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Granddaddy's Sunday Dinner Bacon Pepper Burgers



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Note: The following is an excerpt adapted from [Love Language of the South: A Celebration of the Food, the Hospitality, and the Stories of My Southern Home](#) by Stacy Lyn Harris.

I don't remember when it started. I don't remember when it ended. I just remember that for years during most of my childhood, we'd eat Sunday dinner at Granddaddy's house. Everyone was there: my immediate family, my uncle, and the cousins. I'd get an adrenaline rush as soon as we turned the corner in my stepdad's red Toyota 4Runner. As soon as the car pulled up on the curb (we parked on the curb, so the driveway was clear for the others), I'd race over to one of my favorite spots on earth—the landing strip of lush green grass between my grandad's house and the neighbors. To me it was the most empowering green gymnastics mat.

As my parents walked in the door, I began my tumbling pass with the imagined onlookers as my audience. Over and over again I'd tumble with the utmost precision: roundoff, back handspring, back handspring, back layout, back handspring. I felt invincible! "Stacy, it's time to eat," my mom would call out the door, bringing me back to reality. I'd run inside through the kitchen, head straight for the blue swivel chair at the end of the den, jump in the chair, and spin until I couldn't see straight. About the time the world stopped spinning, I'd see my grandfather pulling the most amazing burgers off the grill.

The second he'd enter the door, I'd make a beeline to him and throw my arms around him, almost knocking his town-famous peppered burgers to the floor. Granddaddy wasn't super affectionate and was kind of quiet, like my dad. He was half-blooded Creek Indian and half Greek. His olive skin had been darkened and wrinkled by the sun, and he never tired of telling me, "Stay out of the sun, Stacy. You don't want to end up looking like this." Maybe it was because I loved him so much, I thought he was good-looking. I don't remember him telling me that he loved me, but I do remember

him telling me that I look exactly like his mother. I felt that meant something special to him, and that in turn made me feel special.

We'd all overfill our plates with simple but delicious food: hamburgers, French fries, fried pickles, and fried green tomatoes. The adults and kids would squeeze around the kitchen table to discuss my grandad's favorite topic: politics. Yes, politics was the topic of our discussions almost every week, which made for exciting conversation—mainly because no one agreed! The only thing that could get Granddaddy off the topic of politics was dessert.

Historically significant Southern desserts were always served at his house: banana pudding, coconut cream pie, ambrosia, lane cake, coconut cake, key lime pie, pineapple upside-down cake, caramel cake—and let me tell you, the caramel cake was the real deal! The desserts were never ending, nor did I want them to be.

After dinner I would often play hide-and-go-seek with my cousins. My favorite hiding spot was way up in the top of an oak tree. I could sit up there and dream for days, until I'd hear "Stacy, get out of that tree, there's heat lightning." Just about every Sunday there was heat lightning, and then a summer shower would move in, drawing me back indoors. Summer Sunday showers were our cue that the weekend was over and it was time to go, but I knew I'd be back next Sunday.

Those weekends have never really been over for me. When I smell a burger cooking, or I run my fingers along a rough wool fabric, I'm back on that swivel chair at Granddaddy's house waiting for him to finish my burger and feeling lucky to be by his side.

Ultimate Bacon Pepper Burgers **With Cheddar and Remoulade**

Serves 9

Ingredients

For the Burgers

- 1½ pounds ground chuck steak
- 1½ pounds ground venison loin
- ½ cup freshly ground black pepper, plus more for seasoning
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter, melted
- 9 brioche hamburger buns, split
- 9 slices sharp cheddar cheese

For the Remoulade Sauce

- 1 cup homemade or good-quality store-bought mayonnaise, such as Duke's or Hellmann's
- ¼ cup capers
- 1 tablespoon grainy mustard
- 1 tablespoon yellow mustard
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- Pinch of kosher salt
- Refrigerator pickles
- 1 pound bacon, cooked
- 1 large Vidalia or other sweet onion, sliced thin
- 2 tomatoes, sliced

You can use all beef chuck in this recipe if you don't have venison. Also, don't be shy with the pepper. It sounds like a lot, but the pepper is the secret to these amazing burgers!

Directions

To make the burgers, in a large bowl, mix the meats, pepper, and salt together. Don't overmix, or the meat will get too warm and mushy. (If you are grinding your own meat, add the salt and pepper to the meat before it goes through the grinder. And keep in mind that you will need to handle the meat less with your hands in order to keep the meat from getting too warm.) Form the meat mixture into nine 1½-inch-thick patties and season each patty with a little more pepper.

Heat a grill pan or cast iron skillet over medium heat. Brush the melted butter on the insides and outsides of each bun. Place the buns, cut side down, in the pan and toast for about 1 minute. Turn the buns over and toast the other side for about 30 seconds, then transfer to a plate or cutting board, cut side up.

Turn the heat up to high. Place a wire rack over a rimmed baking sheet. Add the patties to the same pan and cook for about 1 minute, then turn the temperature back down to medium and cook for about 4 minutes. Flip the patties, place a slice of cheddar cheese on top of each, and cook for another 4 minutes. Place a dome, such as a large metal bowl, over the pan to melt the cheese quicker. When the cheddar has melted and the patties have reached desired doneness, transfer the burgers to a wire rack. For rare, the internal temperature should be 120°F to 125°F; for medium rare, 130°F to 135°F; for medium well, 150°F to 155°F.

To make the remoulade, combine the mayonnaise, capers, mustards, and salt in a food processor or blender and blend until completely smooth.

To serve, spoon a generous amount of remoulade sauce onto each bottom bun, then place some pickles and 2 slices of bacon on top of the sauce. Add a burger and another dollop of sauce, then onion and tomato slices and more pickles. Cover with the top bun.

To Grill the Burgers

If using a gas grill, heat to high. If using a charcoal grill, heat until the charcoal is glowing orange and the heat is high. After cleaning the grill grate, brush the patties with a little oil, then place them on the grill and cook for 3 minutes, or until charred, then flip, add the cheese, and continue cooking for another 4 minutes, or until the burgers reach your desired doneness.

Excerpted from [Love Language of the South](#), a memoir of southern culinary culture, regional traditions, and easy-to-follow recipes, by [Stacy Lyn Harris](#). Used with permission from Worthy Books, a division of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

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