

## Soul Food for Little White Knights

*By Dennis Payton Knight*

There is nothing so enticing and soul satisfying for a little boy coming home from a hard day in the salt mines or parochial school as the aroma of ham and beans radiating from Mom's kitchen, maybe with the sweet undertone of cornbread in the oven. Sometimes they would be green beans, other times they were navy beans, but it didn't matter, because the perfume was supplied entirely by a ham hock simmering in the pot.

Mom often said that if she ever knew in advance that her next meal would be her last, she would make it ham and beans. That sentiment was shared by all of us, from Dad to the littlest Knight in the family. Of course we didn't call it "comfort food" in those days, and we didn't know it as "soul food" either, because neither expression would arrive in our family until well after we had already been grown and fattened. It was just Mom's home cooking, but it was food for the soul, and, oh, was it ever comforting.

Entire restaurant concepts are built around comfort food and soul food, and they are often one and the same. If soul food is collard greens, they will not enrich the soul until they have been simmered with bacon, and if your comfort food is a pot roast, it won't comfort the weary without carrots and potatoes. And gravy.

I don't know about other cultures of the world, but I suspect a little girl in Sweden would be as taken by meatballs and lingonberry as a child in Germany would love schnitzel with spaetzle or a boy in Japan would be taken by yakitori and rice. In short, soul food is comfort food, comfort food is good for the soul, and it all represents the home cooking you grew up with.

Our mom was an accomplished cook who had a college degree in home economics and nutrition. She had quite a repertoire in the kitchen, but she concentrated mostly on traditional family cooking. We loved it all regardless of what it was called.

There were seven of us children spread over some seventeen years, and depending on what grade we were in, or whether one of us was running late because of football practice or a session of marbles, we would straggle home at different times in the afternoon. The only constant is that we would each be hungry, and unless it was ham and beans, or liver and onions, which is another dish that announces itself by aroma, Mom would be quizzed on each burst through the door, "What's for supper?!"

Sometimes dad would be home, too, and if Mom happened to be fixing one of his own favorites and ours, scrumptious pork chops and hominy fried to a golden perfection, he would field the question himself, because he was ready with the answer and a happy twinkle in his eye. "Pig's ass 'n hominy!"