

**Transcript for The Who's Dat Phat Girl Podcast - With Brooke Hoover**  
**SEASON 2 EPISODE #21- Red Beans & Rice Mondays**  
**or, Woes of a Private School Kid & Her School Cafeteria**

Hey y'all, I'm Brooke Hoover. A Louisiana native, actor, writer and comedian. I've lost 100 pounds through diet and exercise or shall I say "lifestyle changes". My twenty year and counting health journey has taught me that just like taking a diet pill for weight loss, body positivity doesn't magically happen overnight. I'm working on re-gaining my self esteem and re-kindling my love affair with Cajun and Southern comfort food in a healthier way all the while juggling eating as clean as I can, re-establishing myself in the entertainment industry which, as we know, is historically fat phobic all the while showing my inner phat girl some love - that's phat with a PH - pretty hot and tempting. Let me tell y'all a tale or two.

As a kid, I wouldn't say I was a picky eater. But, when it came to my lunchtime repertoire I got easily bored of cold sandwiches and my mom told me Lunchables were the devil (to those of you who've seen "The Waterboy", yes, like Kathy Bates' character, most Cajun mommas really do tell their kids that most pre-packaged food that all the WASPy kids are eating are the devil.) So, enter the school lunch time woes. I went to a small school that didn't have a cafeteria so we had to bring our lunches every day. I put Momma's creativity to the test because of my discerning palate and also my OCD kicking in when it came to color and texture.

I saw other kids at school doing creative things with their lunches. I tried to steal ideas from their lunchboxes. But, those creative ideas involved pickled okra which, at first glance, I thought were pickled lizards. Due to my enormous fear of reptiles, I ran the other way before I could learn more about the delicious briny crunch that was oh so Southern. Besides, I thought okra was only something you put in gumbo. Because, as my Nanny says, "if there's no okra in it, then it's not really gumbo." The same friend also had soup that she brought in a red plaid Thermos (which is probably worth a pretty penny today with its bad ass vintage self). But I couldn't imagine soup would remain piping hot for five hours nor could I imagine sipping tepid soup (nor was I yet cultured enough to know about gazpacho.) Alas, first world problems.

So, being a creative genius who's never had much time for B.S., Momma decided to just start delivering my lunch to me every day. Every single day. Momma was basically the 1980's Tab sipping red lipstick wearing version of your modern day disgruntled millennial Door Dash driver. Each morning before she'd drop me off at carpool, Momma would say, "Baby, what do you want for lunch today? Hurry up. It's almost time for you to jump out." Oh, the choices. I could choose to have her go home and make me something, go to my Maw Maw's house and bring whatever wonderful Cajun comfort food Maw Maw was cooking that day, get take-out from one of the many wondrous restaurants South Louisiana has to offer or even pick me up some good ole fashioned fast food (Burger King and Wendy's being my drive thru's of choice at the time.) So many choices, so little time in the carpool line.

Before y'all assume I'm a spoiled little brat who made her momma do everything for her, don't worry. Now that I'm an adult, I've returned the favor. I allow Momma to live with me in beautiful New Jersey (hey, it *is* the Garden State!) just minutes away from the best city in the world (NYC represent!) where she gets to make my bed, do my laundry and blend my green smoothies daily.

While the other kids at school were forced to eat soggy PBJ sandwiches and processed meat, I had the luxury of getting fresh, made to order take-out served up by Momma Anne. I got to eat like a king - not a queen because eating a lot isn't feminine, supposedly but back in the day when there were kings and queens wasn't that the time period where rotund women were actually considered PHAT with a PH by society? Y'all following me? Anyways, I digress. Momma brought me food that was never tepid, always piping hot: from Magnolia Cafe's baked potato soup to Momma's famous roast and green beans to Maw Maw's shrimp etouffe with sometimes the occasional Burger King chicken tenders served up in that little cardboard box that the graphic designers in the mid 1980's thought would look extra wholesome in a faux basket weave design with a fat folk art looking chicken on the front (does anyone remember that? Anyone? Bueller?) It was also a perfect excuse for me, an only child with severe separation anxiety to make sure I got to see her momma mid-day, every day. And, maybe that was the best reason of all.

Until one day when Momma and I royally screwed up. I forgot to tell her that we were having an extra special presentation (not to be confused with the special presentation where two rangers brought in two boa constrictors from the Baton Rouge Zoo and let them slither around on the floor, hence my insane fear of snakes on the floor.) Well, the special presentation happened during our regular lunch hour, moving our usual lunch hour forty five minutes ahead of schedule. So, while all the kids eat their pickled okra, tepid soup and soggy sandwiches, I'm sitting there lunch-less and having anxiety worrying about Momma's whereabouts...and my soup du jour. A friend offers me her Andes mint from her Lunchables and I say, "Thank you. But, I can't have it. It's the devil." With a growling stomach, I am ushered off to the presentation (I forgot what it was about. It clearly wasn't as memorable as the snakes on the floor.)

Mid-presentation one of my favorite teachers whispers for me and I really think I'm in trouble. But, she sneaks me into the teachers' lounge and says my momma brought my food and left it in the lounge for me. I eat my baked potato with chili and cheese from Wendy's (healthy fast food, y'all). I am happy to finally eat but enraged I didn't get to see Momma. My piping hot, ready to order lunch doesn't taste quite as good without getting to hug Momma before digging in.

I must take a quick pause to say bless all those teachers and the principal's hearts (and I don't mean that in the usual Southern facetious way. I mean it from the heart that I'm blessing theirs from) for allowing Momma and I get by with our special lunch-capade for five plus years.

However, when sixth grade hits, because my parents are great parents but also

horrible people, they make me go to a new fancier more rigid school that has uniforms and a cafeteria. I am now forced to wear gingham polyester and a white collared shirt instead of my usual fashion show of my beloved Gitano, Espirt and Spumoni brands that all the girls wore in the mid 1980's. You can hear all about the horror in my other podcast episode entitled, appropriately, "Uniforms." And, even worse, I now am forced to deal with the dreaded "where do I sit at lunch?" conundrum. To this day, I am still traumatized when I am stuck in the New York City lunch time rush and I have to find a seat at a Panera - which is almost as hard as finding a Panera itself in New York City.

Worse than finding a seat at lunch was the food at the cafeteria. Even worse than that was that I couldn't bring food in from the outside...or see Momma. Now, there was a time in high school where I did a fad diet and snuck in Slim Fast and carrots. Some of my friends sat with me in solidarity while I quickly chugged and chomped my lunch in the locker hall. But, this wasn't that time.

People from all over Baton Rouge - and from all over I mean the Junior League of East Baton Rouge Parish - talked about how my new school had the best school cafeteria around. Probably because all those diamond clad basic beasts volunteered there to feel like they were doing good for the world. Well, I wasn't buying it. Literally. My parents were. School lunch was paid for in full upfront with tuition. I think that was a money making scheme and a crock of B.S. (which probably tasted the same as the Crock Pot of food they were feeding us). Even at the age of eleven, I knew a scam when I saw one. But one advantage was that I never had to carry around lunch money or get bullied to give it to other kids. But don't y'all worry. I got bullied for things other than lunch money.

Quick pause y'all for a fun Louisiana culture fact: Mondays are the day to make red beans and rice. Why, you ask? Because Monday is washing day! (By "washing day" I mean it's the day we do laundry. I just thought washing day sounded more authentic.) Laundry takes so damn long and takes so much of your time (because all of us Cajun people have to use a washing board to clean our drawers, of course) what better to cook then a set it and forget it type of dish like a pot of red beans and rice with Andouille sausage?!?! While listening to a certain Who's Dat Phat Girl podcast, coincidence that a new episode comes out on laundry and red bean Mondays? Insert the Cajun French expression for I THINK NOT, right here, Cher!

Cafeteria at my school lunch fact: they have a genius plan to serve red beans and rice every Monday. Red beans and rice is usually a wonderful dish. Especially when my Momma is making them. But, when you're walking to home room at 8:00 in the morning in humidity that's already reached one hundred and ten percent, the smell of Teen Spirit and red beans and rice cooking in the cafeteria are enough to make you want to hurl. And, by "you" I mean me. And no, this nauseous feeling wasn't because I was pregnant. I was a frizzy haired fat chick, no teen pregnancy opportunities for this girl.

The red beans and rice at the school cafeteria compared to my Maw Maw's my momma's or even a Yankee who never set foot in the South were like prison food at the end of the month. And if you must ask, I do know a thing or two about prison. I've binge watched *Orange is the New Black*. And, in high school we went on a field trip to Angola prison. But, maybe I'll save that for another podcast episode. (Give y'all a lil' something to look forward to!)

School cafeteria red beans and rice went like this: the rice was hard and mushy at the same time. The rice texture is supposed to be like clouds - as if angels cooked every single grain themselves. The beans were completely flavorless and the hull had the texture of eating a piece of candy with the wrapper still left on it. And the sausage wasn't Andouille. If you don't know what Andouille sausage is, [Wiki search it](#), I'm fixing to get to the point and I can't stop now. I will just quickly tell you every single restaurant I've ever been in outside of Louisiana, including the Cheers bar in Boston as in where everybody knows your name always spells andouille incorrectly and that really makes Momma mad. The school cafeteria sausage looked more like inverted nipples than spicy, delicious pork or chicken by-product.

One extra hot and humid Monday morning as I walked by the cafeteria stench on the way to home room, I threw up in my mouth a little. I'd had enough of this. That afternoon Momma picked me up at carpool with an Evian and a hand carved smoked turkey sandwich (smoked in my uncle G's own smoker) waiting for me, I told Momma it was child abuse and Fascism for me to be expected to eat that cafeteria garbage or even smell it for one more day. So, Momma unzipped her car phone in a briefcase (reserved *only* for emergencies) and got on the phone with the lady who ran the cafeteria. We will call her Madame M. Now that I think about it, she may have resembled Red from *Orange is the New Black*. If you haven't watched *OITNB*, why do you hate females paving the way? But, also, if you don't watch it, Red is a very tough Russian woman who takes her food very seriously...and she has red hair...if you hadn't guessed. Madame M said Momma was more than welcome to join us for lunch one day and try the food herself if I thought it was so damn bad. Momma got off the phone and told me that Madame M sounded offended. For a second, I thought Momma was going to side with Madame M. But, then she said Madame M also sounded like a Damn Yankee (which meant she was probably from North Louisiana not South Louisiana and hence a sub par chef to our Cajun relatives...or she was the devil.)

Momma said, "Baby, I'm coming for lunch tomorrow. I need to pick out an appropriate outfit for the occasion." I squeezed her and said, "Momma I'm just glad you can join me for lunch." Momma may have looked at me suspicious-like. Or, she may have had fluff from our Pomeranian in her eye.

The next day 11:55am rolls around and all the kids are so excited because Momma is coming to visit. Aside from the bullies, I'd managed to win over a decent amount of the student body with my jokes, my hair bows and my beautiful singing voice as the lead in all the school plays (okay that last part is a lie). See, Momma helped me

gain popularity because she was the quintessential cool mom who cursed, allowed kids to curse around her and road around town with a parrot on who shoulder who also cussed. So, Momma arrives five minutes to high noon and has to get in line with all the rest of us plebeian middle schoolers. Madame M just happens to be walking around the cafeteria wearing a smile instead of her usual smirk and hair net. She spots Momma. Madame M asks Momma and me along with the six friends who deemed me worthy to sit at their lunch table to skip the line. We are served by smiling women in Talbots blazers who plop food onto our plates: chicken nuggets (peasants compared to the royalty on the Burger King menu), mashed potatoes (instant, therefore basically gruel), rice pilaf (from Mondays left-over red beans and rice. I spot an inverted nipple in there) and peas and carrots (clearly from a can.)

At the end of the serving line is a multiple-tiered dessert serving area. The only dessert at the school cafeteria ever worth anything were the peanut butter bars. Which I may or may not still think about to this day. But, that doesn't support my thesis statement! And, today the dessert is blueberry crumble - a gelatinous concoction with crumbled granola on top. I'm thinking this is perfect. Momma is already wincing at the entree and sides (she probably just noticed the inverted nipple in the rice pilaf) and now she has to come up close and personal with the blueberry crumble. The blueberry crumble, much like the strawberry, apple or cherry fruit crumble may *sound* edible. Heck, it may even sound *good* to the untrained foodie. But, fruit crumbles at the school cafeteria are notorious for having the consistency of war food. And, if y'all are questioning how I know what war food is, well let's just say my dad is a history buff who was always watching war movies when I was a kid. I know a thing or two about 'Nam. Okay?

We all sit down at the table and making sure Momma gets to sit at the head of the table. One of my friends, we'll call her Feather says, "Hey Brooke. Show your Momma the blueberry crumble magic trick!" Another girl (who used to bully me but who's now our friend because I made enough fun of her for her to laugh at me and decide I'm cool) says, "Yeah it's so gloopy and glue like and nasty that it just kind of defies gravity." All eyes are on me. I flip over the gelatinous blueberry crumble to show Momma that it is in fact made of war food and super glue. The whole cafeteria - or at least table eight goes silent for thirty seconds. Feather, the bully girl and friends start counting down as the blueberry crumble is still holding strong, "ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two..."

SPLAT! The damn blueberry crumble falls on the plate just milliseconds before time is called. She was holding strong for 29 seconds y'all. I swear I see Madame M peeking her head out from the back of the cafeteria with her beady eyes and rubbing her hands together.

I expect Momma to say something like "well, Brooke Anne, I guess it's not as bad as you said it was. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. There are starving children around the world you privileged little beast." But, instead Momma looks at the fallen blueberry crumble and she says, "Regardless, that is some nasty #\$\$ \*@# \$ y'all" And the whole cafeteria (or table eight at least) roars with laughter. It's not like the

visit really did any good because the food doesn't change for the better. Because of policy and because the school knows that despite my obsession with Judaism and BaRFTY - Baton Rouge Federation of Temple Youth I'm not really Jewish. So, I can't say I require to bring my own Kosher meals. I'm still forced to eat the cafeteria food and my parents are still forced to pay it with my tuition.

However, I will always remember that day when Momma visited my scary grown up school. It was like the days of yore at my hippie dippie elementary school when I literally got to see her and hug her morning, noon and night. The day the blueberry crumble actually crumbled, I may have been a big bad pre-teen who was finally able to master making friends and finding a table to sit at. But, I got to show my Momma that I still needed her. I'm 42 years old and I still need my momma. We may grow up, but we will always need our mommas. One of Momma and my favorite things to do is go to Panera for lunch. And, now we can share in our anxiety over finding a table to sit at.

Thanks so much for listening, y'all. It is my hope to inspire, uplift and entertain you with this Who's Dat Phat Girl podcast. So, if you're HUNGRY for more, you can book me to speak or perform my solo show that inspired this podcast Phat Girl Costumes written by yours truly and directed by my best bud Brian Lady at your virtual or in person event. Please visit [Brookehoover.com/fluffybuttproductions](http://Brookehoover.com/fluffybuttproductions) or email me at [contactbrookehoover@gmail.com](mailto:contactbrookehoover@gmail.com) for more information. And, let's follow each other on instagram - I'm @Br00keH00ver and those 0's are not the letter O but they're ZEROS. Not because I want to be a size 0 but because I guess I'm just so clever with my late 90s Yahoo! self

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