



Preserving History

By Amy Conry Davis | Photography courtesy of Adam Mitchell

When the first pass is thrown at football games, the jams and salsas created by Vicksburg’s Dan Bristow also fly off store shelves and tailgater’s plates.

Bacon Ranch Dressing. Hot Okra. Green Tomato Pickles. This is just a small sample of Dan Bristow’s daily bounty. Based in Vicksburg, Mississippi, Bristow runs Redneck Foods, a homemade salsa, jam, and relish business. His products are based on small-town, Southern recipes from the turn of the century as well food he grew up eating as a kid in Arkansas. The name of his company, in fact, is a tribute to the industrious farmers and gardeners of that by-gone era.

Bristow was inspired by a simpler time when home gardens and small farms were commonplace and meals were made from scratch with uncomplicated ingredients.

“When you worked in the garden, picking those vegetables, planting them, and doing the work,” Bristow says,

“the back of your neck would always be red...some people may take [the name] resentful...but I took it as a fellow that had to work really hard on his vegetables so he could have good food to eat.”

Most of what he knows of this way of life, Bristow learned from the older generations in his family and community. In small towns, especially, sharing homemade food was just what you did. It made for close-knit neighbors and in turn, a close-knit community.

“Years ago, people would go to social gatherings, usually after church. If someone had a really good salsa, for instance, then everybody would share the recipes and that’s how the recipes came about,” Bristow says. The base for his

salsa came from what his mother called “tomato gravy” and served over biscuits and eggs for breakfast.

All of this started five years ago after a car accident left Bristow unable to return to his job in construction. As he recuperated, he made salsa, jelly, and the like, at home in his carport. Initially, it was just for fun, to share with his family, but at the advice of a friend, he decided to try his hand at selling it. The Mississippi Wildlife Extravaganza in Jackson was Bristow’s first foray into the commercial world. Four years later and his jars are on the shelves at Kroger and Piggly Wiggly stores all over the state. Bristow continues to attend public events, nearly every weekend, to sell his goods. He hits hunting shows, flea markets, craft shows, and festivals all over Mississippi as well as Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and Arkansas.

For the most part, Redneck Foods is still a fairly small operation, but it seems to be working just fine for Bristow. Like his products, he keeps things simple and relies on word of mouth and regulars who tend to follow his schedule. He doesn’t use social media but he does take orders via the online shop on his website. Or people can get in touch with him the “old-fashioned” way. “We have a number on every jar, so they can call that number and it’ll ring right here in my pocket,” Bristow says.

Bristow believes the popularity of his products is due to the fact he continues to make them as if he’s making for friends and family. The batches are small but filled to the brim with the good stuff – not fillers – just the way you would make it at home. Whenever possible, he uses fresh, local ingredients. Aside from food-safe yellow dye in the pickles (black pickles are

hard to sell, Bristow adds), they’re all-natural ingredients. Even the glass jars are from a company out of Arkansas.

Bristow continues to experiment with these time-honored recipes by putting his own modern twist on them for today’s generation. As a result, some pretty unique blends have come of it like his FROG (fig, raspberry, orange, and ginger) and Strawberry Jalapeño Jams. Or the Sweet Baby Beets. And don’t forget the Hot Chow-Chow that an out-of-state restaurant uses as a secret sauce in one of their dishes. The list goes on but Bristow says in general his best-sellers are the Mild Salsa, Raspberry Jalapeño Jam, and Apple Butter.

With tailgating season upon us, Bristow has plenty of suggestions for football parties. “When the first football flies, all my products start flying off the shelf,” Bristow says. His top recommendations include Raspberry Jalapeño Jam served with cream cheese and crackers or brushed over grilled meat as a barbecue sauce. The Cajun Candy Relish is excellent over red beans and rice, hot dogs, or burgers – even mixed into deviled eggs. Depending on your taste, either mild or hot salsa works well with oven-baked chicken. For extra heat, the Hot Okra can be cut up and fried or used as a spicy accompaniment to a Bloody Mary.

redneckfoods.net

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