Episode Title: Andrew Zimmern's Kitchen Wisdom

Episode Summary:

Andrew Zimmern grew up in New York City, where he learned his love of food from traveling with his parents and spending weekends with his grandmother. He got his first job in a restaurant on Long Island at age 14, and after some difficult years with substance abuse, he eventually moved to Minnesota, where he got sober and gained attention as a chef, radio host, writer, and television personality. In 2006, he started hosting Bizarre Foods on the Travel Channel, which earned him four James Beard Awards and made him one of the most successful hosts in the history of Food TV.

Episode Type: Full
Episode Rating: Clean
Season Number: 4
Episode Number: 31

Episode Transcript:

Music: Biscuits and Jam Theme begins.

Sid Evans (VO): Welcome to Biscuits and Jam, from Southern Living. I’m your host, Sid Evans, and today I’m talking to someone who may not be from the South, but over twenty plus years as a TV host, he’s spent plenty of time there. Andrew Zimmern grew up in New York City, where he learned his love of food from traveling with his parents and spending weekends with his grandmother. He got his first job in a restaurant on Long Island at age 14, and after some difficult years with substance abuse, he eventually moved to Minnesota, where he got sober and gained attention as a chef, radio host, writer, and television personality. In 2006, he started hosting Bizarre Foods on the Travel Channel, which earned him four James Beard Awards and made him one of the most successful hosts in the history of Food TV. We’ll talk about his life and career, his thoughts on the South, and his current show for the Outdoor Channel, “Andrew Zimmern’s Wild Game Kitchen,” all on this week’s Biscuits & Jam.

Music: Biscuits and Jam Theme ends.

Sid Evans:
Andrew Zimmern, welcome to Biscuits and Jam.
Andrew Zimmern:
Good to be here.

Sid Evans:
Where am I reaching you?

Andrew Zimmern:
I'm sitting in my office in Minneapolis.

Sid Evans:
So, all right. I've gotta get this out there right off the bat, that you are probably one of the least Southern people that I've interviewed on this podcast. I mean, you were born in New York. You live in Minnesota.

Andrew Zimmern:
Mm-hmm.

Sid Evans:
But I also know that you do love the South and have loved your time down here.

Andrew Zimmern:
That's true. Also my family came in from Germany, into the Port of Charleston in the 1840s. A storm blew the boat off course and instead of going to New York, they went to Charleston. And they were meat cutters from central Germany. And my relatives, my ancestors, made their way to Atlanta and cut meat there for quite a while, became very successful. When the armies of the North and South were spending that year in that stand-off on either side of the Potomac, they were selling meat to both sides of this soon-to-be American history-defining conflagration. And they felt as a family that they couldn't feed both sides in a conflict, and the members of the family who felt that, well, it was just easier to feed the people who were geographically just north of you, i.e., the armies of the South, than it would be once bullets started flying, to feed the armies of the North. And so they made what at the time seemed like a simple decision. Years later, when Grant burned Atlanta down, they walked to New York and became furniture makers for-

Sid Evans:
Wow.

Andrew Zimmern:
... generations until my father and his brother, who were the first in the family to go to college, but whenever I'm in Charleston or in Atlanta, and quite honestly, almost any other place in the States that you would cross in between there, and it probably extends all the way to Louisiana. I don't feel it when I'm in Florida for some reason. I have a different feeling there because everyone in my family retired there -
Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern:
... like most Jews from the Northeast, they retired to Florida, and that’s where they spent the last days of their life and are interred. But I feel at home down in the South... I mean, I’ve just always felt it. And that became extremely true the more and more I traveled there, and making television extensively throughout the South, which I did way more than the Northeast, the Midwest or the Northwest simply because of weather.

Sid Evans:
Right.

Andrew Zimmern:
So I’ve spent a lotta time there. I have a lotta friends there. I continue to spend time there. I’ve opened businesses there, and it’s a very special place to me. You know, and I’m a big history and culture geek, I think it is one of the parts of our country that is, number one, very misunderstood, but number two, also holds within it so much of our past, our present-

Sid Evans:
Our food, our music.

Andrew Zimmern:
Yeah. It holds the keys to so many of our cultural totems, and I find it endlessly enjoyable to be there.

Sid Evans:
Well, you’ve got plenty of cred, so you’re-

Andrew Zimmern:
(laughs)

Sid Evans:
... very welcome here on Biscuits and Jam (laughs).

Andrew Zimmern:
I love it.

Sid Evans:
So Andrew, you were born and raised in New York. When you think about the cooks in your family who kinda had the biggest impact on you, and I’m thinking grandparents here, too, who comes to mind?
**Andrew Zimmern:**

My grandmother, my mother, and my father equally, because at various phases in my childhood, they were the ones who gave me the curiosity, gave me the inspiration, taught me in many cases. My grandmother had children late in life, and my mother and father had children late in life, so I had a very older, inactive grandparent, and I was a very rambunctious little kid, but my parents felt it was important that I spend at least a couple days a month with my grandmother, which I'm grateful for. And so typically, every other Saturday, I would spend the afternoon with my grandmother, sleepover, then the whole family would convene in her house every Sunday for a huge lunch, and then I would go home with my mom and dad. My grandmother only did two things on Saturday: She shopped, and she cooked. And my grandmother was also the president of the sisterhood at the synagogue around the corner from where she lived on 79th and West End.

**Sid Evans:**

What was her name?

**Andrew Zimmern:**

Henriette Zimmern. And these were the days where you didn't rotate every five years outta that job, you held onto it like Joseph Stalin held onto power. I mean, if you're the head of the sisterhood at your synagogue, you were a big deal and you do not let anyone have that position until you choose to give it away, but she was a big-timer in that neighborhood because of that. And these were the early to mid '60s. So, around the corner from her house was Zabar's and Greenburg's, and Murray's and all these famous apprentices and stores and what became Fairway Market was there. I mean, all these famous New York City sort of like food landmarks on the Upper West Side that fed this huge population there and every other little store in between, right? Incredible bakeries and meat shops and seafood purveyors back in the days in New York where you didn't have supermarkets everywhere. You had individual specialists, more in what we think of as the European style but was prevalent here until the supermarket sorta pushed all these small vendors and storekeepers out. And so to shop with my grandmother was to go up the avenue, Broadway on one side, and then down and on the other side and visit all these stores where I was sort of treated to see a piece of life that grabbed me by the throat. I mean, to be in a Hungarian butcher store and have them take a rectangle about the size of your pinky of smoked bacon fat, no meat, just the smoked fat, and roll it in hot paprika and hand it to me like a candy-

**Sid Evans:**

(laughs)

**Andrew Zimmern:**

That to me was so delicious, and we would stop at the candy shop to get these little raspberry candies that my dad and his brother liked, and my grandmother always wanted to make sure she had them in her house, and smoked fish at Zabar's, the guys would, you know, be slicing her pound of smoked fish and wrapping up her whitefish and sturgeon and hand me a piece of this smoked fish that just melted in my mouth. I was just so enraptured by this world of food. And then we'd go to her kitchen and she would make the 17 dishes that she made all the time, just in rotation... I don't know how she cooked for so
many people out of a kitchen the size of my laptop, truly, but I was told to sit and stay out of the way ’cause she didn't want me to get hurt by flying chicken fat.

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern:
And eventually, she needed help, and I was so eager to do it and so she taught me a few things, and by the time I was 7, 8, I transferred that into cooking with my mother, weekdays in our home and during the summer a lot out in Long Island. My mother lived out in our summer home all summer long, as did I, went to day camp out there, got involved in sports out there. So we had this amazing garden, and part of the deal was I had to help my mom during the week. My dad would come out on weekends. During that time, I learned a lot from my mother about cooking. And this is just a great story. When she was young and went off to college in San Francisco at Mills College, an old woman's school, she roomed with Trader Vic Bergeron's daughter.

Sid Evans:
Right (laughs). I read that.

Andrew Zimmern:
They were freshman roommates.

Sid Evans:
Yeah.

Andrew Zimmern:
And Trader Vic taught them to cook. So in the '60s, when my mother had a young child and was married and entertained in the home, I think she was the only woman in New York City who was making pu pu platters without looking at a recipe book, and chicken chow mein and all this Polynesian food and Chinese American food, and we were definitely a food first family. But to see it cooked all the time in front of you was to give you a curiosity for it. Now, my father traveled for work. He helped run a big ad agency, and it had goals to be international. So... My parents divorced, and the time that I would be with my dad, he would just take me outta school and bring me with him to Europe or wherever they were expanding to. And by the time I was 10 years old, I had been to four continents, which was an education that I just wouldn't trade for anything in the world. I'm a pale version of my dad. He commanded every room he walked into. He was always the most interesting man there. He just had such a giant-sized life and loved to eat to travel and travel to eat, and he would take me to places. When I was 9 years old, I ate underneath the Roman aqueduct in Valle de Los Gallegos, which is where the Spanish dictator is buried, and there was a restaurant there, very famous one that I understand has just recently closed... you ordered the lamb or the pig. That was it. And then you had all your other courses already chosen for you, and you got a roast baby lamb or pig. It was one per person. And wood-fired. And to experience that before I was 10, and have your father tell you, "You eat the crispy parts, the ears first," you know? "Don't
let them get rubbery with the steam from the rest of your animal." My father just loved food in a way that very few people I've ever met loved food. He was also very friendly with James Beard and the whole sort of downtown New York food cognoscenti sort of scene... He lived down at 2 Horatio Street for 50 years before retiring to Long Island and then eventually to Maine, where he passed 7 or 8 years ago. But those were the three that really gave me all the things I loved... Every tool I needed, I had before I was 10 years old. I then did everything to throw it back in their face over the subsequent 20 years, where I was an incorrigible mess and selfish, user of people and taker of things until I sobered when I was 30 and sort of changed that part of my life around, but you know, looking back on it, it was their gifts that sort of made me who I am today.

Sid Evans:
Wow, what an education. I mean, it was just all kind of baked-in, so to speak (laughs).

Andrew Zimmern:
Yeah. It's so obvious, when I look back on it, right?

Sid Evans:
Yeah. So back to your grandmother for a second. When you think about her and some of those dishes, are there dishes that you make today that she might've taught you or that have kind of stayed with you over the years?

Andrew Zimmern:
Weekly, religiously, and many.

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern:
You know, it's funny that you ask the question that way. I've never actually had it asked that way. What's interesting about it is that, I think if you lined up a hundred well-known culinary people, "Where'd you get your first inspiration for cooking?" If we were playing family feud, number one would be grandmother. "Can we see grandmother?" Ding, ding, ding. That's gonna-

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern:
... come up first-

Sid Evans:
Sure. Yeah.
Andrew Zimmern:
...on the board. Right?

Sid Evans:
Yeah.

Andrew Zimmern:
But how many people cook the food of their grandparents? I think that's probably more confined to people who identify ethnically, religiously, or in some other way, in other words, trying to keep a flame alive. You know, my grandmother was an observant Jew who made the 19th century Eastern European Jewish classics as well as anybody. And so from her chopped liver to her latkes to her chicken soups, her barley soup, with lamb, her brisket, her roast chicken, I mean, all of these things I literally make today. Have I in some cases cheffed them up a little bit? Sure. In some cases have I figured out a smarter way to do something? Absolutely.

Sid Evans:
So Andrew, I don't wanna go through your whole career with restaurants, but you grew up around all this food, you grew up traveling, just having these incredible experiences that you probably took for granted to some degree at the time.

Andrew Zimmern:
Of course. Of course.

Sid Evans:
Like, "Oh (laughs), I guess every kid gets to do things like this." But you go into restaurants and what was it about working in a restaurant that really lit you up? I mean, was it the energy, was it the people, was it making people happy in the restaurant, seeing the way they responded? What was it that really kind of caught fire with you?

Andrew Zimmern:
Well, all those things, and I'll get back to the last one because it speaks a lot to my mental issues that, you know, I think are better but I still have to cope with. For me it was freedom. When I was 14, my father said, "Get a job." I said, "Why do I need a job? I get allowance." He said, "No. Get a job. Buy your clothes." Everyone I knew went to work for landscaping companies. The building boom sort of started then, and you could always get a job pushing a wheelbarrow, and they would pick you up in these trucks at 5:30-6:00 in the morning at your house and they'd drop you off at 3:30-4:00 in the afternoon and it was a hard job. You're hauling dirt and digging holes. And I had seen my friends who were older go through this, and I was like, "Well, I'll be damned if I'm giving up drugs, girls, and the beach." And which at the time, was all I wanted to do that whole summer of 1975. I wanted to cook, and so I got a job at night working in my godmother's restaurant, which was a seafood restaurant in East Hampton called The Quiet Clam. I remember the first night in the restaurant and my godmother put me to work on the cold side, cleaning lettuce, cleaning clams and oysters, helping put ice in the raw bar, and I just went at it and
I had sort of earned a job there shucking oysters and clams and making a pretty tray of shellfish on ice, and this was in an open kitchen that was unintentional. They just couldn't afford to put up a wall. And seeing that tray go across the room, and seeing the person look down and realize that all the oysters and clams were intact; they weren't butchered and hacked, seeing that everything was arranged the right way and the ice wasn't gonna melt into their cocktail sauce or mignonette, I mean, the little things that I think some people notice, others don't, but I did, filled me up with so much joy. I mean, part of my addiction and alcoholism issues are, continue to be, but were back then in full bloom, a ton of unhealthy codependency, where I got my self-esteem from other people, which is sort of a backwards system. I don't recommend it for anyone. I'm just saying that's how I was. And so a lot of it had to do with the romance of the restaurant, the theater of the restaurant. Every day was different. I loved that. You have a bad night, start over the next day and get it right. I loved cooking. I mean, truly. I couldn't put words on it, but I was plagued with depression and anxiety as a young kid, still to some degree today, but when I'm cooking, I'm not thinking about me and my problems. I'm just thinking about what I'm making. You know? It's sort of like playing catch. It's impossible to think about your problems when someone's throwing a ball at you at 40 miles an hour that's gonna hit your face if you don't put your mitt up. So, it solved a lot of my mental health problems. It gave me esteem, took away the shame that I was feeling all the time, right? That's that loving to do things for other people, couldn't care less about me. But at the same time, I found something that gave my mind the peace and quiet that I was desperate for that I only found in using drugs and alcohol until I gave those up and found a different substitute that was a lot healthier. And, you know, I think I liked being part of a team. I liked being a teammate. I liked being the one at the end of the night that the chef was like, "Great job, kid. You know, you pulled us out of the weeds." I mean, that was dynamite. I also liked being the 14-year-old in a room full of 25-year-olds because the things that I was into in my teen years, the 25-year-olds were all doing. Not a lotta my friends were. You know, the music, the parties, the girls, the drugs, the drinking and, again, I'm not glorifying it. I'm not recommending it for anyone. But that, when I was a teenager, was where I was finding my salvation. I was looking for the answers in the wrong places, but I found them in that restaurant community, in a resort town for the summer where that was just part and parcel of the deal. Not all restaurants are like that, but that one certainly was.

Music: Biscuits & Jam theme begins as a music bed.

Sid Evans (VO): After the break, I’ll talk more with Andrew Zimmern about his time in the South and his latest show, ‘Andrew Zimmern’s Wild Game Kitchen.’

Music: Biscuits & Jam theme fades up, then out.

[ AD BREAK ]

Music: Biscuits & Jam theme fades up, then down to a music bed.
Sid Evans (VO): Welcome back to Biscuits & Jam, from Southern Living. I’m Sid Evans, and today I’m talking with the James Beard Award-winning TV host and chef, Andrew Zimmern.

Music: Biscuits & Jam theme fades out.

Sid Evans:
Yeah. Well, let’s go South for a second. I’m guessing that you, on all your travels with your dad, were not going to Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, Texas… probably spending a lot more time in France, places like that. When did you really start to discover Southern food?

Andrew Zimmern:
College ’cause I came into contact with people from all the Southern states, and in many cases, more often than with kids from my part of the world, they all cooked. And so we sort of found each other, and I saw things and I was like, "Holy moly. What is that?" Right? Now by that time, I had eaten gumbos and decided I liked them, but I’d never cooked one. And, you know, when someone from Louisiana — it was actually a woman that I was dating — made gumbo for 20 people next to the keg and this dark brown bubbly thing smelled like it had burnt-

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern:
... and she says, "Yeah. That's the foundation of this whole dish." I was just like, "I am so into you."

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern:
"But I think I'm into what's going in that pot even more."

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern:
And that's where it started, and very quickly, moving back to New York City after college and cooking in New York until I came to Minnesota, there was a lotta Southern food for the first time being cooked in New York City. In the '80s, all of a sudden, you had food popping off there right and left 'cause everyone was hungry for the foods of somewhere else. It was explosive. New York grew up as a restaurant city. I'm talking about Manhattan, actually grew up as a restaurant borough at the end of the '70s and into the '80s for the first time. I remember there was a restaurant called Memphis that was open by a bunch of guys who had some bars and I was friendly with them and they would come into my restaurant all the
time where I was the GM, and I would go up there and eat all the time, and they had barbecued shrimp... Two of them were from Memphis. Two of them were from Georgia, and they just did the classic garlic with sheared rosemary, you know, head-on, I was just in love.

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern:
And people weren't eating the heads in New York. I had eaten shrimp with my father in Europe and in Asia and was like, "Of course you eat the heads." And so there was this sort of thing happening where I realized that the food of the South was less diluted than foods in other places, but then things got really, really, really serious when I started to spend a lotta time in the South and tell stories of Southern culture and Southern food in my early television work. I just couldn't believe this was in my own backyard and I was only discovering it in my 40s. It felt like somehow I had been wronged, and I realized there's-

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern:
... only so many places that you can eat during the first 30-40 years of your life. I'm glad I discovered it when I did. I mean, there's a story with every dish that's put on a table in the South. In other places, some dishes have stories, but people are often in too much of a hurry to tell them. Uh, in the South, no one was in hurry to tell...

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern (38:24):
You've got the story when the dish hit the table. And, uh, I was... I mean, that seduced me very powerfully. I forget in where I first wrote it, but food is good; food with a story is better; food with a story that you haven't heard about is better than that. But food with a story that you haven't heard about but that you relate to is best of all. I was all in that last one with the foods that I was experiencing in Southern homes, right? Yes, in restaurants. Sure. But mostly in the homes that I was going into. And I educated myself and fell in love. The education was quick and the falling in love part was even quicker, and I felt at home down there. Everything came family-style on a platter, right? There seemed to always be more food than what was actually needed. The whole design of the meal was better. It seemed to be more closely tethered to the seasons. And this really surprised me based on what I perceived of the South as someone coming from New York, but it seemed to honor all the different ethnic groups and peoples over the course of the previous hundreds of years that had contributed something into that dish. And it was talked about. There was an element of simplicity, but in that simplicity was real perfection, and within that perfection, the perfection wasn't mandatory.
Sid Evans:
Well, let me ask you about some specific places. You had Bizarre Foods, for a lotta years. 13 seasons or something?

Andrew Zimmerm:
I made that show for almost 15 years before Travel Channel turned into a ghost and paranormal station and got away from travel and food. But because we did Bizarre Foods America and Bizarre World, I count it-

Sid Evans:
Right.

Andrew Zimmermm:
... all as one show. They count them differently on IMDB.

Sid Evans:
Yeah. So, 15 years of travel all over the world and also all over the South. I know you came here to Birmingham and you went to-

Andrew Zimmerm:
Many times.

Sid Evans:
... New Orleans and you went to Charleston and you went to Houston. Out of all of those places, is there one city that you remember that really kinda stands out, that was really special or that seemed kind of the most representative of the Southern food experience?

Andrew Zimmerm:
Oh, my gosh. It’s hard to compare a place like Rayne, Louisiana in the heart of Cajun country, where Donald Link’s family is from. He’s a famous chef and restaurant owner in New Orleans and a close friend. And when Donald took me up there to spend time with his uncle and make hog poffs and go out with his cousin at midnight in the rowboat in the rice paddies to hunt bullfrogs, I've never seen a bullfrog the size of a football.

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmerm:
And then the next day, he cooked... I mean, each leg looked like a chicken-

Sid Evans:
(laughs)
Andrew Zimmern:
... dart quarter. Not just the leg. The dart quarter. I mean, these bullfrogs were gigantic, and he did them with a sauce piquant that I'm actually cooking a version of on Wild Game Kitchen next week, actually. You know, spending time in Rayne, Louisiana and subsequent return trips to that part of Louisiana is different than the small towns in Mississippi, eating fried chicken in the back of essentially a five-and-dime store that would attract customers much in the same way that Target does. If we sell chicken at cost, people will leave with $20 worth of stuff on the way out, you know?

Sid Evans:
Yeah (laughs).

Andrew Zimmern:
And they'll make money, not on the chicken, but on the light bulbs and toilet paper. Is that any more vibrant than getting a food tour of Birmingham 10 years ago, and finding an Asian market with an incredible Chinese market hidden in the back of it that Chris Hastings took me to. And is that any better than being in Charleston, fishing and finding an empty spot on a piece of land that reveals itself when the water goes down and building a fire and roasting it without a pan, on a green stick and pulling it apart with your fingers while a 90-year-old man tells you that his way of life is not disappearing, it's gone, and the words that he's speaking sound like a really sad Jason Isbell song.

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern:
I don't know how you tell the difference between those things. But it really grabbed me, and we returned again and again to tell different types of stories. And I found that in so many towns, cities, and restaurants and peoples' homes in the South, that the stories came out, the food came into sharper focus, the experience was richer, but also it said more about where our country was. So we would return to the South with my MSNBC series What's Eating America because we knew we could talk to people there about a way of life that is disappearing. In Charleston, I think we did this story four or five times, going out to a place where you could get pinwheel oysters that they cooked on a piece of metal over an open fire, and you just sit there and pull them out with your fingers

Sid Evans:
That sounds like Bowen's.

Andrew Zimmern:
It is.

Sid Evans:
(laughs)
Andrew Zimmern:
But we went back to talk to the oystermen there, to find out that oyster prices really hadn't gone up very much in 20 years. But textbooks and gasoline sure did, and the cost of their rent and their insurance and their kids' haircuts. And so these oystermen, who would take oysters in one part of the season and shrimp in another, and stock peoples' meat lockers with deer and wild hogs in another and live off the land and be able to feed their families could no longer do that. And so to know that you could always go back there and tell those stories and have incredible people to share their experience and their story with you, there's no place like the Southeastern quarter of our country. I just think it's rich beyond measure.

Sid Evans:
So you're talking about hunting and I wanna talk about your show for a minute, which is called Wild Game Kitchen. You're going out and hunting and fishing and preparing fish and game that you bring back. What's been the highlight of that experience compared to so many of the other cooking shows that you've done?

Andrew Zimmern:
I've never done a dump and stir show. Ever. I'm a storyteller. I use food as a magnifying glass. And I never wanna be the best. I'm not capable of that. It's also relative, but I'm very interested in being the only. With Bizarre Foods, I felt I was the only. Wild Game Kitchen, I think I'm an only. And that doesn't mean that there aren't other people cooking this type of food there. I just think a lot of those people are fisherman or backcountry woodsmen, or great cooks who wanna show you how to do something with your pheasant, right? I just thought, "Well, is there someone with the 40 years of work cred who can look down the barrel of the TV camera and say, "I would suggest trying this with your venison?" You wanna make chili out of the leg meat and grind the trim for burgers? I do that. But let's not overcook the tenderloin and the backstrap and the top round and let's roast the neck and then pull all the meat off of that and do a ragu with red wine and vegetables because that was the original a la cacciatorere, right? In the style of the hunter that was cooked in Italy. They had dogs that hunted wild pigs and wild deer and those were the cuts that they were given to cook. The center cuts of the animal went up to the count and the countess in the castle, right? So, you know, to be able to tie those things together and to have that ability to do that makes me, in this particular space, an only, so that really intrigued me. I think I also sort of wanted to blow up a little bit of a stereotype. I talk about my alcoholism and my addiction and some of my mental health issues all the time because I want people to know this is the face of that, right? And we clean up pretty well when we're sprinkled with a little dignity and respect and we have a chance to make things right, and I believe in that message very powerfully. But there's so many people who say, "Well, Jews aren't alcoholics." You know, "Jews don't hunt. Especially ones from New York City." And I'm like, "Well, I do. All the time."

Sid Evans:
(laughs)
**Andrew Zimmern:**
And so to have an opportunity to show people what I do in my house, but also to kinda raise up this idea of what wild food can be, I think it has a higher purpose when it comes to solving our climate crisis, our hunger crisis in America, our waste crisis in America, and so many of our other issues. And I think that on the flip side, there are a whole bunch of people throwing a lot of shade at folks in certain parts of our country saying, "Well, if you're out on a bass boat at 5:00 in the morning or 7:00 at night, or if you're shooting catfish with a bow and arrow off the front of a customized rig in the Mobile Bay in Alabama, or if you're treeing raccoons with dogs and cooking those up on the smoker, well, that's a backwards way of life." Well, I'm sorry. I disagree. I do that and I consider it a frontwards way of life.

**Sid Evans:**
I mean, you don't have to look back very far to find cookbooks that had all those things.

**Andrew Zimmern:**
Absolutely not.

**Sid Evans:**
(laughs)

**Andrew Zimmern:**
And by the way, the show is for everyone. So even if you've never held a fishing rod or taken a walk in the woods to look for an animal to put on your dinner table, you can go to the supermarket and buy a piece of meat and do the same fun recipe that I'm doing. You don't need wild turkey to do it. You can do it with chicken or turkey or duck or whatever, and we make sure to tell people that and what to do in case they don't have access to wild foods. But I think we get to spread a message and talk about culture in a way that is very important to me.

**Sid Evans:**
So let me ask you, just in terms of recipes, there are a lot of people who deer hunt in this country, and there are a lot of people, particularly in the South, and they end up with venison, and they don't necessarily know what to do with it. If there's one venison recipe that you could send me that we could share with people, that might get them excited about cooking with venison a little bit more, what would it be?

**Andrew Zimmern:**
You know, I literally think the most fun thing that I do with venison is, I went to a place in Iowa that had a beef fry. I know this sounds crazy. Bear with me.

**Sid Evans:**
(laughs)
And it was called Pitchfork Fondue. And you paid like 20 bucks, and you got salad and potatoes and macaroni salad and lemonade and all the rest of that, and they had these giant vats of boiling oil, and they had these pitchforks. And these guys would spear big hunks of meat, and they would put them into the hot oil, and it would brown it to the crust. It was like deep-fried turkey, but think big primals of beef. And then it would come and rest, and then they'd slice it, and it's really crusty on the outside and it's really juicy on the inside. And I was like, "Wow. I am so doing that".

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern:
... "with red meat when I get home."

Sid Evans:
(laughs)

Andrew Zimmern:
And so now I do it with bison and with venison. And the reason is deep-frying it that temperature locks in the fat and the juices in a way that other methods don't. It's such high heat, right? It cooks really quickly. So you gotta kinda get used to it and test a couple sized pieces before you start butchering everything else up. And it is kinda like fondue. And I've done it individually with a fondue pot, but I didn't like that. I like it better when I go out to the turkey fryer, fry everything and bring it into the house 'cause then you can season the meat with a spice mixture and then have three or four dipping sauces. So you have some salad and veg and other stuff around it, but fried venison is so good. And by the way, when you say "fried venison" to a lot of other families, especially in your part of the world, they roll cubes of venison in flour and pan fry it and then make a pan gravy-

Sid Evans:
Sure.

Andrew Zimmern:
... with it. That's delicious.

Sid Evans:
Yeah.

Andrew Zimmern:
But I'm talking about actually deep-frying it. We do have that recipe on my website, under the season one Wild Game Kitchen recipes. I do it with bison. But you can do it just as easily, uh-

Sid Evans:
What's the recipe called?
Andrew Zimmern:
... venison. I think it's called buffalo bites or bison bites. If you go onto andrewzimmern.com, people can sign up for my substack, but you can also just stick Wild Game Kitchen into the search bar. We just added the season three recipes. Season three is in premiers right now, every Monday night at 9:00 on the Outdoor Channel.

Sid Evans:
That's great. That's great. I'm gonna go investigate (laughs).

Andrew Zimmern:
It's good.

Sid Evans:
Now I just need to get a deer... Andrew, one more question for you. What's the thing that you most love about the South?

Andrew Zimmern:
The people. The world isn't made up of things. My experience is the world is made up of people, and the people in the South are kind and they're generous and they're honest and the people that I've bumped into there have a way of expressing themselves and opening their door that the rest of us really should take a page outta their book on. It's always the people.

Sid Evans:
Yeah, it is. It is, isn't it?

Andrew Zimmern:
Yeah.

Sid Evans:
Andrew Zimmern, thanks so much for being on Biscuits and Jam.

Andrew Zimmern:
I appreciate it. Thank you.

Music: Biscuits and Jam Theme begins.

Sid Evans (VO): Thanks for listening to my conversation with Andrew Zimmern. Southern Living is based in Birmingham, Alabama. Be sure to follow Biscuits & Jam on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen. And we'd love your feedback. If you could rate this podcast and leave us a review, we'd really appreciate it. You can also find us online at southernliving.com/biscuitsandjam. Our theme song is by
Sean Watkins of Nickel Creek. I hope you’ll join us next week for my conversation with one of the most well-known people in the world – and a returning guest to this show – Dolly Parton. We'll see you then!

Music: Biscuits and Jam Theme ends.