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Rich: Duke's Mayonnaise makes one glorious macaroni and cheese

Dixie Divas

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It's a sure thing that when family gathers at my house for Thanksgiving dinner, there will certainly be a hot, gooey dish of homemade macaroni and cheese on the table.

It is my Thanksgiving specialty, though it really isn't mine because I secured the recipe long ago from Aunt Ozelle. Over the years, I have made it on televised cooking shows, given it to magazines that asked for my favorite recipe and posted it to my Web site where it won rave reviews.

In short, I have shared its glorious glory across this nation.

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When Aunt Ozelle shared her recipe for what we call Glorious Macaroni and Cheese, she was specific about one ingredient.

"It calls for mayonnaise," she pointed out, "I always use Duke's." She shrugged casually, tossing up her hands. Since Aunt Ozelle is wedded only to the law and gospel of the scriptures and little else, I paid no attention. I figured any ol' mayo would do. So I bought expensive mayonnaise because I wanted to make the best possible.

Although Glorious Macaroni and Cheese, with sharp cheese, sautéed onions and pimentos and cream of mushroom soup - the ubiquitous ingredient of Southern cooking - claimed whatever fame it has through me, mine never tasted as good as hers.

I couldn't figure out the difference then last year as I was preparing Thanksgiving dinner, it hit me like a bolt of lightning.

"Duke's mayonnaise!" I exclaimed to myself. "That's it!"

I rushed to the grocery store only to find that they had put Duke's mayonnaise on sale and sold out. I was soon to discover that the brand has a cult following in the South. Somehow, I had missed out on that.

To another store I went, bought the last jar on the shelf and went home to make it with the mayonnaise developed by Mrs. Eugenia Duke of Greenville, S.C., in 1917 then sold by her to the Sauer Company of Richmond, Va., in 1929. Over the years, not one ingredient has been changed from Mrs. Duke's original recipe and it is still made in a plant in Greenville.

Not to one soul did I mention the change in mayonnaise brands, not expecting anyone to notice. However, it caused quite a stirring around the table.

Aunt Kathleen spoke first. "Goodness! This Glorious Macaroni and Cheese is fantastic."

"This is the best you've ever made," Mama said.

I set down the pitcher of sweet tea and folded my arms. "I changed mayonnaise." And, I've stuck with it.

Thanks to Mrs. Duke, a smart Southern woman, it's going to be another delicious Thanksgiving at my house.

Hmmm. I can taste it now.

Glorious Macaroni and Cheese

8-ounce box elbow macaroni

1 can cream of mushroom soup

1 cup Duke's mayonnaise

1/4 cup diced jarred pimentos, drained

1/4 cup onions, diced

1 pound sharp cheddar cheese, grated

Cook macaroni for 8 minutes in boiling water. Drain and set aside.

Sauté pimentos and onions lightly in 3 tablespoons margarine. Transfer sautéed mixture to large bowl and add remaining ingredients. Mix and season with salt to taste. Pour into greased casserole dish.

Bake for 25 minutes at 350 degrees.

- Recipe courtesy Ronda Rich and Aunt Ozelle