

The History of Chili Cook-Offs

Part Five: The Chili World Split in Two

Ranger Bob Ritchey
by John Raven, Ph.B.

Last month we brought the Terlingua chili history up to 1974 when Allegani Jani Schofield became the first Terlingua World Champion of the female persuasion. There was a repeat performance by the ladies the following year when Suzi Watson of Houston won the title.

Not long after that, chili politics reared its ugly head. You think the national candidates can fling mud. That's nothing compared to what went on in the chili world.

Many chili cooks were not happy with Frank Tolbert's slap-dash method of running the chili show, and a campaign to unseat Tolbert as Godfather of Terlingua ended up in court. The court battle was over who had the rights to the title "Chili Appreciation Society International" or "CASI", and the judge ruled that the Revolting Party had best claim to the title. This brought about the split in 1983 between the Tolbert faction and the Revolting Party. Thereafter, there would be two World Championship Chili Cook-offs in Terlingua in November.

As memory serves, the last chili cooking took place at Old Town Terlingua in 1982. The CASI faction moved it to Glen Pepper's Villa de la Mina ranch a couple of miles up the road.

Tolbert decided to take "his" cook-off elsewhere. The elsewhere turned out to be some Chihuahuan desert property behind the old Terlingua Store. This gave the title "Behind the Store" to Tolbert's cook-off.

The two opposing cook-offs were held the same day. The Behind the Store faction had far fewer participants than did the CASI show but, mostly due to their bringing in first class musical entertainment, the Behind the Store attendance began to grow.

In the meantime, the California branch of the International Chili Society was holding a real high roller cook-off at the Tropico Gold Mine in California. And that's how we got three world championship chili cook-offs. For 2007, as best I know, there will be the same three cook-offs for the bragging rights to being one of three world champions.

Historic chili recipes

The first really "hot" recipe was that of Ed "Chillee" Paetzel of Houston. Ed was one of the first chili competitors. He personally won Chilympiad twice and Trader's Village Prairie Dog Cook-Off twice. Both of these events were *major* cook-offs. (See [Chat with a Chili Champ](#).)

Ed shared his recipe with his friends, and that base recipe won hundreds of cook-offs. It was the first Killer recipe.

Ed "Chillee" Paetzel's 4-K Chili

The four Ks are for the names of Ed's children, Kim, Karl, Kevin and Kris.

- 2 or 3 tablespoons cooking oil (more if needed)
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed with the blade of your knife
- 1 large red onion (chopped)
- 2 mild canned jalapeños, seeded and chopped (This will give a heat level that a five-year-old will like. This chili is not for fire-eating contests.)
- 5 pounds tender, lean meat, chili ground or hand cut
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 2 rounded tablespoons cumin (comino)
- 2 rounded tablespoons ground New Mexico red chiles
- 2 level tablespoons McCormick or other brand chili powder
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 cup drinkable Texas Merlot Wine (Never cook with a wine you won't drink.)
- 2 cups hardy beef stock
- One 15-ounce can tomato sauce
- Water, if needed

Place cooking oil and garlic in your cooking pot at the same time. Turn on heat and brown garlic. When garlic is nicely browned, remove it from the oil and discard. The cold oil absorbs the favor of the garlic as it cooks without being bitter. Brown the onion, and jalapeno. Brown the meat in same pot with onion and jalapeno.

When meat is brown, put all the spices in and cook and stir until the meat is thoroughly covered with spices. Pour in wine and cook for about three minutes while the alcohol is evaporating. Pour in the beef stock and tomato sauce. If meat is not

completely covered with liquid, add a little water. Do not add beer to this chili. It makes it bitter. Cook chili until done. You can taste along the way. Do not let chili get dry at any time.

In my opinion the secret to Ed's chili was the use of New Mexico Red powder. It has a brilliant red color, and it does not have the bitter taste the ancho-based powders tend to have.

The Ritchey Family

Bob "Ranger Bob" Ritchey got sidetracked on a trip to Luckenbach in 1975 and ended up at Chilympiad, the Texas Men's Championship Chili Cook-Off at San Marcos, Texas. Ranger Bob found the event interesting enough to get started on the chili trail. He developed a recipe and before long he was winning trophies. I think Bob started in 1980, and in 1982 he won Chilympiad, which was the biggest chili cook-off in the world at that time. I think the record number of 401 cookers probably still stands.

The rest of his immediate family, Dad Wes, Mom Dorene, Brother Jeff, and Sister-in-law Dani, and Brother Russell, were soon all involved in the chili cooking craze.

Since then the Ritchey clan has racked up seven wins at Terlingua, five at the Ladies State cook-off, four at Czihilispiel in Flatonia, two at Chilympiad and two at the Texas Open -- all first place wins. Their lesser placings are too numerous to list. You can't get a much better record than this.

Dorene Ritchey's 5-R Chili

- 2 pounds cubed or coarsely ground boneless, trimmed beef (chuck or shoulder arm preferred)
- 1 tablespoon vegetable shortening
- 1-1/2 teaspoons hot sauce
- 8 ounces (1 cup) tomato sauce
- 2 beef bullion cubes
- 2 jalapeño peppers, skin surface slit
- 6 tablespoons chili powder (or to taste)
- 4 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon white pepper
- 3/8 teaspoon cayenne
- 1/4 teaspoon oregano

- 1/8 teaspoon crushed bay leaf

Cook meat over medium heat in melted shortening until meat is gray in color. Add hot sauce, tomato sauce, bullion cubes, one jalapeño and water to cover. Simmer, covered, 40 to 60 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add water if needed. When jalapeño is soft, squeeze in the juice and discard pulp and seeds.

Mix together the chili powder, cumin, onion, garlic, salt, white pepper, cayenne, oregano and bay leaf; divide into 3 portions. Add one portion spice mixture and remaining jalapeño. Continue to cook for one hour adding water as needed. Remove jalapeño, squeeze juice into chili and discard pulp and seeds.

Add second portion of spice mixture. Continue cooking for another 30 minutes, adding water if needed. Add the last remaining spice mixture and cook 15 minutes more. (Chili should be kept thick during cooking. Adding too much water keeps the spices from permeating the meat.)

So there we are, friends and neighbors -- the History of Terlingua chili cooking in five easy installments. I owe a big thank you to Ranger Bob Ritchey for helping me get my story straight as possible.