

Self-proclaimed “cracker” and cookbook author heads to Beaufort



In *THE CRACKER KITCHEN*: A cookbook in celebration of cornbread-fed, down-home family stories and cuisine (Scribner, February 2009), self-proclaimed ‘Cracker’ Janis Owens explores the cultural history of the South through great food and storytelling. Janis, a Florida native, will be in Beaufort on March 14th for an event at the Bay Street Trading Company. Joining her will be another “expert” on southern culture, novelist Pat Conroy, who wrote the cookbook’s Introduction.



Cracker culture is one of the oldest and most misunderstood cultures in American history. But in *THE CRACKER KITCHEN*, Janis traces the history of Crackers in America to show how they’re more than just the “eighth-generation children of working-class immigrants who came to America before the Civil War.” The term “Cracker” was originally used to describe a group of southerners considered “ill read” and “over churchd.” Negative in connotation throughout the 19th and first half of the 20th century, “Crackers” were also known as the “crew-cut, toothless miscreants” of the Civil Rights Movement. However, according to Janis, “Cracker” took a positive turn towards the 1970’s, when “Disney moved to Florida and every Yankee on earth built a condo on the coast” and “the Florida-born natives began to self-refer as Crackers as a way of separating their old Florida culture from the flood of Yankee transplants.” Today, “Cracker” is a term of pride for many and is used to describe the kind of people Crackers really are: proud Americans with a deep love of their country, their families, good food and storytelling.

And in *THE CRACKER KITCHEN*, Janis has over 150 recipes organized into 20 different seasonal Cracker menus, including Easter Ham (that involves the use of a can of cola!), Cracklin’ Cornbread, Sister Jackson’s Sausage Cheese Balls, Mama’s Fried Chicken, Strawberry-Pretzel Salad, Grannie’s Chicken and Dumplings, Peanut Butter Pie (one of my personal favorites), Velveeta Rocky Road Fudge, Baked Armadillo, and even Stewed Squirrel.

Janis Owens and Pat Conroy will be signing *THE CRACKER KITCHEN* at Bay Street Trading Company from 1-4 pm on Saturday, March 14th. For more information, call 524-2000.