

## The University of North Carolina Press

### **A Conversation with Mildred Council**

Author of *Mama Dip's Family Cookbook*

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**Q: How has your life changed since your first cookbook was published?**

**A:** I've gotten older. I was 70 then, and I'm 76 now. It's still going on. I've cut back some, but I'm still working. I've spent a lot of time on this cookbook, and I still enjoy what I do. I traveled a lot for the first book, and I can't go anywhere [without being recognized.] It's just something. I know life—the life I live. People come a long way to talk to me. Churches ask me to come and talk to them about hard times because I can relate to all of that.

**Q: You've said that this book is a continuation of your story....**

**A:** After the first book came out, my mailbox told me all about people's grandmothers and the things they ate and can't get anymore. People ask me to call their sick parents and have a conversation with them. They take pictures of me with them and their children and send them back to me. Busloads of people come from all over North Carolina. One lady's grandchildren brought her to Dip's in an ambulance to eat hush puppies with pot liquor and buttermilk. She just wanted to lie on her stretcher and eat on the porch.

**Q: Are there particular recipes that your customers asked you to include?**

**A:** *Catfish Gumbo* is the main one, and the *Chocolate Pecan Pie*. People always say that they can't make dumplings, so I invented *Chicken Tortilla Stew*. It tastes just the same, but it's easy.

**Q: Which dishes are your personal favorites?**

**A:** I like old-fashioned comfort foods like greens, chicken and dumplings, beef stew, and smothered pork chops.

**Q: You describe some of your recipes as "gone but not forgotten." What do you mean by that?**

**A:** When I say "gone but not forgotten" I mean we've gotten away from Jell-O as a main dessert, from *Chicken Tetrizzini*—from all of that. I'm talking about recipes where you just cook a pot and sit down with bread and eat it.

**Q: You include 85 dessert recipes in MAMA DIP'S FAMILY COOKBOOK. How often do you think we should indulge in sweets?**

**A:** Desserts are not something that you eat all the time. Country people eat Sunday dessert—"something sweet," and sugared yams during the week. Dessert is a luxury.

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Most of the desserts in this book have been served at Dip's—*Stack Cake, Chocolate Pecan Pie*. People see them when they come in.

**Q: You've traveled a lot to promote your books. What have you learned along the way?**

**A:** I'm a low-key person, and traveling hasn't taught me much I didn't already know, except how to be comfortable on an airplane. And I've learned they don't know how to make grits in the North!

**Q: Mama Dip's Kitchen is a family business. What's it like to work with your kin?**

**A:** The challenge of a family business is trying to keep everyone satisfied and focused on the goal of the business. Also, it's often hard to keep family issues out of the business side of things and to keep family life separate from professional life. Part of the reward is that we are never without a cook or waitress or cashier. Someone in the family will always pull through and step in to complete a task. Also, the family grows up with the knowledge of the business and this familiarity with the business helps make it grow.

**Q: Do you have any plans to retire?**

**A:** I plan to slow down after I'm done promoting this book. My children love working at the restaurant as much as I do. Entertaining is often the joy of people's lives, which is how we feel about the Mama Dip's Kitchen. I don't think that I will write another cookbook. However, I may want to write a book that would put my life experiences together in one place. People tell me that I always have more stories to tell.

**Q: What's your philosophy of life?**

**A:** I believe we have to be able to hear the inner being.

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