

## A l u m n i P r o f i l e



## Squeal of a meal

*Jim Early's book plugs the palatable pleasures of pork*

Barbecue is the "All-American" casual food. Served Lexington-style or with Carolina Pig Pickin', chopped or pulled, red slaw or whiteslaw, its followers will drive hundreds of miles to a distant hamlet in search of a 'pretty pig,' says Jim Early ('62, JD '64). And in Early's family, they ate everything but the squeal.

A native of Henderson, North Carolina, a small eastern town near the Virginia border, he has been a longtime resident of Winston-Salem. Early inherited his love of cooking from his mother, Nettie Hicks Early, and her family. They all regarded eating as a form of celebration, and good barbecue was often at the heart of the festivities. Steeped in this atmosphere of great country cooking and

family recipes handed down over generations, Early took the basics of cooking and perfected those skills, developing a flair for gourmet cooking.

In addition to a love of barbecue and fine cooking, Early's upbringing taught him principles that have shaped his life, he says, such as fair play, caring, and reaching out to those who need a hand. This passion inspired him to research and write *The Best Tarheel Barbecue, Manteo to Murphy*, a book dedicated totally to the topic of North Carolina barbecue, with history, chef critiques, recipes, and the personal stories of those who raise the hogs, cook the barbecue, and of those who eat it. He hopes that over the years the proceeds from this book will exceed \$1 million, which he plans to donate to the Special Olympics, North Carolina. Early will sign copies of his book from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday, October 12, at the Homecoming Festival on the Quad.

For six months, Early crammed a 50-hour-a-week law practice in Winston-Salem into four workdays. Leaving each week on Thursday evening and returning Sunday night, he traveled through North Carolina's 100 counties, drove more than 18,000 miles, talked with more than 1,500 people and checked out more than 200 barbecue places, critiquing 140 for his book. With nothing more than a state map spread out on the seat of his car, he traveled the four regions of the Tarheel state, each region's boundaries determined by how his map lay folded.

He found barbecue places on main streets, back alleys, hidden in rolling valleys or on long dusty stretches of the flat coastal plains. He drove back roads, stopped at filling stations, country stores, and fire stations, to ask those he met the all-important question: "If your best friend was celebrating his birthday today and wanted to eat barbecue, where in the

country would you take him as a treat?" From the recommendations of farmers, police officers, and wrecker drivers, he found Hog Heaven in Washington and Butts on the Creek in Maggie Valley. In Frisco, he found Bubba's.

At each barbecue place he approached his meal as if it were a wine tasting. To perform a fair critique, Early would forego meals, remaining hungry throughout the day. "I generally could critique five to six places per day," he says. "I would order a sample of the barbecue in all the ways that it was served — chopped, coarse chopped, and sliced — along with a tablespoon of slaw and one hushpuppy. Cleansing my palate with lemon water before tasting the barbecue, I would take a bite, taste it like a wine, and write what I had experienced."

In addition to being a barbecue judge, Early continues a limited civil law practice and is certified as a superior court mediator. He speaks nationally and internationally on the quality of life, stress management, and achieving balance, motivating his audiences with his philosophy of life — that less is often more. An avid hunter, fisherman, and hunting guide, Early leads expeditions to venues such as Alaska, Montana, South Dakota, the Bahamas, Scotland, and Africa. These trips are part of his new company, Business Adventure Seminars in the Bush, and include gourmet-cooking classes.

"I hope each reader of this book can vicariously experience my journey....New friends and old clasped my hand...but beyond the good food and beauty of rural North Carolina, the thing that made this adventure shine was the people," writes Early in his book. "The outpouring of friendship that I experienced, the warmth, the fellowship, and the laughter will be with me all my days."

— Eileen Kerr

### JIM EARLY'S BANANA PUDDING

- 4 quarts half-n-half (milk)
- 12 tablespoons (level) cornstarch
- 4 cups white sugar
- 16 eggs
- 4 teaspoons vanilla extract
- Pinch salt
- 6-7 fully ripe, firm bananas, sliced
- 1 box Nabisco Nilla wafers

Separate yolks and whites of six eggs. Set egg whites aside in bowl. In a large bowl combine dry ingredients, cornstarch, sugar and salt together. In another large bowl whisk ten whole eggs and the yolks from six eggs until the mixture is well blended. Continue to stir as you add dry ingredients, to prevent lumping. When your liquid is satin-smooth pour into double boiler and cook, uncovered, over hot (almost boiling) water, stirring constantly. When custard begins to thicken (approximately 20 minutes or when it coats a wooden spoon), remove from heat and add vanilla extract. Set custard aside to cool while you prepare baking dish.

Line bottom and sides of a 9x13 or larger baking dish with Nilla wafers; cover the bottom layer of wafers with sliced bananas. Pour a small amount of custard over your first layer of wafers and bananas and repeat until the dish is full, with the top layer being custard. Do not fill to top but allow approximately 1/2 inch for meringue. Whisk the remaining egg whites, stiff but not dry. Add 1/4 cup sugar as you whisk and continue to whisk until mixture forms stiff peaks. Spread meringue on top of pudding, covering to edge. Bake in preheated 425-degree oven for five minutes or until golden brown.

Let the pudding rest at room temperature several hours before serving to allow custard to soften the wafers and absorb the flavor of the bananas. If you need to refrigerate, place toothpicks vertically and intermittently to support the aluminum foil, and to keep the foil from touching the meringue peaks. The dish can be made ahead, refrigerated and served later. It does not require reheating. Simply set the dish out several hours before serving and allow it to rise to room temperature.