

Episode Title: **Ree Drummond's Pioneer Potluck**

Episode Subtitle (Optional):

Episode Summary: In this week's episode, Sid Evans, Editor-in-Chief of Southern Living Magazine, talks to popular author and Food Network personality Ree Drummond about life on her Oklahoma cattle ranch, her daughter's recent wedding, becoming a foster parent, and the similarities between Southern and Pioneer Woman cooking.

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(NEW Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Sid NARRATION: Welcome to Biscuits and Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of Southern Living Magazine. If you love food television, today's guest needs no introduction. And if you're a home cook, just saying that you're trying a new recipe from "the Pioneer Woman" is enough to send your family running to the table.

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Sid NARRATION: Ree Drummond began her blog, Confessions of a Pioneer Woman, in 2006 and within no time, she was winning awards for documenting life on her cattle ranch in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, as well as her adventures in the kitchen. She's since written 20 best-selling books, and for the last ten years, Food Network has aired her incredibly-popular Pioneer Woman cooking show, making Ree one of America's most beloved culinary icons.

Sid NARRATION: Today, Ree talks with me about her daughter's recent wedding, becoming a foster parent, and the similarities between Southern and Pioneer Woman cooking. All that and more this week on Biscuits & Jam. **[THEME MUSIC ENDS]**

SID: Well, Ree Drummond, welcome to Biscuits and Jam.

REE: Well, thank you so much. I'm so excited to be here. Thank you for having me.

SID: Well, it is such an honor to have you on this show and before we talk about anything else, I just wanted to know where you got your biscuit recipe.

REE: Oh, gosh. Well, I have one that I used to make—that my mom made growing up, and it's just a traditional, roll out the dough, cut it with a glass or a biscuit cutter, and it's good. But now I make a little bit more of a drop biscuit that, A, is easier because it skips the step of having to roll. And B, it's a little bit better. No disrespect to my mom, but I love the craggy surface of a drop biscuit. And so, to me, it just works with my life. You just kind of stir it together and plop it onto a sheet pan and bake without having to go through the step of rolling and cutting.

REE: In terms of the recipe, I just kept adding more butter until it was right.

SID: Well, you can never go wrong with that.

REE: I completely agree.

SID: Well, this may sound kind of weird, but I've heard that we have something in common. I've heard that you don't like bananas.

REE: [gasps] Do you not like bananas?

SID: I don't. I really don't.

REE: You know, this is a very exclusive club that, we're a part of. And it's so funny because, throughout my years on social media, I have never made any bones about the fact that I loathe bananas. I can't stand the taste, the texture. Most of the time, it's met with puzzlement and people are like, "how could you not like bananas?" And my response, "How could you like bananas?" I won't have any Dole sponsorships any time soon, let's put it that way. But, every now and then someone will, chime in or comment and say, "I didn't know there were any other people like me out there," so it is kind of a brotherhood/sisterhood.

SID: Ree, you grew up in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, which is about a half an hour from Pawhuska where you live now. Is that right?

REE: Yes, that's right.

SID: So everyone is so used to seeing you in this beautiful kitchen on TV, but I'm wondering if you can describe the kitchen where you grew up.

REE: Oh, yes, I had three siblings and we had a pretty busy house. My mom cooked dinner, basically every weeknight. And I still remember—all of those dinners. Just sitting down. Stuffed green peppers and spaghetti with meatballs but the kitchen was electric stove with six burners and a microwave that was about the size of my closet. You know, microwaves used to be very large and I think we had an early microwave. I'm not I'm not going to ask how old you are, but when, when we got a microwave, it was like, this is kind of new.

REE: Our countertops were black formica, which was kind of edgy. And then an entire wall of the island of the hood was cork and so my mom stuck things on there, pictures of us and newspaper clippings and recipes from her friends. And I always give my mom a hard time about this, but I found a picture of myself years ago when I first started blogging and I was just about to leave for school. I was in ninth grade and I had a total mall outfit on. Just—it was—it wasn't wasn't pretty. I was channeling Molly Ringwald, but it didn't work very well. But I posted it on my blog in the early days. And my mom called me and she said, "Take that picture off of the Internet. What are you doing?" I was like, "well, I mean, I was in ninth grade. It's part of my history." She said, I'm not talking about you. I'm talking about the jello molds I have hanging on my wall. She, she had like copper jello mold in a nice, cute arrangement.

SID: Well, we love jello molds that Southern Living, so you always got to be proud of those.

REE: Absolutely. They'll come back one of these days as a decor item.

SID: So I saw that you recently did some cooking with your mom on your show, which looked like a lot of fun, and I'm just wondering, what are some things that she taught you about cooking that have stayed with you?

REE: My mom, recently moved back to Oklahoma. She's been living in, Chattanooga for many years, so she just moved back, and it's so great to have her here. And I invited her on my show, because the kids and I are still filming, as we did all through 2020 because my TV crew is from

the UK and they haven't been able to come back. So I just said, "Mom, you want to come film?" And she said sure. And she did such a good job. She made some of her favorite dishes and it reminded me just how effortless cooking was for my mom. She didn't have culinary training. She just had a natural ease about her in the kitchen. I don't have any memories of my mom stressing out over dinner or, being worried about food she was making for a dinner party.

REE: And that's one thing I remember about my mom, is that in the late 70s, through the mid-80s, kind of during my real formative years, she and my dad would have dinner parties. And she would send us upstairs and say, don't come down, you know, until everybody leaves. You just go keep yourself busy. Go ride your bike around the neighborhood for five hours. We don't care. But I think that is one of the things I picked up was just how she just had a natural ease about her. And if something didn't turn out exactly the way she intended, it never sidelined her. And, to me, everything she made was delicious. But I think a lot of people could say that about their mom's cooking.

SID: Well, I feel like you may be channeling your mom or have been for all these years because I think people come to you because you make it look easy.

REE: Well, part of that I can attribute to my mom, and then part of it is I actually do make very easy meals. And, because of the life that I live on this cattle ranch with picky cowboys all around me, I have to accept a certain reality about the things that, you know, "my crowd" is going to dive into and the things that they aren't. So fortunately, over the long term, they do gravitate toward just hearty, simple, family-friendly meals. So if I do look like I have an ease about me, it's not like I'm making souffles on TV in real-time.

SID: Right.

(EDITING: Instrumental music break -- pull from various choices -- :10 fade in/fade out)

SID: Well, so Ree, what did the holidays look like for you growing up? Was it a big event with lots and lots of people?

REE: We were pretty, similar to how we are now around the holidays, it's very much just our immediate family, my father-in-law, my husband's brother, and his family. We don't have huge crowds or huge gatherings. And I think that's part of why I love the holidays so much. I love a big family reunion but around the holidays, for us, it's time to unwind a little bit. It's not a time where we want to work extra hard. My husband and his brother are ranchers and it's pretty much a 365-day-a-year enterprise, where they can never really take their eye off the ball. With the exception of Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, where they really do feel like they can

kick their boots off, literally and figuratively, and just enjoy not having to go feed the cattle -- unless there's a blizzard. And that has happened before that.

SID: Right.

REE: So I kind of take my cues from that. And I don't want to get the household up in an uproar over a big, elegant, huge gathering. So we wear jeans and, go to midnight mass and which is actually at six p.m. in our small town, but, holidays to me are about relaxing and, and eating.

SID: Well, speaking of feeding ranchers, I want to ask you about your husband, Ladd, who kind of derailed your plans to go to law school. And I'm trying to imagine the two of you sitting down to a meal together on one of your first dates because you were a vegetarian at the time. Is that right?

REE: I was gonna say, he derailed a lot of plans in my life, all for the better, of course, but—yeah, I was a vegetarian. I went to college in California. And I didn't have the courage of my convictions like, you know, many vegetarians do. Ladd made me a steak shortly after we started dating and I took a bite and I was no longer a vegetarian. So...I, I think I was vegetarian for the wrong reasons. But, our very first meal that I cooked for him—at this time I was eating seafood and I decided to make him linguine with clam sauce. And if you knew anything about Osage County Men you know it's all about, meat, potatoes and you know chocolate pie or lemon meringue pie. But I just thought, oh, I've been loving linguine with clam sauce. I think I'll make it for him.

REE: And this was back in the very early days of our dating. So we were both very polite to each other. We still are, but we're a little more honest about our likes and dislikes. But I served him a pile of linguine with clam sauce. It was just one of those huge rimmed pasta bowls. And I piled it on and he ate some bites and ate some bites. And then his phone rang and he had to take it because it was kind of fire season and they were on wildfire watch. And so he was gone for a good 15 minutes or so. And when he came back, I thought, “oh, poor guy, he's going to still be hungry.” So I just doubled up the plate and piled more on. So later - much, much later - he did confess, that it was the longest meal of his life. He doesn't eat clams, you know, seafood—He likes, shrimp and lobster, but not clams and not in spaghetti that's hard to eat. So it's a hilarious story. And he told me at the time that when the phone rang, he halfway wished that it was a wildfire, that he had to leave to go fight.

SID: So I'm guessing that was one of the last times that y'all had linguini with clam sauce?

REE: I think it was the last time. I've enjoyed it many times since. But that's OK. He has a lot of other great qualities, but you know, broad eating horizons are not one of them.

SID: Well, let's talk about steak for a second. So one of the stories that really ignited your career was a blog post on how to cook a steak. And you did it in great detail with all these photographs of the different steps. And I'm wondering, what was it about that, recipe and the way that you presented it that really took off and that really, connected with people?

REE: Gosh, it's such a good question. I've asked myself many times through the years, you know what was it? Why did, the things that I was blogging about resonate with some people? But a little background. I had started blogging in 2006 and I wasn't the first generation of bloggers by any means. That was a few years earlier, but it still was very early, blogs weren't quite mainstream yet. And I had been blogging about ranch life and my perspective of raising four children in the country when I didn't have a country background. I took pictures of them going with Ladd to work cattle and I took pictures of my country dogs. And so that was really how all of this began. At the time I started blogging, I'd been married ten years and had lived in the country for ten years. So all I can think is that I had a lot to say. So the stories just poured out of me. But it wasn't until about seven or eight months into personal blogging that I posted my steak recipe and I had no intention of turning that into a regular thing.

REE: Food blogging, I don't think was a term yet. But instead of posting just the photo of the steak I posted, you know, before and the seasoning of the steak, which, by the way, was Lowry's seasoned salt and McCormick lemon pepper and butter. So we're not talking "I was breaking culinary ground" here, but after I posted it, the people who had read my blog for all those months said, oh, this is so cool, do another one. And so a few days later, I did the same thing with a different recipe. I think it might have been lasagna or something else, and that just was the beginning of my sharing recipes.

REE: So it was very just organic kind of "in the moment." And it evolved.

REE: I think what people enjoyed was the step-by-step, format of the recipes. Because so many cookbooks, you get the final food photo, but you don't necessarily see the process or the mess that it can look like until you get it to that final stage. So I think that's part of what people enjoyed. And then I always was very clear that I was a home cook. And I think a lot of people enjoyed that point of view. Just I don't want to necessarily see how a CIA-trained chef would make this. I want to see how someone like me would make this. And then other people probably just enjoyed, you know, the jokes I told in between recipe steps. And it's probably

different reasons. But it's funny to think that that steak recipe was kind of the beginning of my sharing food so much.

SID: Yeah, the beginning of a very long and very successful journey.

REE: Those are always the best journeys, though. The ones that you couldn't have really planned or orchestrated.

(EDITING: Instrumental music break of NEW Biscuits and Jam theme "Fiddler's Barn" from Epidemic Sound -- fade in/fade out)

SID NARRATION: We'll continue with Ree Drummond, the Pioneer Woman, after the break.

BREAK

(EDITING: Instrumental music break of NEW Biscuits and Jam theme -- "Fiddler's Barn" from Epidemic Sound -- fade in/fade out)

SID NARRATION: Welcome back to Biscuits & Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, and we're talking with Ree Drummond.

SID: So Ree this is a Southern Living podcast and of course, we focus on Southern food. How would you explain the differences between Southern cooking and, say, pioneer woman cooking?

REE: I think about this a lot, because I don't really consider myself a Southern cook because I have a lot of respect for Southern cooks and I know Southern food when I see it and, and hear it and eat it. It's so hard to describe, though. But I, I just think of, things that I ate growing up everywhere from Hilton Head, South Carolina, which I don't know if you can consider that Southern food but I...

SID: Sure.

REE: I still remember some of those things that I ate as a child, you know, on vacation. But things that, you know, I would eat in Atlanta or New Orleans or, even Arkansas. You know, I think that's probably on the edge of the South. It's so hard to define. I just think it's everything from, you know, Black Eyed Peas and Red Eye Gravy. I'm not deep enough south to consider myself a Southern cook. I have a lot of Tex-Mex influence in my cooking. We love Mexican food, and I have a little bit of California that comes in from my old vegetarian days and Southern food is the best, especially when someone from the true south is making it and their mother made it and their grandma made it. And that's informing the way they make it. I would say that's a lot of my

favorite recipes are that way. But I think Southern Living could probably write the full volume on what Southern food actually is.

SID: Well, we've been writing it for about fifty-five years and I think we're still working on it.

REE: Yeah. Well, it probably changes, but then some things never change.

SID: But there's so much overlap between Southern food and what you do. And I think you have a lot of Southern fans, clearly, millions of fans, of your cookbooks and your TV show and your magazine, because I think they see a lot that they recognize. You know, they see the biscuits and they see the macaroni and cheese and they see the barbecue jalapeno poppers and you name it. It's definitely food that they love and that they see as Southern in some way.

REE: That's true, there is so much overlap, and sometimes it's hard to describe the difference between the Southern dishes that I love and kind of the Midwest, but I always go back to my favorite category of food, which is potluck.

REE: And I just love a church potluck. I just think church ladies are the best cooks, whether they're Midwestern or Southern. And so I think. The types of recipes that I know resonate with, people in the South, who have followed my show, are the ones that, you would put on the dessert table at a church potluck, that aren't afraid to use a graham cracker crust or sometimes cool whip. I mean, I'm not a food snob. Especially, if you mix cool whip with vanilla pudding, and if it's instant pudding, even better. Like, some of those concoctions are so bad they're good.

SID: Yeah.

REE: But I think potluck is kind of what brings that all together for me.

SID: Yeah, so true. So you've been a champion of small towns for a long time and you've invested so much time and energy into your own small town. I just wanted to ask you about Pawhuska and how you've seen it change over the years.

REE: I love our small town. We live about 20 minutes west of Pawhuska, but it is our town. It's where my kids grew up. My boys went to school there. Pawhuska is such an incredible town in terms of history. And it is the headquarters of the Osage Nation. The number one employer in Pawhuska and the Pioneer Woman Mercantile is the second largest employer. So you have the agriculture and the history of the oil and the Native American history. So it's a really incredible

place. It is a former oil boomtown. So for many years it definitely showed signs that it was former. It had seen better days. We opened the mercantile in 2016 and...

REE: there was already some momentum in the town. I, I don't like to take credit for any sort of resurgence. I was part of it but there are some really great, great people, some young people who had visions for what Pawhuska could be and the timing just seemed to work. But what I love more than anything is that people may come to Pawhuska because of the Pioneer Woman or to see our ranch or the lodge. We offer tours, for part of the year, but they stay for the other things that Pawhuska has to offer.

REE: So it's exciting to see them go to that Osage Nation museum and the Osage County Museum. And we have a swinging bridge in town that's really scary that you walk across and it swings and people get their photos on the swinging bridge. So to me, it's just exciting to see the heart beating again in Pawhuska. We do have some people who work for us at the Mercantile who are old enough to remember Pawhuska in its glory days. And so for them, it's exciting to see their enthusiasm for seeing a new vibrance and a lot of hustle-bustle. And right now they're actually filming a major movie in Pawhuska...

SID: Really?

REE: Martin Scorsese is here with Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert DeNiro, and they're shooting a, a big movie based on David Grann's novel Killers of the Flower Moon. So Pawhuska is really, really busy right now. So it's very exciting.

SID: That is exciting. Is there a big Fourth of July celebration in Pawhuska?

REE: There is! We used to have it at our house. It wasn't like the official Pawhuska celebration but when my daughter Alex, who just got married, was two, we started inviting friends over for fireworks, and then it grew and grew and the fireworks then showed up in a pickup. And then a few years later, we'd have to fill up a horse trailer with fireworks and bring it out. And then a few years later, a moving truck would show up with fireworks. And I do burgers and hot dogs, grilled chicken, grilled steaks, and then everybody would bring potluck dishes. About three years ago, we actually moved it to downtown Pawhuska and let the Mercantile sort of be the center of activity.

REE: And so it's been really fun. My kids they objected a little bit. They said we want to have it at our house. And Ladd and I were like, we don't. We're done. We're done. But it's fun for it to

be in Pawhuska and the fireworks, I'm afraid, have only gotten bigger. And people lined the hillside and set up lawn chairs to watch. So Fourth of July is big around here for sure.

SID: Well, and especially this year, after the year that we've been through, I'm sure it was small, if anything, last year. So a lot of excitement.

REE: Yes. Yeah, I think this summer is going to be one to remember for so many reasons. It already feels so much better in America.

(EDITING: Instrumental music break -- pull from various choices -- :10 fade in/fade out)

SID: Ree mentioned your daughter Alex, who just got married on the ranch, and you must still be floating from that experience, but also imagine a little tired. How's the planning and what was that process like for you? And why did she decide to get married on the ranch?

REE: Well, she was engaged last August, and we love her now-husband Mauricio. When they first became engaged, they came home from Dallas to talk about where to get married. Alex thought, "well, we'll probably just do it in Tulsa. It's more centrally located." Pawhuska's a little bit off the beaten path. So Ladd and I met them in Tulsa and we went to a hotel in a really beautiful event place. And at the end of that day, it just didn't feel right. We love Tulsa, of course, but it's not Alex's home and the ranch is their home. So the more we started talking about it, the more excited we got, and the more we felt it was right for her to get married on the ranch. It's where she grew up.

REE: Now, the wedding was May 1st, which, you know, "May 1st in Oklahoma. What could possibly go wrong?" You know, it's storm season. It's tornado season. But it turned out to be the perfect day. Enough breeze to keep the flies away, but everybody's hair still looked OK. And it took my husband and me a couple of weeks to feel like we were going to survive it after that. But I just drove by the wedding site yesterday and it's like nothing ever happened. It's so funny. We put up a big tent and had all sorts of things going on, but it just disappeared. And all we have is the memories now.

SID: Well, the pictures were just beautiful...

REE: Oh, thank you.

SID: And you know, we usually talk a lot about music on this podcast. So I got to ask you at least one music question, and I heard that she picked "Cowgirls Don't Cry,"...

REE: Yes.

SID: By Brooks & Dunn for the father/daughter dance. Did you help her choose that or was that all her?

REE: That was all her. And it's funny because I love that song, but she thought it was just the perfect tribute to her relationship with, with Ladd, my husband. I didn't cry too much the day of the wedding. But when Alex and Ladd danced to "Cowgirls, Don't Cry", I had to fight them. I had to fight the tears. Because those two have quite a history. I mean, she worked cattle with him starting at age, you know, two and a half, three. When she graduated from high school, he kept saying he feels like he's losing the best ranch hand he's ever had.

SID: Ohh.

REE: Because she really just has always been so much help to him. And so, yeah, it was a beautiful country song for that occasion.

REE: I'm tearing up right now. I need to get over myself.

SID: It's still very fresh in the memory, I can tell.

REE: Yes. Yes.

SID: So you and Ladd became foster parents, to a young man named Jamar, who is, I think, 18 now, is that right?

REE: Yes, he is.

SID: So what have you learned from that experience and what would you tell people who are thinking about becoming foster parents?

REE: Oh, thank you for asking about Jamar. Interestingly, he's just getting ready to leave for college, basically, next week. So, I may get a lump in my throat again before this conversation is over. But, he's been living with our family for a couple of years. And, becoming foster parents was not something that Ladd and I had really sought out or discussed or necessarily, you know, ever had thought would be in the cards for us.

REE: We were plenty busy with the four kids we had, let's just put it that way. But the circumstances presented themselves to us and it kind of was the situation where there wasn't really a choice. We couldn't really turn away from, from the circumstances. And we made the decision and Jamar was in our house within a week, I think, after that. So Jamar was a part of our family. And...

REE: I wouldn't be one to give advice to prospective foster parents because I still probably have a lot to learn, but it is truly about the child. And that is the reason for all of it. It isn't to fill a need in your house or to fulfill an emptiness in you. It is always about the child, whether they're a young child or an older child.

REE: So I think Ladd and I were kind of united in that this isn't, this isn't about us. And so if we have days where things are—aren't as smooth as we think they could be or when challenges arise that vision kind of got us through those bumps.

SID: Well, you talked in your new book, newish book, *Frontier Follies*, about the classes that you took to become foster parents which I thought was so interesting. I didn't realize that people did that when they were becoming foster parents. Can you share a little bit about that?

REE: To be a foster parent in Oklahoma and probably most states is that you do have to go through, official training and education. When I first heard that the amount of hours that had to be devoted to foster parent education, I balked a little bit because, A, I'm a busy woman. And I'm always doing about 30 things a day and sitting, taking a class for—I think it was a total of 19-28 hours or something like that. I thought, ohhh. And then B, I thought, I've already raised four kids, I know how to be a parent, I don't need training and as I wrote in my book...

REE: Totally saw the light about why it's so crucial to have this training, because we all have our little bubbles that we exist in. And, it does just tell you that the things that neglect and abuse and trauma can do to an individual, whether it's a young child or an older child, and the tools that you need to help them, the importance of their sibling relationships that that they have with their blood siblings, how important it is to maintain those. And I could go on and on. But there was that man in my class with me, named Herman, who it turns out became my very good friend that we never would have met otherwise. He was, becoming a foster parent to his cousin's child.

REE: And so, he and I kind of formed a friendship. And he's a member of the Osage Nation. And so I learned a lot from him. So it was a great reminder to me just to keep my mind open, keep my heart open, because the whole situation with Jamar has expanded my perspective in so

many ways. And it expanded my grocery list because Jamar is 6'5, you know, 280. He eats as much as my other boys. And so, it's been a busy year or two of cooking for me, for sure.

SID: Well, speaking of that, Ree, I just have one more question. What are you making for dinner tonight?

REE: I'm not just saying this because I live on a cattle ranch, but I'm making rib-eye steaks and smashed potatoes and iceberg salad with a lot of carrots to make it healthy and ranch. You caught me on a pretty basic day.

SID: Sounds pretty good to me. Well, Ree Drummond thank you so much for being on Biscuits and Jam.

REE: Aw, this is so fun. Thank you so much for having me. I loved it and I love Southern Living. Always have. My mom always had it on her on our coffee table. So it's kind of part of my makeup, in a way.

SID: Oh, thank you for that. **[INTERVIEW ENDS]**

NEW Biscuits theme music "Fiddler's Barn" from Epidemic Sound fades in

Sid NARRATION: Thanks for listening to my conversation with Ree Drummond. You can watch The Pioneer Woman on Food Network, stream it on Discovery Plus, or visit ThePioneerWoman.com for recipes, social media and more.

Southern Living is based in Birmingham, AL, and this podcast was produced and edited in Nashville, TN. If you like what you hear, please consider leaving us a review on Apple Podcasts or telling your friends about the program. You can find us online at southernliving.com, and subscribe to our print publication by searching for Southern Living at www.magazine.store.

Biscuits and Jam is produced by Heather Morgan Shott, Krissy Tiglias and me, Sid Evans, for Southern Living. Thanks also to Ann Kane, Jim Hanke, Danielle Roth, Matt Sav, Erica Wong and Rachael King at Pod People.

I look forward to having you back here next time, for more Biscuits & Jam!

END MUSIC