



Linda Green, aka Miss Linda, the Ya Ka Mein Lady

BY SUE STRACHAN

YOU ALWAYS REMEMBER YOUR FIRST TIME – AND WITH ya ka mein, it was no different. I had eyed it suspiciously for a while, much like sucking crawfish heads. Ya ka mein, to me, had a decidedly ramen-noodle-college-dorm-food vibe. But everyone kept on telling me how good it was, and it was hard to resist the woman who made it. So I broke down, and while I watched Miss Linda create her signature dish, I realized that I would soon be a convert.

A New Orleans native and a culinary icon, Linda Green, aka Miss Linda, has fed almost everyone in the New Orleans – as well as a good portion of tourists who have come to a number of festivals. I know that every Thursday at Ogden After Hours (I work at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art), I count myself among those who savor her ya ka mein and soul food dishes. It was here that I had that first introduction to ya ka mein – a distinctly New Orleans dish with origins that can change as much as the storyteller. Is it Asian? Is it a mix of traditions? Is it a New Orleans dish? Does it really cure hangovers, hence the nick-

At a Glance

PROFESSION: Chef **AGE:** I am ageless! **RESIDES:** Central City **BORN/RAISED:** Central City (11th Ward) **FAMILY:** Two daughters, Nikhita Green and Katrina Green; one son, Mansfield Patterson; nine grandchildren. **EDUCATION:** Graduate of Booker T. Washington High School, I went to Delgado Community College to take business classes. **FAVORITE BOOK:** I read anything and everything, but I really like romances, those with history – especially New Orleans' **FAVORITE MOVIE:** I love old movies, particularly *The Thin Man*, *After the Thin Man* and all the other ones with Myrna Loy and William Powell. Bette Davis is a favorite. **FAVORITE TV SHOW:** I watch old movies on Turner Classic Movies

channel. But I really like "I Love Lucy." I wake up at 4 a.m., thank the Lord, then turn the TV on to "Lucy." **FAVORITE FOOD:** Oysters – all types of ways. **LEAST FAVORITE FOOD:** Coconut **FAVORITE MUSIC/MUSICIAN:** I know some people aren't going to like this, but I like Chris Brown. I also like Shamarr Allen, Trombone Shorty, the Soul Rebels and the Hot 8 Brass Band – I was the first person to employ them, and when they're in town, they play for my second-line. I'm the Soul Rebels' official caterer in town. **FAVORITE VACATION:** It's been a while since I've had a vacation. But I really liked Lake Tahoe. I went in the winter ... the snow was beautiful. I even put skis on, but just to take a photo. **HOBBY:** Cooking! I dream about cooking. I dream of shrimp, crab and all kinds of stuff.

name "Old Sober?" While foodie scholars ponder endlessly on these questions, I know what I'll do in the meantime: eat and enjoy.

Cooking had always been a part of Miss Linda's life – as a child learning from her mother, helping her mother with cooking and selling her ya ka mein and other food, working for the Orleans Parish School Board in food service. Then Hurricane Katrina hit, and in the aftermath she wasn't called back to work. As Miss Linda already had a following from selling her food part-time at festivals, local events, parties and second-lines, she made the decision to become a full-time culinary entrepreneur.

Her menu consists of home cooking, soul food, New Orleans classics: ya ka mein; pork chop sandwiches; shrimp and crabmeat dressing; gumbo; red beans and rice; bread pudding; jambalaya; curry shrimp pasta; peach cobbler; sweet potato pie; and greens – "Taj Mahal says he has to have my greens when he's in town," she says.

And after years of bringing her soul food to us hungry souls, TV, chefs and food personalities have come-a-calling: "Chopped" (which she won) Anthony Bourdain's "No Reservations," the History Channel with Larry the Cable Guy, chef Jeffrey Saad for "United Tastes of America," as ☐

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City Park Salad Granny Smith apples, Stilton blue,
applewood bacon

*denotes a \$4 upcharge / menu subject to change

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Photo by: Emily Smith

well as keeping it schooled at home with appearances on the local TV stations.

There have also been phone calls from other shows, but Miss Linda has a keen sense of what works for her and what doesn't.

Craving some ya ka mein, yet? Visit *TheYaKaMeinLady.com*. Or, you can find her on Thursdays at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art during its Ogden After Hours, the Freret Street Market and festivals such as New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, Essence and Cajun-Zydeco, to name a few. She is in the process of fixing her food truck, which should be up and running some time soon – then she'll be all over town, and there will be no excuse not to have it!

How do you classify your food? It's soul food ... comfort food ... street food.

You never went to culinary school – who taught you to cook? My mother, Shirley Green, taught me everything I know. I was taught by the best.

Tell me about your mother. She worked for the Orleans Parish School Board, which I did as well. Mom worked in the food service department – she was one of the best cooks. I learned a lot – she taught me well.

Mom would feed the block. She would also make the food for Bean Brothers Bar, but it was called something else then. They said that you had to visit Shirley before you went into the bar! She had fried fish, potato salad, stewed hen and ya ka mein, which always sold out.

I see your signature dish spelled a number of different ways. How do you spell it? Ya ka mein

I know you aren't going to give me your recipe for ya ka mein, but I'm curious about what goes into it. I boil down a chuck roast to broth, but you can use any meat that you want. Then there's the chopped green onions, a

half hard-boiled egg per portion and spaghetti noodles. Top with hot sauce and soy sauce, which gives it the Asian twist. I can also do a vegetarian broth.

My ya ka mein is the same recipe as my mother's.

So I've heard a variety of versions about how ya ka mein was created. The first is that the Chinese created it when they came to the U.S. [back in the 19th century]. The second version is that the black soldiers who fought in the Korean War got a taste of Asian food, brought it here, then a connection was made with the black bars. Something pretty unique was created here.

Are your recipes written down? No, I do everything by memory. My mother taught me; now I'm teaching my family. However, I'm doing a cookbook.

You went on Anthony Bourdain's show – and I know a number of people who are intimidated by him. What is your take on him? Everybody says he is this and he is that. But he's really cool.

Is there anything that you want to learn how to cook? I know how to cook in large volume. I want to go to a cooking class to learn how to how to make dishes in smaller portions.

You mention how much your family is involved, and how it's important to carry on your family's culinary tradition. I'm working hard so I can leave them something. My daughters are involved, and my grandchildren are, too. I want to keep it going on. All my grandchildren know how to make the food.

Who have your mentors been? Adam Shipley, Quint Davis, Michelle Nugent, Renee Tervalon, Libra LaGrone, Rhonda Finley, Ben Gersh, Poppy Tooker, Judy Walker and my mother, Shirley Green.

True Confession: I like to lay down and think. Something come up, I like to rest and think about it. ✨