

**Episode Title:** Alton Brown's Best Biscuit

**Episode Description:** In this week's episode, Sid Evans, Editor-in-Chief of Southern Living Magazine, talks to chef, author, actor, cinematographer, musician, and storyteller, Alton Brown about his childhood in North Georgia, his complicated relationship with Southern food, and his other life as a musician. Plus, Alton shares the greatest lessons he learned from his grandmother about food, biscuits, and much more.

**Episode Transcript:**

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

**Voice over from Sid Evans:** Welcome to a special Summer Tour edition of Biscuits and Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of Southern Living Magazine, and my guest this week is a chef, author, actor, cinematographer, musician, and storyteller. I think it's fair to say Alton Brown changed food television forever, transforming a sleepy genre with his unique brand of funny, smart, and highly entertaining cooking shows. His scientific approach to cooking, as well as knack for showmanship, have made him one of the most successful food celebrities of all time, and he's not slowing down. He just finished the second leg of his Beyond The Eats tour, and he recently released Good Eats 4: The Final Years — a door stopper of a book and what he says will be the last of his award-winning series. Today, we'll chat about his childhood in North Georgia, his complicated relationship with Southern food, and his other life as a musician. Plus, Alton shares the greatest lessons he learned from his grandmother about food, biscuits, and much more.

**(End of theme music)**

**Sid Evans:** Alton Brown, welcome to Biscuits & Jam.

**Alton Brown:** Thanks for having me on.

**Sid Evans:** So where am I reaching you right now?

**Alton Brown:** I'm at home in, uh, Marietta, Georgia for at least a few days.

**Sid Evans:** So Alton, you were born in LA, I believe, um, but you spent a lot of your childhood in a small town in Georgia. Do you have, um, fond memories of growing up there?

**Alton Brown:** Not many. No. That's not entirely true. Both of my parents were from North Georgia, um, Cornelia in fact, which is very close to Cleveland, not one county over. And it had been my father's dream to own a radio station. We were living in Los Angeles and, and I had terrible asthma problems with the smog there. And, it just so happens that my dad had an opportunity to buy an AM radio station in Cleveland, Georgia, WRWH, 1350 on your radio dial. and so we moved to Georgia. So I went, from North Hollywood, California, to not very far from where they made the movie Deliverance to a school where kids came, sometimes without shoes, because you know, shoes are for Sunday. And it was, it was an interesting, mixed bag. My parents eventually also bought the county newspaper. and the thing that I, that, you asked me about good memories, I would say that, most of my really good memories there have to do with, uh, there's a very large camp for Jewish kids, uh, just outside Cleveland called Camp Barney.

And, even kids from New York, from all over the country come there but, they had a day camp for us gentile kids. And, so I spent a lot of my summers at Camp Barney doing camp-like things. and I have a lot of really fond memories of, of that time.

**Sid Evans:** So a kind of connection with the outdoors that you might not have gotten as much in Los Angeles?

**Alton Brown:** Oh, definitely. except for a few strange instances, like one time, an organ grinder at a circus lost his monkey. and the monkey took up residence on the rooftops of our neighborhood. The problem is no one saw the monkey, but me. And so when I keep telling people that there was a monkey wearing a small red vest on the roof, they were like, "This child clearly needs some form of medication." So there, there were some, some times with, with wild animals, but not like living in North Georgia where one could stumble across any form of animal life. For instance, in fourth grade, we were all scouts, and scouts in those days, whatever day your scout meeting was on, you came to school in your uniform. And your uniform of course, included your prized possession, which was your scout knife. Back then, bringing a knife to school was like everybody was carrying, and one day a friend of mine showed up and in his lunchbox he had a baby possum, uh, that he had caught in the woods. And I knew the second that I saw the baby possum, that I had to have it. And I traded my coveted boy scout knife for the possum, which then became a house pet in our, in our home for, for quite a while. Uh, her name was Marcy, Marcy the Marsupial. so I can't imagine a more Southern upbringing than having a possum as a pet.

**Sid Evans:** You really can't make this stuff up.

**Alton Brown:** Yeah. You can't make it. Well, you could (laughs),

**Sid Evans:** (laughs) Well, so what about food, Alton? When did you have some of your first kind of aha moments with food?

**Alton Brown:** I was a foodie from early on, and had very odd tastes. Most parents worry about getting their kids to eat things. My parents worried about keeping me from eating things, because I would put almost anything in my mouth. When I was three, I discovered the joys of Gaines-Burgers dog food, which I would still tap right now, if you put one in front of me. so I had all kinds of crazy tastes. When I got to Georgia, I realized that I, I disliked almost all Southern food, except for biscuits, which my grandmother was an exceptional practitioner of the art of biscuiture. It was interesting because my families were like merchant class, but they had come up very, very poor. And so they ate, we'll, let's just call it, a, a limited menu of, um, of things, but they were still very connected to a time when the south, even North Georgia was very agrarian, you know, so there was a lot of great produce. You know, the first time I locked onto some Silver Queen corn, I thought I was gonna die. I mean, that was what food was supposed to taste like. But then my, my grandfather or my, my mother's father also taught me the joys of canned sardines, which are not exactly a Southern thing, but a love that I have with me to this day. So I think that I, I had gone from, a very cosmopolitan, to Georgia, which was not that, it was very much about learning local cuisines. when they had the radio station and the newspaper, they would often trade ad space to people for foods that they might produce on their farm. That might be cakes, any number of, of cured meat products. So I really kind of had, I had my own CSA, you know, I had my own, artisanal, food sources,, as a kid. And I, I learned very early on to, to appreciate that, to be honest.

**Sid Evans:** So you mentioned your grandmother, was she around, uh, in, in Georgia and someone who, who taught you a lot there or, or did that come later?

**Alton Brown:** You know, the teaching of cuisine and of cooking technique in, in the south, I mean, first off I, I was fortunate to have all my grandparents were alive for a lot of years. I was very close to my maternal grandparents, especially my grandmother.

**Sid Evans:** Was that Ma Mae?

**Alton Brown:**

Ma Mae. Yes. Ma Mae. But Ma Mae wouldn't have told you she was a great cook. She cooked because her husband and family needed feeding. she owned a dress shop, which she had saved and, and she'd worked in a mill, And so she would say, "Good Lord, this isn't cuisine. This is not starving to death." What I think a lot of Southern cooks do, especially those that came up, of course, they very strongly remembered the war, they remembered Victory Gardens. There was still a local community cannery. So a lot of stuff got put up, as we love to say but the teaching was more like this. It's like, you throw out bait. Okay. Here's the bait. The bait is a biscuit. Okay. Here's this biscuit, go eat your biscuit. You eat the biscuit. You really like the biscuit. So eventually you start to smell the biscuits and you smell the biscuits that's in the kitchen. So you go to the kitchen. And pretty soon you start going to the kitchen even earlier when you know biscuits are gonna be made. And pretty soon you're just watching, you're just watching, and then you're talking and it's perhaps years before you even think about touching the food. And that's because, in the '60s and early '70s, male children were not by and large, actively taught how to cook.

**Sid Evans:** Right.

**Alton Brown:** But what my grandmother taught wasn't like, "Come here, you're gonna learn how to make dot, dot, dot." No. That was my grandfather's job. "Come here. You're going to learn how to put a break line in a VW Beetle." Okay. That was different. Of course, that was also money making and also a very masculine craft. So I wouldn't say that anyone taught me until much, much, much, much later. I have often told this story and there's probably references to it on the internet, that the, the greatest lesson that my grandmother taught me about food was to shut up and pay attention. I had gone for years not being able to conquer or replicate her biscuits until I, I finally put ingredients out of my mind and technique out of my mind and noticed that because she had arthritis, which was really bad in her later years, when she needed the biscuit dough, she never bent her fingers. That was the secret. That was the entire difference between her biscuits and my biscuits is that I was overworking the dough by actually flexing my fingers into it. By just sitting back and watching her again, completely forgetting everything else, I was able to pick that up. And that's when you realize that every recipe, every dish is marked by a life, So her mark was that she couldn't bend her hands. Now, I haven't figured out what my mark is yet. (laughs)

**Sid Evans:** Well, you know, you have this incredibly scientific approach to cooking. You're famous for it. It's a part of your TV shows that you've done for years. But she seems kind of like the anti-scientist.

**Alton Brown:** Oh, she couldn't care less. when I went to Ma Mae and told her that I was gonna have, uh, my own television show, she said, "Where?" And I said, "Food Network." And she was like, "There's a TV channel about cooking? Who would watch that.?" She was like, "Truly, like, why would someone wanna watch the thing that I had to do in order to feed my family? Oh my God, it's the last thing I'm gonna

watch.” And I'm like, “I know. I don't know what to tell you.” So not only was she anti-scientific, she was anti the entire process. (laughs), she thought all this fussing about food was just ridiculous.

**Sid Evans:** (laughs) Well, that must be why she is so well remembered for her appearances on that show. So Alton, you graduated from the New England Culinary Institute for someone who grew up in the south and was so steeped in Southern cooking, did you have to unlearn a bunch of things or was the Southern background actually an advantage?

**Alton Brown:** Hmm. Well, I wouldn't call it an advantage. I will tell you that, the chefs that I encountered at school, some of who were really fine chefs, and, and one particular French chef that I interned under, it's funny, 'cause French chefs in a way are a whole lot like traditional Southern cooks. They don't care about how, they don't care about why, they just care about do it. Pay attention. They care about The passing on of instructional knowledge, this is how you do it. You don't need to know why, you don't need to know anything, but this is how you do it. Now, up in Vermont, they can't cook grits, okay? They don't, because they don't understand what a grit even is. It's, it's kind of like, you know, My Cousin Vinny, “What exactly is a grit?” They don't know. They think it's polenta, no, no, it's white hominy corn and it's cooked kind of the same, but it isn't the same, so I didn't have to de-learn anything because really we were all kind of being held together by European traditions, which I'd experienced, during, a summer of, of college in Italy and, and a few other places. I'd been somewhere besides the south, but what I did have to appreciate is the deep regional differences in ingredients, in cooking technologies, in cooking, customs and traditions and even just taste and flavor. but it was a struggle for me because in, in either case,, I very quickly understood that, what I had to have in order to cook was I had to know why. And that was a really hard question to get answered back then. And unfortunately, uh, yes, part of my, oh God, I can't believe I'm gonna use this word, brand (laughs) is that “science” of, of understanding what's going on, but the danger in that is separating yourself from tradition and from custom. And I have met people that have cast aside family custom, culinary custom, and traded it in for “science”. That may make the food better, but it also invalidates it to some degree.

**Sid Evans:** Mm.

**Alton Brown:** And I worry about that.

**Sid Evans:** Mm-hmm. Something gets lost there.

**Alton Brown:** Something gets traded.

**Sid Evans:** Mm-hmm.

**Alton Brown:** And in some cases that trade is justified. For instance, I don't know how many people I've had come up to me and thank me for the Good Eats Roast Turkey, because it saved them from the tradition of dry flavorless Turkey that had currently existed in their family. So I'm glad for that. I'm glad that people got a Turkey that they liked but it did force a separation. It forced a break in a chain. That chain was probably gonna get broken anyway. Coming out of, you know, World War II, the changes in, in the food that we buy, meant losing a bit of soul, in exchange for, I would say convenience, but that's too convenient of a word.

**Sid Evans:** (laughs) But something decidedly, not soulful. (laughs)

**Alton Brown:** Yes. Decidedly not soulful. (laughs) But what is soulful in, in food? What is that? We throw that around a lot, you know. People they talk about, "Oh, the soul." What does that mean? I, I, I don't know what that means. Do you know what it means?

**Sid Evans:** I think it has something to do with that tradition that you're talking about., and something that has some meaning beyond the ingredients.

**Alton Brown:** Yes. Does that have a flavor?

**Sid Evans:** I think you know it when you taste it. (laughs)

**Alton Brown:** Well, I think it's about family connectivity. And what I think that we have done culturally and this is very much at my door. I'm one of the people that did this, was to replace family with media. We have taken the learning of culinary traditions away from our grandparents and our parents and placed it in the hand of slick media presenters of which I am. I'm really a slick presenter. I'm very good at it. I don't know that I should have always done that.

**Sid Evans:** But you've also been an ambassador for Southern food and someone who has, written about, talked about Southern food traditions.

**Alton Brown:** Well, I mean, look, I would like to think that I haven't capitalized on that in a big way. I'm from the south. And we spend most of our weekends in a one room cabin on a lake in Alabama. We buy our fried chicken at a gas station, okay? (laughs) but I still don't know what "Southern" food is. I struggle to understand the actual concept of what Southern food is because I, I refuse to believe that it's a series of dishes and I refuse to believe that it is a series of ingredients, okay? There's something else. And it's something that we don't talk about much because to do so means skimming right on the edge of a lot of things that make a lot of people angry. I suspect that the, the cuisine of my grandmother was probably more influenced by her African American neighbors than her own lineage. So to talk about Southern food, we have to talk about race and we have to talk about history and here's the thing, the most beautiful thing that I can think of about Southern cuisine is in its best forms exquisitely exclusive and inclusive at the same time. it is of itself and of everyone at the same time. And so I think that really Southern cuisine has to be viewed constantly through the lens of history in an honest unflinching way that makes a lot of people really uncomfortable.

**Sid Evans:** You're absolutely right. And I think it's important to keep having that conversation and, um, it kind of never ends, you've gotta keep talking about it and, as long as you're connected to it in some way.

**Alton Brown:** Well, the challenge about media. I'm here talking to you because I made a TV show for a bunch of years. The things that led me to that had almost nothing to do with food and a lot more to do with filmmaking. I decided to go (laughs) into this because I was a filmmaker who was really unhappy with my clients. I don't know that from a cultural standpoint I have ignited or engaged in useful cultural communication or conversation. What I've done is tried to get people to be able to make better meatloaf. and that's an easy thing to talk about. I can talk to you about meatloaf all day, but again, when we, when we talk about Southern food, well...

**Sid Evans:** (laughs) That's a whole other thing.

**(Instrumental music break of Biscuits and Jam theme)**

**Voice over from Sid Evans:** I'll be back with more from Alton Brown after the break.

(AD BREAK)

**(Instrumental music break of Biscuits and Jam theme)**

**Voice over from Sid Evans:** Welcome back to Biscuits & Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, and today I'm talking with Alton Brown.

**Sid Evans:** You know, one thing is for sure, Southern food has a very different profile now on the kind of national stage than it did when you were in culinary school back in 1997.

**Alton Brown:** Absolutely. Yeah.

**Sid Evans:** I mean, how would you compare the perception of it back then to what you see today and what you've seen evolve over the last 15, 20 years?

**Alton Brown:** I think when you talk about a regional cuisine and I'm going to, to generalize this to concept rather than place, whether you're talking about the cuisine of Brittany, whether you're talking about the, uh, cuisine of Hong Kong, there are multiple regional cuisines and they're identified by whether or not they can be identified. So what I mean by that is like, okay, there's Southern cuisine and then there's Louisiana and then there's New Orleans, right? And these are cuisines that have managed to carve out a spot in the PR kind of world. and I would argue that whether it's Pacific Northwest, whether it's the Backwoods of Maine, whether it's Macon, Georgia, whether it's Richmond, Virginia, what you manage to export culturally is that which is easy to swallow and is easy to communicate, you know. I went down a rabbit hole when doing a show about the poor boy sandwich. And you notice that I'm saying poor boy instead of Po' boy.

**Sid Evans:** Yep.

**Alton Brown:** And people have jumped all over me about that, but you know, that Po was actually a marketing move that happened during the '70s. The sandwich traditionally is the poor boy, but see, it's so easy to fall for the marketing and replicate it as authenticity.

**Sid Evans:** Right.

**Alton Brown:** Now, I am certain that there are Southern families who drink almost exclusively out of Mason jars, but I am sick to death of going to restaurants where I'm served bourbon cocktails in a freaking Mason jar. (laughs) Don't you guys have any glasses? So my thing is that part of what's been accepted or, or even lauded, amplified about "Southern" cuisine, for the rest of the country, missed the point. Now, here's the problem with that. Now let's say that we're running the fiefdom of the south culinarily speaking, we have a council and we decide to put ourselves out in a giant marketing campaign to the rest of the country. We're pushing our product, you know, we're pushing bourbon and we're

pushing grits and we're pushing shrimp and we're pushing barbecue. Well, whatever sticks becomes the thing that we start to amplify for ourselves. So yes, Southern cuisine has had a massive push in the last 20 years, but I, I fear that maybe we have also kind of cut our noses off to spite our face by the fact that then we just amplify back that. It's like feedback. And that's harmful.

**Sid Evans:** There are things that get lost.

**Alton Brown:** Right. I'm sorry, we don't drink bourbon at every freaking meal, you know. We don't have shrimp, and by the way, shrimp and grits is a breakfast dish, not, you know, a dinner dish. And so when you remove the context, the historic understanding, when you remove that for the sake of marketing expediency, you have to know that, that the water just gets shallower and shallower.

**Sid Evans:** Yeah. Well, so Alton, you're at an interesting juncture in your career right now. you recently announced that you're leaving the Food Network to pursue some other things. Um, what are you interested in at this stage in your career?

**Alton Brown:** I started doing these live touring shows and the live touring shows have become more and more important to me. At first it was just a bet with myself, "Hey, can I do a live touring show about food? Can I do a culinary variety show?" And I did it back in 2013, '14, '15, and I did another one in, in '16, '17, '18. And then we, we've just come off our second leg of the Beyond The Eats tour, and the more that I do it, the more important it is to me. So I'm trying to figure out what that means. Our media landscape has changed so, so significantly, and our culinary landscape as we wrestle and deal with the fact that there have been a lot of voices that have not been heard, there are a lot of voices that have not been amplified, I want to be in on fixing that cultural inequity, but I also don't wanna completely silence myself. What is my role? What is the role of a 60 year old white guy? I don't know. I don't know. I know what my skill set is. I know what I'm good at. I know what I could be good at, but what should I do at this point is a very different question from what can I do. I used to only think in terms of what can I do? What do I have the power to do? What do I have the leverage to do? And I'm not doing that anymore. I, I'm thinking more and more about what I ought to do. And that takes stillness and a moment of freaking silence (laughs), which I'm not doing right now. I'm proving to you that I, you don't even, you can leave the room. I can do this by myself. I've come off of the second leg of Beyond The Eats. I released the fourth Good Eats book. I'm gonna go back out on the road in November and December with a holiday variant, as we're calling it of Beyond The Eats. But in the meantime, I'm gonna shut up. Uh, my wife and I will continue to do our, our live YouTube show, Quarantine Kitchen, because we have a very small audience (laughs), who likes to watch us drink and cuss. People still can't understand that, "God, that's Alton Brown and he's cussing." But other than that, I'm going to spend a few months reading a lot, writing a lot, cooking a lot, and kind of just trying to observe the world, you know. As a culture in a society, I think we are at a crossroad. And food, food has one magical ability I mean, other than keeping us alive, one, and that is, it is connective tissue that brings people together. The words, community, communication, communion, they all have the same root, it means to have in common. And it is one of the only things that food alone can do, So part of what I'm looking at is the fact that I have a certain amount of authority in food. I know a few things about food. What should I do with that? And I don't know. I don't know right now.

**Sid Evans:** Well, I'm looking forward to seeing what that is.

**Alton Brown:** Me too. (laughs)

**Sid Evans:** But Alton, I wanna ask you about your book. You mentioned-

**Alton Brown:** Sure.

**Sid Evans:** Your new book, which is called Good Eats 4: The Final Years, which sounds very final. (laughs)

**Alton Brown:** Mm-hmm. For Good Eats it is. Yeah.

**Sid Evans:** But I, I saw you comment somewhere that, of all the books in this series, this was the hardest one to put together. Is that true?

**Alton Brown:** Yes. Absolutely the hardest. A lot of this book reflected a sub series of Good Eats called Good Eats: Reloaded, which was a series where I went back into old shows and made repairs and renovations. One of the things that I had to reckon with during that time is (laughs) I've, a lot of years have, have passed down the river of time. And, mortality being what it is, is a lot closer. And was very much apparent to me in this. And so I think that I, I knew that this would be the absolute last Good Eats book. It is the last Good Eats book. We were actually getting ready to tear the set out of my studio, I think that I put a lot more work into it because of that. I also tackled a lot of the photography myself.

**Sid Evans:** It's quite hefty.

**Alton Brown:** Yeah. It's like four and a half pounds. Sorry. But, even when I did Good Eats: The Later Years, the third book, I knew I'd be coming back. I knew that I was just gonna go out. I was gonna do a show called Cutthroat Kitchen. I was gonna do some other things and then I would come back to Good Eats. It was always my plan to come back to it. Um but that's done now and I am really done with that now. And that is powerful because I have to look and admit that that show was really kind of my life's work. It was the thing that if I die tomorrow, please remember me for that, and so, yeah, that made the book a lot harder and, and probably a hundred pages longer. (laughs)

**Sid Evans:** Well, do you feel like you have the final, last word on, uh, biscuits in there?

**Alton Brown:** I have the last word for me. The biscuit recipe that I have in this book, which I am ready to proclaim is my best biscuit, is an act of heresy. For which even less than a hundred years ago, I probably would've been burned at a stake. And I ended up with a biscuit, I was literally just playing through like versions over and over of trying to come up with. Then it was like, "What, what does the biscuit want? What does the biscuit need?" And in the end, the damn thing is gluten free. (laughs) And I, I didn't, I wasn't aiming for that man, you know. My grandmother, that sound is her bones rattling around as they spin inside the coffin, because there's no White Lily flour in there. There's no wheat flour at all. I will not for one moment break out words like ultimate, which is the most ludicrous word to ever put in front on a recipe. Nothing is ever ultimate or perfect, or any of those things. I will tell you, however, that it's the only biscuit that I've made since and so I'm done with that.

**Sid Evans:** Well, I can't wait to, uh, to try it out. I was particularly interested in what you said about buttermilk. I didn't realize that buttermilk used to be sort of a more watery consistency.

**Alton Brown:** Buttermilk was the Gatorade of the 18th and 19th centuries. It was a very liquidy, but, protein packed beverage that was kept in, well-houses, to keep it cool, uh, for drinking in the summertime. It was the original sports drink.

**Sid Evans:** Yeah. (laughs) I'm excited to give them a try. Well, Alton before I let you go, I've gotta talk about music for a second. You're a musician, you're an avid guitar player. Um, what are playing music and cooking have in common for you?

**Alton Brown:** Oh my gosh. I am an avid musician. I, I grew up as, uh, a saxophone player and I had even at one point planned on being a professional jazz saxophonist. I started playing guitar when I realized that I wanted to write songs and you can't sing and play a saxophone at the same time. The similarities are for me, um, very significant because, especially when you look at jazz, you have to understand what it is you're listening to very often, which is also very much the truth with eating Southern food. You have to know what it is you're tasting. You have to understand it. So, you must understand structure. You must understand form. Once you structurally master things, then and only then can you play with the rules, it's all mishmash until then, which is why really great jazz players, you know, whether it's a guitarist or a saxophonist or a trumpeter, I don't care what it is, will play within the structure of the chords, go out, meander, take a wild ride, and always come back every few minutes to let you know, yeah, I know what I'm doing. I know what this is. I know what's in a D seven sharp nine. And that is also very, very critical in cooking in general. Um, but certainly in Southern cooking where it has been so easy for people to make riffs on things, "I'm making my own riff on, you know, um, this dish or that dish." It's like, "Well, you, that's fine." You can, you can show me what a Pan-Asian shrimp and grits is, but if you're gonna use those words, shrimp and grits, then you better make sure that in that dish you show me that you actually respect and understand the original form.

**Sid Evans:** Yeah. You gotta know the rules in order to break the rules.

**Alton Brown:** And even breaking the rules is only kind of temporary. You can bend them. I don't know that you can ever break them. I think that breaking the rules very often loses the audience, but you can bend them. It's knowing how far you can bend it before you break it. Whether it's barbecue or whether it's just simply a nice pot of greens, you gotta show me that you understand what it is, understand what the structure is, understand the traditions, respect it before you mess with it.

**Sid Evans:** Yeah. Well, Alton, you're often referred as a chef, an author, an actor, a cinematographer or musician, but you're not often referred to as a teacher. And I just, I wonder if you see yourself that way, because it seems like you have done so much teaching through your shows and your books?

**Alton Brown:** I don't. I'm a storyteller. My job has always been to entertain. We used to have a sign over the studio door where we were shooting Good Eats that said laughing brains are more absorbent. You can teach if you can entertain. My job has always been to entertain first and foremost, but I've always made sure that there was something that you could take away. I'm an entertainer. I tell stories. And it just so happens that my stories typically concerning food involve a payload of knowledge or a payload of, of knowhow that is either gonna be accepted or not receptive. But in the end, if you're entertained, okay, my job is done.

**Sid Evans:** (laughs) Well, Alton, I just have one more question for you. What does it mean to you to be Southern?

**Alton Brown:** Joyously conflicted. It is messy business being a southerner. It means embracing contradictions. It means in its best iteration, an understanding not only of others, but a much more critical examination and understanding of self. It is not easy business being Southern in a modern sense. And being Southern does not mean that you get to fall back on traditions that protect you or somehow cocoon you from the realities of the rest of the world. That's not Southern. I don't think that that's really Southern. I think real Southern is spooky business. We're haunted, we're spiritual. We are sinners and saints. We (laughs) are drunkards and preachers, and we create astoundingly soulful pieces of art, astoundingly soulful music. And what I hope for the south is that, We must rise in full understanding and strive for the full understanding of who we are and what we are, what we've done, what we're gonna do, what we're doing today, what we'll do tomorrow and understand that those trajectories are ours to determine. We are not victims, we are not forgotten, we are not downtrodden. Yeah, I think I'm gonna leave it at that.

**Sid Evans:** It's a lot, isn't it? (laughs)

**Alton Brown:** Well, it's a lot more than a lot of people that aren't Southern might think.

**Sid Evans:** Well, Alton Brown, thank you so much for being on Biscuits & Jam.

**Alton Brown:** Thanks so much for having me. I'm hungry for both the biscuits and the jam right now, so (laughs), um, I think I'm gonna go crank up the oven and make some of those damn gluten free biscuits. I can't believe I'm even saying that.

**Voice over from Sid Evans:** Thanks for listening to my conversation with Alton Brown. You can visit [AltonBrown.com](http://AltonBrown.com) for recipes, merch, tour dates, and more. Southern Living is based in Birmingham, AL. Be sure to follow Biscuits & Jam on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you listen so you don't miss an episode. And we'd love your feedback. If you could rate this podcast and leave us a review we'd really appreciate it. You can also find us online at [southernliving.com/biscuitsandjam](http://southernliving.com/biscuitsandjam) We'll be back on July 12th with Caitlyn Smith.