**Uncle Earls Famous Barbecue**

After a tiresome trip, I finally arrived at my sister’s apartment in Charleston South Carolina. I’ve only been to Charleston once before, but quickly learned that one of the city’s biggest perks, after seeing my sister of course, is dinner at the iconic Uncle Earl’s Famous Barbecue Restaurant!

After a good night’s rest, some catching up with my sister, and an afternoon historic horse and carriage tour, we excitedly decided upon dinner at Uncle Earl’s. It’s a no reservations, come as you are, kind of barbecue joint. As we neared the restaurant, you could see the lit “Uncle Earl’s Famous Barbecue” pinky red colored neon sign on top of the building.  The burning hickory wood and scent of smoked barbecue meats covered in rubs and sauces, filled the air.  Turning the corner, we saw the dated, long rectangular one-story building with a Lincoln Log facade.  An alternating thick red and white striped canopy, hung over the windows.  On the side of the dated building was a large, wooden, pig shaped plaque, outlining the different cuts of pork.  Over the pig was a sign saying “Horrifying vegetarians since 1993. Along the back side were piles of cut wood chunks, waiting to be fed to the smokers by the pit masters, keeping the fire roaring and the meats cooking.  Waves of heat and aromas stirred our appetites and our senses.

  It was early so we were seated as soon as we arrived.  The floor was covered in sawdust and the room was filled with picnic tables, covered in bright red and white checkered tablecloths.  Looking up at the ceiling, I saw exposed metal ducts, beams and pipes painted in grays and black, giving it an unfinished, but eclectic appearance. As the picnic tables accommodated up to 12 guests, the two of us were seated with another party of six.

A guitarist and female singer were set up in the corner. The guitar’s notes had a real twang to them and the singer had a very deep-down, heart and soul, blues kind of voice. She reminded me a little of Janis Joplin from my younger days and was certainly a pleasant addition to the whole southern barbecue experience.

Sally, our waitress came over and said, “Here you go sugar,” as she handed us some tacky menus, stained with a couple of red and brown fingerprints. She placed plenty of paper napkins, a pack of plastic utensils and several packets of wet wipes on the table. As I rarely eat barbecue, my mind was already set on the baby back ribs. They came with corn on the cob, Uncle Earl’s famous creamy coleslaw, mashed potatoes smothered in gravy and a small loaf of cornbread on the side. My sister ordered the brisket sandwich, with a side of onion rings and sweet potato fries.

When Sally returned, she placed an overflowing dinner plates on the table in front of me and said, “Enjoy your dinner honey.” I cut a rib off of the rack and picked it up. As I lifted it to my mouth, I felt the slimy, greasy, sauce on my fingers. As I dug my teeth into the ribs, I could feel the sauce and grease smear over my lips and spread onto my cheeks. I felt so messy, but the taste made me crazy. The corn was served in an oblong dish, bathing in a pool of melted butter. I picked it up and chewed off a section of kernels. Between the ribs and the corn, I worried about how strong my newly bonded front tooth would hold up to the test. My mind was lost in the tastes and flavors. I was deriving so much pleasure from the meal, it felt naughty.

Before we left, I asked Sally for a fresh slice of key lime pie to take back to the apartment. I just needed a taste of that chilled, sweet, creamy, pucker power dessert after all that grease. I also asked for a slice of pecan (pee can) pie for my sister. All of a sudden, Sally bent down, put her hands on the table, looked me straight in the eye and said, “The word is pronounced pecan (pah cahn) and not that thing you put under a hospital bed.” We all just laughed.

I don’t know how many times I will return to Charleston, but when I do, Uncle Earls will always remain on my list of treasures!