



Chefs Share: Childhood Memories That Inspired San Diego's Top Dishes

Our earliest memories of food shape what we eat, how we cook, and for some skills chefs, what we do for work. I asked some of San Diego's best chefs to share their favorite childhood dishes and how those memories have inspired their current menus.

BACON-WRAPPED MEATLOAF



Bill Sauer – Courtesy Photo

Bill Sauer of The Duck Dive takes inspiration from his mother, who he says “was a very good cook. She made basic food, but always created everything from scratch. Dishes like Salisbury Steak, meatloaf and cinnamon rolls were her specialty.” With a nod to his mom’s meatloaf, he includes the dish on his menus. “I have been doing meatloaf for a few years in restaurants, using basically my mother’s recipe with a few small changes. I wrap the whole loaf in bacon, cook it, slice it and grill it on the charbroiler. Just like my mom did for me, I serve it on mashed potatoes with carrots, except I use baby carrots roasted in black pepper and brown sugar. My mother always topped off her meatloaf with a ketchup glaze, and I like to do a smoked tomato jus with fried onion strings.”

FRIED CHICKEN



John Hamaker – Courtesy Photo

The Rail's John Hamaker says his favorite childhood dish was “My mother’s fried chicken! You could see the love and care she would put into the meal, and you could definitely taste it with every bite. She’d spend the whole day getting everything ready – absolutely everything was from scratch. It’s honestly some of the best fried chicken I’ve ever had, and I’ve had a lot of fried chicken. To this day, it’s still what I ask for on my birthday!” While the talented chef can make almost any culinary delight, he struggles to recreate his childhood fried chicken, sharing “It’s tough to recreate your mom’s cooking!”