

BUFFALO WINGS

I flew into Buffalo, New York last night and am now in Niagara Falls, getting wet and admiring the view. And of course, what is the most famous thing in Buffalo for a food writer like me but Buffalo Wings! Buffalo Wings have been so ingrained in our food culture that it's surprising to think they've only been around for a little over 40 years.

Buffalo Wings were invented at the Anchor Bar in Buffalo, New York, owned by Frank and Teressa Bellissimo. According to the story, Teressa needed a quick late night snack one night in 1964 when her son Dominic and some friends came into the bar. She had a bunch of chicken wings on hand, so quickly improvising, she stuck them under the broiler, (they later switched to deep frying), sprinkled them with a buttery hot sauce mixture, pulled some celery sticks off the antipasto dishes and served them with the house dressing, which happened to be blue cheese. And so Buffalo Wings were born. That was pretty much the end of the tale until 1980, when Calvin Trillin, food writer and columnist for the *New Yorker* magazine did a story on Buffalo Wings for his magazine. The following year, *New York Times* food writers Craig Claiborne and Pierre Franey did a column and recipe on Buffalo Wings in the *New York Times*—and the food press took notice. Two years later, Hooters Restaurant chain was founded featuring hot wings. Domino's Pizza introduced them nationally in 1994, Pizza Hut followed in 1995, and now everybody is serving Buffalo Wings, as far away as Singapore, Japan, and even Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. You can even find Oriental Style hot wings, Southern style hot wings, jerked chicken wings, and even hot wings cooked with peanut butter.

Everybody liked Buffalo Wings. Former Dodgers manager Tommy Lasorda raved about them. Former First Lady Hilary Clinton had an order delivered to her plane on a stop through Buffalo. Today, the Anchor Bar serves over 70,000 pounds of chicken wings a MONTH! That's a lot of chicken.

The Anchor Bar's web site gives a recipe for Buffalo Wings, but it uses their own house brand Buffalo Wing Sauce, which is cheating. For the rest of us, here's what you do. For the chicken, you'll need 2 ½ pounds of chicken wings, (that's about 12 to 16 whole wings), salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste, and enough vegetable oil to deep-fry the chicken wings. For the hot sauce, you'll need half a stick of butter or margarine, 4-5 tablespoons (or even more) of Tabasco or other hot sauce, (my favorite is Crystal).

Cut off and discard the tips from the wings, and split the wings at the joint. Sprinkle the wings with some salt and pepper. Deep fry the wings in oil heated to about 350 degrees until they're brown and crispy, from 10 to 15 minutes. Drain on paper towels. Meanwhile, in a saucepan, melt the butter and add the hot sauce. (A little experimentation will achieve the right blend for you.) When the chicken wings are done, put the wings in the saucepan and toss to coat evenly. Put them on a platter and serve, accompanied by celery sticks and some Blue Cheese dressing. Some cooks put the wings in a baking pan after they've been tossed in the hot sauce and stick them in a hot oven for a few minutes to bake on the sauce.

If you don't want to deep fry the wings, you can bake them in a 425-degree oven for 45 minutes until completely cooked and crispy. Some cooks also add a little bit of vinegar to the hot sauce and butter mixture—indeed, some versions claim that a tablespoon of vinegar was part of Teressa's original recipe. And some cooks claim that only margarine, not butter, will do. And many Buffalo Wing aficionados claim that the only hot sauce to use is Durkee's Frank's Original Red Hot Cayenne Pepper Sauce, made by the folks that make French's mustard.

Of course, cold beer is the only proper accompaniment. This is Steve Muni, on the road for the Hometown Kitchen.