmother's recipe. Whenever I make teacakes I, I dro-, I mix everything up an' drop it off from the spoon onto a cookie sheet like you would uh chocolate chip cookies or oatmeal raisin cookies or somethin' like that an' then they, they just spreads out an' make a thin crispy cookie. I never had an success with, I guess I didn't have the patience that I needed to have with rolling out those teacakes an' gettin' 'em really, really thin, because you have to have 'em really, really thin because when they bake they rise up an' they're gonna get about that thick right there an' I guess that's what? Half an' inch, quarter of an' inch, thick. Uhm, but the story that they tell in my ex-husband's family is that they, they want to eat the dough more than they wanted to eat the cookies already made 'cause they liked the way the dough taste. And there is, really it's a good tastin' dough uhm, it's uhm, it's sweet an' you know everyday ingredients that they already had there in the kitchen. If you wanted to make up a batch of teacakes you didn't have to run to the store to get any chocolate an' you didn't have to get any special flavorin' everything was right there, what you produced. That's what I like, that's the reason I like to make teacakes 'cause it's that generally everything is right there in the cabinet.

RH: Ok, so they're easy to make?

SP: They're very easy to make. Yes, an' an' it's uh, it's uh quick treat for the kids an' one recipe goes, makes a lot of cookies.

RH: Ok. When does you family like to eat teacakes?

SP: ANY-time. I love to eat them for breakfast an' at midnight, but you know, when you think about officially havin' teacakes, you think of it in the afternoon.

RH: Where does your family get the recipe for teacakes?

SP: It's just a handed down recipe, not, uhm, I developed the one I do from, I wanted to find an easy way make teacakes without havin' to roll 'em out so I just sort of worked on mine, but uhm, you know.

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RH: Ok. Describe the types of baking that you would do for carrying food to a church dinner, to someone's house when someone died.

SP: Yeah, I always make pound cakes when people die an' uh, uh, if, if there's fresh vegetables, if it's in the summertime, I try to do some peas or some green beans or uh, uh some squash or corn or something like that. If it is in the winter time, I generally would do uhm black eyed peas an' maybe a ham, potato salad somethin' like that. Uhm . . .

RH: Is there any purpose for that type of food or [inaudible]?

SP: Good comfort food for th-, and it would hold up well, you know, lotta times they didn't have refrigeration so when you get a mess of fresh vegetables they could [inaudible] most of the day, you know, and uhm course we wouldn't do that now, but . . . [laughs]

RH: Describe, describe the baking process for these specialty foods.

SP: Well, uhm when I do a Pound Cake, I, I, see when I first started cookin' when I was in my late teens, early twenties I thought there must be some way that you can do a shortcut to get a really nice white pound cake an' it worked on it an' worked on it an' worked on it an' then I came to realize that pound cakes are a work of patience, they, there are no shortcuts to get the kind of consistency that you need in a pound cake. You have to, I use real butter an' sugar an' you cream, you beat that with an electric mixer for at least ten minutes an' then you add six eggs one at a time, you haveta wait in between addin' each egg to make sure whether it's whippin' it good an' then you sift your flour three times an' measure it three times an' then the third time that you sift it you add uhm some bakin' powder to it an' then you, an' then I measure out my milk an' you have to add that flour mixture to the eggs an' sugar an' butter mixture alternately. It takes about twenty five minutes just to mix up a pound cake an' then it takes a hour an' a half to bake one. So your talkin', you have to set aside at least two hours in the afternoon or whenever your gonna bake a pound cake. So when you, when you take a pound cake to a family whose lost a loved one, it's truly a labor of love an' it's a big moist cake that serves about twenty five people. So if they have a big crowd there you're pretty much guaranteed everybody's gonna get a piece of that pound cake. An' it's a whole lot different from buyin' a pound cake down at Kroger. It's just, uh completely different experience. The taste is different, plus they know that you made it for them an' it is a way for you to uhm in a way minister to them.

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RH: Ok. It sounds great. Does your family make banana pudding?

SP: OH, yes! And, we don't cheat on banana pudding, ok, that's another one of Ms. Nelly's recipes that she, I, I use her recipe but my Mama also makes it this way. You uh, you make a

custard with uh sugar an' butter an' eggs an' evaporated milk an' you cook that, you blend uh, vanilla too, you cook that on top of the stove until it's thick but you don't, you haveta stir it constantly, that's another eight or ten minute job because if you, if you don't stir it constantly it's gonna scorch an' taste like burned milk an' you don't want that. Then you layer ripe bananas an' uhm vanilla wafers an' then a layer of that pudding, vanilla wafers, ripe bananas, an' a layer of that pudding [inaudible] three times then I whip uh, I save out the eggs whites from the egg yolks from whenever I make that custard, let those come to room temperature an' then I make a meringue out of those an' spread that on top of the pudding an' then put it in a hot oven until it's nice an' brown an' I like to serve that warm. I don't like cold banana pudding, I like warm, sweet banana pudding. And I don't like to use instant pudding an' cool whip. I think that, I think cheapens the substance. [laughs]

RH: You're right.

SP: I like old fashioned, baked, fresh banana pudding.

RH: Are there certain occasions for banana pudding?

SP: I, I generally only make banana pudding in the, in the summer time, but I've had clients who've had parties like uhm what ya call it, Mardi Gras parties, where they for whatever reason they want catered food an' then they wanted banana pudding as dessert, you know, so, but uh banana pudding can go just about any time of the year just so long as you have nice ripe bananas.

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RH: Bet you could. [laughs] Uhm, what would you say is your favorite. Excuse me. Why do you think baking traditions have changed over time in your family?

SP: Uhhh, well, for one thing uh when, when I was younger we didn't have a lot of money an' you had to uhm bake with what you had on hand an' we always had biscuits an' cornbread which means you always have self-rising flour an' shortenin' an' butter. An' you only had different uhm cakes an' stuff like that on special occasions an' instead of buying gifts at Christmas we cooked food so, you know, that was how we spent our money. Uh, uh sometimes uhm sometimes as the years have gone by an' people's lives have gotten busier an' busier, there's not the time, you don't have the time you have to invest to baking from scratch. You know, I think that's probably why so many peop-, that's becoming a lost art because uhm it, when you have a two-income family an' children are involved every kind of leisure activity that you can think of an' the mother's split the time between being a chauffeur an' a bread winner an' tryin' to take care of the family, you, you, you rely on prepackaged foods to fill that gap an' I wish that uh, an' people also because cooking uhm is one of the kind of things that you have to do in order to stay in practice an' uhm if you've never been shown how easy it is to put a meal together from scratch then it's very intimidating an' people don't know how to get past that intimidation an' it's just easier to pick up something that's already cooked than it is to get in the kitchen an' do it an' uhm but there's a lotta joy that can be had in, in preparin' foods from scratch, the old fashioned way, first of all it taste wonderful an' secondly your family knows they have something wholesome to eat an' it's a labor of love to, you know, an' they know you've spent time doing that an' uhm it's, I wish we could pull down some of those barriers, back because there's a lotta joy to be had in it.

RH: So you, so you would say it is very important?

SP: It is very important in my family.

RH: Ok.

SP: Yes, even my teenage sons can cook. They could put a meal together if they had to, but that's because I've required them to work with me. [laughs]

RH: How have the baking traditions in our community changed over your lifetime?

SP: Just that there's so much more prepackaged uh convenient stuff an' why do something from scratch when you can pull something down from the shelf or already buy it, or, what, you know, what they call it at Kroger or Publix or whatever, you know, the Pound Cake well it's not the kinda Pound cake that I make, but you know, it is something sweet to eat, you know, but mostly it's a time saving factor. People just, their lives are so complicated that they don't have time to do that an' you're so tired when you come in from work that it's whatever's easiest, is what gets put in your mouth, but if people didn't do that, I wouldn't have clients. [laughs]

RH: Yeah. Well, we want to thank you for takin' the time out to interview with us an' we sure appreciate it an' uh we hope we can taste some of your food in the future.