

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

WHITNEY WORSHAM

(I) really don't remember the first time I had a slugburger. I think they were just always part of my growing up experience here. I think I thought every town had slugburgers as an option to a hamburger. So most of the time if you ordered a hamburger here they would say, "Do you want a slugburger?" And you would say or have to specify, "No, I want a beef burger." Because a lot of places here serve slugburgers. So yeah, I just grew up thinking everybody had them and knew about them.

Local Farey Tales music begins

NORA VETTER

Welcome to Local Farey Tales. I'm your narrator, Nora Vetter. What IS a local farey tale? It's the story of a fare, f-a-r-e, that can only be found in certain regions, states, cities and so on... Each tale will be told with the help of the voices that know it well; historians, creators, servers, festival organizers, super fans, etc.

Today's featured fare is the Slugburger. Also known as doughburger, Dudie Burger, cereal burger and many other monikers. You just heard Whitney Worsham from the Crossroads Museum in Corinth, Mississippi. Now let's meet the rest of our Slugburger Tale-Tellers.

Tale-Tellers Intro

I'm Annemarie Anderson the Southern Foodways Alliance Oral Historian, Angela Avent the Director of Main Street Corinth, Bryan Huff currently Assistant Editor of Independent Appeal, Jessica Huff the Director of Chamber and Tourism for the McNairy County EDC and Chamber of Commerce, Pat Knight I own Pat's Cafe in Selmer, Tennessee, Derek Pirtle Owner/Operator of Dub's Burgers in Athens, Alabama, Holly Poynor from New Albany, Mississippi, Owner and Operator of Latham's Hamburger Inn, Christi White Owner of Johnnie's in Tupelo, Mississippi, Whitney Worsham the Director of the Crossroads Museum in Corinth, Mississippi, I'm Boyd Yarbrough from the Oren Dunn City Museum and you're listening...

DEREK PIRTLE

...and you are listening to the...

WHITNEY WORSHAM

...listening to the local...

ANGELA AVENT

...the local farey tale of...

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BRYAN HUFF

...local farey tale of the slugburger...

HOLLY POYNOR

...farey tale of the doughburger...

BOYD YARBROUGH

...of the Dudie Burger...

ANNEMARIE ANDERSON

...the slugburger.

2:20 - Music transition

NORA VETTER

Before The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger continues, a moment of remembrance for an honorary Slugburger Tale-Teller, Willie Weeks. He was the owner of Weeks Diner in Booneville, Miss. He passed on April 11, 2020. You'll be hearing other Tale-Tellers reference his ancestor's history with the slugburger. And he proudly continued that legacy. Links to more information about the Weeks family's ties to the origin of the slugburger recipe will be provided on LocalFareyTales.com.

2:58 - Music transition

PAT KNIGHT

I'm Pat Knight from Pat's Cafe and you're listening to the Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger.

When they ask what I put in my burgers and you know we call them slugburgers, that's when I show them the length of my index finger and tell them we only use the ones that are that long. And these people from Louisiana, they were acting really bad you know, like this is terrible. I said, "Oh, y'all hush. Y'all from Louisiana, you people will eat anything." So they burst out laughing and they had slugburgers after that.

WHITNEY WORSHAM

And they called it a slugburger then because it was a nickel. And that's another name for a nickel at the time, they called it a slug. So it really has nothing to do with snails. Which some people from outside our area think when they come here.

BOYD YARBROUGH

Doesn't sound too appetizing does it? Gimme a Dudie Burger. Uh-huh. That doesn't sound too good. But, uh, it was his nickname. Thurman Christian. Thurman "Dudie" Christian was his name and his nickname was Dudie. So that's why it was Dudie's Diner.

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But unless you're from around here and you know about that, I mean, who wants a Dudie Burger? But they're good.

HOLLY POYNOR

We had it on our menu that it's a doughburger. And then most the time if it's someone that's never been in, we can kinda pick up on that so we go ahead and tell them and make sure if we have any question that they don't know what it is we go ahead and tell them. But of course, I've heard of instances where people have been in and did not know but most the time they are pleasantly surprised.

ANNEMARIE ANDERSON

I also have a very good friend from Athens, Alabama who is not a fan. But we've had conversations about them. She grew up there and she's like, "I don't like them." But that is not most people.

ANGELA AVENT

I guess if you grew up eating them, there again, like I say, it's kinda like a tradition that you just...you want a slugburger. They're just really good.

PAT KNIGHT

You know a lot of people call them uh, doughburgers and poolhall burgers and my thing is I don't care what you call it as long as you keep eating it.

CHRISTI WHITE

People call them doughburgers, people call them Johnnie Burgers, they call them Dudie Burgers, slugburgers, we all know what they're ordering. Because in Corinth it'd be, they call them slugburgers up there so...it's kinda where you're at.

BOYD YARBROUGH

In North Mississippi, there's still, I guess, I can count just right in Northeast Mississippi, six or eight restaurants that still serve the doughburger. There's the Latham burger in New Albany, Trolley Car Burger or a slugburger in they call it up in Corinth, there's uh Iuka doughburger, there's the Barn burger in Ripley, so they're still all over the place up in this area.

ANNEMARIE ANDERSON

You can find a slugburger or doughburger, they're referred to as different things, sometimes cereal burger, you can find them in the Tennessee Valley which is the Northeast part of Mississippi, the Northwest part of Alabama into kinda Central Northern Alabama and then up into Tennessee. So that area kind of makes a radius...

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BRYAN HUFF

If you ever visited Selmer, Tennessee, one of the first questions you're gonna get asked, especially if you've never been here is, "Have you had a slugburger?" And if the answer is "no", there's a good chance you're gonna find yourself sitting on a stool at one of these restaurants.

CHRISTI WHITE

So it's a hamburger. It's got a little bit fluffier texture to it. I love 'em. They are an acquired taste. Some people have tried them and they don't like 'em. There again, like I say, it's an acquired taste. But I think everybody needs to try one at least once when they come out here. Just see and say, "Hey, I tried it." You either like it or you don't so...

WHITNEY WORSHAM

Well, it looks a lot like a burger from the outside. And, umm, you can see the crispy fried edges stickin' out. And when you bite into it, you might, you know, it might feel crispy at first but then it's soft on the inside. Just so good.

HOLLY POYNOR

Ours are crunch on the outside and soft on the inside.

BRYAN HUFF

I'm sure you've had a hushpuppy. Imagine a hushpuppy that's flat and has meat in it. It's kinda what consistency wise, not flavor wise but consistency wise what this was like.

ANNEMARIE ANDERSON

And the reason why it works is what it's made out of, right? So it's beef, some people also have pork in there, it's largely beef. And then it's umm, it has filler in there. So there's an extender agent. So that might be bread or breadcrumbs. That might be soy cereal...hence the name cereal burgers. Could be flour...So it's all these different extending agents, depending on the place you go to, that's mixed with this beef. And then it's pattied out and fried. So there's this textural difference as well which also makes it different from a hamburger. It's kinda mushy in the center and then it is crisp and crackly on the outside.

BOYD YARBROUGH

And the good part of the burger is the edges where it's crispy. The flour helps it give 'em a crispness to it that is an additional feature of the Dudie Burger.

PAT KNIGHT

Here in Tennessee, we like ours thin and crispy.

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CHRISTI WHITE

If you want one thin and crispy we aim to please.

HOLLY POYNOR

I have people request to have ‘em “crispy all the way”. So I’ll flatten those, they’ll say, “flat and crispy”, so I’ll flatten mine with a spatula and a glass Coke bottle. I use the glass Coke bottle to press the burger down on top of that spatula and then we’ll flatten it just as thin as we can get it and then you know, make it real toasty and brown. That’s the way they like it. A lot of people do.

BOYD YARBROUGH

I got a friend that comes over every once and a while and that’s what we’ll have for dinner. We’ll mix up a little batch of Dudie burgers or you may wanna call them Johnnie burgers but...it’s more romantic than a doughburger ya know...so, to have a name to it.

WHITNEY WORSHAM

You can buy the slugburger meat here at some of the local grocery stores. And what we’ve done at home instead of making the burger sized patty is we’ve made little quarter size little patty and we dipped them in mustard relish and kinda just made an appetizer out of ‘em and they’re so good.

ANGELA AVENT

A slugburger is soy, flour and meal and a little bit of hamburger meat patted together and deep fried into a almost a hard type patty. Put on a hamburger bun and served with mustard, pickle and onion.

HOLLY POYNOR

Traditional Latham’s burger is mustard, pickle and onion. And that was the only way it was served for many years here. You could just tell them with or without. But then Miss Vicki Latham took over back in the eighties and she added the availability of lettuce and tomato and things like that.

CHRISTI WHITE

And if you come out here and say, “Oh, I want a doughburger dressed”, a doughburger dressed in Johnnie’s world is mustard, pickle, onion, lettuce and tomato where a lot of places a dressed burger is mayonnaise, lettuce, tomato but not in Johnnie’s world. We have our own world out here so...

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PAT KNIGHT

I would tell them to put whatever they eat on another burger is what they'd like on slugburgers. And mostly, people around here eat pickle, onion and mustard. But we also serve lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise or a mixture of all of that.

DEREK PIRTLE

Part of what makes it so fun is where you go regionally the toppings are going to be a little bit different. So if you go to like, Southern Middle Tennessee or even Southeastern Tennessee, you may find a real thick mustard based slaw. Real yellow slaw with cabbage in it. Uh, North Alabama area you generally find like a sweet slaw. Vinegar, sugar based slaw. And then in Northern Mississippi sometimes you find a mayonnaise based slaw. Typically though a slugburger does have some type of slaw, cabbage topping on it. For us, an "All the Way" is mustard, ketchup, pickle, onion and slaw. Then a cheeseburger "All the Way" is mustard, ketchup, pickle, onion, slaw, lettuce and tomato. So that's what we do differently than most people. That's just our menu.

BOYD YARBROUGH

I'm gonna share a Dudie burger with ya. Okay, gotcha bun here, ok, gotcha bun. Now we're gonna put a little bit of mustard on the bun here. Just a circle of mustard. There. Gotta have a couple slices of onion to go on it. Have some onion. And a couple of slices of pickle. And then you've got our delicious Dudie burger. And then like...mmmmm...you wanna bite? Here, have some.

11:57 - Music transition

ANNEMARIE ANDERSON

I'm Annemarie Anderson from the Southern Foodways Alliance and you're listening to the Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger.

The origins of the slugburger are murky at best. But it is very regionally rooted and it is a working class food. And that's kinda the beauty of this.

DEREK PIRTLE

The slugburger kinda came out of necessity. It started ya know, during the Depression and post Depression era, especially in the South. Whenever you had a family trying to feed a bunch of kids and they really couldn't afford it, they would take their hamburger meat and extend it to make it last kinda forever. You know, for as long as they could. A lot of time they would take one pound hamburger meat and add things into it to make it go farther. They weren't feeding one or two kids, they were feeding as many as possible with the same amount of meat for as little bit of money as possible. So as far as who invented it, where exactly it came from, I have no clue. I don't know if anybody does.

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Umm, I just think it kinda came out of necessity. I'm sure somebody coined the phrase slugburger or doughburger along the way but as far as the genre of food goes, it's definitely a stand alone and it came out of necessity from my understanding.

HOLLY POYNOR

The stories I've heard that's passed down through the generations it's kinda like an Appalachian Mountain tradition to stretch meat back in the Depression era and it just kinda stuck around I think because people developed a taste for it here. Ya know, they had big families, money was tight and so they added flour and some of the slugburgers here have a cornmeal or soy meal mixed in 'em. Some people put eggs... Ya know, a lot of fillers that they used to stretch the meat to feed a large family.

PAT KNIGHT

There's a family in Corinth, the Weeks family. They came up with the recipe. I think they tried a lot of things. I don't know about you but my family was poor and a lot of children and my Mother was always trying to extend the beef some way. Ya know, like cornflakes or crackers or ya know something like that. And the idea behind it was to make something cheap that the farmers coming to town on Saturday, they'd stay from daylight to dark, and it was cheap and it was good and they could feed their families on it.

WHITNEY WORSHAM

It got the name slugburger because they were made, it started during the Depression when ground beef, like it is now, had gotten really expensive. And it was just out of reach for so many families to have to be able to afford ground beef so they started making up something using flour or grain or whatever they had and pattied that out and served that on a bun as if it were a hamburger. And there become a definite recipe eventually that everybody has come to know today as the slugburger.

ANNEMARIE ANDERSON

Slugburgers are a fixture of the Tennessee Valley. And that's because of industry, right? That's because it's an easy working class food. This is a place where a lot of industry was brought in after you know, TVA Works started. And so these are people that are working in textile mills, working at feed plants...

ANGELA AVENT

I think that, like I said, the one that's out on 72, I may be wrong but I believe they had them before Borroum's did downtown. There was that, there was two or three that was on the highway, Slugburger Cafe, that just came from the people that had the carts and you know, they were selling so much, kinda like the hot dog stands, whatever and they just started putting them in the buildings and that's where they are.

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PAT KNIGHT

When I was a kid, my mother was a nurse and she got paid once a month. And once a month she would stop here at this place and it was known as Leonard's Cafe then and she would get a dozen for a dollar. And she would get a dozen on payday and bring 'em home to us and that was my first experience.

JESSICA HUFF

Even with my Mom, their generation, they didn't, umm, they could come into town because the local school was here on 5th street and they could walk into town. And they would get a slugburger at the Rexall or Leonard's where Ms. Pat's is now. It was Leonard's Cafe. And so, they would come into town if they had any extra change, kind like us when we were in high school.

BRYAN HUFF

Right.

ANGELA AVENT

I do remember it was and really still is lots of times a Saturday ritual. When I was young there was a place called The White Trolley on Highway 72. It's actually still there. It is, it looks like a trolley car. We used to go on Saturdays when we'd be out shopping, doing whatever and I thought it was fun to go sit on the barstools...just grew up eating the slugburgers.

DEREK PIRTLE

For a long time, a lot of childhood, Saturday mornings were "Hey, let's go get our hair cut and walk across the town square and eat at Dub's Burgers." Really fun story is that I have a customer that literally turned 17 this year that I've now got on my employee staff umm, I can remember when she was 12 and serving her my first year. So it's fun to see her story of Dub's is gonna look different, really than anybody else's.

ANNEMARIE ANDERSON

Cause also historically speaking, it's significant, right? Because it's not just some interesting food it tells us something. It tells us something about the people that ate that food. It tells us something about, you know, the culture of that place. And that's why we study slugburgers and that's why we study any food because it tells us something about who we are as a people, umm, about our identity but also about our economics about our culture, umm, and about place!

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BRYAN HUFF

Honestly, now with what we've gone through with COVID, uh, it seems like that makes the slugburger relevant again as being something that's there for people when they've lost their jobs and everything.

17:57 - Music transition

BRYAN HUFF

My name is Bryan Huff and you're listening to the Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger. We're kinda the birthplace of Rockabilly Music. For a lot of people, that's been a well kept secret that really needs to...it's not really been fleshed out. A lot of times when you think what Rock and Roll you think of Tupelo and Memphis cause of Elvis. But Elvis first played with Carl Perkins...

JESSICA HUFF

...here in Bethel Springs...

BRYAN HUFF

...here in Bethel Springs just a few miles north of where we're sitting right here. First place they ever met, ever played together. And this is where they developed their sound so we're literally sitting at the birthplace of Rockabilly Music. And Elvis said he'd never come back because he didn't make enough gas money to get back to Tupelo.

JESSICA HUFF

Is that what Pat's husband, Harold...

BRYAN HUFF

That's what Harold said. Harold Knight. He's no longer with us. But Harold was really kinda keeper of the flame of all these stories.

JESSICA HUFF

Yeah.

BRYAN HUFF

And uh, you know, when you went to the slugburger place over at Ms Pat's, Harold was a permanent fixture. He, you were gonna hear stories about all this.

BOYD YARBROUGH

In Tupelo, Johnnie's Drive-In, course that's the famous drive-in that Elvis used to go to when he, as he became famous or right before and right after he got his popularity. He'd go to Johnnie's and get the Johnnie Burger. They called it a Johnnie Burger at Johnnie's.

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CHRISTI WHITE

Now I'm just gonna have to tell you the story that I have been told. So, okay...umm, we are located, we're just a block from the birthplace. We're actually just one street over from where Elvis went to school as a child. So the rumor is that he would come over after school and get a cheeseburger doughburger and RC Cola. And so, that's just the story we've always heard. We actually have a plaque out front on the patio telling about him coming here as a child, getting the doughburger and the RC Cola with his friends...and then we actually have a picture of him sitting in one of the booths here on the wall. It was taken in '56 I believe and a little story about how we got the picture. So...

BOYD YARBROUGH

The booth that Elvis Presley sat in is still there at Johnnie's. And there's a picture of him sitting in the booth so I like to sit in it sometimes ya know and kinda give that pose that he's got and when people come I say, "Thank you very much."

CHRISTI WHITE

Actually it was a traveling salesman took the picture. He just forgot about it and he stumbled upon it and brought it out here to Johnnie's. So I think it was about 40 years before he even thought about he had it. So we've had it out here since 1997. I mean, it's not anything on Elvis Week to have 35 ya know, 30 Elvis impersonators in here sitting with the customers and they're just lovin' it.

BOYD YARBROUGH

Gene Simmons, not the Gene Simmons of the Kiss, but there was kinda a country, early rockabilly singer in Tupelo, Gene Simmons...do you 'member, you may remember a song way back called, "Haunted House". "...my new house today..." Anyway, uh, that was one of his most popular songs but he did write a song about Dudie's Diner. Do you want me to sing to ya? Ya'll turn your radios down. Turn your sound down now so you won't break your computers but I'm not a real good singer so this is gonna be Imma tear it up but it's uh, "Dudie was a Christian for that was his family name, slinging hash and burgers was his only claim to fame, I've been from California clear across to Carolina but the best damn meal I ever had was down at Dudie's Diner." So that was a popular song around Tupelo because it mentioned Dudie and his diner.

ANGELA AVENT

Somebody came and made a commercial and there's a song of the slugburger that's actually the "Slugburger Song". Yeah, Charley Kyles. It was. The first year that I did this which was just four years ago he came to me and told me that. Did you know there's a song? Did you know you should play that song?

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

ANNEMARIE ANDERSON

Do you know the artist Brittany Howard? Have you seen her music video for "Stay High"? Okay, that's the story of the story of the slugburger. So, she's from Athens, Alabama. And Dub's is in there. And this is uh, the story of "Stay High" is this man, played by Terry Crews, he's gettin' out of the poultry plant, he goes to the store, he's looking for food, they're singin' and everybody is like, singin' and dancin' along with him...he goes to Dub's Burgers he gets a sack of Dub's Burgers which are..slugburgers and he goes home. And he says to his daughters, "I got hamburgers!" and those are slugburgers in that bag. It's kinda loosely based on her Dad and his work in this poultry plant. And that's just really like to me, the story of this, right? It's a working class food.

DEREK PIRTLE

When she was here she was super sweet, uh, she was great to take time with all of us. Terry Crews was in the video as well and they were both super honorable to us as owners of a small town business. They spent a lot of time with us. And uh, we talked about a lot. We really didn't talk about anything as far as her personal history here at Dub's specifically other than she remembers growing up here eating it. She remembers being brought here by family members. And it is kinda an iconic place in town. There's a couple hot spots ya gotta hit and this is one of them. And she was extremely respectful and um, generous to us as a company and I was really grateful to have her here.

23:26 - Music transition

BOYD YARBROUGH

I'm Boyd Yarbrough from the Oren Dunn City Museum and you're listening to the Local Farey Tale of the Dudie Burger.

I guess the first time that I tried a Dudie Burger was with my Dad. He liked to go down to the Trolley Car Diner on Saturday afternoons and just as a lunch as a light lunch have a Dudie Burger. So I remember, I guess maybe, gosh how many? I won't say, maybe 50 years ago or more I guess, 60 maybe, was my first Dudie Burger. And the atmosphere of the old trolley car was exciting, too. That wasn't like any other kinda cafe or restaurant around town because it was actually one that Dudie Christian had brought in, in like 1947 to start selling his food from that location. The diner itself was located across town in Tupelo. Which is probably the most major intersection in town. I mean, it's a 4-way intersection with a railroad track that splits it right down the middle. So about 20 times a day all the traffic has to stop at this major intersection. Always has. And so, they redid that intersection 20 years ago or more to realign another street. It had another street that came into that intersection, made it 5-way street so they realigned and moved the street down south a little bit and it went right through where Dudie's Diner was sitting. So they had to get Dudie's...

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

Matter of fact he had already gone out of the restaurant business, for a while it was a little antique shop and then after that it was a tattoo parlor. And then uh, it had become vacant about a year before they relocated the street so we had a generous benefactor that had a crane and scaffolding moving company that moved it for us for free out here to the Oren Dunn Museum. So it became relocated I think maybe about 1986 or something like that. Maybe '87 to the grounds here at the Oren Dunn Museum. And then a few years later after that we were thinking of ways we needed to raise money to help preserve the history and improve our exhibits and thought well, why don't we sell Dudie Burgers? So the first year we had I don't know we made 4 or 500 Dudie Burgers maybe and sold them. Which was pretty good deal cause we never done it before. And then it's just grown and grown and grown every year after that.

ANGELA AVENT

I remember of course when the Slugburger Festival started. That was in 1987 by a gentleman named Jimmy Hathcock who owned a Jewelry Store down close to Borroum's. It was my understanding that they were just one day like "this should be celebrated". And they wanted to do something downtown and so on the court square which is right where Borroum's is right across from the Courthouse, they put together what was the first festival 34 years ago. And it has grown into what it is today from there.

BRYAN HUFF

I think it just started once the Rockabilly Highway Revival Festival came in. There were, we felt there were other small pieces that needed to be plugged in so people had more of a full picture of what it was like to be here in McNairy County and so the Slugout started to come in. And it was really meant to be like a friendly thing. Just where we showcased them more than anything. Uh, because everybody...it's very tribal. You have your Pat's fans, you have your Wink's fans and the slugburger they love is the slugburger they love you're not changing 'em.

JESSICA HUFF

Yeah

BRYAN HUFF

And so I thought it'd be a lotta fun to sorta pit these tribes against each other to see who would show up to support their slugburger...

JESSICA HUFF

'17?

BRYAN HUFF

I think we started in 2017.

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JESSICA HUFF

I do, too.

BRYAN HUFF

This will be its fifth year.

JESSICA HUFF

Yeah.

BOYD YARBROUGH

Recipe was given to us...course it was a secret I can't tell ya about it, I'd have to kill ya...but uh, as far as the preparation for the burgers segment itself, we probably get about 120 lbs of hamburger meat and about 50 or 75 lbs of flour and probably 6 or 7 gallons of pickles and I don't know about a dozen or two of these mustard containers ya know... So then, a couple days before the festival, one of the local restaurant owners allows us to come in and mix the mix. The first, I don't know we were stupid, for the first 10 or 12 years we'd mix it by hand in these big trays and stuff and ya know just squeeze and squish and mix the flour and all that. But then, one day, DING! Why don't we use one of those big mixers that they have at the restaurants? So we found a guy that would let us do that. So it's been a lot easier the past 5 or 6 years. Mixing the Dudie Burger mix mechanically rather than by hand. Although, there may be a little bit of taste difference with your hands in it versus the machine.

ANGELA AVENT

So actually the Rotary Club here cooks the burgers and serves them. They sure do.

BRYAN HUFF

So the downtown, a lot of the streets are blocked off so they can literally just walk from restaurant to restaurant and those restaurants are open throughout the festival. And so, they can literally sit down at any of these places and enjoy 'em. And that was kinda the idea, too...was to drive people to these businesses.

BOYD YARBROUGH

We don't actually cook in the diner but you're allowed to sit at the diner as they did years ago ya know. But uh, then we've got two big griddles I mean, uh big ol' flat top griddles that you can put maybe 40 hamburgers on at a time. So, you scoop 'em out with a ice cream scoop. That's about the size of the...a big scooping ice cream scoop and plop it down and let it set a minute and then ya get your spatula and you squish it down and it cooks...oh, I'd say maybe 3 or 4 minutes it'll cook. And then we got volunteers that are continually uh, squeezing mustard and putting on pickles and slappin' on a hamburger and then wrappin' it up because some people, gosh you wouldn't believe...

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

They come and buy a sack full of Dudie Burgers. I mean like, "Gimme 12 Dudie Burgers!" Course they were are...just throwing them all together and also it's a hectic, hectic deal in the kitchen. Which is an outside kitchen actually. Cause you can smell the onions and all the everything cookin'. So it's kinda, we wanted it that way. Umm, but uh, I mean, we have sold as many as like 1800 Dudie Burgers on a day. Golly daw.

BRYAN HUFF

Participation is totally voluntary. They don't have to like be a part of it. We really encourage them just for the fact to just get the names to the restaurants out. Cause we had, we wanted them made to where they were originally made so that meant onions, pickle and mustard. Those were the three original condiments because they were inexpensive, readily available... so those were the three things that people mainly used on the slugburger. Um, so we wanted them made in that particular fashion. Uh, so we would send people with coolers to each restaurant and they would get 'em to make sure they stayed warm. Ya know, put 'em in the coolers and bring 'em to the Courthouse. And then we had a room hidden away. The panel of judges was unknown. We would have judged come in...

JESSICA HUFF

Protect their identity.

BRYAN HUFF

To protect their identity. We didn't want any threats or anything so no one knew who the judges were. First year we had a few out of town judges...

JESSICA HUFF

Yeah, we did...

BRYAN HUFF

Which was really interesting.. But the 2nd year and I'm pretty sure the 3rd year they were...

JESSICA HUFF

...all local...

BRYAN HUFF

All local judges. What was so funny too is, cause then some of them were eating them and they would even try to guess whose they were eating. It's so funny because uh, a lot of times they thought they were eating one person's but it was another person's. And so, when they would come in, we would have them as numbers. And then someone had the cooler in another room where those were numbered and corresponded to where they came from. So that way we had a record to keep track of.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

And that way also, the judges had no clue where they came from. And that was hilarious with them trying to guess whose was whose. Cause a lot of times they...

JESSICA HUFF

...were wrong...

BRYAN HUFF

...were wrong...

JESSICA HUFF

Yeah. First year winner was um, Rockabilly Cafe which was unusual because all the judges were sittin' there tellin' me and you in the room, "Oh, this is my favorite." "This is my favorite." "This is my favorite." And then here comes Rockabilly Cafe who was new to the table doin' this....

BRYAN HUFF

Yep.

JESSICA HUFF

And then they beat them all that first year so it was different...

BRYAN HUFF

By one point.

JESSICA HUFF

By one point. And then Ms. Pat came back next year and...

BRYAN HUFF

...came back the next year...

JESSICA HUFF

..she reigned.

BRYAN HUFF

And yeah, she's won ever since so...

PAT KNIGHT

We have a Rockabilly Festival and I've won the Judge's Trophy for 3 years and the People's Choice Trophy, I've won that a couple of years.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

BRYAN HUFF

Online. We have a poll that we run on Facebook and uh, we actually pay for that through a polling company so that no one can vote twice. Umm, and uh, that is part of the People's Choice is on Facebook so... And that's where it really, people can get vocal and start sharin' their like "Vote for this", ya know? So yeah...

JESSICA HUFF

I think we migrated to that because...

BRYAN HUFF

I think that ended up taking over completely...

JESSICA HUFF

...we weren't real sure how...

BRYAN HUFF

...instead of doing the paper...

JESSICA HUFF

Yeah, yeah...

BRYAN HUFF

We let the Facebook because everybody uses Facebook now so it became a really easy thing people could do with their phones. And everything could get on there and we have them vote and share and I can't remember how many votes we had one year it was astronomical.

JESSICA HUFF

It was a lot.

BRYAN HUFF

A huge number of votes. Umm....

JESSICA HUFF

Cause I think the winning number was right around 400.

BRYAN HUFF

Yeah, but once again, still it was, they were all so close. I mean, it's amazing to me how you never have someone just takeoff with it. There's so many people that, there's some people that would go to all the places they just love them all. They just love slugburgers in this area. So there's never any one that just takes off. It's always a really close competition.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

BOYD YARBROUGH

We have a couple contests. We have a Dudie Burger cooking contest. Which is a judged contest. Who can make a burger that most simulates the actual real Dudie Burger. We just give 'em the ingredients and they have to figure out what to make and some of them are pretty good, some of them are ya know, not so good. But it's , that's a fun thing and then we have a Dudie Burger Eating Contest, too. I mean, how many, the person that can eat the most Dudie Burgers in a timed limit there so... That's a funny thing, too. 7 I think is the record. I'm thinking.. We give them a minute and a half. And I think 7 is the most that someone has eaten.

BRYAN HUFF

After the judging is done we would have, set up a tent in front of the Courthouse and we would have the eating competition. And the eating competition was a lot of fun. It was amazing. What was the record? Somebody ate. Was it like...6? It was a ridiculous amount. Slugburgers are not something that you really eat a lot of....uh...

JESSICA HUFF

Cause it's on a bun...

BRYAN HUFF

It's on a bun so the bread is a lot and when you have this fried patty that's already...it's kinda like breading itself. That's a lot to take down. Just, uh, in a short period of time. Need a lot of water. They came from one restaurant. We just wouldn't tell them who. Because we wanted everybody...cause like we said, some places made them thicker, some places made them thinner so on the eating competition side, I think we'd get like 50 of them from one place. Just no one was allowed to know where they came from cause we changed every year. We literally just gave them 10 a piece and like if somebody could get through 10 of 'em...

JESSICA HUFF

Yeah.

BRYAN HUFF

Which I don't know if that ever happened...

JESSICA HUFF

We do. We have one...

BRYAN HUFF

One person.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

JESSICA HUFF

...person has 2 years in a row. He's done it 2 years in a row.

BRYAN HUFF

That's right. That's right. 2 years in a row he's finished it. Yeah. Is he still with us? We don't know. We may have actually killed that person.

WHITNEY WORSHAM

There's usually a Slugburger Eating Contest. Which, it is like watching a train wreck. If you've ever watched the Hotdog Eating Contest on television that happens in New York ...it's awful to watch but you can't look away. And we get a lot of the same contestants from that Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest that come down for that.

ANGELA AVENT

There was a Slugburger Eating Contest and it was, uh, it had turned to a National Event. We had the actual Joey Chestnut, he has come. There's actually been several of those guys. I think they had 'em about 4 years. It was, it drew a pretty big crowd. I mean, it really did. But um, we don't do that anymore. Ya know, ya gotta change it up, ya gotta switch things up. We may have a local Slugburger Eating Contest this year just local folks eating. Yeah, it's funny, the lady that started that got married this past weekend and Joey Chestnut actually came back and came to her wedding. Yeah. I think he won it like, 2 or 3 times. Yeah, but he was here. Yeah.

BRYAN HUFF

At the end of that we have like the awards session and we award the winners of the Eating Competition and we award the winning restaurant and everything right there on stage. There's probably YouTube and Facebook videos out there everywhere because there's lots of cell phones up videoing and just cheering on everybody. I mean some of them have a favorite and they're cheering on their neighbor, their friend or their relative or whoever but a lot of times it's just, they're really there to just supporting everybody. And it's just fun. It's just a lot of fun and we need more fun.

ANGELA AVENT

The festival is 3 days long and we have a carnival of course up in uptown part. And that runs for 3 days. We have an entertainment site which is at the Care Garden. Which is down there where the Museum is. And there will be entertainment on those nights. We have a Slug Idol, as we call it, competition. That is put on by Garrett Eye Clinic and um, that has really turned into a big deal. We have people come from multiple counties to participate in that event. And of course a winner is crowned on the first night. After that is done, we have usually local entertainment that performs that night. And then on Saturday night we try to get National Acts if we can and then some wedding band type bands also come and perform.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

Then, there is food cooked on both sites. Slugburgers of course are on both sites, um, we also have the traditional carnival type food and barbecue being from the South. Lots of lemonade stands and um, this year we're having a car show uptown. There's not been a lot of events during the day because of the heat. It's usually so hot here. They've tried vendor booths before but this year we're having a car show that will be uptown around the Courthouse. We have a pageant that's in the day. The Slugburger Pageant. It is just a beauty pageant. Sponsored by our local pageant attire store, Sparkle. It's all age divisions from one year through eighteen and they just have a pageant on Saturday and if you win you get to ride in the Christmas Parade as Miss Slugburger as well as being on stage on Saturday night. So, it's a pretty packed 3 days.

BOYD YARBROUGH

But it has always been on the first weekend of May. Because we've coincided with another big event in Tupelo, called "The Blue Suede Cruise". Which attracts, I don't know, gosh, 7 or 800, maybe 1000 antique and hotrod cars and stuff into Tupelo. So we thought it would be a great segway with the old cars and the old burgers to have kinda a combined event.

ANGELA AVENT

Well, there is a lady and I don't know who it is, but she's from Pennsylvania and she comes every year. She had a family connection here and with just selling the t-shirts um, those go on Facebook of course and you just wouldn't believe the places I ship the t-shirts to. And it's from, I either lived there years ago and my grandmother mails me one every one year and she's not there anymore I need a t-shirt so... I mean, we probably have, I don't know, 8 or 9 different states that we ship t-shirts to. And I would say probably 5 people that are like, that I do mail to that they're like, I've never missed a t-shirt. Don't wanna miss it. Like last year, you know we didn't have, obviously we didn't have the festival, but we did have t-shirt because we were like, we have to have the t-shirt whether we have the festival or not.

BOYD YARBROUGH

And what I hate about the Dudie Burger Festival is making people wait as long as they wait for one of these burgers. So we're still working on ways to speed all that up. Standing in line for a doughburger for 15 minutes, I don't know. It just bothers me. It just... I wanna get em and get their burger to them so they can enjoy it instead of havin' to wait in line.

41:24 - Music transition

HOLLY POYNOR

I'm Holly Poynor from Latham's Hamburger Inn and you're listening to the Local Farey Tale of the Doughburger.

Around the age of probably 10, I ate my first Latham's burger from Latham's.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

My sister and her husband lived in New Albany for a short time after they got out of college. And I came and stayed with them some on the weekends. And they brought me to Latham's. So I remember it from then.

DEREK PIRTLE

So, I literally have pictures of me in diapers on the barstool here at Dub's. So for me, a slugburger is just kinda culturally a way of life. It's somethin' that's always been there and um, so I guess first impressions were they were great cause I've been eatin' 'em ever since.

CHRISTI WHITE

My parents actually purchased Johnnie's in 1981 from John and Margaret Chism who were the original owners. So I have grown up eating them.

PAT KNIGHT

The man who started my little cafe's name was Buster. And he sold it to the Leonards. And the Leonards, uh, their health got bad. And so, they sold it to a lady named, Norma Jean Borden and I went to work for her in December of '87. And she bought it in September of '87 and I bought it in January of '88. I worked for her about a month when I bought it. And I have been here, I've started on my 34th year. And I really like doing it.

DEREK PIRTLE

I purchased it about 5 years ago. 5 years July 1. From a gentleman named Lanier Greenhaw. Lanier is from Athens, this area as well and his Father and his Uncle owned it. Jimmy and Herbie. Jimmy bought Herbie out so Jimmy bought out Herbie's half of the restaurant and that's how Lanier ended up with it. He got it from his Father. Jimmy and Herbie got it from the original uh, establishment owner and that was Dub Greenhaw. Locally known here affectionately as Dub.

CHRISTI WHITE

Johnnie's was originally opened October 17, 1945 by John and Margaret Chism. They were the original owners, like I said. They ran it until the early 80s when my parents, Don and Barbara Knight purchased it. And then they recently just retired on June the 30th of 2020. So I took over July the 1st of 2020. So I'm still getting my feet wet on being an actual owner. I've been out here working for 5 years but...

HOLLY POYNOR

The way I understand, Latham's the original recipe came around in 1928 umm, by a gentleman last name of Staggs. He was out of Tennessee. He ran Staggs here for 20 years or so. He later sold to the Grisham family. Then um, Miss Latham, helped Miss Grisham there at Latha...well, Grisham's then.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

And when they retired, she and her husband bought it so it became Latham's sometime in like the 60s. And then um, their daughter-in-law, Vicki, wound up buying it in the 80s and she had it until about three years ago when I purchased it. And I just kept the Latham's name. Vicki continues to work here some on Saturdays just to come in and help me out and then her brother actually is retired now and he helps run the front for me so... They're still very involved ya know cause of the name and just the tradition. They want to see this place continue.

CHRISTI WHITE

We are Tupelo's oldest restaurant. As far as I know, we are doing it the same exact way they were doing it. So. And I'm doing it the way my Dad was doing it and he was doing it the way they were doing it. Umm, so, to my knowledge nothing has changed.

PAT KNIGHT

We were buying ours from a Mr. Gray at a Meat Market down in Corinth, Mississippi. Which is about 20 minutes from here. And he was very good to me. But he had the recipe and we had a new health man. And the new health man wanted to know the ingredients in the slugburgers. And Mr. Gray would not give it to him. So, in order to...he thought he would get the recipe, he told Mr. Gray that he could not sell it to me to transport across state lines and then cook it and sell it to my customers. Which, that was devastating to me and to him, too. Because that was the only outlet that I had. And so, their health man called the health man up here and told us that if we were caught going across state lines the fine would be swift and stiff. And I'm a big coward. I'm gonna go by the rules. And so, I was just worried to death what was I gonna do. Cause that's half my business right there...

HOLLY POYNOR

Vicki actually came in and um, taught me how to make them. And so, it's just learning how far to press down when you're trying to flatten them out without making 'em, ya know, fall apart. And that was kinda a hard thing. And then getting the temperature on your grease just right. And um, being careful not to burn them. Because a lot people ask for them to be crispy, and ya know, you want them to be crispy but you also don't want them to have a ya know, scorch taste. So just kinda learn, it's just a little bit different than cooking a regular hamburger.

PAT KNIGHT

And umm, my son happened to be dating a little girl whose grandmother had had a slugburger place and she made her own slugburgers. So, woman that I am, I used my...and I called her and I asked her if she would sell me her recipe. And she said, "No, but I'll come down there and show you how to make it." And I said, "You will?!" She said, "Yes." And I said, "Alright..." And course now she made hers in a dishpan.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

And she mixed it together sorta like biscuits with her hand but uh, for the amount I needed I knew that wasn't enough so we started with her recipe and uh, got it until we thought it was right.

HOLLY POYNOR

When I bought it, I asked her would she come back in because it kinda had gotten a little bit, it'd gotten a bit far away from what this had been originally. And so, without her coming in to help me make sure we had the recipe right and um, having her name associated with it, you know, and letting people know that she was back and that it was gonna be the original recipe was very important to me. And it has made all the difference in the world. Because we have people come in now that had been in previously and they're like, "Oh wow. These taste like they used to." And that makes, that gives me the best feeling in the world to hear people say that. It just make, I can't tell you how happy that makes me. Because that's what..That's all I wanted is I wanted it to be reminiscent of what it was, ya know, 30, 40 years ago.

PAT KNIGHT

When I bought this place, I went to previous owner Ms. Leonard. And I asked her if she'd come to work for me and show me how to do this. And uh, I said, well, I asked if she would and she said, "Well..." Now she was like in her 70s then. And she said, "Well, I might be bossy." And I said, "Well, I'll treat ya just like I would my Mother." And she looked at me kinda strange and she said, "Well, how's that?" And I said, "I listen to everything ya got to say and then go ahead and do what I wanted to." So she worked for me for some 20 years. She was a good woman. And finally her knee played out and she had to quit but she told me, "I'd like to stay. I just can't go any further." She was a fine woman. And I loved her dearly.

BRYAN HUFF

It seems like the slugburger, it's very interesting, it's gotten...you have a change of the guard. You've gone from Leonards, you've gone from Pat's...But someone's always there to pick up the mantle.

CHRISTI WHITE

I will say this, it is not something I thought I would be doing. Just because my parents, um, being in the restaurant business is very confining as far as it's hard to plan. I can rem..ya know, my Dad was always working at night so it was pretty much ya know, my Mom and I at home all the time. Just because of the hours he had to work. Mother did all the bookwork. She was the bookkeeper, payroll, all that. But I went to college. Got a degree from University of Mississippi in Accounting and that's...Mother and Daddy wanted me to do something else. And I did for 15 1/2 years I worked at the local hospital here in town. And my husband and I have a Fish & Steak House. So umm, 5 years ago I left the hospital and tell Mom and Dad I wanted to come work for them and learn the family business. My Dad is almost 77.

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My Mom is in her early 70s. I'm not going to divulge her true age. So I knew there was comin' a time that he was gonna want to retire. But he didn't want it outside of the family. So um, I just, I'm gonna do it. I need something different. And it's fun.

DEREK PIRTLE

This is a 100% family business for us. Ya know, my wife and I we own it but if workers call out my Dad or my Father-in-Law or Mom or Mother-in-Law, somebody's gonna jump in cause the need. That's kinda what makes slugburgers fun is it's still very family oriented and this business is family driven. Um, everybody knows that Olivia is my wife. Olivia is my heart behind why we do it and just kinda support for that in the family and it's just fun to see it come full circle with family.

BOYD YARBROUGH

As a matter of fact, Johnnie and Dudie were Brothers-in-Law. So it's kinda a family connection there that they both served basically the same type of burger.

CHRISTI WHITE

And actually the gentleman that owned Dudie's was Mr. John Chism's brother-in-law. I believe I'm telling that correctly. So there was a family relation. So they're very similar in how they were cooked because ya know he was cookin' the same thing his brother-in-law was here. But Johnnie's, the doughburger at Johnnie's came first before the Dudie Burger.

PAT KNIGHT

Now here's something real interesting about Mr. Gray. It's a real sweet thing. Uh, I kept buying my soybean grits from him. And when he was about to die, he told his wife to call me and give me the name of the place where he bought his grits in Memphis. But he said, "You tell her not to go down there by herself cause it's in a bad part of town." And I thought that was so sweet, ya know, that he would be dying and think of me. I really thought a lot of him and his wife, Ms. Gray.

BRYAN HUFF

Cause if no one picks up that mantle to carry it on...no one is gonna have these stories. So it's kinda, it's a little frightening in a way.

CHRISTI WHITE

I've enjoyed hearing Dad's stories and it's kinda now my turn to hear the stories and see what happens at this crazy little place.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

HOLLY POYNOR

Then I have some of the sweetest stories where children have come in or ya know, reminiscing of their parents or their grandparents but they brought them here and they may come here on their birthday just to remember when they would come with them ya know, years ago. And so they always have sweet stories to tell.

PAT KNIGHT

And he was here really early and he was in a real hurry and I said, "Why are you in such a hurry?" And he said, "My Daughter's having a baby and she's craving slugburgers and I've got to fly them to Memphis." And I said, "You're gonna fly them?!" And he said, "Yes! How much do I owe you?" I said, "Well, if you can fly 'em, I can furnish them for free." And then, here about a month ago, he brought a young man in with him and he said, "Ms. Pat, do you remember that baby being born?" I said, "I do!" And he said, "Well, this is him. He's 21." I thought that was hilarious.

CHRISTI WHITE

We have tons of guest books. We try to get all of our visitors to sign a guest book. And they'll leave note and we've had stuff mailed to us from Australia and different places. We've got a car tag that's on the wall that's actually from Queensland that a visitor sent us. It's just, we get stuff like that people send all the time. We send t-shirts and mail stuff to them also. It's just, it's a lot of fun.

PAT KNIGHT

We had folks in town and they were from Germany. And they were working at factory that we had here. And they were on their way home and uh, he came in and asked me if I would let him film me cookin' slugburgers. And I said, "Well, sure!" And he said, "And would you talk to the camera and tell them about slugburgers?" And I said, "Sure, I don't mind." And so I did. And uh, when my hus...I came home from work and I uh, was telling my husband about it and he said, "Oh my goodness. Somewhere on the History Channel in Germany they're showing that film and thinking, 'look at that poor hillbilly woman'."

DEREK PIRTLE

If you're from here and you've been away for awhile and you come back, this is on the list for sure. For most people. Like today, we had a guy that just got released from active duty and came home and literally got home and came and eat. That's like, that's what he did. Came and eat. So umm...

ANGELA AVENT

And I have a Brother-in-Law that lives in Reno, Nevada. He is the exact same way. When his plane lands. He stops by and buys 20 slugburgers.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

And he eats on those slugburgers his entire stay. And we have actually got dry ice and flown him slugburgers to Reno, Nevada. When you gotta have one, you gotta have one. And that's what you do. True story.

PAT KNIGHT

If your Post Office does overnight delivery uh, and my brother lives in uh, Michigan. And his Son-in-Law was having a birthday and he wanted some shipped and uh, so we froze burgers and we froze mustard and I got 'em to the Post Office at 4:30 and they were delivered at 2:30 the next day. And uh, it cost \$46 to mail 12 burgers to Michigan. So, yes, we've done that but mostly people get them and put them in the freezer. And then put them in the cooler and take 'em home. We have a fella that lives in Tampa, Florida and he gets 150 patties at a time. Takes them home and puts them in the freezer. So, that's pretty cool.

HOLLY POYNOR

I guess the biggest thing about being a part of Latham's is the people, too. Is um, we just, we've become so close to those locals that come here that love this place. Even we have people that come over from Alabama that now they feel like family and they drive nearly 2 hours to come over about once every 2 months. And uh, it's just...it's community, I guess has been a bit part of Latham's. It's really not just about the burger it's about coming in, sitting down and you know we know what's going on in your daily life that we're...how is so-and-so feeling and it's just...that's an important thing especially in this day and time to be able to have a place like this to come to. And feel like you're family. And feel like people know you and they care about you.

JESSICA HUFF

Well a fond memory is of Ms. Pat's Cafe. We would go there during my high school years. You know anytime you were out for whatever reason from high school we would go to Miss Pat's to eat lunch. It was cheap, it was very quick ya know? And Ms. Pat she's knows all of us.

BRYAN HUFF

Yeah.

JESSICA HUFF

Even to today. Ya know? She remembers everybody's name that comes through the door. And umm, it just feels like home. It's always felt like home with her.

PAT KNIGHT

I've just been here 30 going on 34 years and I enjoy my job and I enjoy my customers...

"The Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger" Transcript

DEREK PIRTLE

In Southern Tennessee, Northern Mississippi, Northern Georgia and North Alabama - the few places that are around here, it's kind of like a dying art, ya know? It's something that you're going to find very locally, very regionally, all of them are kinda Mom & Pop owned. Nobody's doing it anywhere on the corporate level. Uh, so it's fun to go see to experience the culture of the local people, local places that serve it and how different each burger is because they do have their own flare.

58:20 - Music transition

Nora Vetter

And that is the Local Farey Tale of the Slugburger.

More information about the Slugburger Tale-Tellers can be found at [local farey \(farey\) tales \(tales\).com](http://localfarey(farey)tales(tales).com) and be sure to follow LocalFareyTalesPodcast on Facebook and Instagram to share your own tales about the Slugburger or other local fare. And if you don't know much about your local fare... Ask! There are tale tellers everywhere. A sackful of gratitude to Annemarie Anderson, Angela Avent, Bryan Huff, Jessica Huff, Ms. Pat Knight, Derek Pirtle, Holly Poynor, Christi Knight White, Whitney Worsham and Boyd Yarbrough for sharing their time and slugburger knowledge. Concept, Production and Editing by me, Nora Vetter, Music by Anisha Thomas, and Artwork by Jonathan Reich. More Local Farey Tales are coming soon so be sure to subscribe on your favorite place to listen to podcasts.

59:50 - End of episode