



Introduction

*G*EOGRAPHY DRAMATICALLY impacts our lives. In its own way, it becomes part of our genetic makeup. It is as if the soils of where we grow up run in our veins along with our blood. It helps define us.

And that is especially true when it comes to the South. There is a definite sense of place at the Southern table, as food has always been a very important part of the Southern identity. The South in many ways exists as we know it today, because of the evolution of its relationship with food, and how that food is prepared. And the proximity of Memphis to the Mississippi Delta, called “the most Southern place on earth”, creates its own powerful geographic overlay on the traditions of its food.

Food is the most universal of all experiences. It represents our most direct interaction with the earth. And food is about tradition, and authenticity in cooking comes from preserving those traditions, passed down through stories and recipes.

In this collection of culinary stories about the locally owned restaurants of Memphis, and the creative chefs and owners behind each of them, you will meet the people who on a daily basis preserve the unique traditions of the Bluff City palate, while also artfully expanding the cuisine of the city through their own

interpretations of what Southern food is and can be. From iconic Bluff City establishments (owned and operated by second, third, and even fourth generations of the same family) to new homegrown cookeries, from casual to refined, from timeless to modern, and from historic to emerging, what is presented in these pages could be called a culinary postcard of the city. However, a more accurate description may be an epicurean literary tale with an engaging cast of characters that plays out over twenty-eight chapters.

Within these stories you will be reminded that the phrase “farm to table” is more than just a marketing slogan, but rather is an entrepreneurial philosophy embraced by many chefs across the city, where farmers and their ability to bring forth abundance from the earth are not just recognized, but honored and respected.

Those you will meet in this book are in their own way applying individual creative artistry to the culinary terroir of Memphis. Each recognizes that taste is a way to understand pleasure, and they are committed to delivering such through inviting dishes that are ever-evolving, while at the same retaining their traditional roots. The end result of the “local only” gastronomic expedition on which you are about to embark is a vibrant and eclectic foodtopia that offers up a kaleidoscope of flavors.