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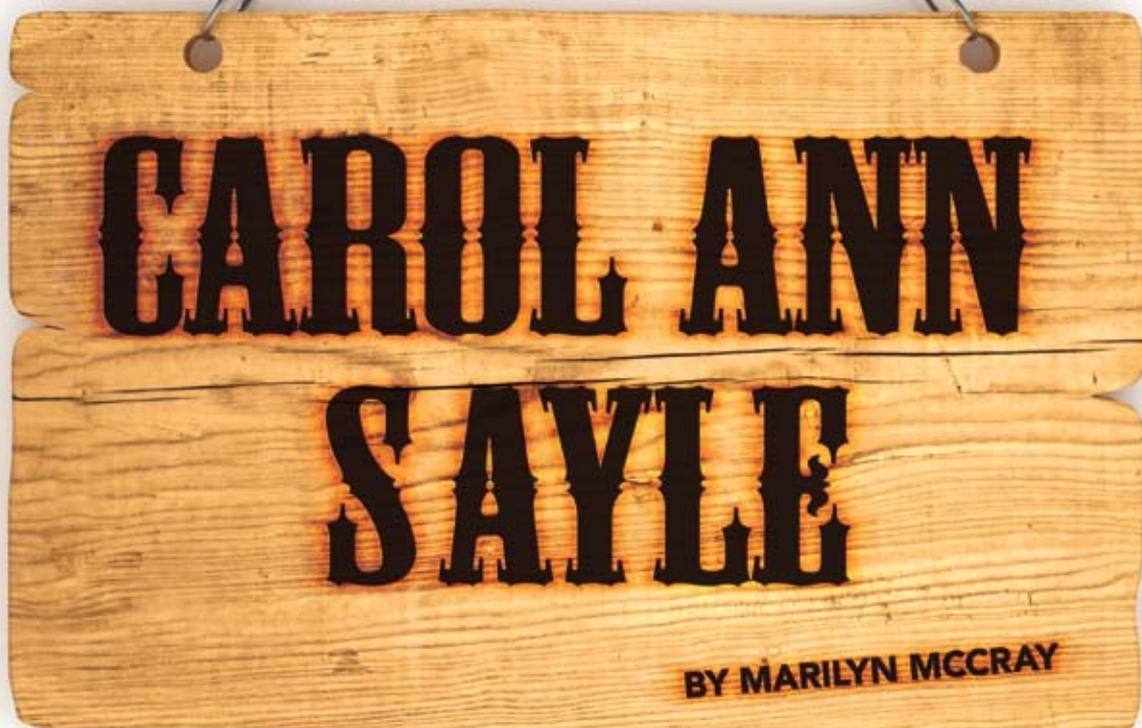
NEW READER REWARDS PG.48



**CAROL ANN
SAYLE**
OF BOGGY CREEK FARM

THE GENERATIONS ISSUE: BEAUTY AT ANY AGE | GREEN INVESTING | GENERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE





OUTSTANDING IN HER FIELD

farmer, artist, storyteller, writer, blogger,
mother, grandmother + wife

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC DOGGETT STUDIOS



As the soft light of dawn begins to illuminate the east Austin fields and ancient pecan trees,

CAROL ANN SAYLE

carefully constructs colorful sculptures of heirloom tomatoes on the tables of the farm stand. She creates colorful line drawings of veggies with phrases like “Loose but Moral Carrots” for price tags, and admits, “It’s hard for art not to seep in.”

The first eager shoppers begin to arrive. She greets them with a hearty “Good Mornin” and an occasional hug. A tall, slim woman, with bright blue eyes and wispy hair pulled back into a ponytail, Sayle is the heart and soul of Boggy Creek Farm.



EARLY DAYS IN S.A.

Carol Ann Sayle was the middle sibling in a close-knit family that lived in a modest house built by her father in Balcones Heights, northwest of San Antonio. Over the years, she has introduced her family as “Chief and Little Dove” (her civil servant parents), and “Bro Bill” and “Sis Linda.” “Everything was pretty simple in the ‘50s,” Sayle remembered. “I was pretty much in my own world, but I liked playing baseball with Bro Bill and his friends.”

Polio hit Texas and Sis Linda contracted the virus, so Sayle stepped in to care for her sister. Part of her new responsibilities included cooking for the family because Little Dove had gone to work. In the post-war culture of convenience, dinner at the Sayle home, like so many, had always come out of cans, so

she carried on in the family tradition. “I just couldn’t eat mustard greens out of a can with nothing on them,” recalled Sayle. “And that caused a great stir. I had to sit at the table for two hours. Finally I secretly put the greens in the napkin on my lap and that was the end of that and I was excused.”

AUSTIN CALLING

“I wanted to get the hell out of Dodge,” Sayle joked. So she chose to study for a teaching degree at Southwest Texas (now Texas State University) but quickly became bored and set out for UT and the bright lights in the big city of Austin. There she met and married another UT student. After graduation, they moved to Kyle with a young son in tow, where she took her first job teaching English and Spanish.

The family built a ranch-style house in Oak Hill in 1969. “I didn’t want to be a housewife. That wasn’t part of the plan because I couldn’t make any money. So I would finally be an artist and took a couple of painting courses,” said Sayle. She developed her own artistic style, started teaching art classes and painting in her laundry room studio while the two children were in school. As her success as a painter grew in 1973, she moved her

“I had been drawing constantly. In high school, I wanted to be not just an artist, but a fashion designer,” remembers Sayle. “I would draw women in all sorts of clothes on the sides of my papers.” Her father, Chief, wrote training manuals at Lackland Air Force Base and advised his daughter that the artists he knew were a dime-a-dozen and made no money so she should look for other career paths. “So basically I had five choices. I could be a teacher (because that was the recommended path), a secretary, a stewardess, a nurse or the wife of somebody who made money.”

studio to Fredericksburg Village in Oak Hill. The other businesses there were Teenie’s Antique Clothing, an insurance company, Willie Nelson’s office and a television repair shop run by returning Vietnam veteran Larry Butler. It was a friendly, eclectic bunch, going out to lunch or the occasional Friday BBQ’s. Her marriage had ended in divorce but she began to bloom not only as an artist but also as a successful businesswoman.

BLENDING PAINT + FAMILY

Butler admired the talented artist in the studio down the way and a friendship grew over the next year. “We were both divorced around the same time and one thing led to another,” said Butler, as he reminisced, smiling as his eyes lit up. They were married in August of 1976 and moved the blended family with Sayle’s son Steve and daughter Tracy, and Tom, Butler’s son, into a small house in South Austin.

For Sayle, there was one more step to

complete the blended family. “The divorce was between two adults. But I decided that since we both loved the kids and they us, we would act in their interest. And that extended to the future spouses too. I had made a cake. Wayne dropped off the kids; Gail remained in the car. I said, ‘Invite Gail in and let’s eat some cake.’ That was the first drop of glue that brought us all together. Our family had simply gotten larger and more complex. And it turned out well.”

“By 1981, the oil recession had hit and galleries were dropping like flies,” recollected Sayle as demand for her paintings dried up. Butler had become a successful real estate broker and Sayle followed suit working for Amelia Bullock. “Things were good until the real estate market began to stagnate in the mid ‘80s and for more than a year Larry had no income so he turned to home remodeling.”



FARMING BEGINS

By that time, they had purchased a small farm in Gause in Milam County where Butler had grown up. The family would spend weekends on the farm where Sayle would paint and garden. She would tend a small flock of 10 chickens with daughter Tracy. Chickens had always held a special fascination for Sayle since she received dyed, Easter chicks as a child. The flock eventually returned to the backyard in Austin and she would never be chicken-less again.

Sayle and Butler made the decision to move from gardening to farming in Gause before the terms “locally grown” and “organic” developed the cachet they hold today. After a well-meaning relative had suggested dusting the new tomato crop to prevent pests, Sayle said, “We knew we didn’t want poison on our food, so we learned about compost, cow manure and other things. The new farm got its organic certification.”

Hungry for new markets for their produce, along with daughter Tracy and cousin Claire Porter, they began selling their vegetables from a card table in front of Wiggy’s liquor store on 6th Street. As the farm became more bountiful, Sayle carefully washed and bagged tomatoes, then headed to Whole Foods. Taking a bite of the juicy, red fruit, the produce buyer was impressed, but informed Sayle that she needed to bring the tomatoes in boxes. Sayle knew that boxes were an expense that the fledgling farmers couldn’t afford, so she made a deal for used boxes. They expanded to salad mix by the bag accompanied by a note from Miss Ethel, the guinea hen from her backyard flock, ghostwritten by Sayle. That started a long relationship with Whole Foods and the many stories from members of the flock.

Butler found an MLS listing on five acres at 3414 Lyons Road in old east Austin, on the wrong side of I-35 during the savings and loan crisis. The rich bottom land had been farmed since the 1830’s Republic of Texas days, but by the end of World War II, the farms were divided up into lots for houses and commercial enterprises. Only a few sizable tracts of land escaped this fate. Five minutes after seeing the property, Sayle and Butler decided to take the plunge and purchased the land that had been one of the first farms outside Austin with some creative financing.

After removing 10-foot high weeds, four junk cars and 16 truckloads of junk, eventually they begin bringing the farm back to life. The Greek Revival house had been built around 1840 or ‘41. The roof had collapsed and the chimneys caved in to the attic. There were broken windows, no doors or gas service when they moved in. Butler’s house-remodeling skills were quickly put to work.

They started to farm the new acreage in 1992 and organic food had a new address in Austin when they opened the farm stand. Butler created a number of signature products that ranged from wild mustang grape jelly, bean dip and Gause Honey. The most popular of his creations has been the Smoked Dried Tomatoes that were featured on *The Food Network*. Sayle designed the labels featuring Tubby J. Tupelo, the farm cat. Not only did home cooks seek out the market, but also over the years, Sayle and Butler have made friends with many local restaurateurs who seek out local produce and continue to come to the market.





“HORRIBLENESS”

Farming takes practical common sense and an acceptance of the vagaries of Texas weather for which Sayle coined a term, “horribleness,” that describes the consequences of unpredictability. “Horribleness” can encompass many terrible things that range from raccoons on the strawberries to last year’s record drought that caused loss of the Roma tomato crop used to create the signature Smoke Dried Tomatoes. But in November 2001, Sayle experienced the ultimate “horribleness” when an F2 tornado struck the farm. Twelve inches of rain fell, accompanied by howling, 100-mile-an-hour winds, thunder and lightning. She pushed furniture in front of a door, holding it against the force of the intense wind. Her glasses fell off and broke. There was a horrific, howling noise while water filled the historic house. “I stopped for a moment to recite the 23rd Psalm and thought, ‘This is the way you go out.’” The winds eventually subsided and she surveyed the damage.

Returning from Gause, Butler had to walk past the police barricades in the neighborhood. A huge pecan tree had

taken out a corner of the house and numerous limbs were down. By the next day, friends, chefs and customers showed up with chainsaws and an old fashioned “barn raiser” was planned. “It would be late February before the bedroom wall was replaced,” Sayle said. “I loved waking up to the sunrise with the plastic and the patterns that trees had traced on the ‘wall.’ I’ve done my share of crying and cursing,” she recalls. “Now I have to get up and deal with it.”

“It would take five women to replace Carol Ann,” Butler chuckles. “She can stand toe-to-toe with the best of them.” Sayle runs the seven-day-a-week operation in Austin performing an integrated army of tasks that include driving tractors, hauling row cover and riding herd on the chickens. Her Spanish-language skills let her communicate with her work crew. Butler takes care of the other farm several days a week, returning to Austin to join Sayle in the operation of the city farm. It is a lot of time apart for the couple, but as Butler observed, “We talk every evening and prop each other up.”



Boggy Creek Tornado Nov. 2001

☞ A huge pecan tree had taken out a corner of the house and numerous limbs were down. ☞

IN THE COOP

with Carol Ann



"RUSTY ROO" THE ROOSTER

5 YEARS OLD

FAV. PASTIME: Eating corn scratch (he's a sugar addict) + romancing the hens in the afternoon, often violently.

QUIRK: He's a member of the Taliban Roosters and thus is very rude to the career girls among the hens; he detests Tootie J. Tootums.



TOOTIE J. TOOTUMS

6 YEARS OLD

BLACK SEX LINK HEN

(but she's only mildly interested)

FAV. PASTIME: Looking for worms in the field with Carol Ann + panhandling in the farm stand with Harriet (below), She has favorite hen status and talks a lot.



AUNT TOOTER TOOTUMS

8 YEARS OLD

BLACK SEX LINK HEN

(but she is past all that)

FAV. PASTIME: Relaxing, as any hen past henopause is wont to do.

INTERESTING FACT: She's Tootie J. Tootums' aunt.



HARRIET

8 YEARS OLD

BLACK AUSTRALORP HEN

FAVE: Panhandling in the farm stand. She loves croissants and Barrie's breads.

QUIRK: Doesn't talk, even when spoken to.



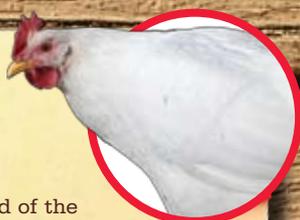
RUMPY

7 MONTHS OLD

RUMPLESS CHILEAN ARAUCANA HEN

FAV. PASTIME: Likes to be out on the farm each afternoon.

INTERESTING FACTS: Lays olive green eggs. No tail to speak of and she's proud of that.



BOSS CHICK

5 MONTHS OLD

WHITE LEGHORN HEN

INTERESTING FACTS: Head of the Boss Chick and the Bossy Babes Club. Boss and the Babes lived in the farm house kitchen for 3 months. The Bossies are out on the farm every day, one way or another. They are privileged + they are big talkers.



AUNT DROP TAIL

15 YEARS OLD

AMERICAUNA HEN

FAV. PASTIME: Eating, dust bathing, relaxing. She's earned it.

INTERESTING FACT: Got her name from a hatch defect: her tail points straight down.

BOGGY CREEK TALES

Ever the businesswoman, Sayle became the office manager, accountant and keeper of the organic records. The farm soon became her new creative medium. She began finding her voice as a storyteller, a longstanding Sayle family tradition, sharing the Boggy Creek experience through her books. *Eating in Season*, an illustrated cookbook appeared in 1999. She then published a children's book, *Tales from the Hen House*. It won a Teddy award in 2000, from the Texas Writer's League. She rolled out the digital doormat, creating a website providing information about farming, as well as a list of what will be at the next market. "I created *News of the Farm*, one of the first agricultural email newsletters," said Sayle. "Bro Bill forwarded every issue to 79 of his closest friends." The newsletter introduced dedicated readers

to the cast of characters that inhabit the farm and included the people who work the land, Aunt Penny, Head Hen and the chickens. Sometimes she writes about even more nefarious visitors like the ice cream thieves who helped spawn a new flavor after their criminal assault on the freezer. Sayle has gone on to be a regular contributor to *edible Austin* and a blogger for *The Atlantic*.

Over the years, Boggy Creek Farm became a place not just for amazing food, but also for people and celebrations. There have been many gatherings, birthday parties, reunions, memorial services and fundraisers for organizations like Green Corn and Project Transitions. Descendants of the Smith family, who founded the farm in the 19th century, gathered there. One of the first back porch memorial

services was for Little Dove. "It was much nicer than being in a church where the preacher really didn't know her," Sayle said. "Everyone gets a chance to talk here." This was also true for Bro Bill's memorial, which Sayle planned and acted as Mistress of Ceremonies. Family members and friends took turns on the back porch to share memories of a favorite brother.

"Everything I've done has been a success," reflected the now 65-year-old Sayle, proudly. "I feel like the farm is successful because we keep doing it. We'll never get rich, but we don't have to have a job in town. I still love it, still feel passionate about it." *AW*

MORE INFO
BOGGYCREEKFARM.COM



WHAT OTHERS SAY...

MARLA CAMP

Publisher, *Edible Austin* + Friend of the Farm

She is one of the foremost pioneers of organic farming in Texas, and also one of the most moving and articulate spokespersons for small family farming in Central Texas. We're honored to have her as a regular columnist in *edible Austin* and we also rely on her regularly to join panels on sustainability and local sourcing for groups. At the Texas Book Festival, her participation in Corby Kummer's panel in 2008 led to her writing a regular column for *The Atlantic*.

DORSEY BARGER

Owner of Eastside Café, East Austin Farmer + Friend of the Farm

(also former and fellow *AW* cover woman, April 2008)

I've known Carol Ann for 22 years. They were starting Boggy Creek Farm about the same time I was starting Eastside Café. She has been a friend and neighbor and inspiration. Few people in Austin have the influence in the food and farm community that Carol Ann has. Two-and-a-half years ago when I took over gardening, she was a source of moral support and practical advice, letting me come over and see her washing shed before I built mine. I love Carol Ann Sayle.

JIM HIGHTOWER

Former Texas Commissioner of Agriculture + Friend of the Farm

Carol Ann is one of Austin's true jewels and a renowned national leader in the organic/local food movement. A practical idealist, big-thinker, no-nonsense doer, a delightful writer, and an all-around, fun, human being; she takes deep and deserved pride in being a dirt-under-the-fingernails, natural farmer – and in being fully-bilingual in chicken clucks.

VIRGINIA WOOD

Chef and *Food-o-File* Columnist of *The Austin Chronicle* + Friend of the Farm

Carol Ann Sayle is an artist who taught school but she found her voice at the farm, sharing her experiences with people from the chickens to what's in season. Her affection for the chickens is infectious. She and Larry have an amazing marriage with a shared purpose. They work hard and are energized by it. They derive pleasure out of sharing their lives with people. They have educated the public about food.

DEBORAH MADISON

Chef, Award-Winning Author of *Nine Cookbooks* + Friend of the Farm

Carol Ann is incredibly innovative and passionate. Personally, she is a tough bird, with lots of room in her big, loving heart. She and Larry had the vision to create Boggy Creek Farm at a time when there was no support system. And to suffer all the miseries that Austin weather promises and still be upright and smiling – that's really something to me!

ERIC POLZER

Chef de Cuisine at Wink, Former Intern + Friend of the Farm

I first met Carol Ann and Larry when they had a stand in front of Whole Foods. We were looking for local produce to feature as specials at Wink. At the time, there weren't local farmers markets. I had grown up on a family farm and I spent time working at the Gause and Austin farms to get a better understanding of what they did. From sitting on the back porch talking, to getting my hands dirty and pulling weeds, I learned about how they farm. The day Alice Waters came to visit, I'd been in the tomato plants, cutting suckers and taking care of worms. I was covered in gook. Carol Ann is outspoken, one of her most endearing qualities. We have developed a great respect that goes both ways.



RECIPES FROM CAROL ANN

Excerpted from *Eating in Season – Recipes from Boggy Creek Farm* by Carol Ann Sayle © 1999

HILTON'S OKRA FRITTERS

No, not everyone loves okra, but even the okra-shy person like me will tolerate it fried. Who doesn't like fried? It's the recognized national culinary method isn't it? But Larry and his dad Hilton are true okra lovers. They don't even care if it's boiled to slimyness. Some folks are like that. I remember a college roommate who would smile at me wickedly as she spooned down the most awful looking institutional okra mess I've ever seen. Give me fried. In the summer, Hilton likes to treat the farm crew in Gause to a pile of Hilton's Okra Fritters for lunch. Everyone loves it. There's not a smear of slime anywhere. Here's the recipe:

6 TABLESPOONS CORNMEAL

2 TABLESPOONS FLOUR

SALT/BLACK PEPPER TO TASTE

1 EGG (beaten)

½ CUP TO 1 CUP MILK OR BUTTERMILK
(enough to make a loose mixture when
the dries are combined with the wets)

2 TABLESPOONS OLIVE OIL (plus more for frying)

1 SMALL ONION (chopped fine, ¼" dice)

2 CLOVES GARLIC (chopped very fine)

1 CUP OKRA (chopped in thin rounds – ¼" thick)



Combine the dry ingredients together in a small bowl. Mix Egg, Milk and Olive Oil together in a medium to large bowl. Add the Onion, Garlic and Okra. Stir to coat the veggies.

Add the dries to the wets. Combine to make a loose "pancake batter," adding more milk if needed. Heat additional Olive Oil in a big skillet over medium heat. Drop by spoonfuls to make 4" sized circles, like pancakes. Brown the top.

Hilton says it's basically a runny cornbread mixture with the okra and other ingredients chopped fine enough to make a crunchy pancake/fritter.

Serves? Maybe two, but it depends on if they are okra lovers, or fried lovers, or both. No matter: it won't be enough.

COOL CUCUMBER & CHEVRE SANDWICH

Well, almost no one likes to cook during the hot days of August and September, but, since we have to continue eating to continue living, we often resort to easy things like sandwiches. I like to pile a sandwich with a lot of ingredients, but one of these towering concoctions is difficult to eat with your hands. So to get around that, I'll use just one slice of bread, top it with the vegetables, and serve it with a fork and knife: an open-face sandwich. If you have any cucumber slices left, chill 'em and put them on your closed eyelids as you take your afternoon nap. Remember, waste not ...

A SLICE OF GOOD BREAD

2 TABLESPOONS MILD GOAT CHEESE (Chevre)

1 SMALL CUCUMBER

SALT (to taste)

SHREDDED BASIL OR FRENCH SORREL



Spread the Bread with the Chevre. Slice the Cucumber very thinly (peel it first if the skin is bitter) and place slices on top of the Chevre. Salt to taste. Top all with the shredded Basil or French Sorrel. Serves 1, daintily. (Hal)

MORE ON THE WEB

FUTURE OF THE FARM

+ CAROL ANN'S DAILY SCHEDULE

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