



Cornbread Nation **6**

The Best of Southern Food Writing

Edited by **Brett Anderson**

General Editor, **John T. Edge**

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Flooded

Jennifer Justus

My editor wanted a story on banana pudding.

People need a break from the flood, she said. You're helping them by giving them that.

I didn't believe her.

Sitting at my desk with stacks of cookbooks, less than a week after the flood of May 2010, I couldn't keep my eyes on the Word document where I should have been writing about tricks for perfectly peaked meringue or which wafers taste best.

No, my eyes were fixed on Facebook instead.

I read that Jeremy, the chef at Tayst, had made gumbo for a team of volunteers helping Marne Duke, a tireless supporter of the local food community who had lost her home. I saw pictures of food that Tandy and his staff at City House delivered to the Red Cross. My friend Michelle even helped a stranger named Mary clean out the Madison home she had lived in for fifty years.

My city was still underwater. Friends needed help. And I was supposed to write about banana pudding?

Then I remembered my grandfather. He ate banana pudding every chance he could get.

A tall thin man with a booming voice, I had seen him clear out half a casserole of the stuff, scooping it into a soup bowl rather than a dessert plate. He ate it at his sisters' houses. He ate it at restaurants. He made it at home. But I also saw him eat it at a makeshift table of plywood laid across two sawhorses in the middle of a flooded hardware store. It was 1990, and the family business that his father had started in the 1930s—and that he sold to my parents in 1981—had just been carried away.

The plywood table was a drop-off spot for donated food. Church ladies

