Episode Title: Edward Lee's Mission of Service

Episode Summary: In this week's episode, Sid Evans, Editor-in-Chief of Southern Living Magazine, talks to four-time James Beard Award nominee Edward Lee about his Korean upbringing, why music and food in the South are so intertwined, how he's honoring chefs Edna Lewis and David McAtee, and how he feels the basis of all Southern cooking begins in the home.

EDWARD LEE: There's nothing quite like the hospitality of going to someone's house and, you know, sitting on a porch in the South, and someone makes you a cocktail, brings out a deviled egg. And it's not the food or the drink; it's the way they do it and it makes you feel welcome.

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

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *Welcome to Biscuits and Jam from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of Southern Living Magazine. My guest this week is an acclaimed chef who has brought a mixture of the Korean cooking he grew up with, and techniques learned in New York and Paris, to Louisville, Kentucky. It's no understatement to say that he's dramatically changed that city's food scene—and in many ways the very definition of Southern cuisine.*

EDWARD LEE: Because I do think Southern food and Korean food have this beautiful synergy where, again, there's opposite sides of the universe, but the humbleness of the food, the simplicity, developing flavors over hours and hours over the stove. Every time I would eat something really Southern, I would go, like, we do the same thing in Korea. Just different ingredients.

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *Chef Edward Lee is a James Beard Award winning author, a former Top Chef contestant and judge, and the owner of several restaurants, including the now legendary 610 Magnolia in his hometown of Louisville. He's also the co-founder of the Lee Initiative, a non-profit that has provided millions of free meals to out-of-work restaurant industry employees during the pandemic. We'll dive further into the Lee Initiative today, as well as how Southern music and Southern food are intertwined, and why he feels the basis for all Southern cooking begins at home. All that and more this week on Biscuits & Jam.*

(Theme music ends)

SID EVANS: Edward Lee, welcome to Biscuits and Jam.

EDWARD LEE: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

SID EVANS: So Edward, you're kind of a fixture in Louisville now, but that wasn't always the case. You grew up in Canarsie in Brooklyn, where you were surrounded by so many different ethnicities and cultures. What was some of the food that you grew up around?

EDWARD LEE: I mean, we didn't eat out much. I ate most of my meals at home, but obviously, like, there was old school, like New York pizzerias. And I remember there's this little Jamaican place, where we used get our beef patties. There was lots of Caribbean food, lots of Indian food, Pakistani food. It took me going off to college, you know, in Michigan to realize like, “Oh, you didn't have Pakistani food at your fingertips,” and not everyone had this childhood where you just had this incredible, melting pot literally of food and culture.

SID EVANS: So at home for you, it was Korean food, right?

EDWARD LEE: Yeah, I mean, both my parents worked long hours. So my grandmother sort of stayed at home and cooked, and that's all she knew was Korean food. Everything was made from scratch cause it's a lot cheaper. We had jars of things all over the house. You know, now it would look real trendy and stuff. But back then it was like weird things, funky things fermenting in jars all over the house. My friends would come over and like, go into the bathroom, you know, and like, you’d open the shower curtain, there'd just be like tubs of kimchi in the bathtub, and like trying to explain that to my friends. I'm like, “I don't know.” But now it's like all the rage, you know? So this is my grandmother was, uh, very ahead of her time.

SID EVANS: So you've talked about your grandmother being a big influence on you in terms of food. What did she call her, by the way?

EDWARD LEE: *Halmeoni*, which is the Korean word for grandmother, just a generic, you know, grandma or granny. She was very influential. In Korean culture, like the man or the male or the son is not really supposed to take the culinary tradition, right? Because traditional Korean culture, it's a woman's job. And, um, my sister couldn't care less about food or cooking or whatever. And I was young, and I kind of, you know, I had to play by myself a lot. Cause, you know, like there's a seven year difference between my sister and I. So in essence I was kind of like an only kid, so I hung out at home a lot. And I don't know what it was, but I just I was very attracted to the smells and sounds and the sights of food. I've always loved food. And I always used to hang around my grandmother and she would get annoyed at me cause she'd say, like, "This is not for you. Like, get out of the kitchen.” And I had to like, you know, literally fight my way into the kitchen. And she never gave me a single recipe her whole life. She never gave me a single recipe, you know, which I regret in many ways, because by the time I realized and I was a chef and everything, like, she had passed on. But there are certain foundational things that you never forget. They're not recipes, necessarily, but they're foundational things that's set in me. But it was funny because she, she, she only cooked Korean food and she refused to cook American food. Like a 7-year-old, if I wanted a PB&J, she'd be like, "You have to make it yourself." Like she would not make me a PB&J. If I wanted Korean food she'd make it, but if I wanted a cheeseburger or a, you know, a grilled cheese sandwich, she was like, "I don't know, go to the fridge. Figure it out."

SID EVANS: So Edward, when did you first become aware that there was a thing called Southern food?

EDWARD LEE: Uh, jeez. not for a long time. For people out there who don't know my story, I grew up in New York and I was raised in New York and then opened a restaurant in New York. And then 9/11 happened. And my restaurant, we were very close to the twin towers, and I just had this feeling like before I jump into another project or do anything else, I want to go and discover what America means to me because New York City is not America. It is this glorious, weird melting pot, very international, but it's not American. And I'd always wanted to go to the Kentucky Derby. It's always been on my bucket list. And, um, it's just some of the weird, a friend of a friend of a friend kind of thing, an opportunity came up to help out a chef during Derby. His name was Eddie Carver, and he had a restaurant called 610 Magnolia. He had opened that restaurant in 1976, when I was 4 years old. He liked my cooking and we just got along and he said, “Well, you should take over my restaurant because I'm old and I want to retire.” And at first I said, “Nah you're crazy.” Like what — I'm, I'm like a Korean kid, you know, from Brooklyn. LIke, what am I going to do in the South. I barely know anything about the South.

But I always liked country music. I can't tell you like where or how I listened to this or who introduced me to it. And I remember, like other kids were listening to hip hop because that was like the thing. And I said, “Have you heard about this guy called Johnny Cash?” There was always that like, I don't know, larger-than-life mystique about what it means to be in the South.

And so I was like, “Oh, I got to go, you know, travel, see what it's all about.” So when the opportunity came up, I went to Kentucky and, I went for the Derby, right? And, and it seemed very busy. And, if you've been, like there's beautiful women and hats and flowers are blooming, and there's like celebrities everywhere and it's just—everyone looks great. I was like, this is a really cool town. And you know, like no one told me it's not like that the other 51 weeks out of the year.

So I finally called Eddie Garber back and I said, “You know, I'll come down for six months, and I'm just going to clear my head and I'm gonna learn, I'm gonna live out my Southern fantasy and drink some bourbon and, you know, ride a horse or two and you know, I'll go back to New York.” That's now been 19 and a half years ago—

SID EVANS: Wow.

EDWARD LEE: —was when that happened, yeah and I don't regret at any minute of it. I ate around the South, I learned a lot. I went to a lot of people's homes, you know, because I do think like the basis of Southern cooking is it's less restaurant focused and it's more, you know, sort of focused on people's homes and home cooking.

SID EVANS: For sure.

EDWARD LEE: Maybe a lot of grandmothers, you know, who… finally, I met grandmothers who'd share recipes with me instead of my own grandmother, reading a lot of vintage cookbooks and stuff like that.

And as I was discovering Southern food, it actually brought me closer to Korean food. I don't know, maybe I was in Louisville for like a year or so, and I went to a soul food restaurant and I ate a bowl of collard greens, and I just remember thinking, like, I never had this before, but and the ingredients are different, but it reminds me of a soup that I had growing up when I was a kid. And it was a seaweed soup, but it has the same things, right? Like instead of ham hocks, they'd use dried anchovy and beef.

And so I go like, wow, it brings me back to my Korean food roots. Because I do think Southern food and Korean food have this beautiful synergy where, again, there's opposite sides of the universe, but the humbleness of the food, the simplicity, developing flavors over hours and hours over the stove. I think about like how you eat a barbecue, it's low and slow and you may have some cornbread and grits. And you may have some pickles. And it is not very different from a Korean barbecue where you have like kalbi, but you have kimchi and rice and pickles, you know, cucumbers and spinach. They're both based on a protein with lots of pickles, stuff that you graze on. They're meant be eaten with your hands. They're both very, like, earthy and warm. Every time I would eat something really Southern, I would go like, we do the same thing in Korea. Just different ingredients. What if some of the stuff works together? What if I made a bowl of collard greens, but I would throw kimchi in there?

To me, the best food is personal. The best food tells a story of—not like a whole culture story—but like a story of you, the chef, whoever, whatever your experience is. Um, I had this weird experience where I discovered Southern food in this sort of parallel narrative as I was rediscovering Korean food, and I decided to put some of it together and see what comes of it.

SID EVANS: So when you showed up at 610 Magnolia, what were some of the dishes that were being served then?

EDWARD LEE: I honestly, don't remember. Like, a lot of the food was what I would just call fancy European food: seared salmon with some kind of like zucchini ribbons and beurre blanc sauce. Because of the restaurants that I worked in New York, I was very comfortable with it and, you know, I spent six months in France. So I'm very comfortable cooking European food and all that, but, It's not the kind of food that like gets me going. And I believe that you can find your audience anywhere in the whole world. And I feel very fortunate that I was able to find an audience in Louisville, Kentucky, that liked my food and believed in it and supported me. I always challenged myself and people that came to my restaurant, and I think they appreciated that. And even if they didn't understand everything, I think they appreciated the fact that, you know, I came to Louisville with a purpose and it was not to educate people by any means, but also not to dumb down things. We were on a journey together and I feel really proud of the city of Louisville and how far it's come. And so it's been a really cool journey. I was just in Louisville this weekend and It's just like, it's so cool. So many things are happening. and you know, that wasn't the case 20 years ago.

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

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *I'll be back with more from Chef Edward Lee after the break.*

BREAK

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

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *Welcome back to Biscuits and Jam from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, and I'm talking with four-time James Beard Award nominee Chef Edward Lee.*

SID EVANS: So, Edward, now you've got all these restaurants. Imean you've got, 610 Magnolia. You've got Whiskey Dry. you've got one called Succotash, in D.C. They're all very different. But what would you say that your restaurants have in common?

EDWARD LEE: They're different because I'm slightly schizophrenic—you know, like 610 Magnolia, it's very high end and it's very precious and it's very quiet in there. And, you know, obviously the whiskey place is very loud. Succotash is kind of just in the middle. It's almost like a little bit of a greatest hits of the South and stuff. And if anything, it's my one like big fault I'm so noncommittal. I can't just go like, "I'm just going to do fine dining for the rest of my life," or, "I'm just going to open up whiskey joints and serve burgers the rest of my life." I just can't, I don't know; I have all these different loves, and I just keep exploring them and do things.

You know one of the things they, they truly have in common is a commitment to service and culture. You can do whatever, you can serve burgers and you can serve beer and you can serve like eel but if it's not delivered with warmth and hospitality, if it's not delivered with a sense of care, it just doesn't feel the same. I truly believe the food doesn't taste as good. And so like when you want something to taste really good, not only do you have to perfect that recipe in the kitchen, but you have to find people that believe in it and who serve it with love and graciousness. I'm sure everyone out there has been to a restaurant where you know, you really want to like it, and whatever it was, the waiter or the hostess, or just someone just wasn't feeling it, and, you know, or you just don't feel the warmth in the restaurant. The food doesn't taste good—

SID EVANS: Yeah.

EDWARD LEE: —no matter how delicious it is. And so we focus a lot on what I think of as culture. And culture's different from hospitality, right? Culture is not like "keep my water glass filled" or, "present my steak this perfectly." You know, culture is just like knowing things. So like when we opened our restaurant in D.C., all our staff are from D.C. But I taught them a whole lesson on Southern music. And I think a lot of restaurants see this world, like the way to come out and rattle off, you know, 30 ingredients about what this dish means. I'm like, you can't separate Southern food from Southern music, you know?

SID EVANS: Hmm.

EDWARD LEE: It's just they go so hand at hand. You can't.

SID EVANS: Yeah.

EDWARD LEE: You can't separate bourbon from playing cornhole. There's so many things that are culturally intertwined that you can't just sit there and do a bourbon tasting and not acknowledge like where this came from, that it was predominantly drunk by like coal miners and factory workers. And then that there's this whole culture that came up from that in the history of why bourbon is this, why it's not scotch. You know, it's not just ingredients. It came from a whole history and culture.

So we talk a lot about that with the staff and I don't want people to just be presented with like, "Here's fried chicken. I don't know where it came from. It's just fried chicken."Iif you can actually talk a little bit and explain and you got some good, you know, Avett Brothers playing on the music, and then you're listening, and then all of a sudden you're drinking a good bourbon and you're explaining why this cocktail goes with this fried chicken, and why you should have some pickled jalapenos with it, it's all a whole organic thing and it comes together. At the end of the day, I want you to go away feeling like, that you just didn't have a meal, but you had an experience.

SID EVANS: You're telling a story and you're also a writer, Edward, and you have a book that came out a couple of years ago called *Buttermilk Graffiti* that won a James Beard award in 2019. And it's all about traveling around the country and discovering what you called America's melting pot cuisine, and I'm wondering if that journey really changed you, when you were reporting and writing that book.

EDWARD LEE: It really did, I think. I spent so much of my life studying food and I spent so much of my life in the four walls of a kitchen where we were just like, just learn technique and learn how to braise and like, I didn't have time or money or resources or the energy to go out and travel and look and read and make friends. One of the benefits of, I guess, doing well and succeeding and getting older is that you do have a little more resources. And so I really wanted to discover these things about food that were left out of my education, which was, culture and people and stories passed down from generation to generation, through families, through friends, through cultures, through narratives. And that's something that I've picked up about Southern food like, 20 years of being in Kentucky and I joined the SFA, I got really good friends with John T. Edge and all the chef friends that I met through there and just traveling, you know, all over the South. And, quite frankly, I may not be from the South, but I don't know —there aren't a lot of people who have traveled to all the little, you know fried chicken stands in the South that I've done the last 20 years. Like I go to east parts of eastern Kentucky and my friends in Louisville are like, "Why the hell did you go there?" I'm like, "It's pretty good food."

You meet all the people who sort of, you know, have this food knowledge in their head, and they're not necessarily always the people that write it down or, write a book. And so, in writing *Buttermilk Graffiti*, I met so many of these people and I got to tell their story. And in doing so, I just realized that there's an endless trove of stories in this country about the very foods that we love.

SID EVANS: Well, you know, speaking of people whose stories haven't been told as much, your first chapter in that book is about Café Du Monde in New Orleans, which is, you know, one of the most iconic restaurants in the city, if not the whole South. And you pointed out that almost all of the waitstaff are from Vietnam, which was so interesting, and I guess I had noticed that, but I hadn't really thought about it. What does that one place tell you about Southern food?

EDWARD LEE: Well, it's, it's iconic, it beautifully exemplifies the history of Southern food and the direction that it's going and that there's all these intersections and crossovers. I remember the first time I went to Cafe Du Monde and like, you know, there's some people in New Orleans because they've been going there so long cause you don't see it, you know? And, and, and maybe it's like a testament to like not seeing race, and I'm sitting at the table going, "Is anyone else recognizing that their entire staff is speaking Vietnamese in the corner over there? And we're at Cafe du Monde? there's got to be a reason for that, you know? I got to get to the bottom of this."

To me, it all starts with immigration, right? And immigration and migration and flows of people; it's always a moving target. I mean, I've traveled the globe, you know, with what I do. And everyone says, "Well, the South is this one thing. And it's very white." And I go, it's really not. You go there and you see it and you eat the food and you talk to the people and you travel to all these places and you go, it's really diverse in the south. You don't notice it at first, and maybe it's not always what it's portrayed as, but it is very diverse. And not only is it very diverse, but it has had to embrace diversity in ways that maybe other cities or other regions have not. And you know this, the South has had a dark history, but in some ways, because of that, it has to address its history of racism in ways that other cities have not had to, uh, or other regions. And listen, you would be naive to think that racism exists in Mississippi, but it doesn't exist in New York City?

SID EVANS: Right.

EDWARD LEE: Or it doesn't exist in L.A.? Like it exists everywhere, but there is something about Southern culture that forces you to kind of confront it and look at it and say, like, "Yeah, there's, there's been this." And so we, we try and move on. I think there's still a lot of stereotypes about the South, which are embedded in stereotypes. They're not embedded in truth. And but then that's the very thing that we're all trying to get over, it's stereotypes, and bigotry and whatnot. So it's a really interesting thing to be in the South, to not be white, but to also like, write about it because it is. I mean, it's, you know, there are pockets of places in the South where it's incredibly diverse and, and I love celebrating that.

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

SID EVANS: Well, Edward, speaking of trying to make change in the South and really in the country, I wanted to ask you about this remarkable organization that you founded with Lindsay Ofcacek. Tell me a little bit about the Lee Initiative and what was the original idea behind it and how has that changed?

EDWARD LEE: Yeah. Well, thank you. First of all, I think you're the only person that's pronounced her name, right? So I'm going—I think it's like—I don't know where the origin is, but I—even I can't say it right. So she's gonna get , it will be very nice for her—

SID EVANS: I had some practice.

EDWARD LEE: Yeah. We started it really after the MeToo movement happened and we saw, you know, obviously, the chefs getting canceled for their sexual harassment abuses. And, you know, our entire professional lives have been in this industry. And listen, the media does what they do: They shine a spotlight on things that need to be spoken out against. But what happens is then we have this negative image of the entire industry. And so, we wanted to do something that was positive, right? And so what we did was is that, "Well, let's do a mentorship program, like as we're talking about the injustices, let's actually do something to help these young women get ahead in the food world. And so that they don't quit the industry and they don't have this belief that everyone is bad in this industry." And so that's what we started with. Uh, we were thrust—we're just at the right time, at the right place. We had this nonprofit set up already. We had a syst—because we fed people in the past, and we just had this blueprint for relief kitchens already set up. So we were quickly able to mobilize and start a relief kitchen in Louisville, which, you know, in, in the first three or four days of the economic shutdown when restaurants shut down and we fed thousands of people and we realized like, this is a national problem, not a local problem.

EDWARD LEE: So money started pouring in. We asked sponsors, we asked corporate sponsors, we asked our partners, Maker's Mark stepped up big, and we just started to open up relief kitchens around the country and fed over two million meals during COVID, to, to restaurant workers who were out of work.

SID EVANS: Unbelievable.

EDWARD LEE: Yeah, we did a million and a half dollars in grants to small family farms, a million and a half dollars to grants to small family owned Black businesses and restaurants that didn't get their PPP loans. We just you know keep pushing forward. We're going to try and do things that are impactful. We're not a typical nonprofit. We're five people in a small office. At this point, over 93 or 94 cents out of every dollar we raise goes directly into aid and programing, and, and, and so we we don't have overhead, we don't have a marketing team, we don't pay for consultants. We run on, on a philosophy that like, there's work to be done. There's people that need help, and we have to do things out of kindness. We don't do them for awards. We don't do them for accolades. We don't do them for money. We do things because there are people out there that need help and they need our help.

That's been a thread that whether it's helping nurses during COVID─you know, the nurses were working so hard, doing 12-, 13-hour shifts and they would go home, they couldn't feed their families. They didn't have time. So we would deliver meal kits for four to all these nurses so they wouldn't have to cook it at home, whether it's a young female line cook that's looking for a career path in this business, to a bartender who's out of work, to a farmer who can't sell their products because of the economic

shutdown. We approach this attitude of like, you know what, if you were, if I was in your shoes, what would you really need? You know, not not with what gets the best PR, but what do you really need?

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

SID EVANS: Edward, I also wanted to ask you about the McAtee Community Kitchen, which you started in Louisville back in 2020 and you hired a young chef named Nikkia Rhodes, who we recently named a Southern Living cook of the year. Can you tell me a little bit about Nikkia and, and what her role has been in that group?

EDWARD LEE: Yeah, Nikkia was someone who I met, um, gosh, many years ago now, and, and she was one of the first people that went through the young women chefs mentorship program. She's had a bit of a rough childhood, you know, and she's had to deal with a lot of things that young people should not have to deal with. And whenever I see that my heart goes out to them because I had a kind of a rough childhood too, and, and food was my outlet; like, food brought me out of poverty. Food brought me to a place where I don't think I could have succeeded otherwise.

And I saw that Nikkia and I saw something special. And I said to her, "Well, you have to go through this program." And she got a job and worked at my restaurant MilkWood, and she worked at 610, and like every thing that she's ever done, she would excel at. And then she would like sort of graduate. And she was just so integral, and during COVID, she was first one that stepped up and said, "What do you need? I'll help out the relief kitchens, I'll help do this."

And, for those of you, people who don't know, David McAtee was a barbecue chef and he was murdered during the protests in Louisville, Kentucky, during the social movement protests. And he wasn't even protesting. He was cooking barbecue in his backyard; they, they shot him. To me, the reason we renamed the kitchen McAtee was not—it wasn't a political statement. It was the fact that he was a chef in Louisville, and I share that with him. He was someone who cared about his community and he was, he was known for giving free meals to people in need, you know, even though he didn't have much himself. And so I said, "We're going to name this community kitchen after him because what he really cared about more than anything else was his community. And we're going to use that, that money and energy and spirit to feed people in his community." And I asked Nikkia, I said, I have this idea and I'm gonna name this kitchen after him and you're going to take it over. She didn't hesitate. She was like, "That would mean a lot. That would mean a lot to me and my community and my people." And I couldn't have done it without Nikkia. She's been a rock and she's been someone who has always taken any challenge and risen to the occasion. So I'm very much indebted to her for helping me do the McAtee Kitchen. And, we're looking at other ways to do it and we're going to launch sort of like a 2.0 McAtee kitchen come the spring.

SID EVANS: That's great. I've heard you say that Edna Lewis had a big impact on you as a chef and I'm just wondering what her legacy means to you today.

EDWARD LEE: Listen, there's a lot—Southern food has had this like huge peak and this huge popularity, but Edna Lewis was someone who was able to speak to it, to write about it, to celebrate it during a time when it wasn't trendy. And, and I think that's a really important thing to understand: We all kind of stand on the shoulders of what she did, and that she had the ability and the audacity and the courage to, like, write about those things. And to write about issues that weren't exactly popular back then. When I first moved to Louisville 20 years ago, Southern food wasn't popular. So like my restaurant was very Eurocentric and other restaurants were doing Caesar salads and what I always tell people, I learned Southern food in Louisville, Kentucky, homes—but there were three restaurants that I would go to religiously: Franco's, Big Momma's, and, and Josanne's. And those are all three soul food restaurants, you know, run by Black ladies. And they were the ones that were keeping the flame of Southern food alive and well in Louisville, Kentucky, when it wasn't popular, when it wasn't trendy, when you couldn't charge $18 for a bucket of fried chicken, right? Because they were charging $6, and they were making oxtail and they were making smothered pork and they were making all these things. And that's where I got the taste for it.

Now, you know, you walk down Louisville, Kentucky, and, and you can't walk two blocks without getting hit in the head with a skillet of cornbread. That wasn't the case 20 years ago. So if you really wanted to learn about cornbread, you know, you had to go to—or Shirley's, where I would wait 20 minutes for her damn hot water cornbread because she would make it from scratch and it would take 20 minutes. And I didn't have a lot of time, but I was like, I'm going to wait for it. But it was the best damn cornbread in, in Kentucky. And even I'm, I'm even to blame. It's people like myself who kind of popularized it in some subset of society, but I've always felt that it was important to give these people credit and to say like this is a food that's in these people's DNA. It's in their blood. It's in their livelihoods. And, Edna Lewis is someone who was able to crystallize that into words. I think she brought it out of the greasy back kitchen, and made it something that was respectable and made it into an art form, made it into something that we go, "Oh, we now study Southern food, right?" That wasn't happening a generation ago. But there's always those people who're just steadfast and just do what they do, and I really appreciate them for it.

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

SID EVANS: Yeah, well, Edward, I just have one more question for you. And it may sound funny to a guy who grew up in Canarsie, but you've been in the South and in Louisville for 20 years now. What does it mean to you to be Southern?

EDWARD LEE: Um, oh, man. That's not funny at all. I really do think it's the kindness and the care, and just the community that I see all over the South is just real. It's real and in a way—like, we talk about hospitality and I get it like, yeah, you can go to Danny Meyer restaurant they're very hospitable, but there's nothing quite like the hospitality of going to someone's house and you know, sitting on a porch in the South and someone makes you a cocktail, brings out a deviled egg. And it's not the food or the drink, it's the way they do it and it makes you feel welcome, and that doesn't happen everywhere.

And I'll tell you a funny story to finish it off. I grew up like I was like, a chef in, in Manhattan, in New York, so it was very rough. And I remember I moved to Louisville and I was, they'd sent me some bad fish and I was talking to my fish purveyer I said, "Hey, I need this order." They're like, "Well, we can't sell to you anymore." And I said, "Why? did I not pay my bills?" He goes, "No, you cursed at us yesterday." I said, "What? Are you, are you serious?" They're like, he's like, "We don't treat people like that here. You can't do that. I don't care how mad you get at us." But you know what? They were right! The fish was still rotten, but they were right. and guess what? I don't curse like that anymore. And I don't talk to people like that anymore. And I think that's what I learned to be a Southerner is that you treat people with kindness and you get kindness in turn. And thank God because I have a daughter now and I don't want my daughter to see me yelling and cursing in people all day long. I think I'm a much better person that I am now than 20 years ago.

SID EVANS: Well, Edward Lee, thank you so much for being on Biscuits and Jam.

EDWARD LEE: Thank you very much for having me. Really appreciate it.

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

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *Thanks for listening to my conversation with Edward Lee. Follow @chefedwardlee on Instagram, and keep up with him via his website, chefedwardlee.com. His most recent book is Buttermilk Graffiti: A Chef's Journey to Discover America's New Melting-Pot Cuisine, available everywhere.*

Join me next week as we close out Season 2 of Biscuits & Jam with selections from some of our favorite guests of 2021, including Amy Grant, Fiona Prine, Erin & Ben Napier, and Jon Batiste.

JON BATISTE: The deeper you go on the inside, hopefully, the more timeless and the more relevant the messaging will be. You talk about hymns, that's what makes hymns so powerful. You know, they can apply to you in any time in your life. Think about "Amazing Grace." Those songs weren't written for a specific moment, but the depth of them applies to all moments.

Southern Living is based in Birmingham, Alabama, and this podcast was produced and edited in Nashville, Tennessee. If you like what you hear, please consider leaving us a review on Apple Podcasts or telling your friends about the program.

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, Andy Bosnak, Matt Sav and Rachael King at Pod People.

We'll see you back here next week for more Biscuits & Jam!