

George's Red Snapper

Serves 4

Minnie served fish on Fridays. Always. Even after the Pope said it wasn't necessary. Bobby Dunlap, who grew up working in Dear and Paw Paw's cleaners and was in and out of their house, becoming a kind of fifth son and a best friend to middle son George, remembers picking up the fish from the neighborhood fishmonger many a Friday early afternoon: "I didn't even have to say what I wanted. I just had to say I was there for Mrs. Randall's order and they would know exactly how many pieces of perch and how they should be fixed."

When George got older he preferred red snapper, an Alabama fish. Descended from both slaves and slave owners, George was deeply conflicted about his Alabama roots. He avoided the state quite literally like the plague, going there only on rare occasion and under duress until 1981, the year his youngest daughter, my mama, graduated from college. At the graduation he said he was forgiving America. Afterward he traveled to Selma. He reported being astounded to see black and white children swimming together in a Holiday Inn pool. "I expected, one day, to see angels eating manna. I didn't expect to see black kids in swimming pools in Alabama." The luxury of an integrated clear-water swimming pool, not a murky-water river, was a "kingdom come" moment for George. He celebrated by eating red snapper. -- Caroline Randall Williams

2 skinless red snapper fillets (about 1 pound total)

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 lemon, cut into quarters

A few sprigs fresh oregano

A few sprigs fresh parsley

½ lime

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Divide both fillets in half. Put each piece in the middle of its own square of aluminum foil. Drizzle the snapper with the olive oil, and squeeze one quarter of the lemon over each fillet. Cover each fillet with oregano and parsley sprigs. Fold the aluminum foil in toward the middle so that each fillet is fully wrapped. Fold and pinch the edges to seal completely. Put the packets on a baking sheet. Bake until the fish is cooked through, about 10 minutes.
3. Carefully open the foil packets (there may be a lot of steam), transfer the fillets to plates, and squeeze the lime over them. Serve immediately.

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