

**Episode Title:** Mary Gauthier's Jalapeno Cornbread

**Episode Summary:** In this week's episode, Sid Evans, Editor-in-Chief of Southern Living Magazine, talks to singer/songwriter Mary Gauthier about bringing Louisiana cooking to Boston, memories of the late John Prine, and the best Italian cookies.

**Episode Transcript:**

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

**SID EVANS:** Welcome to another episode of Biscuits & Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of Southern Living Magazine.

*We've recorded these episodes as we've all sheltered-at-home, and between passionate conversations about Southern food, you'll also hear honest takes about how these musicians have been dealing with the pandemic.*

*Today's guest is a Grammy-nominated songwriter who spent the early part of her career as a chef and restaurant owner, so she's no stranger to the kitchen.*

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Yeah, Sid, I've been cooking every single night and, in fact, I'm on the verge of looking in my closet to see if I have any chef coats left. I'm cooking, I'm cooking every night.

**SID EVANS NARRATION:** *For Mary Gauthier, music and food have been lifelong passions. A native of Louisiana, she opened a successful creole restaurant in Boston that often had lines out the door. She later sold her share of that business and used the funds to make an album named after that restaurant, Dixie Kitchen. And despite not getting into the music industry until she was 35, she quickly built a reputation as one of Nashville's most talented songwriters, with names like Tim McGraw, Blake Shelton, and Jimmy Buffett all covering her work.*

*Mary's latest album Rifles and Rosary Beads was co-written with wounded veterans. It speaks directly to the challenges and fears that soldiers and their families have faced. This track, "The War After The War," was named NPR's Song of the Year in 2018. It's a powerful snapshot of a veteran adjusting to life at home, living in the shadows of fallen servicemen and women. Like so many of Mary's songs, it's unflinchingly honest.*

***("The War After the War" by Mary Gauthier fades up during Sid's statement of the title, with the verse at full volume after Sid saying "servicemen and women." Approx 1:04 - 1:29 plays so we can hear the following clearly: "People look at you and thank you for the sacrifice you made / They look at me and smile and say I'm lucky you're okay / Invisible, the war after the war" )***

**SID EVANS NARRATION:** *On today's program, Mary tells us that keeping things simple usually works best for cooking and songwriting.*

**MARY GAUTHIER:** You can do a complex souffle if you want, but man, people are just gonna love it if you fry okra. Put a little salt and pepper in the batter, drip it in grease. Sit it in front

of them. They're going to love it. It's a really, uh, beautiful lesson. Be yourself in your songs. Don't put on airs.

**SID EVANS NARRATION:** You'll also hear about a favorite on Dixie Kitchen's old menu, the Southern Hospitality Platter.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** It was a big hit. People, it was just straight up carbs. And it was so good and not good for you.

**SID EVANS NARRATION:** All that and more on Episode 5 of *Biscuits & Jam*.

*(theme music ends)*

**SID EVANS:** Well, Mary Gauthier, it's great to have you on. Welcome to *Biscuits & Jam*.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Great to be with you, Sid. Thank you.

**SID EVANS:** first of all, tell me where the name Gauthier comes from. And, am I saying it correctly?

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Yeah, you got it. It's a Cajun French name. I was born in New Orleans, raised down in Baton Rouge and Thibodaux, Louisiana. The name is very common in South Louisiana, but once I started traveling as a songwriter, I realized it's virtually unpronounceable everywhere else on earth. So, uh, not the greatest stage name, but in Louisiana, everybody knows somebody named Gauthier.

I was, um, I was adopted into a Italian family, actually. So the name is quite complicated for me. You know, my adoptive Italian father, um, got the name from a man he never met. His Italian mother got pregnant from a uh, they call them, uh, in the family, a crazy musician, uh, crazy Cajun. And, he married her and then disappeared. So my dad never met his dad. Mr. Gauthier is a mystery to all of us, but we carry his name and that, uh, is so removed anyway from me because I was adopted that it's so many levels of removal.

It's a long story, which I've made records about. Actually, looking for roots, looking for that, uh, the story that resonates. It's been quite, quite the journey for me. The reason I ended up in music actually is, this quest for identity and meaning. The Louisiana heritage is a part of who I am. But, I carry it lightly. I don't really know where I'm truly from. I'm an alien.

**SID EVANS:** So Mary, so much of your life has been about food. I mean, tell me some of your early food memories.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** like I said, I was adopted, but I was adopted by Italians in a Cajun town. There was a large Italian community in Thibodaux, Louisiana. So both sides of my family have Italian names and both side, both grandparents, my, my mother's parents and my father's mother, owned restaurants.

And so, my dad's mom owned a place called Jenny's Cafe, and she would cook, uh, Italian food, mostly meatballs and spaghetti for folks, uh, down in Thibodaux, Louisiana. And my,

uh, grandparents on my mother's side owned a cafe called the Green Lantern Café. And, uh, they did breakfast and lunch as well.

And so I was raised by, my parents who both worked for the state, but their parents worked in restaurants. don't know, 22 or something. I want my own restaurant. They both looked at me like, "don't do it." Because they watched their parents...just owning a restaurant is 24/7.

And they didn't want that for themselves. I really enjoy food service. I ended up going to chef school eventually, but I really, I like the hands on.

I think the thing that, that food and music have in common, I think it's a very active way of expressing and showing love. if you make somebody a really good meal and you put love in it, they can, they can feel that.

And, uh, there's a, a transfer of affection in that transaction. And I think, I think that's really the overlap is the way that, I approached songwriting and, and the way that I did approach cooking. It was one, one meal at a time, one song at a time, a transfer of affection really.

**SID EVANS:** I mean, that's what so much of Southern cooking is about. What did your holidays look like? Um, what does an Italian Cajun holiday look like?

**MARY GAUTHIER:** A lot of food. We were weaving Italian heritage into the culture, uh, of South Louisiana, which was predominantly, French, and African. So we had okra, which, you know, came from Africa. if you trace back the heritage of it, it came from, the Caribbean and Africa. And, uh, we had, they call it oyster dressing. Which is a South Louisiana delicacy, and they'd put it with, celery, peppers, onions, garlic, and bread, which celery, peppers and onions is, they call it the Holy Trinity down there.

Um, it goes in everything. So we'd have oyster dressing, fried okra, stewed okra, and then they'd put, uh, the stuffing in the Turkey was an Italian stuffing. It was ground meat with cinnamon, pecans, and raisins, and they'd stuffed that into the bird and, uh, cook, the bird, the Turkey, uh, with the stuffing inside it, they stitched the, the, uh, the stuffing into the, uh, outside of the bird and close it on the skin that hung out the, the backend of the bird and it would be so delicious. It was called sweet dressing. Oh, I forget the most important ingredient of that...sugar.

Uh, you know, South Louisiana is a, a major producer of sugar. So we find, uh, sugar in everything. So it's a sweet dressing ground meat, pecans, which are indigenous to South Louisiana, sugar, cinnamon, and, uh, it was sauteed in a cast iron skillet and then stuffed into the bird and then cooked, recooked in the bird. Uh, and there was all kinds of other side things like a 'course sweet potato pie, pumpkin pie, pecan pie, uh, bread pudding with bourbon sauce. Uh, the cocktails were endless. Part of the cooking process from my family would always involve, um, cocktails.

They'd start with the wine and, uh, work, work their way up to, uh, stuff with bourbon. Uh...bourbon was the, was the hard liquor of choice. whiskey sours for the ladies. And the, men would just, I think, drink bourbon over cracked ice.

**SID EVANS:** Uh huh. So, uh, so Mary, when did you really start it with the family or was it really more of a restaurant thing, um, that you really took to it.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Well, I wish that I cooked more with my grandmother. She, she died when I was 14, so I was a little young, but she would cook cookies and cookies and cookies. We had so many Italian cookies, dozens of kinds of Italian cookies and breads and, and her family, there was 12 brothers and sisters and they'd all throw in and we'd have this giant feast of St. Joseph. And I wish I'd cooked more with her cause those Italian cookies were incredible.

But I didn't really learn how to cook well until I went to chef school. I went, I went to chef school. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, uh, at the Cambridge School of Culinary Arts,

**SID EVANS:** That's a long way from Louisiana.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** I know, but the way they taught it was through Italian cooking. The teacher and owner Roberta Dowling, who's no longer with us, uh, believed that the best way to teach students to cook is to learn how to cook, uh, the indigenous foods of each region of Italy.

Emilia-Romagna, Lombardi, each region has very specific approach to foods we think of as Italian food. Uh, you know, some regions would put carrots in the sauce for sweetener, some regions, would put a variety of things in the sauce that make it distinctive. So I learned Italian again at chef school, and we sort of spend a little time with the French, but she was, uh, a believer, that the French over complicated things that the way to go is Italian. And I actually am in agreement with her that, the simple, simple cuisine of, uh, taking a zucchini in and pulling it from your garden and just sauteeing in it real quick with salt and pepper and olive oil, maybe a little garlic, and putting it on a plate. What a delicious approach. So, uh, uh, yeah, I ended up in Boston through a series of things and went to culinary school there. And that was where I opened, my, first restaurant called the Dixie Kitchen.

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

**SID EVANS:** So Mary, you, you left home really young. How did you get from point A to point B, how did you get through that and get, a point where you could go to culinary school?

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Well, there's a line in the Tennessee Williams, a play called A Streetcar Named Desire, where Blanche DuBois, as she's being carried off at the end of the movie by, a man and a woman in white coats who are fixing to put her in restraints, she looks up and smiles at them before they institutionalize her, as they're carrying her away.

And she says, "I've always relied on the kindness of strangers." I've always loved that scene, and I love that line. That's the answer, Sid. I've always relied on the kindness of strangers. As an adoptee, you know, my whole family is, um, is, is once removed. They were strangers to me and they brought me in and were kind to me.

Uh, I left young cause we, we had addiction in our family. I had addiction in me. Uh, and it was, uh, it was a tough go. Uh, but I ended up, with this opportunity in Boston, uh, I found

these investors who paid for me to go to chef school. Um, it was, through a series of events that, looking back are kind of miraculous.

I ended up, with a group of people who believed in me and invested in me and funded several restaurants and my education.

**SID EVANS:** So food really helped you get through some tough times.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Yeah, I think so. I think that's how it worked. I think that you'd be in at the restaurant. Um, opening night of my second restaurant, I was arrested for drunk driving. And that's July 13th, 1990. And I remember it because that's my sobriety date. I'll be 30 years sober in two months. And after I got sober, I was able to, really flourish in that restaurant business.

It provided stability for me and the restaurant did real well. And then at a certain point. I was just consumed with songwriting. And so my passion went from food and restaurant to, to creation of, of songs. And, 10 years into sobriety, I came to Nashville. You know, food and restaurants were a life raft for me, uh, and then songs and songwriting became a life raft for me. And, and still are, I think.

**SID EVANS:** What was it like bringing Cajun food to Boston, Massachusetts and introducing it to probably a bunch of people who, had not had much of it before.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Yes. Good question. The full service restaurant that we opened for Cajun food, was, a small Jewish deli.

And the owner of the Jewish deli passed away at work one day. Uh, and it was just so happens, one of my investors it was his favorite deli, cause he loved their potato salad. Cause they did that thing where they made potato salad with hot potatoes. If you dress hot...if you boil real potatoes and dress it with the mayonnaise and the, and the vinegar while the potatoes are still hot and throw in the onions and the egg while the potatoes are still hot, it's just this very special potato salad. It's the way you do it right. According to my Jewish investor, Norman Cholesky. And Norm, Norman, knew potato salad.

Well, when the owner died, the restaurant became available. His daughters tried to run it, but there was, there was no way. And so we actually picked up the lease from that restaurant for \$20,000. It was a run down. It had run to the ground. Uh, it was a mess of a place.

And so he handed me the keys and we made a decision to transition from what they were doing into Cajun food. I was in chef school at the time and, um, my Italian, I haven't told the story ever, but my Italian, teacher at chef school said, "Maria, you have to do what's in your heart."

I'm like, I was going to open up some kind of cafeteria there or something. I didn't know what to do with the place. I was handed a restaurant that was a disaster, but it was a restaurant. And, um. I didn't know what to make of it. And you know, I was drinking after work. I wasn't sober yet. My Italian chef teacher said I had to do what's in my heart and what's in my heart, of course, is Cajun.

And so, uh, I went back, uh, and proposed the Cajun restaurant to my Jewish investor. And it took him a while to agree that this was what we should do, but we eventually did. And, and, um. So we closed it down for two weeks, and I had a mural painter come in and put scenes from New Orleans on the walls. I changed the menu, uh, and when the people came in the day we opened the Cajun restaurant and they didn't have their potato salad anymore, it was quite the disappointment.

They didn't know what to do with an oyster pobo or jambalaya, or gumbo. The Cheap Eats section of the Boston Globe got wind of it. And, uh, this was a very important, publicity stunt really, I don't even know how it happened, but once Cheap Eats reviewed a place, the city of Boston knew about it. Everything on the menu was under \$10. So Cheap Eats grabbed us and from the minute the Cheap Eats ran, we had a line out the door. And that lasted for seven years.

**SID EVANS:** Wow, that's really something.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** It was madness. The city of Boston lined up at the door, and I didn't know how to run a restaurant that, that was, um, uh, inundated...

**SID EVANS:** Successful?

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Inundated with interest. I had to learn how to move fast. And, it is settled into displaced southerners.

We had, so many people. That, were so excited to see collard greens and fried okra and real gumbo and, oh my God, oyster pobo, shrimp pobo, crawfish pobo, smoked sausage pobo they had, hadn't had it for years. I think it was one of Boston's first fully-integrated restaurants. Our clientele was half black, half white. I didn't see that anywhere else in the city at the time. And, uh, we spoke to people's longing for home. Uh, we sold Tony Chachere's Creole Seasoning, which...

**SID EVANS:** I love that stuff.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Yeah. Couldn't get it in the grocery stores yet. I brought it in from New Orleans.

We flew in, bushels and bushels of live crawfish. I'd run a, a crawfish festival when crawfish, where were at their peak. I'd drive to Logan airport and pick up a couple of hundred pounds of crawfish that were flown in from South Louisiana. And, and the lines were, uh, out the door for crawfish, boiled crawfish.

Nobody else was doing it. So it really worked. It served a need that I didn't even know was there. This follow your heart thing, it's a really good piece of advice. Um, it's a really good piece of advice. It works for food and it really works for songs as well.

**SID EVANS:** So what were your hit items on the menu?

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Um, we called, uh, this thing we made up the Southern Hospitality Platter. That's the thing that flew out the door the most. The Southern Hospitality Platter had a piece

of jalapeno cornbread and a big piece...uh, I like sweet cornbread and I liked it with chunks of jalapenos in it. So, uh, it would be about three inches high, uh, and about two inches long.

It was a tall, beautiful piece of cornbread that was anything but dry. We put sour cream and quite a bit of celery peppers, onions, uh, and it was...a lot of people don't like sweet cornbread. Uh, but it had a bite and a sweetness, so it had sugar and jalapenos.

So it would come with a giant chunk of cornbread, uh, jambalaya. We made our jambalaya with, shrimp and smoked sausage, and chicken thighs and then red beans and rice. And we made our red beans and rice with smoked ham hocks, so they get chunk of ham, hock meat.

So red beans and rice, jambalaya, cornbread. Uh, it was a big hit. People, it was just straight up carbs. And it was so good and not good for you.

But people, people loved it. And then a side of, uh, collard greens that we would cook with, onions and bacon.

**SID EVANS:** You know, when you build a restaurant like that, you're building, a community and I'm just wondering, was it hard for you to walk away from that as much as you wanted to play music.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Yeah. It was a process more than an event. Um. I knew I was being pulled towards music and I knew I was falling out of love with the restaurant, but I would wake up in a cold sweat and I'd just will myself to try and fall back in love with the restaurant 'cause it was stable and it was providing for a lot of people's families.

And, we did well, but you know, when a relationship's over, you can't, will yourself to be in love again. And, slowly but surely, I knew I was going to have to go. And so we did end up writing out all the recipes much more clearly than the, the way that we had done it before. Portions, we figured out portion, like, you know, half a cup of this and a quarter cup of that and, and made a recipe book. Uh, and pulled it all together into a sorta, heres' how you do Dixie Kitchen. And I handed it to my business partners, they bought me out for, you know, not much money, like \$10,000, which I put into my second record. And my head waiter took over and I moved to Nashville. I don't think they lasted a year. They tried, but you, you gotta have a Cajun at the Cajun restaurant.

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

**SID NARRATION:** *There's lots more with Mary Gauthier, after the break.*

(AD BREAK)

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

**SID NARRATION:** Welcome back to *Biscuits & Jam*, from *Southern Living*. I'm Sid Evans, and we're talking with singer/songwriter Mary Gauthier.

**SID EVANS:** Tell me about the move to Nashville. That was a real moment for you and, and a, and a huge change, um, kind of later in life. Um, you know what brought that on?

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Well, I knew I was in love with songwriting, and I knew I was not in love with cooking. And so, um, made a record of my first 10 songs, I made a record and it got nominated for Boston Music Award, which was incredible in a city full of folk singers. Uh, there's only three, records nominated for best new artist.

I got nominated, and that gave me some confidence. And so I really, really, really focused on the next batch of songs. Uh, and that next batch of songs became my second record. And I got invited to play the Newport Folk Festival. I still owned two restaurants, was working full time and I'd never toured. In fact, I'd never even actually played gigs.

I was still playing open mics, and, uh, that changed everything. It's like, okay, if they think I'm good enough for Newport Folk Festival, I need to take this seriously. And after Newport booked me, uh, 12 other folk festivals booked me that summer. And that's when I said, I gotta go. I gotta go, I gotta go to Nashville, I gotta take this seriously.

**SID EVANS:** So Mary, we're here talking on April 9th, and we just got word a couple of days ago that John Prine had died. And you at one point said that, that all roads lead to John Prine. And I'm wondering what kind of influence he had on you and your journey.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Well for me, there was no greater influence than, the songs and music of John Prine. Um, John never got complicated. He really, uh, kept it three chords and the truth his whole career. And so anybody who could learn a G, a C, a D, and maybe a B minor on a guitar could play a John Prine song.

And I think that that's part of the appeal. His melodies were, were so catchy, they would suck you in and then the lyrics would keep you there. John, uh, was I think, the one artist, that, spoke to me the longest, the deepest and, forever will be the greatest influence on me.

I first saw John Prine when I was student at LSU, I was 19 years old and John used to come, and play, with, um, six pack of beer and a pack of cigarettes. And so he'd come on stage and the barstool wasn't for him to sit on it was for him to put the six pack of beer on.

And the show was over when he ran out of beer and I, I probably saw more John Prine shows than any other artist.

And then, uh, when I came to Nashville, um, my goal was to meet and, uh, pitch myself to Al Bunetta, John's manager, John's record company.

And, and, uh, I was able to do that. I actually was offered a record deal at, uh, Oh Boy Records, but he came in at the same time that the Lost Highways offer came and I went with the major label instead. But, uh, John took me on the road nonetheless, and I got to tour with him for a couple of years. I was his opening act and went from town to town, got to know him, got to be friends with him.

Uh, was really, uh, sitting at the foot of the master every night side stage, watching him work his magic. I can't overestimate the amount of, uh, affection and, and love I have for the man and his music. Uh, he opened so, so many doors for me. He's integral to, to me as a human being and as an artist, uh, his, there's just no way to overestimate what, what he did for me.



**SID EVANS:** Hmm. Uh, Mary. How did he affect you as a, as a songwriter?

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Well, he taught me that, uh, the best way to go is, is to write the truth and keep it simple. The simple truths that are universal. And do it in your own voice. You don't have to imitate anybody. Just be yourself. Keep it simple, stay true.

Uh, and that's really the biggest lesson you can learn in songwriting. Actually, there's the overlap with cooking as well. You know, you can, you can do a complex souffle if you want, but man, people are just gonna love it if you fry okra. Put a little salt and pepper in the batter, drip it in grease.

Sit it in front of them. They're going to love it. It's a really, uh, beautiful lesson that, uh, be yourself in your songs. Don't put on airs. Don't try to impress anybody. You know, and he always was able to do it with a smile as well.

This was one of the great slight of hands that John Prine always, was capable of better than anyone is that ability to do it with a wink and a nod. He would make you smile even though there was tears on your face. That's a, that's a master.

**SID EVANS:** Yes, it is. So, so your last album was, um, was called Rifles and Rosary Beads.

And it was co-written with wounded veterans, um, and it was also nominated for a Grammy. And I'm just wondering if you could tell us a little bit about the concept behind that and, and how that came to be.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Yeah. I was invited to be a participant in a nonprofit called Songwriting with Soldiers and the nonprofit pairs professional songwriters with wounded veterans and their families. Uh, and we go to a retreat center, um, and spend a weekend bearing witness and writing songs. It's usually a small gathering...four songwriters, six to 10 veterans, and each veteran, sometimes with their family, will leave that retreat with a song of their own, uh, that reflects their I did that program, uh, as a songwriter for a little over five years when I realized I was sitting on a goldmine of songs, uh, that these songs were really good.

And, uh, uh, I asked the, the founder of the program, Darden Smith, if he would mind if I made a record of these songs and put them into the world. And once again, back to my Italian professor at cooking school who said, "Maria, you follow your heart." So my heart knew that these songs were good and they were better than anything I was writing on my own.

And, uh, I made a record about two and a half years ago. Of, uh, 10 of the songs. I'm sitting on about 50 co-writes with veterans and their families that I personally participated in. The organization itself has over 500 co-writes with veterans and their families.

Um, and you can find all the songs at [songwritingwithsoldiers.org](http://songwritingwithsoldiers.org) but I picked 10 of the 50 I thought reflected the experiences that I had heard.

And I put them into a record and, and we released it, and wouldn't you know it, the thing got traction. And we ended up, uh, nominated for a Grammy. Uh, yeah. And, uh, actually we walked out of the ceremony with John Prine, who John and I, we both did not win.

We, I've got a great picture of me and John next to each other, uh, with, uh, this look on our eye. Like, "well, what do we do?" You know, he said, "well, we go back to work." I think the joy of being nominated, uh, and John did an interview with, uh, CBS This Morning that we watched the other night. And John said, "people don't remember whether you won or not. They remember that your name is affiliated with the Grammys." And I think that's true. Being nominated is, is a very big deal. And being part of the discussion, uh, especially with these songs because they're not about me. They're really, truly a reflection of war trauma and what war does to an individual and a family, uh, was a big deal for me. The impact on our soldiers and their families has remained the same since the beginning of conflict.

**SID EVANS:** Yeah. You've got a great song on there about a veteran having breakfast at a Waffle House, and you seem to find a lot of meaning in, uh, simple moments like that.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Learned it from John. Learned it from John. Um, yeah. You put the character into a story. And, uh, when the veteran told me that Waffle House on veterans day, November the 11th, uh, gives a free breakfast to active duty military. Uh, that's when I knew that's where our song's gonna go. Like, we're going to bring you to the Waffle House and you're going to tell me what happens next.

So just sat him down in the Waffle House, uh, in our imagination. Uh, and he talked about the waitress, and he talked about being thanked for his service. He talked about being uncomfortable, with being called a hero. Cause in his heart he knew that the real heroes were no longer with us. Uh, he talked about the parade going by the Veterans' Day parade and, and how he was proud of his service.

And how he wanted to honor other people's service, but also how he was uncomfortable with applause and celebration. Because war is tragic. And the complexity of all that worked itself into that song. And I would have, honest to God, never have written that song if John hadn't shown me what to do with his masterpiece, Sam Stone. One of the greatest songs of the 20th century about a Vietnam veteran who came home wounded, became a junkie and ended up OD'ing. Um, that song is a masterpiece and it opened the door for me to tell the truth. As I worked with veterans.

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

**SID EVANS:** You know, speaking of great songs, um, there's a song called, uh, Mercy Now that became a big hit for you, and it just seems very appropriate right now. And I'm, I'm wondering, you know, what your thoughts are about the concept of, of mercy as it relates to what's going on right now in the world.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Yeah, Sid, thanks for asking. I guess I wrote that in 2002. So it's 18 years old now, and it's so strange how a song can, uh, mean different things as we go through, uh, different things. I came to that song, um, as I realized the, uh, that, uh, if I wanted mercy, which I did, um, then it would be in my own best interest to offer mercy as well. The song is going to have a new meaning as we work our way through whatever's coming next during this terrible pandemic of 2020.

**Mary's song "Mercy Now" starts fading in, Mary sings "They carry the weight of the faithful / who follow them down / I love my church and country / and they could use some mercy now."**

**SID EVANS:** You know, with everyone spending so much time at home and all locked down in quarantine. And I'm just wondering if this has, uh, changed your perspective on, on things.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Well, you know, I'm a slow mover. I think on perspective. Uh, I'm painfully aware of how wrong I often am. So what I'm trying to do is, uh, just keep it in the day, like, uh, not try to draw any conclusions yet. Just observe, understand that, uh, uh, things change quickly. Uh, we don't know what the world's going to look like when we go back outside again.

Uh, we're pretty sure that, uh, uh, there'll be setbacks. I mean, I'm having tour dates cancel in, in the end of August right now, so this is going to be much longer than most people are prepared for.

I'm going to try to stay, uh, in the, the mindset of, uh, first and foremost, "do no harm." Uh, and then try to go into "how can I be of service?" But, but I think for, for me coming up with what it means or, or, or, or how to, uh, how to make sense of it, man is premature. I really don't know yet.

**SID EVANS:** Well, Mary, I got to bring it back to food one more time. Just ask, have you been, uh, have you been doing any, a lot of cooking, uh, these last few weeks and found any comfort there?

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Yeah, Sid, I've been cooking every single night and, uh, I haven't done that since I walked out of the kitchen. Uh, in fact, I'm on the verge of looking in my closet to see if I have any chef coats left. I'm cooking, I'm cooking every night. Um, I think I got rid of most of my chef coats, if not all, but there might be one somewhere cause it had my name and my restaurant.

So I might have kept it like a old, uh...

**SID EVANS:** Talisman.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Memento. Yeah. I'm cooking a lot. I'm finding, uh, I'm loving cooking in a sheet pan in the oven. Put everything in one sheet pan. Put some tinfoil down in a real good cookie sheet that won't bend and just throw some chicken and vegetables and potatoes in one sheet pan and pop it in the oven. It's real nice.

I'm, I'm enjoying it. You know, my hands. I'm getting burned again, which is great. I'm, uh, I'm experiencing all the joys of reaching in the oven and hitting your arm against the top of the oven and, and there goes another burn. Grabbing a hot skillet by the handle, forgetting, "Oh my God, where is my potholder. What have I just done? I'm relearning how to cook again, I guess. I haven't done that really in, in, since I came to Nashville, I would have a dinner party every now and then and cook for people, but not like this.

Not every day, three meals a day. So I'm back at it and I'm really grateful I have the skills. You know, I'm, I'm Zooming with people who are like, "Oh my God, all I know how to make is cereal." Uh, you know, "I, if I don't have a microwave meal, I don't have food. I don't even know how to make bacon and eggs. How do you cook eggs that don't burn?"

Like, I went to chef school. It's all coming back. I know how to cook. I can plan meals for the week. It's all about timing and preparing and being able to use the ingredients that you have in your refrigerator that are going bad you've got to be able to put them all together into a meal. I know how to do that after all those years in the restaurant, you know, that's what soup is for, for goodness sakes. But I think ultimately, uh, uh, it's bringing me back and I'm glad I know how to do it.

**SID EVANS:** Well, we've got a few recipes at Southern Living. If, uh, if you ever need a refresher.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** I know. I love the magazine. My mother's got, I think a Southern Living from the 50's I don't know how long you've been along, but she's got shelves and...

**SID EVANS:** '66

**MARY GAUTHIER:** shelves and shelves and shelves and shelves of it, probably from 66.

**SID EVANS:** Well, Mary Gauthier, thank you for being on Biscuits & Jam. It's been great to have you on.

**MARY GAUTHIER:** Sid, thanks for doing this. Uh, I really appreciate it. It's a great opportunity to, to talk with you. And you asked such good questions. You brought me back 30 years and, uh, I'm back cleaning up a mouse-ridden dirty old restaurant that I'm converting to a Cajun restaurant. Oh my God, that was hard. Thank you for bringing me, uh, into gratitude for being a singer-songwriter. I like what I do. I love my job. Thank you.

***(Instrumental theme music fades in for outro to program)***

**Sid NARRATION:** *Thanks for listening to my conversation with Mary Gauthier. Her most recent album Rifles and Rosary Beads and her latest single "Truckers and Troubadours" are both available wherever you get music. You can also visit marygauthier.com for updates and more.*

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*Biscuits & Jam is produced by Heather Morgan Shott, Krissy Tiglias and me, Sid Evans, for Southern Living. Thanks also to Ann Kane, Jim Hanke, Eliza Lambert and Rachael King at Pod People.*

*On our next episode, I'll be joined by the legendary Willie Nelson, so I hope you'll tune in for more Biscuits & Jam. See you then!*

*(Music ends)*