Keeping Creole Cuisine Alive

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New Orleans is widely known for its delicious Creole cooking. It's a blend of Spanish and French food, sprinkled with a Caribbean influence.

A unique school project is trying to keep the Crescent City's cooking style alive.

The Early Show correspondent Melinda Murphy explains in a “Study Hall” segment that it was an oral history project that started last spring, months before Hurricane Katrina hit. The project involved four schools in the city.

In the process, Murphy observes, one student learned how important Creole is to his own family, bringing with it a culture Murphy calls "as rich and murky as a pot of gumbo."

When Jerry Reese first heard he had to do a project on Creole food, he decided to interview his grandmother, Ruth Byers.

"He questioned everything I did with the cooking," Byers told Murphy. "He wanted to know all about it, where it came from. And he was very inquisitive. So, I told him all I knew!"

"I asked her about her mother," Reese says, "and her husband's mother. And not only about the food, but you know, where they used to live, what were they interested in?"

Turns out, Creole cooking is a family tradition, which was borne out by Reese’s great-grandmother, Camille Cotton, who's about to turn 100.

She says she learned to cook “from my Momma,” who in turn learned from her Momma. So, cooking Creole-style has been in the family for generations.

Tracing the roots of Creole was the whole idea behind the project, Murphy points out. More about the project can be seen at the Gulf Coast Disaster page on the CBS News site.
Besides interviewing relatives, students spoke with folks at a local market, and sampled Creole at some of New Orleans finest restaurants.

The students' work was part of a larger project for the Historic New Orleans Collection, the brainchild of Sue Laudeman, a curator of the museum.

"There’s hardly any subject that … doesn't have a connection of food in New Orleans," she remarked. "It's always on people’s minds. So I thought, if we ever lost this, it'd be a pretty boring city!"

They almost did lose it. Creole’s future was changed forever, as was Reese’s, when Katrina roared ashore.

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