



THE

Spicy Story

OF

NNK

Northern Neck Sauce

By Dianne Scison

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THIS IS NOT BARBECUE SAUCE, OR HOT SAUCE, IT IS NORTHERN NECK SAUCE, WITH BOTH HOT AND MILD VERSIONS. IT PAIRS EQUALLY WELL WITH CRABS AND OYSTERS AS IT DOES WITH CHICKEN AND PORK. IT ADDS THE PERFECT EDGE FOR A BLOODY MARY, WHILE ALSO GIVING LAYERS TO BRUNSWICK STEW, MEATLOAF, AND BURGERS.

Something hot is cooking up in kitchens across the country. It is new, it is bold, and it is the award-winning culmination of one family's promise to their elders; to carry on a secret sauce recipe that is redefining spicy foods.

It started decades ago in Lancaster County, Virginia, at Crosby's Snack Bar on Mary Ball Road. Opened in the 1950s by Elevern "William" Crosby, Sr., customers from far and wide bought his famous chicken sandwiches. Still regarded by many as the best served in the country, this was no regular patty. It was, instead, a whole quarter breast, including the wing and bones, served up on thick white bread. Customers pulled the tender meat from the bone and dipped it in Crosby's famous sauce. That sauce kept customers coming for years to come, as the business stayed family owned and operated for over 50 years. When the Snack Bar closed, those very few family members who knew the way, kept the secret sauce as a treat, making batches for special occasions. It could have stayed there, a family recipe in a rural part of Virginia, had it not been for one man's vision.

Calvin Parker, Jr., Crosby's grandson, grew up helping his grandfather make the sauce. He watched the hard work that was put in and saw first-hand the importance of responsibility, treating customers like family, and working like tomorrow depended on today. He always had it in mind to produce the sauce commercially. "One day," however, never seemed to come. Then, from across time and impossibility, Calvin got a message from his late grandfather.

"I was asleep one night and a voice came in my dream - clear as day - and Crosby said, "Just do it," Calvin recalled, explaining that when he first awoke, the dream was so vivid

- but it was just a dream, right? Later that day, one of the Parkers' friends asked about the sauce, and everything clicked.

By this time, the recipe was over 60 years old. It had been 18 years since Calvin's uncle, Bill, helped teach Calvin's wife and business partner, Angela, how to make the delicious sauce, and the trio were known to have it on hand for special events or holidays. Bill, who has since passed, is very missed by both Calvin and Angela and remains a well-loved figure in their lives.

For Calvin, the dreams kept coming, and people kept asking for the sauce. At that time, Angela was in getting her MBA from Virginia Commonwealth University, and she started using the sauce in her assignments. "I had the fundamental business concept that I was learning, and I had the sauce, so I just made it mesh," Angela said, adding that while she knew there was no way they could fill the shoes of Uncle Bill, Crosby or his wife, Iris, - the Parkers would do their best.

Their best, it turns out, is exactly that. The Best. They started with their Richmond kitchen, transforming it into a compliant cooking area that meets stringent safety and health regulations, exceeding the standards to become part of Virginia's Finest - the highest bar for small food businesses in the commonwealth. Then, the process of building the sauce began. They took the recipe and started making slight changes to bring it as close to what they felt was originally served.

"We decided to name it Northern Neck Sauce," Calvin said,



explaining that they wanted to honor the rich history of the region and the people who supported his grandfather's eatery, and continue to support the new sauce's journey.

From the start, the Parkers hustled. It takes 12 hours of hard work to make a batch of around 100 small bottles. In the beginning, they would take the sauce out to friends and on the streets to get people's opinions.

Customers constantly ask Calvin about the secret to the sauce. His reply? "The people made the recipe. They tell me what they like," Calvin said, noting that he has taken the advice of so many during this journey, and that both he and his wife are extremely grateful to all those – their angels and their critics - who have helped along the way. With bright eyes, Calvin recalled how incredulous he was when a small, older lady once told him, "It wasn't hot enough!"

It has not always been easy cooking. There were times that, defeated, they had to throw entire batches away. They learned that the actual pots and pans they used, whether aluminum or stainless steel, have a noticeable effect on the final product. They got rid of peanut oil, and the finished product is more nutritious, gluten free, cholesterol free, and virtually fat free.

"We take pride in this sauce. We pray. If anything is off, we toss it," Angela said. Both Calvin and Angela work full-time jobs outside of making the sauce. After a hard day, they put everything aside to team up in the kitchen. It is a breathtaking relationship that proves the strength of love and patience, and it is imbued into the final product. From the bottling to the labelling and packaging – the Parkers do it all themselves.

"It is a labor of love," Angela explained, adding that this was her husband's dream. "I am here to support his dream. I am here to make sure that what he wants to do with the sauce, I encourage. I am his number one cheerleader."

So, what is so unique about this sauce? Probably the fact that you can use it for just about everything - and therein lies the feat the Parker's have accomplished. This is not barbecue sauce, or hot sauce, it is Northern Neck Sauce, with both hot and mild versions. It pairs equally well with crabs and

oysters as it does with chicken and pork. It adds the perfect edge for a Bloody Mary, while also giving layers to Brunswick stew, meatloaf, and burgers. According to the label, it can serve as anything from a dipping sauce to a finishing sauce or marinade. It is truly that distinctive.

Overcoming doubts and with hope in their hearts, the Parkers decided, at the last minute, to enter the 2022 Virginia Food & Beverage Expo. They had been nervous about their entry. The competition had been on hold since 2018 due to the pandemic, and all the vendors were seasoned and had been preparing for years to be there.

Judges went table to the table, and the Parkers started to feel a buzz in the air. Lives were about to change. They watched Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin approach the microphone and announce 2022 Best New Food Winner to be Northern Neck Sauce!

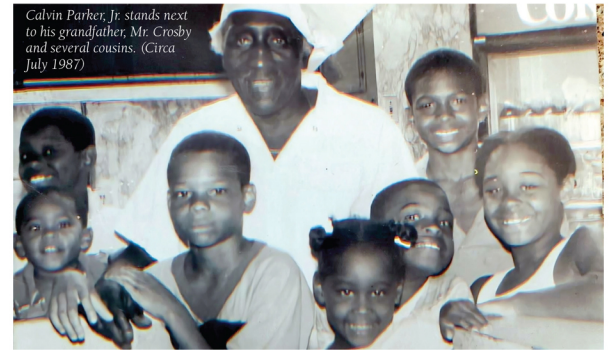
"When Youngkin called out our name, I started crying," Angela admits, noting that their hearts just about stopped. "All that hard work. There were 300 other people doing this for years, and we won." Smiling, Calvin said that it all goes back to the dream, and the work ethic instilled in him by one man. "I knew it was going to be good. My grandfather cooked in front of a thousand people, and a thousand people loved his sauce," he said.

The Parkers have been tested during their journey. They have missed time with friends and family while they poured their hearts into their endeavor. For the past year, they have barely slept. Calvin and Angela have not paid themselves a dime for their efforts. They put everything they have right back into making Northern Neck Sauce bigger and better. They have gone from their premiere on Mother's Day 2021, to currently being on the shelves of 28 stores and counting. Shoppers at Miss Mary's Seafood in Lancaster (the first store to carry Northern Neck Sauce) and at Ace Hardware in Colonial Beach or Warsaw pluck up the bottles. The sauce sells out almost as soon as it comes in.

Northern Neck Sauce has evolved into something that is only outpaced by the Parkers' dreams and drive. From its humble beginnings in Lancaster County, Calvin and Angela have taken their



Mrs. William and Iris Crosby. (Circa 1978 est.)



Calvin Parker, Jr. stands next to his grandfather, Mr. Crosby and several cousins. (Circa July 1987)





Calvin holds the trophy for the 2022 Best New Food Product at the Richmond Convention Center. (March 31, 2022)



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vision and made it reality. The sauce is exquisitely unique. It blends an old country feel with vibrant and exciting layers and spicy nuances.

Pushing for greatness, the duo has added online sales to their website as well as on Amazon. They offer sauces to repeat customers from as far away as California, Washington State, and Alabama. They sell out at Stratford Hall events, as well as the Heathsville Strawberry, Carytown Watermelon, and Urbanna Oyster Festivals.

“I tell everyone, there are a thousand sauces out there, a million, but give me three seconds, just three seconds, to taste my sauce, and it will change your life!” Calvin said earnestly. His wife agreed, adding that every bottle was literally from their family to yours.

This holiday season, the Parkers are planning to stock shelves with limited edition holiday boxes, filled with all sorts of goodies, so that customers can gift them to loved ones. They are also giving thanks for the support of the community, and the endless strength lent to them by their own family, including Calvin’s mother, Gail, and the extended Scott and Crosby families. For more information on the sauce, its history, or upcoming events, go to NorthernNeckSauce.com or follow them on Facebook. <#>



Inset: Governor Glenn Youngkin (center) holds a bottle of the winning sauce with Angela Parker, and her son, Justin.