

ALISA LAY
2 Sisters in the Kitchen – Carrollton, MS

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Location: Downtown Greenwood Farmers' Market – Greenwood, MS
Interviewer: Amy Evans Streeter
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 45 minutes
Project: Downtown Greenwood Farmers' Market

[Begin Alisa Lay Interview]

00:00:02

Amy Evans Streeter: This is Amy Evans Streeter for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Saturday, September 10, 2011. May I ask you, Lisa, to state your name and occupation for the record, please?

00:00:17

Alisa Lay: Hi, my name is Alisa. Everybody calls me Lisa Lay. I am an alcohol and drug counselor at Life Help here in Greenwood. I've been in that profession for 25 years. And my sister and I, Brenda [Glenn], we have a little on the side job, and we call ourselves Two Sisters in the Kitchen. And what we do is we can goods that my grandmother had given us recipes for, and we're now teaching our—my nephew [Jason Glenn] how to can because we feel it is a dying art.

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AES: Lovely. And would you mind sharing your birth date for the record so we can get your—your birth date?

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AL: My birthday is November 25, 1956.

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AES: All right. And we have some customers approaching.

00:01:04

AL: [To Customer] No. How y'all doing? Now you've got this really cool slick comfortable hair-do going on today, ready for the summer.

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Customer: It is comfortable. I've had it like this for 30 years.

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AL: Can I help you with something?

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Customer: I'm just looking.

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AL: Okay, if you have any questions just—

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Customer: How much are jars of—?

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AL: Everything—all the pint jars are \$5.50. We have the salsa, the pickled okra; we have some bread and butter pickles. We're kind of running out of everything because this is our last—my last weekend here. She is recording me because she's interviewing me for some research on—

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Customer: I won't be looking at myself on TV, will I?

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AL: No, ma'am.

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Customer: I don't like cameras.

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AL: You don't like cameras?

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Customer: No. This is strawberry—?

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AES: All right, no, yeah so we—

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AL: We established my birthday.

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AES: You established your birth date, and so let's talk about how you got into being a part of the [Downtown Greenwood] Farmers' Market. I understand you've been here from the beginning.

00:02:07

AL: Yeah. Actually the first year the Farmers' Market, we—my sister and I drove by one day to buy watermelon and we started looking around and we decided well, you know what? We need to start bringing some of our canned goods up. We had a small garden that year, so we brought some of our vegetables and we started—of course, we had been canning but we started canning some of my grandmother's recipes that we have had for years, and we had to tweak them a little bit.

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And so over the past four years we just—that's what we've become; we've become Two Sisters in the Kitchen. And we can some—I think they're some unique recipes. And they must be because we—we do really well. We have a lot of come back—return customers.

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And so then from there—I've always baked muffins. And so from there we started bringing our muffins, you know, that we bake, and then I'm a good cook and my grandmother had some good recipes, and my aunt had some good recipes. So we just started making a variety of different things, and we started coming to the Farmers' Market and we started making friends with other vendors. And like Donald [Bender of Mockingbird Bakery] is here, and we love playing around with Donald and Hal [Fiore], and we just enjoy coming. We enjoy it.

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And then we have people that come and see us just to come and see us. This one customer that we have, he knew my father real well and he'll come by and he'll say, "How are those Lay sisters doing?" And so it's good to see Mr. Jeffers come by and—. It's—not only is it a place to come and sell your products, which is important, because, you know, I like making the extra money, but it's a place to come where you can visit people, you can talk about the old

times, you know. We have a lot of older people in the community that come out and visit. And I've met people that knew my grandparents. You know, the story I just told you [before recording began], he—I've met people that have known my grandparents and my father and my mother are both deceased. But they come back and they talk about you know my family, and I enjoy talking to them.

00:04:08

AES: So how far back does your family go in—in Greenwood or Leflore County or both?

00:04:12

AL: In this area? Well, in this area and Sunflower County, my—on my mother's side they were farmers. The Shurdens. They farmed. They started out as sharecroppers up in the hills, and then they moved back in this area, let's see—I would probably say 75 or maybe 100 years ago. And then my grandmother's side of the family has always lived in this part of the country, and I really have a story I want to tell you about my grandmother, if you want me to tell you.

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We have okra that has been in our family; the okra seeds have been in our family almost 200 years, passed down from my grandmother from generation to generation. And we've shared that okra seed with close family and friends. I've shared it with people from other states that have come in to visit. And the difference in our okra and what you see today is this okra is the original heirloom Longhorn okra. I wish I had some with me to show you.

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And the okra will get—I don't know how long that is. *[Gestures with hands to illustrate length]*. How many inches would that be?

00:05:15

AES: It looks like about 14 inches.

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AL: Okay. The okra can get that long and still be tender enough to cook. You can't cook it whole—whole okra, but you can chop it up. And it—it's slick; it doesn't have the hard ridges in it and it doesn't have that harsh—you know, okra sometimes has a real harsh strong taste. It's a milder taste. And we've just been cooking it for years. And you know we had a customer come by while ago, you know, asking for the okra and it's—and it makes me feel good to know that this is something that my grand—this is part of my grandmother, who—you know, I miss her a lot; this is part of her and part of her mother, Granny Weaver and part of her mother, and it's just gone down from generation to generation.

00:05:59

AES: So when your grandmother shared those seeds, what did she impart to you in—in that moment?

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AL: Well, I was a child, so it didn't matter to me. “It's okra. Mama, its just okra.” But my sister—my mother died when I was 12, so my sister tells me the stories. And Mama told her how that every year they would hang the okra up out in the shed to dry, and they would just keep on saving those seeds. And she would say—because my mom, Randy Mama, but we called her Mama, she was real thrifty. And she would say, “Well honey, we're going to save these seeds

every year and don't you—don't you not save those seeds because once they're gone, they're gone. And that's part of your history, and you can't buy it." So she said we saved it for years; that's how we ate.

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So for them it wasn't a sentimental thing; it was survival. And for us it's a sentimental thing.

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AES: But she knew that there was historic and family value imparted in the okra seeds passing on?

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AL: Yes, yes. She knew that because she would tell us, "Now this was Granny Weaver's and her mama planted it." Because in their family they always had their small garden outside the house, and that's where they planted the okra. In the fields they planted cotton, but Mama and—and Granny Weaver, they planted food in—to feed the family. And so for her, it was passing down part of her—part of Granny Weaver, really, because she was so close to her.

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AES: Wow. So you have—and you said you're sharing them with other parts of your family and did you say friends also?

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AL: Yeah, my brother lives in Georgia, and he has okra seed and then we planted okra this year. It didn't come up and we said, "Oh, what are we going to do?" And so we called Mr. Jeffers, who is a friend that—acquaintance that comes by every Saturday because we had given him seed years and years and years ago. And we said, "George, do you have any seed left? I don't think ours is going to come up." And we were really getting nervous. So he brought us seed, and then it ended up that it all came up. And so yeah, you—we're not going to let go of this seed. It's not going to die.

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We have—I can't think of her name right now, but one of the attorney's wives came through one day and was buying okra and she said her son lives in another state. And so we gave her seed to give—send to him. And then we've had people that just came through that we just shared the seed with—not people we didn't know, but people that seemed really sincere about—interested in the agricultural history of the okra.

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AES: Is there anything else like the okra that y'all have saved over the years that kind of carries that same story and history?

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AL: No. Just the okra seed; that's the only thing we have that's gone down, other than the recipe books. But that's the only—only seed that we have. We do grow heirloom vegetables. This past year, due to our health, we didn't—we didn't really have a big garden. We had just a small garden and my nephew did as—as well as he could because he had never gardened before. But we do plant heirloom tomatoes. We planted—I had a—an acquaintance of mine gave me some Black

Russian tomato seeds, and I planted those and those—I've kept those seeds because he was a real special friend. So that may become one of our heirloom specialties.

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AES: Wow. So tell me—if you wouldn't mind retelling the story about your great-grandmother and all those children, I think that would be great.

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AL: Oh, okay. Okay. Ma Shurden, they lived in Sunflower County [Mississippi], and they all—they were—they were sharecroppers, and they were just real poor. And she had 17 children that lived. And my grandmother, who we called Randy Mama, she was there with her husband and there were several of the other brothers that were there with their wives. And so they were getting ready to cook breakfast, and so Randy Mama started helping making the biscuits out. And she made out some biscuits. I don't know exactly how many she made out, and Ma Shurden said, "That's enough."

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And Randy Mama, my grandmother, just a sweet, kind, meek woman and Ma Shurden was a stern, no-nonsense woman, since she had—had 17 children and so Randy Mama started making out sausage patties. And she made out about a dozen, and Ma Shurden said, "That's enough." And Randy Mama said, "I turned to her, and I said, 'But Ma Shurden, this isn't enough to go around.'" And Ma Shurden replied, "Them that get there last for breakfast will be there first for dinner." **[Laughs]** So we always laugh about that because having 17 kids, that's probably how she had to feed them. You get there on time, you take care of your food, and you get out there and get to work. **[Laughs]**

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AES: Yeah, that's a great story. So tell me about the recipe books.

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AL: Well, when my grandmother died, she just had recipes—you know, she gave us recipes throughout the year. She taught my sister how to can, and I never really thought anything about it. I really wasn't that interested in it. I left this area and moved to California and lived there for 15 years, and when I came back I moved from Los Angeles to Teoc, Mississippi, and it was a big culture change.

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And so I told my sister [Brenda], "I'm not—I'm not getting out in that garden and working like we had to when we were growing up. That's—I'm not going to do that." But something happened and I started seeing the garden and I started—I really developed a relationship with God in the garden, and so, as a result of that, my sister would start canning. And her health wasn't real good, and that's one reason I came back. So I had already started, you know, having a spiritual growth in the garden and then she would be canning, and I would start helping her just to help her. And then that's where my sister and I had a chance to talk. We'd be in the kitchen and—I'm going to cry because she's so special to me; [*Sighs*] but we'd be in the kitchen and things would be going on in the rest of the house, and we wouldn't even be paying any attention to them. We'd just be talking—talking and working.

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And so we'd pull Mama's recipe books out, and we'd sit in my sister's room on the bed and we'd have recipe books scattered everywhere. And we'd say, "Oh, this sounds like a good

recipe” or “I can't believe this. I'm not trying this.” And my sister would say, “Well, that sounds good to me. Let's try it.”

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And so we would try to make it and some things that my mom—in Randy Mama's recipe book we've tried and we just cannot do it, but I'm not going to give up. She used to make a chicken pie that was just out of this world. And she didn't make them little; she made them in wash tubs is what she—you know, these big wash tubs for family reunions. Because if 17 family—you know kids in that family and they grow up and we'd have family reunions, and there would be kids everywhere. And my sister and I have tried to make that recipe, but Mama didn't measure anything. And half the recipes you can't read because she wasn't a real educated woman, but, you know, she could read and write, and she read the Bible all the time. But some of the recipes don't make a lot of sense, so when we start going—started going through them, some of them turned out to be a disaster. So we had to tweak some of them, but that's how we got started going through her books.

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And then when my aunt, Aunt Chris, died, we got some of her recipes too. And we just tried different recipes. We don't cook as much as we used to anymore because we're so busy, so I really miss that time where we get to sit down in the kitchen and talk and just to be sisters. It's real important to me to have a sister.

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AES: How close are y'all in age?

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AL: She's 10 years older, yeah.

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AES: Is that right.

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AL: I'm very sentimental about my sister, very. She is the most important person in my life. So we're Two Sisters in the Kitchen.

00:14:00

AES: Yeah. So tell me about—let's get back to canning again. Why don't you tell me a little bit about what you have here on the table today?

00:14:05

AL: Well, I've really done well today. I didn't bring a lot of things because this is my last week, and I've given away some of the items that I had to my regular customers. We have a black bean and corn salsa, which, hands down, is the best salsa you will ever eat in your life. And I have many, many people to vouch for it.

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But my grandmother had a recipe—I don't remember what she called it, but she didn't call it salsa. And I think she made it for the farm hands when they came in from—from Mexico. That was back when you needed someone to pick cotton, they drove down to Mexico. They picked up a load of Hispanics—Mexicans—and they brought them back, and she would have to

cook for them. So I think some—someone in that group taught her how to make this—what we turned into black bean and corn salsa.

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And the—the reason it’s so good is because we can—we use the tomatoes that we grow, usually Heirloom tomatoes. So towards the end of the season we start canning all of our tomatoes so that when the season starts next year for the Farmers’ Market, we have canned tomatoes to make salsa because salsa is our biggest seller. It has the black beans in it are dried; I don’t use canned black beans. We do use canned corn, but it has fresh tomatoes. It has fresh jalapeno peppers that we grow, and then we freeze them. It has cilantro, which we dry that we grow, and we just dry it because we don’t want to buy it. We don’t want to buy it from another country. We want it to be from here in Leflore—in Carroll County because I live in Carroll County. And everything in there is fresh that can be fresh and some things have to be purchased. But that’s our best seller; love it—love it, eat it out the can, out of the jar. I like to eat it with my English—with my black-eyed peas instead of chow-chow.

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So that’s one of our big sellers. Then the, okra of course, the pickled okra, and I like the way my grandmother used to cook okra in an iron skillet and she’d put grease in there—bacon grease, of course, and a little bit of water, and she would fry it down, and she’d almost burn it and that’s about the only way I eat okra. So when we started making pickled okra, I told my sister, “I’m not tasting that. That is just disgusting to me.” **[Laughs]** The thought of eating raw okra—but actually it’s not raw because during the canning process it gets cooked.

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So I tasted one one day and it was okay, but I’m not a big okra eating fan except for the way Mama cooked it. But that’s a big seller because we only have it for a short period of time.

And actually, the shrimp man [Bubba Frazier], he's our biggest okra customer. And then we have the bread and butter pickles here that, you know, that's a standard. That's not a real hard thing to make, if you know what you're doing. And then we have, which is interesting, we have our marinated green beans for salad, which is also a Bloody Mary green bean. And the way we started making those, one of the ladies that—the first year that we were here—asked us, “Do you ever make Bloody Mary green beans?” And my sister said, “No,” because we're not big drinkers of Bloody Mary(s) and—of anything really. So my sister started—the first thing she did was went through my grandmother's recipe and she did not find—she knew she would not find a Bloody Mary green bean in my grandmother's recipe because she didn't drink, but she did find a recipe for pickled green beans—marinated green beans.

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And so then she kind of did a little more research and tweaked it a little bit, and we were growing green beans at the time. And she is the most patient person in the world because she would go through the green beans and find the straight ones, find the thin ones that would fit down in the jar perfect. When Mr. Tribble had his booth set up here that year, she would go sit over there for an hour looking for the perfect green beans, and we had some old vintage canning jars that were tall but not as tall as the quart jars. And so we started out canning the marinated green beans, I mean the Bloody Mary green beans in these long thin jars. Well we ran out of those soon, and so now we count them in regular pint jars and we still try to pick out the straightest longest prettiest green beans.

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Well, the funny thing about that is we would have to chop them off to make them fit, and we were just throwing the little pieces of green bean away. And I said, “You know what? We've lost our minds.” And—and she said, “Why?” I said, “Because we make these Bloody Mary green

beans,” which I open a jar and chop them up and put them on my salad. So then we started saving the ones that we chopped over. I mean how—I mean you look—and she said, “You know how stupid I was?” So we started saving the pieces that we’d chop off, and we started making marinated salad green beans, so that’s the story about the green beans.

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What else do we have? Ah, this is an interesting one. We have the tart apple relish because we’re always looking for stuff to sell—different things to make and sell. And so she found this in Aunt Chris’ cookbook, I believe, and what it is—it’s tart green apples and we have a friend that gives us green apples, and tart green apples, celery, apples, and I’m sure—celery, carrots, and apples, and I’m sure it has some other things in it. And we made some of those, and that’s not one of my favorite things that we make but my sister likes it, and she’ll put it on her salad. But the thing that she has used it for that’s interesting is she made a pasta salad with it. And—and that was good.

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We have some construction going on—**[Laughs]** trying to beautify the—the city.

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Now the next thing we have is dilly tomatoes, dilly green tomatoes. My nephew was looking for something to make one day, so he was going through Mama’s cookbook and he found some pickled tomatoes. Now we’ve made pickled sweet tomatoes before, like bread and butter pickles, you know. You slice them and you put them on your sandwiches. But we wanted something dill because we have a—a friend that comes by and she’s diabetic, and so she’s always looking to see what we have. So he made these dilly green tomatoes, and she said they were real good. I haven’t tried them yet. She said that they were really good on salads, and she

likes to eat them just throughout the day because they're green tomatoes and they're healthy, and they have no sugar in them.

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Oh the—another thing we have; what are these things? These are the—oh, the marinated cayenne peppers. Well my brother loves hot, hot, hot things so last year for Christmas we decided that we would marinade some peppers for him instead of just making the regular Southern pepper sauce. So we added garlic to it and onions and roasted red bell pepper. So those are—those are good, I suppose, because I don't eat hot things. Anyway, he enjoyed them. So I have that today.

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I have some apple preserves again. We have a friend that gave us some apples. And Mama had a recipe. And when I say Mama, I'm talking about Randy Mama. She had a recipe for apple jelly, and I was too lazy to go through the whole process. So I said, "I'm going to make apple preserves." So I went through the process of cooking the apples down and then going to put the water in them and going to drain it out—drain it off and through a cheesecloth and get the pulp out. I just left it and so it made an apple preserve, which is really good if you like apples. I tasted it, and I thought, well, this is pretty good. You know, I like this better than apple jelly.

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So that's been interesting to have the apple preserves, which I also make sugar-free. Everything that we make in—as far as jellies, I try to make sugar-free also. But I'm out because it sells real fast. Break time.

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Hey, I tell her we all—y'all mind me telling her I got a customer here? What's your name honey?

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Customer: Helen.

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AL: Okay; well we just had customers walk up, and this is Miss Helen and her grandson Nicholas? And Nicholas decided he wanted to buy some strawberry preserves, and one of my healthy, healthy, healthy zucchini muffins. I started making these about 14 years ago when I lived in Los Angeles. I would go to this restaurant around the corner, and they would make zucchini muffins. And they were so good and they were really nice, and they gave me the recipe. So what is in it is it's a blend of whole-wheat flour and a white flour, but what I'm using for the white flour is an unbleached organic white flour. That's what I'm using now until I run out, and then I'll have to see what else I come up with.

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And whole-wheat flour; it's got pineapple in it. It's got granola in it; it's got raisins. It's got brown sugar, flax seed, which is very healthy and very good, and it has Post Grape Nuts because some people are allergic to pecans and other nuts, so I don't put nuts in it. I put Grape Nuts to give it the crunch. Baby, it is good. Thank you, Nicholas.

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Nicholas: Thank you. Bye-bye. Y'all enjoy talking.

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AES: Thank you, Nicholas, very much. Bye, y'all.

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AL: I love talking to people—love talking to people. So anyway, I was telling you everything I make as far as jellies. I just sold my last jar of strawberry preserves, which I didn't grow the strawberries. I bought them. And I sold my last jar—no, I have one jar left of cherry plum jelly. And so people look at it, and they say, “Is this cherry jelly?” And I say, “No, it’s a cherry plum.” Again, this friend that gives me the apples, he gives me the cherry plums, and I make jelly from it. I have a friend up until this year that gave me figs, and then our fig tree started producing and she also gives me all the muscadines and all the scuppernongs, I think, is how you pronounced it and all the pears that I want. But it’s been a slow year for us, so we didn't get to do any of those because of health problems.

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So those are the things that I have here for sale and sometimes I have other—oh, another story if you want me to tell you another story.

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AES: Yes.

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AL: It’s a quick one. We’ve been going through these recipe books for four years, and my nephew said, “I need something new to make,” and he opened my grandmother’s recipe book—just opened it up and didn't even turn the page and so, “Oh, look Mama.” He was talking to his mother. He said, “Look Mom, a recipe for sweet onion relish. I’m going to try that.” So he started making—the first year we had our own onions and then he had to start buying because he

made so much of it. He started making sweet Vidalia onion relish, which is absolutely delicious and I don't have any, and he couldn't make it fast enough. And I said, "Look-a-there, he just opens the book and he becomes the Sweet Onion Relish King."

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So now, since I don't eat raw onions, he makes the sweet onion relish, we put it in potato salad because it takes the place of the raw onions and it takes the place of the pickles. It's delicious, but I don't have any more of it.

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AES: So is—is your nephew the one who is going to carry on the family traditions of canning and the recipes and the okra seeds?

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AL: Yes, he is because he has two sisters that could care less about doing anything like that. And then he has a brother who is in the Army, who, you know, he—he doesn't have time or any interest in doing this. So he is very interested in carrying on the tradition and he says—he really got upset with us when we thought we had lost our okra seeds this year.

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So he has one okra bush or whatever you call it that we're just letting it grow really big so we can let it turn to seed and not lose any this year.

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AES: What is his name and how old is he?

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AL: His name is Jason [Glenn] and gosh, how old is Jason—40? Forty. He's about—almost forty years old, I guess, and he's a good boy. He is a good boy. He—he lives here in Greenwood. And he's usually here with me every week, but he had to go help his cousin, and so he packed everything up in the car for me this morning and then the men—the guys that were setting up they helped me unpack it, and I gave them muffins. **[Laughs]** Sometimes I think I give away as many muffins as I sell **[Laughs]** but that's okay.

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AES: Well, let me ask you this. You were talking about, you know, family being so important to you and working with your sister and going through these recipe books. How has that—how have you translated that personal family meaning to your customers here at the Farmers' Market, and what does it mean to you to share these products with them?

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AL: You know, first of all, let me say that everything that we make, somebody in the family tastes. I may not taste everything because—but somebody is going to taste it to make sure that we like it. And if we don't think it tastes good, we throw it away, pour it out, which we've done that many times. So when people come through now and they ask about our products, I take a great deal of pride in—and I tell them the story. If you're sitting—if you're in the booth next to me, you get tired of hearing the same story over and over and over again. But it—I like to tell people about my family because I love my family, and some of the people know my family. And I just want them to—I want them to enjoy our product.

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I want them to know that when they buy something from us not only are they buying something that really tastes good; they're buying something from somebody that enjoyed making it. And when it gets to the point where I don't enjoy doing it, then I stop. And that's why this is my last week here because it's getting to be too much work, considering the rest of my life is so busy right now. So this is my last week here because I don't have to time to do it anymore.

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AES: Well and your sister was telling me on the phone about the new state regulations about selling prepared foods. Can you talk about that for a minute?

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AL: Well I—from what I understand, with the new state regulations, in order to—it'll go into effect next year and if you're going to sell canned goods, you're going to have to be certified, which means you're going to have to go through the state certification. You have to take their class. They want you to—they want to make sure that you are—are providing foods that meet the government regulations.

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The food that we make I feel meets the government regulation already because any of my grandmother's recipes that we have, my sister has gone on the Internet and looked at government regulations. Like our salsa. We had to—we have to tweak things, and the reason why is because the vegetables that are—that we grow today don't have the acidity in them that they used to, so they don't preserve as well. So you have to make sure that if you're not growing heirloom fruits and vegetables with high acidity, that it's going to actually be preserved without giving someone a good old case of botulism.

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So I think that's what the state is doing, but at the same time I'm not sure that they're not just trying to make some—have some control and make some money. So you have to go to this class, and I don't know how much it costs. You have to get certified. Then you have to have them come out and check the kitchen that you're cooking it in, and the kitchen has to be totally closed off from the rest of the house, if you're going to do it in your home. You have to have a separate bathroom—well, go figure. You know, that makes a lot of sense. You're going to have a separate bathroom anyway, but it has to meet their standards, has to be away from the kitchen. And what I understand—what—I'm not sure, but I think someone said it can only be used for washing, you know, cleaning the kitchen. Nobody else can be in there using it.

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You have to have a door going into your kitchen, which is impossible in our kitchen because we have this huge open kitchen. And you have to a door, and that's not going to work for us and it just seems like it's—makes it un-enjoyable. So we have decided that if—if the Farmers' Market next year—if the state comes in and says, “You have to be certified to sell here,” that we're not going to do it. We'll keep making our vegetables, we'll keep making our salsa and we'll keep giving it to people for Christmas presents, which I save a lot of money that way, and we—I'll still take orders from people, but we won't sell canned goods here. We'll grow our heirloom vegetables, and we'll probably sell some of those here next year. I'll be out of school and I'll have more time, but as far as the canning, we're not going to let it—we're not going to stop canning because we enjoy it—. As a matter of fact, maybe it'll be more enjoyable again because the pressure won't be on that—“Oh, no, I made 20 cans of salsa—jars of salsa and I sold them all, and now I got to start all over again.”

00:31:06

So, you know, whatever happens—happens.

00:31:11

AES: Well I'm glad to hear that you'll bring some of your vegetables out next year because I imagine not only will customers miss you, but that would be kind of hard to go cold turkey, [and miss out on] the social dynamic of—of the Market.

00:31:20

AL: Yeah, I think it will. And the Farmers' Market, there's so many great ideas for it, and they just hadn't happened. And I was talking to Hal [Fiore] earlier—well, maybe if—I'll be out of school. Hopefully, you know, I'll be in better health. And maybe next year I can help them work more on doing some events for the Farmers' Market because I enjoy that. You know, I'm such a shy person and all [*Laughs*], so I hope next year that I can become more involved in promoting the Farmers' Market. Since I've sat on all—I've been on all sides. I started out as a—someone coming to purchase, and then I became a vendor. I'm really interested in promoting it with the kids. I'm really—really interested in our area doing some type of community garden with the children in school.

00:32:15

I did—I'm going to school now to get my Masters in Social Work, and one of the research papers that I worked on was school gardening. And I think it's—it would be really feasible here for—for something like that and maybe I'll work—maybe that's something else I'll do next year. I don't know, you know.

00:32:35

AES: It sounds like you want and need to keep busy even though *[Laughs]* you sound like you stay busy.

00:32:39

AL: Yeah. Yeah, I like to stay busy.

00:32:40

AES: So tell me about—speaking about young people, you know, Nicholas who was just here, do you get reactions from young people kind of wondering about canning and not being familiar with it, and they're introduced to it with your product?

00:32:52

AL: Sure. It's really interesting because a lot of people come in through—with their children and they like to look at the pretty colors because, you know, it's really pretty, you know, if—if you see the red salsa and the greens and then the different colors. And the kids will say, "What is that? What is that?"

00:33:09

And in the beginning of the year we have tasting. You know, we haven't—we're not doing it late in the season because it's a lot of work, but the kids will come through and they want to taste everything, especially the sweet stuff. And yes, "What is this?" And like the apple jelly one time—not the apple jelly, the muscadine. One of the kids said, "What is this?" And I said, "It's muscadine jelly." And he tasted it, and he said, "Oh, Mom, this is better than what we get in the store." So yeah, they like to be aware of it and they ask questions and it—some of the kids are really interested, and I think that's great too. I really do.

00:33:48

AES: Well and I was reaching back [behind me] here because I think you had a quart of Bloody Mary mix earlier. Did you sell it?

00:33:54

AL: Oh, I do have a quart of Bloody Mary Mix, and it's in my ice cooler. I don't know if we have any—if we can come up with some cups or something but I thought, you know, we can't put the Mary in it but we can drink the Bloody part.

Hello?

00:34:08

AES: We have another customer.

[Recording is paused for approximately five minutes]

00:34:10

AL: Yes, I do. Okay, you ready? Okay, the Bloody Mary Mix has become a really big seller and it was by accident because the lady that asked us to make the Bloody Mary green bean, my sister started thinking and said, “Okay, well let's—let's make some Bloody Mary mix.” And we looked through Mama's recipe book, and we found a recipe for tomato juice. And so we made it, and it was a lot of work, a lot of—lot of—lot of work and it was rich and thick. And I really didn't care for it because it was so thick, but people bought it that first time and they said, "Oh,

this is going to make a good base for gazpacho.” And so they bought it all up, and so then we said, “Are we going to make this again?”

00:34:52

So then we looked in Aunt Chris’ recipe book and took Mama’s recipe and we combined it together, and we came up with really a Bloody Mary Mix that’s not quite as thick as that gazpacho. So now we have Bloody Mary mix that we sell, which I’ve had in the cooler cooling off. I don’t—I—I think vodka ruins it, so I like to eat it—I like to drink it out of the refrigerator cold. So that’s why we have Bloody Mary mix.

00:35:20

AES: All right. We’re going to sneak out some cups so we can taste it in a minute. But I have just a couple more questions, if you don’t mind.

00:35:25

AL: Sure. I’ll put it back in the cooler because I like it cold. It’s not much coldness in there but—.

00:35:30

AES: Okay. I want to ask you, you know, when I was taking pictures and you were arranging your jars and stuff you said you’re really obsessive about your display. So I want to ask you about your display and also your labels, which are very unique and pretty.

00:35:40

AL: Actually, the display today is not really great because I didn't want to bring what we have—I have little wooden display things that my niece gave me, but the labels, you know, my sister says, “You just really enjoy that, don’t you?” So, I do. I go on the computer and I try to find cute little labels that go with our product, like my salsa labels. I searched for a while until I found just the right salsa label. So I would write it in. I would print out the label, and then I’d take the top of the jar and draw a circle around it and cut it off and write the name on it, and I do that for everything.

00:36:16

Then I got really smart when I ended up—I’m having problems with carpal tunnel in my hand, I said, “I’m going to type these labels out.” So then I started typing the labels, and I just put them on the top of it screw the top back on. I used to—I have a little touch of compulsive obsessive disorder I think because I used to—the top of the label had to line [up] with the jar, and it had to be perfect. That was the first year. The second year, I just slapped that top on there and **[Laughs]** it doesn’t matter if it lines up. I got 45 more jars I got to put labels on. So yeah, I’m a little—I like making the labels. It’s a calming factor, I guess.

00:37:01

AES: Well, you can tell it’s part of what you do and that you’re proud of it because you do it well. So maybe we could just wrap this up so that you can do more business and I won't bother you anymore, but I want to ask you what—what the Greenwood Farmers’ Market has meant to the community at large would you say?

00:37:18

AL: I think the community at large is missing out on a wonderful opportunity because a lot of people don't know—. **[To a customer]** No, ma'am, I'm sorry. I don't. You know what, give her my phone number or if you know, when I make some more you give her a call. Y'all have a good day. **[Back to interviewer]** Word of mouth is really one of the best advertisements. But what I was saying is I think that the community in Greenwood is missing out on a wonderful opportunity to be exposed to fresh, healthy, local-grown food. You don't have to worry about what's been put in it. You know, what it's been fertilized with. It's not shipped in from another country. It's safe. I think that they're missing out on an opportunity to support the community financially, to keep the money in the community by coming to the Farmers' Market. Most of all, I think that they've missed out on the opportunity for a good healthy social environment.

00:38:25

I—and I—I feel bad about that. What the solution is, I don't know. I would love to work with someone more next year on providing—introducing it to the community in a better way. The people that do come, however, have for me, and for what I've seen with the customers here they have developed a bond, a friendship. The—where it's located I think is very important. There was kind of an—not an argument but a discussion on whether we should move it a couple of years ago. It is located right here on the railroad track, which, in the past, has been a significant divider of races. And because it's located right here on the border, I think that it has brought the community—the different cultures in the community together.

00:39:19

Another thing I see and—and just for me in Greenwood—and I was born and raised here—there's always been a distinct social class differentiation, not just racial. And I think that the Farmers' Market has brought together a lot of people from a different social class to enjoy each other's company. So not only has it benefited the vendors who have made some money, but

believe me, we're not getting rich out here, it has brought some of the people in the community together on a different level that Greenwood is not familiar with. Now that's just me. **[Laughs]** And that's how—that's what I think and that's what I—I feel.

00:39:59

AES: Do you think people saw that originally as kind of a byproduct of the Market or do you think that's happened more organically?

00:40:04

AL: I think it happened organically. I think that maybe some of the people from outside this area that live here now may have noticed the—the differences and had hoped that it would bring the community together. I don't think that they realized that it would bring the community together the way it has because if you look around, you see some—. Hello? Pause.

00:40:35

Okay, if you look around—. **[To customers]** Hey there, come on up. How you doing? Have you been here before? I thought I had seen you. **[To interviewer]** If you look around the Market, there's not many people here right now, but if you look around when it is busy, well just the vendors; we have different races. We have different classes. You have some people that are in the—I would say the upper middle class, the lower middle class. You have some people that are on the poverty line. You have people that are wealthy. And they all come here, and they don't seem to care that there are other people that ordinarily they wouldn't associate with. But they do here.

00:41:17

AES: All because of food.

00:41:18

AL: All because of food—starts out with food but it doesn't end with food. **[To customer]** Have you tried our salsa before? Did you like it? Good. **[To interviewer]** Okay. There's so many things that we can do here to promote the Farmers' Market to everybody in the community.

00:41:35

Last year my sister and I invested \$100—not very much money—and we made fans and we put our labels on them because I like labels and things and our phone number. And people—we can give them to people—especially kids, the kids love to get them and play with it. And it—you know, if we did something like this with the Farmers' Market next year, I think that would be a great promotion.

00:41:56

AES: So what are your other hopes for the future of the Market?

00:41:59

AL: For the Market? I understand that eventually there's going to be some type of walk or bike ride—something that comes through this area right here. I would love to see the Market grow and have more vendors come out, have more people come out, because if the people don't come out and support the vendors, we're going to disappear. I would love to see children's events where the master gardeners come out and they show children how to grow fresh vegetables. I would love to see them have one or two little garden plots here, you know, so that—some

container gardening so that people could come back every week and see the progress of what a garden can be.

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I would love to see—have a big old chicken coop-type thing set over to protect everybody from the sun and just have events and—. I would love to see the library come, the—the children’s librarian, Sue, come and do some events with the kids, because if we don’t start educating our children on this dying art of canning vegetables, growing vegetables, then most—some kids don’t even know where vegetables come from. I’d love to see it expand and have a big tent in the middle where people can sit and drink coffee and eat muffins and talk and visit and buy their corn and take it home and boil it for supper and come back next week and say, “That was the best corn I ever ate.” It’s kind of simple.

00:43:36

AES: Wonderful. Well is there anything, a thought you’d like to end on or something that we haven’t talked about that you want to make sure to say?

00:43:44

AL: I don’t think so. I think if I had to tell you how I feel about the Farmers’ Market and the canning and just the whole experience in general it—this is my last week here and that’s kind of sad for me because it’s been a lot of hard work. And sometimes I’ve just not wanted to get up at 5 o’clock in the morning and go out and pick that okra or those tomatoes but it’s kind of sad—hey—to know that after today I won’t be back selling again until possibly next year, and I don’t know what the future brings. But I will be involved in some way because I can’t just stop now. It’s kind of like, I’m an alcohol and drug counselor, and I tell my clients when they come in and

it's their first time to come in for residential treatment, and I'll tell them, "You will never be the same when you leave here because you have been exposed to something new."

00:44:38

And that's how I feel about this. If you get involved in this and you're exposed to this experience, you will always come back to it, year after year after year. So that's my plan.

00:44:50

AES: Well great. Lisa this has been such a pleasure. I'm so glad that you sat and talked with me today. I know you're here to do business, but thank you, thank you, thank you.

00:44:55

AL: No, thank you. I really, really enjoyed meeting you.

00:44:59

[End Alisa Lay Interview]