



erine Hurst still eats occasional lunches at her family's bunker of a restaurant, painted various shades of beige and decorated with faux European oil pastorals.

Felton Hurst Sr., their son, worked as a skycap before he stepped into the lead cook role in 1994. Now seventy-six, he arrives six days a week before seven to stand alongside his wife, Marilyn, smothering pork parts and cooking down pots of greens. Flavored with smoked neck bones and pickled pig tails, his hand-torn and long-simmered greens are as good as any I've ever eaten.

Thirty pounds of mustards and eight pounds of collards go into that pot each morning. By eleven, when his regulars gather out front, those greens have collapsed into a pork-bobbed heap that tastes vaguely sweet and appropriately sharp and reminds me that, no matter my crush on new flavors and influences, the cooking that stirs my soul often relies on the back-and-forth of leafy greens and smoked pig. Spooned onto a white plate, alongside a spreading lagoon of red beans and two mounds of white rice, the greens at Hurst

taste like a proof of concept for the generational transfer of knowledge.

"The ultimate in vegetal affection is called smothering," my friend Sara Roa-hen explains in *Gumbo Tales*. "The technique is as emotive as it is practical: to smother a vegetable is to play upon its most lovable attributes, like smothering a sweetheart in kisses." Rereading her book, on my return from New Orleans, I am reminded that labor- and time-intensive techniques such as smothering do not mask the taste of meats and vegetables. They coax flavor and sustenance. At Hurst, menu references to smothered this and smothered that broadcast devotion to this style of cooking—and to the women and men who depend on back-of-the-stove dishes to fuel their work.

Ten family members work the kitchen and dining room here. Lisa Hurst, one of Felton and Marilyn's daughters, will most likely be the Hurst who greets you. She doesn't smother new arrivals with affection. But when you step to the counter at the rear of the restaurant, her smile is wide and genuine. When she speaks, she stretches the endearment "baby" into a pleasant taffy of a diphthong. And if you're new to Hurst, she might play a free song on the jukebox as a sort of welcome.

On a recent Tuesday morning that song was Tucka's "Don't Make Me Beg," a nouveau soul ballad that sounds as timeless as Felton Hurst Sr.'s greens taste. By the time the song ended, the front parking lot was full, the side-street parking was gone, and the line for smothered ribs and greens was six deep. ☐

## Great Greens

Get a taste of Mississippi's finest

At the family-owned Bully's Restaurant in Jackson, Mississippi, Greta Brown Bully, her husband, Ballery Tyrone Bully, and their colleagues strip and stem collard greens. They core and chop cabbage. They wash grit from mustards and turnips. And they cook those greens down until they turn soft and velvety. In a moment when fresh greens cooked with care can be hard to find, Bully's over-delivers, serving three different versions daily. —J.T.E.

BY JOHN T. EDGE

# Smothered with Love

JUST OUTSIDE NEW ORLEANS' LOUIS ARMSTRONG AIRPORT, HURST RESTAURANT DISHES OUT EIGHTY YEARS OF FAMILY TRADITION—AND ONE DIVINE POT OF GREENS



Two women, bundled in puffy jackets, stand in the cold on the first true winter day in November. Beneath a backlit white sign that advertises po'boys, red beans and rice, and seafood dinners, under the eaves of a celadon brick building, they stamp their feet and peer through plate-glass windows painted with blue crabs and pink shrimp, waiting for one of the family members who work at Hurst Restaurant and Seafood to unbolt the front door and welcome the first lunch customers.

"I just found this place," says one of the women, who works surveillance at nearby Louis Armstrong international airport here in Kenner, Louisiana, a rapidly diversifying bedroom community of strip malls and tract homes about fifteen miles upriver from New Orleans. "This food tastes like the food I cook at home. Only I don't have to cook it. Have you tried those smothered ribs? Oh my God!"

This police officer and I have a couple of things in common. I too have become a fan of the smothered ribs that Felton Hurst Sr., a son of founders LJ and Katherine Hurst, cooks down on Fridays into threads of pork and slivers of onions and pools of gravy. And this place is also new to me. Unless you grew up in Kenner, Hurst Restaurant, alongside a tire repair shop on a highway marked by auto parts stores, taquerias, and soul-food takeaways, will probably be new to you.

Last year, Donald Link, the New Orleans chef who made his name interpreting Creole and Cajun cooking at Herbsaint and Cochon, and who first heard of Hurst while standing in line at an Airline Highway convenience store, sent me a picture of the menu, with its roster of daily specials, including those smothered ribs as well as smothered neck bones and smothered pork chops. A string of excited texts followed. "This is the real deal....This place is killing me. Finally."

Travel enough to eat, and cynicism creeps in on tip-



toes. You know it. You've seen it and tasted it. Or you've talked to someone else who has seen it or tasted it. A couple of recent trips to Hurst, for gravy-smothered pork cuts and long-stewed greens and beans, restored my faith in the possibilities of the open road and the promise of honest pot cooking.

Founded in nearby Shrewsbury in 1939 and doing business in Kenner since 1946, Hurst hasn't garnered much press coverage. But that's not always the best measure of restaurants like this one, which exist to serve regulars and excel at the kind of New Orleans repertory cooking that gets you meatballs and white beans on Thursdays, gumbo on Fridays, and po'boys stuffed with delicately fried shrimp every day.

Like Eddie's, the fabled Seventh Ward plate-lunch café founded by Eddie Baquet and his wife, Myrtle, and Willie Mae's Scotch House, the Tremé fried-chicken joint that rose to fame under the ownership of Willie Mae Seaton, Hurst began as a family barroom. LJ Hurst, who worked days as a cement finisher, laying foundations for the homes that mushroomed across 1950s Kenner, poured drinks at night. Katherine Hurst, who raised six boys and five girls in the restaurant, fed her customers what she fed her family. Look closely at the black-and-white portrait mounted next to the kitchen pass, and you see her standing tall alongside her husband, demurely clutching her purse. Now ninety-four, Kath-

Clockwise from far left: A smothered pork chop with greens and rice; Marilyn Hurst and her husband, Felton Hurst Sr.; Hurst Restaurant's well-worn service bell; a customer settles in for lunch; family members Lashantia Lumar, Lanell Lumar, and Lisa Hurst; one of the restaurant's painted windows.