

SPECIALTY FOOD

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MAGAZINE®

Bounties of the Bay

Pamela Barefoot of Blue Crab Bay Co./Bay Beyond Inc. talks about first jobs, crabbing and clamming, and some real down-home food experiences.

BY SUSAN SEGREST

What were your first jobs in the food business?

My first paid job was a waitress at Gunflint Lodge on the Canadian border of Minnesota in the summer of 1969. (It was also my first time eating bear.) I had grits shipped in from North Carolina to keep me happy. The unpaid jobs involved holding down the chicken while my mother waved the axe, helping my grandpa salt hams and stocking cans on the shelf of my father's rural grocery store in North Carolina.

Why did you decide to move to the Eastern Shore?

My husband wanted to build boats; I wanted to be closer to salt water for fishing, crabbing, clamming and shell collecting.

How did you get started in specialty food?

The Eastern Shore is a rural coastal community and in 1984, there were few employment opportunities, so I created my own. My first products were Clam and Crab Dip Blends, which we still offer.

What have been some surprising successes?

How fast the business grew over the first few years; how Sting Ray® Bloody Mary Mixer took off and turned the business around during an especially low point. But I guess the biggest surprise is that my dream actually came true, and now I have a lifestyle job that offers me the slow pace of life in a rural area coupled with the excitement of traveling to places like San Francisco for trade shows.

What has been the most interesting culinary experience you've had recently?

Last year, several industry notables visited the Eastern Shore for a Southern food experience, including Ari Weinzweig of Zingerman's and celebrated author Molly O'Neill. We wined on local vintages and dined on fried snapping turtle, barbecued venison, collard greens and stewed muskrat (pee-YEW!).

What is the question you get asked most often?

"Are you and Michael Barefoot of A Southern Season related?" Actually, Michael is my first cousin. We're the same age and grew up together in rural North Carolina. He's the one who told me I had a "great idea" when I told him about my vision for Blue Crab Bay back in 1985. I figured he should know!

If you knew you were having your last meal, what would you choose to eat?

Definitely not muskrat! I would start out with some salty oysters on the half shell. My main course would be pan-fried soft shell crabs, mashed potatoes and fresh boiled okra. And for dessert, warm crème brûlée. |SFM|

Susan Segrest is a contributing editor to Specialty Food Magazine.

