

REMEMBERING MARY FERCHAUD

By: Jerry Folsie

Editors Note: Jerry Folsie is one of the children of Royley Folsie, originally of St. James. Jerry is one of the Folsie children that Mary Ferchaud helped to raise. If Ferchaud were alive today, she would be celebrating her 91st birthday on March 8th.

MISS SISTER'S GUMBO Z'HERBES (GREEN GUMBO)

Mary Ferchaud, affectionately known in the black community as Miss Sister, went to work for the Folsie family about two weeks after the May 11, 1955 death of our mother. Mary, who had been working for the principal of St. James High School, knocked on our door one day and told our dad, "Mr. Royley, you need me." When Daddy asked, "What do you mean, I need you?" Mary answered, "You need me to help you raise them children." Needless to say, my grief stricken dad, was more than happy to accept Mary's offer.

Mary later told my wife, Julie, some twenty or so years later, that she was walking down the lane, which ran next to our rent house on Barras Lane in St. James and saw my mother, who was pregnant and close to her delivery date, hanging clothes on the clothesline. As she walked by, Mary said to Mother, "Mam Therese, you sure have a lot of work, doing all that clothes for all them children." Mary went on to tell Julie that mother's response was, "You're right Mary. If something ever happens to me, I sure hope somebody would help Royley take care of all my babies." The very next day, Mother died of childbirth.

Mary told Julie, she thought that conversation with Mother, the day before Mother died, was a sign from God. She said it was all she could think about for the next two weeks, until she was driven to approach my dad about helping to care for us. Mary came to work for us in May of 1955 and worked for us and loved us like a mother for the next 30 years. Words could never do justice to my trying to explain how much Mary loved and influenced the lives of my seven brothers and sisters and me. One thing I will say about Mary is that she taught us how to love and she taught us how to care.

After Julie and I got married and had children, Mary cared for our two boys, Jay and Jon. Oh, did Mary love those two boys, who she watched from their birth until they started Kindergarten. Butch and Boogie, as she called them, lit up her world. Julie would drop them off at Mary's house on her way to St. James High, where she taught English, Speech, and Journalism. Mary would take them with her to Daddy's house and Julie would pick them up on her way home from work. Mary worked for Daddy until 1985.

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Anyway, Mary was loved and revered by everyone in my family. She made each of us believe that we were her favorite. She indeed had eight favorites. Mary passed away in 2000 at the age of 86. God bless Mary for all she did for my family and may she rest in peace. I know what she did for us earned her place in heaven.

Mary was the best cook I have ever known. Most of my family members have a love for cooking, which I am sure was encouraged by our desire to re-create some of the dishes Mary had ready for us when meal time came around. We grew up without very much money. Daddy worked at the St. James Sugarhouse, where his wages were only able to supply the basics. However, we ate like royalty. We had about a one-acre vegetable garden and were fortunate enough to live in an area where we had an abundant supply of fish, shrimp, crawfish, and wild game. We also raised pigs and chickens. And best of all, we had Mary. Her love, patience and skill of cooking turned the wonderful ingredients into Cajun and Creole classics. I want to share one of Mary's dishes with you. I chose Gumbo Z'Herbes because it, like Mary, was one of the treasures of the black community.

The tradition behind **GUMBO Z'HERBES** is that it was usually made on Holy Thursday for consumption on Good Friday. Since Good Friday was and is a day of fasting and abstinence from meat for Catholics, something meatless had to be prepared for dinner. Since my family enjoyed this dish so much, Mary fixed it on days other than Good Friday and on those days she used ham hocks or bacon. I have used both in this recipe. Mary used whatever greens we had in the garden, which usually included, collard greens, mustard greens, turnip greens, spinach, green leaf lettuce, cabbage, parsley and green onions. If we had beet tops and carrot tops, they were also added. Use what you have.

Ingredients:

2 bunch collard greens	½ lb smoked turkey necks
2 bunch mustard greens	1-gallon chicken broth
1 bunch spinach	3 ribs of celery (chopped)
½ head of cabbage	12 oz. smoked sausage
1 bunch turnip greens	1 chopped onion
1 bunch green onions	2 tablespoons minced garlic
1 bunch flat-leaf parsley	3 bay leaves
2 heaping tablespoons of roux	Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
½ teaspoon dried thyme	1 tablespoon gumbo file'

Wash all greens thoroughly and remove all stems or hard centers. Chop and set aside. Place turkey necks, onions and celery with two cups of water in a 12 quart pot. Bring to a boil and simmer for about 10 minutes. Add greens, roux, half the parsley and chicken stock. Boil together in for about 2 hours.

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Run about half of the mixture through a food processor and return to pot. Adjust seasoning, if necessary. Add gumbo file'.

Serve like other gumbo, in a soup bowl over steamed rice or like a soup with no rice. Put about ½ cup of rice in each bowl and ladle a heaping portion of gumbo z'herbes over it. You may also add about 1/8 teaspoon of gumbo file to each bowl.

Thank you, Mary, for this dish and for the many others I have learned to love. I love you and I miss you. You will live in my heart 'til the day I die.

Jerry