

EDDIE HERNANDEZ

Taqueria del Sol – Atlanta, GA

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Interviewer: Kate Medley

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: 1 hour, 19 minutes

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[Begin Eddie Hernandez Interview]

00:00:00

Kate Medley: This is Kate Medley interviewing Eddie Hernandez at Taqueria del Sol on April 19, 2010.

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Eddie Hernandez: Yes.

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KM: And now I'll get you to introduce yourself.

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EH: Hi; my name is Eddie Hernandez. I'm the Executive Chef and Partner for Taqueria del Sol in Atlanta, Georgia. We've been here 10 years [*Laughs*].

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KM: Okay, so I'm going to get you to tell us your birthplace and birth date.

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EH: Okay, I was born in Monterrey, Mexico. I was born on November 17, 1954.

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KM: And how did you come to do what you do?

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EH: Well it was something that came out within our family. A lot of the males in my family knows how to cook. And it's due to the fact that we like to eat what we like to eat when we want to eat it and not when other people want us to eat it. And the only way to eat what you like is if you know how to make it, and that way if you don't want to eat eggs and beans today for breakfast then you make your own potatoes and eggs. And so we all got interested in cooking. I was the only one that sort of got good at it, you know even though that everybody knows how to cook in my family, but nobody has done it like I do. I was the only one that really got interested and wanted to make it better.

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KM: Tell me about your family.

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EH: Well I was an only child between my mother and my father. I have three half-sisters and three half-brothers who live in Monterrey to this day. My mom grew up in Monterrey along with my grandmother and they were--they lived by themselves. My mother and my father separated when I was very young, and we sort of became just one family, my mother, her brother, and my grandmother and I. However, we do have a big family, you know but I, myself, was the only one [*Laughs*]. So that was kind of hard. I grew up with my cousins for the most part in Mexico. And now we all live in the United States. Anything else [*Laughs*]?

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KM: Earlier you were telling me about your grandmother.

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EH: Her name is Consuela and she was the businesswoman, the entrepreneur, the one that loved to—. She was a very independent woman, real strong character, and she was the one that got me to start cooking, you know because she owned restaurant and bars. And she was an excellent cook. I'm not going to say a chef because by then there was no such a thing as chef. Everybody was just cooks. And she cooked a lot of things that I never seen other people do that I really liked. And when I asked her to make me something she would just say if you want to eat it then learn how to make it because I'm not going to be here one day and who is going to cook it for you? And so I started to learn a little bit and eventually I become pretty good at it even though that I was you know real young. I was about 14 at the time.

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But I was the one that got good at it, where people knew that I sort of had a knack for it. But it just is a desire. I think it's like everything else – if you like what you do then you will become good at it, but you've got to like it. If you don't like it, it will never work, no matter what you want to do.

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KM: So what sorts of things did your grandmother teach you to cook?

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EH: Oh there was some crazy stuff. You know she did a lot of— there's a thing in Mexico; it's a good bar food and a side dish for tacos. It's pork skin, pickled pork skin, and she was the best

at that. I mean she can do these things like nobody can. I mean they were really, really good. She had a really good recipe. And I learned how to make that because I like them and I wanted to be able to eat them all the time. So I learned how to make that and she did a lot of dishes with fresh corn. She was big on fresh food. I mean that was one thing that—the people that used to go to the bar liked the fact that they can get a good meal there. It was a pub. It was a Mexican pub, you know, but we're talking about 45 years ago – 40 years ago.

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Now they're very popular, a pub, this sort of thing, the finger foods and things like that, and drinks. Well that was sort of like what my grandmother had where guys go over there for a beer, but they'll be looking and see what we had to eat for the day because she would never make the same thing every day. You know, she'll make it like we do now [at Taqueria del Sol]. It will come back later, but not every day. And when you went there you'd see what she'd have or Cheetos, as simple as that. *[Laughs]*

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I got some boiled beans, that's what she would say. You want some beans? So everybody had to take what she had.

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KM: And you mentioned her fresh ingredients. Where would she get her fresh ingredients?

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EH: The market. We went to the market every day. Not only did she have a mini-grocery, it was like everything, a mini-grocery, a bar, a restaurant, a lodge—anything you wanted. I mean she was always having drinks over there. She filled the needs for the neighborhood better than

anybody I know. I mean she gave credit to everybody. Some of them never paid back, but that was just the kind of person that she was. So she would go well, bring this and bring that, and eventually it got to where I would go to the market myself, you know just get in the truck and go and bring things back. And she ended up having like seven of these things and so I had to move around. Sometimes I would do the buying for two or three restaurants at one time; you know just the small things but enough for everybody. And therefore, we always had the fresh corn, the fresh potatoes, the fresh cabbage, anything that was good at the market that she liked.

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What are these things called? Now I'm not going to think about it because I wanted to tell you about it. **[Laughs]** But she will just get like radishes and do a million things with it because they were fresh. She saw them, she'd pick them up, and would bring them back with her and then she'll either pickle/can them, make them sweet like candied; she will do a million things with these things except cook them. She never cooked the radishes. They were always either fresh, pickled, or turned into some sort of jelly that she did. But that I never really got into it. She loved it. I hated it. You know she just got—it just got this sour face to it. I just—I never got used to that one.

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KM: Do you still dislike radishes?

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EH: No, I like radishes a lot. I just don't like her candied radishes. And thank god I'm just—she died a long time ago—**[Laughs]** but she's going, my god he still hates them. **[Laughs]**

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KM: What was the name of her bar and did you ever work there?

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EH: Well there was only one of them that had a name. All of them were known as Dona Chelo, which was her nickname. Her name was Consuelo. And everybody called her Dona Chelo. So she didn't have any names on them except for the first one it had the neighborhood name and it was called El Topo. And that was the name of the neighborhood. And all the other ones, they just became Dona Chelo's Place, you know and she had like one on several different neighborhoods. She would just have one and she grew, you know, real slow. She didn't open seven at one time, but she had one and then she opened another one and a few years later she opened another one. And eventually—I wasn't there by the time she had seven. I was already living in Texas. But she ended up having like seven and we were always close and now you know she would call—you need to get back over here. What are you doing over there? You don't make enough money; that's what she would tell me. You'll make more money with me here than over there.

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KM: Over there in Texas?

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EH: Uh-huh. She would say that it was a waste of time being in Texas, being a musician. She hated me being a musician. She always told me this is not a good life, not a good life for you. You'll die and you need to quit. And what do you want me to do? I'm going to work with you in the restaurant all my life? No, I decided to get out and do my own thing. Eventually I came back.

Unfortunately I never came back enough to spend some more time with her. I mean I got good at music and you know, that took a lot of my time. And the little time I had, it was not enough for me to travel from Texas to Mexico for a couple of days and then have to come back. You know it just didn't work. But over the years we kept in touch, and the only one good thing that I got about it is that she told my mom— she said you know this guy? You're going to see him on TV one day. She said, I just know that he's going to do something with his life.

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And lucky for me, my mother did get to see me on TV in Mexico. I was on *CNN* for the *Oscars* and we were doing *Like Water for Chocolate* and it was the first time that I was actually going to be aired in Mexico because of the movie, so my mom got to see me. And she called my aunt and she said, I know Dona Chelo said that he will be on TV one day at which [*Laughs*]--.

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KM: Tell me about--tell me about when you left Mexico. How old were you and do you remember that day?

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EH: I don't remember the day. It was kind of a mixed-feeling decision. But it was based on the fact that I really enjoyed music. I love music. I'll listen to anything from country to hard rock, except reggae. I just never got big on that, but you know I can listen to a nice ballad, to a hard rock song, no problem. And based on that, then I became a musician and I wanted to see how far I can take that. In order to move up you need to be on the right places and for me it was Houston, Texas at the time. And I was 16 at the time or 17, and I moved to Texas and I did that really heavy for about five years. And then I decided that I wanted to have a life. I wanted to have a

wife. I wanted to get married and I wanted to do other things. Music was not going to give me that, so I quit music for a little while and only played part-time and started working for a company in Texas, got married, had a daughter, you know. The relationship didn't went more than three years and then I split up, so I got back in music. **[Laughs]** And then I played music until [nineteen]'89—'89 I think—'88. I quit in [nineteen] '89. That's when I moved to Texas and I went to Georgia and I met Mike.

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KM: You played the drums?

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EH: I play drums, yeah. I play a little bit of everything, but drums was my position. But we were pretty flexible. We all knew how to play multiple instruments and some songs I would play guitar or bass and we would just move around. And that was the thing that kept us together that we were able to—I don't want to play this song. You play it and we would do it and that worked out really good. We had a good relationship.

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KM: What was the name of your band and where would y'all play?

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EH: Facinacion, which means Fascination and we played all over--all over Mexico. By then you would be like a really, really huge act if you played on this side of the Mississippi. It was all out west. It was from little parts in Louisiana which we did play in Shreveport and a few places in

Louisiana but it was all back there where, you know all the way from LA to Texas and in between, up and down, up to Oklahoma, you know.

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At the time, the next venue for us was Chicago. We would have to go straight to Chicago and back, you know, and I won't be able to tell you the name of the places because probably they're not there anymore. I mean I'm just hoping that the owners are still alive but by then the places okay had one name when we played them, and they had a second name the next time we went around. And we only played each place one time a year. So it's pretty hard for me to remember that. I'm not big on pictures and posters and things like that. I never kept anything. I don't keep articles. It's really nice to be interviewed or to have your name on a piece of paper. At the end of the day you still got a job to do and my job as I mentioned is that these restaurants will run the way they do every day. So I don't key on that. I mean it's nice. Lucky for me I grew up with the spotlight for a good while when I was a musician to the point that I don't crave it. You know I say thank you Jesus, you know for everything that happens to me every day, but it's welcome, but I'm not big on that--never have. So therefore --I can tell you the name of the owners [*Laughs*], but never the name of the place; there's no pictures.

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CNN tried to find pictures and back when I played music. When I used to play they were in Mexico, there was a couple of pictures that I kept. I bought a brand new drum set that it was like my child and I took a picture with this drum set because at the time nobody except for the guys from *Three Dog Night* had that drum set. The drummer for *Three Dog Night* had the same set as I did and I saved my money and I bought this set. So I took a picture of that drum set

[Laughs] because it was like my pride and joy and I took it to my mom and I said look at this set. I told you I wanted to buy it and she kept it. And we kept that picture for years.

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But when my mother died, and my mother died about 11 years ago, a lot of the things that we had at the house neither my sisters nor my brothers kept them the way she did. And I was living in Texas and all this stuff was in Mexico. The same thing with the articles; here in the United States, I had a scrapbook. It got lost. It's gone.

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KM: Remind me how old you were when you moved to the US.

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EH: Seventeen. Sixteen, turning seventeen.

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KM: Do you remember your first food impressions when you came to the US?

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EH: **[Laughs]** Not good ones that's for sure. It was different back then. You know the Latino community in Texas at the time predominantly was Chicanos, Latin American people, who you

know they were Mexicans but not really you know. I mean their fathers were Mexican but their kids—people my age—were Chicanos is what they were called. And they were not big on Mexican food and in Texas there was a few very good restaurants but when you're just moving from another country and you don't know your way around, it took me about six months [*Phone Rings*]--.

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It took me about six months to get acquainted with Houston and to find the spots where I wanted to go eat at the time. There was no street food. Very few places had like a good chicken soup or a good menudo or--or a good torta.

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And once I found those places, then I was fine. But I used to go to Kentucky Fried Chicken all the time. I loved Kentucky Fried Chicken. And obviously I didn't know a lot of English at the time and I would go there and I would say can I have the chicken and can I have the Coke? And they would give me 20 pieces of chicken [*Laughs*] and a two-liter Coke. And every week for the first month I craved chicken, so I wanted more chicken. I'd go there and then the girls got to know me and they'd go crate of chicken? And I would say yeah; \$16.20 for a bucket of chicken in 1977. [*Laughs*] I was paying \$16 just so that I can have chicken, but I liked it, you know and I bought it all the time, so--. [*Laughs*] It was hilarious.

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And then I found my way around and I was able to feel good. There was not really many good Mexican markets back then you know. Everybody was more into barbequing and grilling and smoking meats. Well to this day Texas is known for that. And I was like dying over there. I

was like, my god, where's the Farmers Market here? Where can I get some corn, some cabbage you know so that I can cook? [*Phone Rings*]

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KM: You were telling us about how you couldn't find any fresh ingredients.

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EH: Well no, I mean, because I didn't know my way around and I didn't know where the markets were. And back then you know HEB was the name brand over there and until I got comfortable to go to the store myself and you have to think about it. I was 17 years, turning 18, and the main thing that I craved food-wise was my home cooking, what I used to eat at home. I wanted that.

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KM: Like what specifically?

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EH: Well it's not said, but it is the truth. We love eating beans and potatoes and eggs in the morning with flour tortillas. You can't find that in Houston, Texas in 1977 to save your life. You go for breakfast and the best thing you can get will be huevos rancheros somewhere, nothing like I wanted to eat. I wanted to have some nice soups for lunch. You can't get that either. So once I

got acquainted with the stores, I started to cook for myself, only because I wanted to have what I grew up eating you know.

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And that's the way it went for a long time until I moved away. And then I moved in with my aunt and she's the best flour tortilla maker in the world. And I mean this lady can make them. I mean she's good. And she cooked just like the way we cooked in my house, so I liked that part. I liked living with them. I was willing to commute from Waco to Houston so that I can stay at her home and have you know the kind of meal that I wanted to eat except for the weekends because we had to go play and then when we'd come back on Monday I would just go to Waco and say I don't want to be in Houston. I'd go to Waco.

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KM: How did your aunt make her tortillas?

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EH: [*Laughs*] Really good. I mean she'd have—it's really basic, a small recipe. She doesn't use lard. She uses shortening and a little bit of baking powder and salt. That's it. Lukewarm water, mix it, roll them, cook them, and eat them. And I tried to make it like her. I can't. I mean, I got the rolling pin in the back just for the tortillas. I make them all the time for me and for the guys in the kitchen, so I always—when I cook, I cook for everybody. As I was telling you about the pasta, I do that all the time because I like to have homemade meals. You know I just cooked pasta while ago with shrimp because we just happened to get shrimp and I wanted a little pasta

and so I did me a really spicy jalapeno sauce. And those are the things that you can't get nowhere. It's like here you know. We have a restaurant [*Phone Rings*]—. I forgot to unplug the phone.

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Well as I was telling you, you can have a restaurant and you see a lot of people patronizing your place and you know we're very proud of that—that people come and eat with us. But we also crave other things, you know I mean a good hamburger, a good hotdog, a good steak. No matter what you do, you just cannot do it all the time. And home food is irreplaceable as far as I'm concerned. Nothing like a good home meal.

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KM: Tell us about moving to Atlanta.

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EH: Moving to Atlanta was just something that I did at the time because I was trying to get away from music. Music, as I was telling you, is not a good life. It's a good money-making thing, if you do it right, if you do it for the right reasons and you see it as a business. A lot of us see it as either for traveling or for whatever reasons other than looking at it as a business. For me music was a business that eventually wore me out. You know I didn't want to do it anymore. You eat at more Waffle Houses than anybody in the world, sleep in places where you don't know no one—you know you're on your own. And I can understand why a lot of the musicians drink—it is because of loneliness. You're over there with the same guys, so many hours of the day, for

so many days out of the week that eventually you don't even want to see each other. But if you see it as a job then you make it work, and we did. We made it work for a long time. We made our money and then the time came for me that I didn't want to do it anymore and I came to Atlanta. I had a friend here who we played soccer together in Texas in Waco and I knew him. And I knew he was over here and I just wanted to get out of the State.

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I figured that if I stayed in the State you know my family or my friends would bring me right back to where I was. And I wanted to take some time off to see what I wanted to do with my life at the time. So I came to visit my buddy Cecilio. He's in Atlanta and on a bet I ended up meeting Mike Klank, my partner today. And he got me a job. I walked into the restaurant one day before they opened and asked him for a job.

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KM: Wait; let's go back. You're visiting your brother Cecilio

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EH: Cecilio

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KM: Cecilio in Atlanta and you see a restaurant named—?

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EH: El Azteca in Clayton County and it's outside Morrow. It was called El Azteca. It was a franchise from a chain of restaurants here in Atlanta called El Azteca. They're owned by Javier Macias and a good friend of mine, Jose Montez. Back then they were just branching out. Mike and David and Wayne and all of them purchased franchises from Javier and they were going to do this restaurant in Clayton County, which was not known for Mexican restaurants. Over there it's country by then, you know and I ended up driving by the mall with Cecilio and he suggested that I apply. And I say no. I don't want to work in the restaurant. He said, you're afraid they're not going to give you a job? And I said no, I'll get a job. I know that. He says, no, you won't get hired. I'll bet you a case of beer. And I said okay. Go ahead.

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So we sat [*Laughs*] and walk in and Mike was there and I asked him for a job as a waiter. I said I didn't want to go into the kitchen. And he gave me the job. He told me what he expected out of me if I was going to work with him and I kind of liked the way he handled himself and I thought he was a good person that maybe I'd listen to.

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KM: And you scored a case of beer?

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EH: Uh-hmm. I lost my hair—thanks. [*Laughs*] I chopped my hair off. Mike didn't know who I was the next day when I walked in with short hair and black pants and white shirt, because that's

how I pictured a waiter. Don't ask me why. I just pictured a waiter with black pants and a white shirt. I cut my hair, walked in. Mike said, can I help you? And I said I'm Eddie. **[Laughs]** He started laughing and asked me about my hair. And I told him that I cut it off. **[Laughs]** And I started working with him and three days later I was in the kitchen.

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KM: When was this?

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EH: That was three days after I got the job as a waiter.

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KM: What year?

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EH: It was [nineteen]'89, November '89.

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KM: So how did it go?

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EH: Well the restaurant was extremely busy. It was something new on that side of town. And they were really busy. They were not—nobody was doing a good job. The kitchen, they wasted stuff. I don't think nobody had a clue on what they were doing. If anybody knew more about what was happening it was Mike, because he used to work for Manuel's and he had an idea of how to run a restaurant. But if you think about it, all of the partners at the time, 90-percent were lawyers and the only one that was not a lawyer was Jim Denoia who was a jewelry designer. He's a good guy. I mean I like Jim a lot and we worked together for a long time. And he helped me in the kitchen immensely. He was the one that helped me with names and things like that and where to get things and where to go and all that. And Mike was just keeping everything together.

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KM: And tell us, who is Mike?

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EH: Mike Klank is like my mentor. He's my partner, but I don't think that a lot of people know how much he knows about food. I mean obviously he's from Memphis. He knows about barbecue. He can smoke meats like no one. I mean almost as good as I do or better. But he also went to New Mexico. He had friends from school. He has an Engineering degree from Georgia Tech, so a lot of his friends were from New Mexico and from all over the place. He spent some time in Durango and Taos in New Mexico and he became a fan of the food, you know Latin food, Southwestern food. So he knows a lot about food. And him and I, over the years we

evolved the food to be what it is today. I mean I think we were the first ones that started messing with the Southwestern food and turning it into a different cuisine by changing the way turnip greens are or grits or potatoes or gravies or anything that has to do with the South. I'll take it and take it apart and do something else with it because it's so easy to work with it. I mean, I do black-eyed peas like— I love them. I don't know, we did them in Oxford [at the Southern Foodways Symposium] three years ago. And people really was [*Laughs*]--what is this? Refried black-eyed peas [*Laughs*]. Leave it to me.

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KM: So back in Clayton County, this was Mike's first restaurant?

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EH: Uh-huh.

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KM: And what kind of food were you serving?

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EH: Well it was your regular typical Tex-Mex, South—on the South, not like the Tex-Mex that we had in Texas, but an idea that they had on how Mexican food should be presented to the American market. Totally wrong. It was nothing like—in Mexico they will not eat

that food, not even the rice they were making. Forget about the beans. I mean my grandmother would have thrown them out the window with the cook, you know, because they were not that good. And when I came into the picture and we talked about it. Mike and I sat down and talked about it and I kept saying, I said look at this thing. The enchilada sauce if it has any flavor to it, it's flour. It has no starch. It's nothing but water and flour with spices and I said how can you serve that? I mean that is just not—it's wrong; it's not Mexican food.

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The ground beef tasted like cardboard. The rice, when it was cooked, it was like popcorn. You know it was crunchy, no flavor, and everything was that way. But I think that people bought it because the people didn't know better then. That's what they were told that was Mexican food and they bought it and ate it. I just happened to disagree with that at the time and I made that point very clear to a lot of people that no, make no mistake. We don't eat this stuff. I mean we do eat ground beef, but this is not the one we will be eating in Mexico, for us this is leftovers. It's bad and it's not good.

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So little by little, you know – the one good thing that I can say is that Mike is a person that can tell whether you're for real or not and he believed in what I was telling him and he trusted me. And based on the fact that I know that he was trusting me, I worked really hard to make sure that I was not going to prove him wrong—that he was going to see that I knew what I was talking about when we talk about Mexican food. And he was the only one out of everybody that had a little bit more knowledge on Mexican food due to the fact that he lived in New Mexico. He had seen green chili for what it is; he had seen beans

like people had not seen here. And he had seen enchiladas with red chili, nothing like what they had, or green chili and he had seen a little bit better quality food in New Mexico and therefore you know he had an idea. He didn't have anybody to make it that would be able to make that kind of food.

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And once we got together I think about the second year he trusted me enough where he started to talk about the South, the South ways. We added green chili to the menu because he told me about what he used to have. And the turnip greens story is it was just out of the blue. It was something that nobody expected us to do at the time.

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There's a man named Bobby Avery and his wife, Juanita, and he grew turnip greens for fun. And he kept bringing me. He started to bring me a big bag—a fresh bag full of turnip greens every Friday. And he would say, if anybody can make these things good one day it's going to be you and I know you and he'd bring me another bag. And they would go bad because I didn't know what to do with them. So finally I feel bad for Bobby so I went to Mike and I said Mike, you need to tell me—how did you eat these things here? Bobby keeps bringing them and I feel bad because I never do anything with them. So he took me to Mary Mac's [Tea Room], which it was supposed to have the best turnip greens. To this day, in the city, they believe Mary Mac's has the best turnip greens. And I saw how they did them. I got an idea. I went back and made them. Mike thought they were the best thing he had so far and so were the customers. And at the end of the day that's what mattered the most—what the customers liked. And we gave them away that day at the bar.

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The next week, Bobby brought me more greens. I made them again. **[Laughs]** We gave them away at the bar. By the third week, people would come and sit at the bar waiting for the turnip greens. **[Laughs]** And it was really well for about five or six weeks. And he comes in a little now, Bobby brought me the greens. Nobody told me you were supposed to wash them because Bobby always brought them in clean. This particular day he did not. I just threw them in the pot and cook them and did everything **[Laughs]**. And Mike said are the greens ready? And I said yeah and here a cup. And Mike put a little bit of the greens and I can hear him going **[Gestures-Slurping]** and he looked at me and he says you didn't wash them today. And I went I never do.

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He said what do you mean you don't clean them? And I said no, I just throw them in the pot the way Bobby brings them to me. He went outside and talked to Bobby and came back **[Laughs]**; he went Bobby didn't clean them. And that's how I learned that you're supposed to clean the turnip greens because I didn't know. And people like them. You know, they used to bring their own cornbread because I would refuse to make it. I said no, it's a Mexican restaurant. You eat them with chips or flour tortillas. I don't care. There will be no cornbread served with these greens.

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And eventually people were waiting for the greens and now that we knew there was a market for that kind of food and that particular item, we put them on the menu. And they've been on the menu for 20 years now.

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KM: How are they like Mary Mac's turnip greens?

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EH: Well I think Mary Mac's greens are good because they still make them the old way, the way they originally were done, the Old South you know. And I don't make them like the Old South. I don't think about trying to do things like they used to do them, but to do them the way I think I will eat them. If I was given turnip greens in Mexico I will eat them the way we serve them today. You ask me to make a gravy, a Low Country gravy I'll make it the way I will make it in Mexico. I don't see things like how they make the food in the South, the old food.

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I mean I get wonderful food in places that nobody expected, you know in rinky-dinky places with an old lady cooking. But when you're talking about doing what we do now where we want to present it to the customers and we want them to see what I can do with it, and I can see the response from the customers that they want more things from the South but done in a different way. You know anybody can make mashed potatoes. But can you make mashed potatoes with ancho peppers or with guajillo peppers? Now it's a trend. Everybody makes potatoes with cauliflower and, god knows, no radishes, please.

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And they do all these gravies now you know. Instead of doing a traditional black pepper gravy, I do one that has lard and sugar, and people loves it. I mean we sell tons of that thing when we do it you know fried chicken with mashed potatoes and Low Country gravy, my god. That's what people like you know. I do a pork loin with jalapeno gravy and another twist on

another Southern dish you know the pork chop with the potatoes and the gravy. I do it with loin and people like that too. **[Phone Rings]**

00:38:36

So over the years I've been able to do, you know, like shrimp and grits. I use instant grits for my grits, but the way I do my grits is the idea of how the South uses an ingredient. The way I do it is my idea of how I see that one ingredient to feed the masses, where everybody will like it. There's no arguing whether it might have sugar or not, whether they're sweet or not, but it's the one ingredient and how you can make that ingredient where 80-percent of the people will like it. Twenty-percent is going to hate it.

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KM: Is the difference often spices or the fat that you use or the--?

00:39:25

EH: The spices.

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KM: The spices.

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EH: The spices and the peppers. Well peppers are another form of spice except it's fresh. And that would surprise one thing from another one. I mean, I can use 17 different types of peppers with the same ingredients and not one will taste the same because each item will be designed to taste different to complement that. I do grits with bleu cheese. I do grits with habanero peppers. I do just straight out grits that are sweet for shrimp and grits and I do grits with a million other things, you know with anything that I got in mind. It is still the grit, the predominant thing that we're cooking. We're just cooking it to fit the idea the way we want to present the grits for the day.

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The same thing goes with the gravy, you know, I mean with the barbecue sauces. We do a Carolina barbecue vinegar-based sauce, but we also do a Texas barbecue sauce that is also vinegar-based. And when you see them they're not alike—totally different. They do different things. And that's the thing that I like about working with things in the South that they have so many things that we can work with you know and that's what I like.

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KM: Is it fresh ingredients?

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EH: Yeah, I mean not just the fresh ingredients. Brussels sprouts, like my favorite thing, not everybody else's favorite thing. I do steamed cabbage with carrots with blue corn-fried chicken on top of it and a mint jalapeno sauce on it that will just make you want to come back tomorrow

except there will be no more tomorrow. We'll make you wait six weeks. And it's the little things like that that has allowed us to grow—not only for me personally as a chef or a cook but for the restaurant to be distinctive, to be different than everybody else. I mean we're still a Mexican restaurant – and a restaurant that sells American food Mexican-style, Southwestern style, Chinese if I feel like it one day, but the variety has allowed us to blend in and to create our own market. But the Southern thing, you know, like the buttermilk fried chicken with green beans and horseradish gravy, you know, it's your typical Southern dish done with a twist. People love it. There's a market for that.

00:41:56

KM: You mentioned Mary Mac's [Tea Room]. How else did you learn about Southern foods?

00:42:01

EH: Well, like I say, Mike was—is the one that has always groomed me to understand what I want to do. I mean he knows what I want to do with food and he takes me to the places or brings me the books, which we have all over the place around here. He brings me the books and says read this book. It's about this guy in Louisiana. Or, read this book, it's about this guy in Memphis because he can see that I'm struggling with a particular cuisine. And he has helped me so much you know to learn about the South that I think John T. [Edge] finally gave him credit for what he has done, you know, with the restaurant and how he has helped change the South, you know the Southern food into something else.

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You know even though that I do all the cooking, it's his input about how we want to be represented in the South, how we want the South to see us as a restaurant—not me personally as a chef or not just Mike as a person but as a restaurant. It's a team. We work together and we try to do what we can.

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KM: Let's go back to El Azteca and Clayton County. Is that where you started developing your menu?

00:43:23

EH: Uh-hmm, a little bit. I believe that in order to create a market you have to be different than everybody else. People is not going to cross the street to go to the McDonald's across the street if there's one on this side. It is the same on both sides of the street. So why would you want to cross the street? The only way that I will make them cross the street is by me being different, by putting a product that the people across the street did not have and for that I have to create things that were not available at the time—that they can't understand in their mind what I was doing or what I was trying then to try. And by doing things the right way; doing the chili rellenos the way a chili rellenos should be instead of how El Azteca used to do it. You know, Southern enchilada, with the right sauce, the way that—an enchilada I will eat, the main thing when we were doing this is that I would only serve food that I will eat. I will not put something on the menu because it sold or because it sounds appealing. If I didn't want to eat it, it was not going to go on the menu. Never has, never will to this day because that's my motto and everybody that works for me

understands that if you cannot eat it and it's free for you don't sell it to the customer because they're going to pay for it because it will be something that you're willing to eat before we sell it to anybody.

00:45:00

KM: Was your customer base in Clayton County, did they welcome these changes or were they receptive?

00:45:07

EH: Well it was so funny. At the beginning, they didn't want to try it, so my job was to lure them to try it. So I would just go and say hey, try this, it's on me, and I'd just leave it on the table, give it to them. And they'd try it and before they leave they'll say like oh it was really good, what is it? And I'll say oh it's a chicken enchilada. We have it on a special every Monday. And then I will give them something else. And then I will say this one we'll have it on Wednesdays. And this one we'll have it on Fridays. And eventually I work it where I had seven specials that we serve Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, but always the same. And then people knew that they loved the chicken enchiladas on Monday so they came on Monday. And if they want to have a good chili rellenos they came on Tuesday. A good carnita [inaudible-00:45:59], they came on Wednesday and it went on. And once I gained a little bit of the trust and as they now—then I was able to go with seafood. So now we're going to have some fish but we're going to have it the way we do in Mexico. And eventually I

was able to have a separate menu away from the menu that became my customer base. They came into see what I had over her, not what we had over here.

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And if everything fails then they can sit at the bar and have greens. They know they can have that, so eventually they became not only our customers, but our friends and those people that came in for many, many years and in a second think it's one of the best restaurants other than the Sundown that we have—Mike and I have ever had because we became their friends. And they came in and they trust us and Mike said you got to have this and they will just follow.

00:47:02

KM: How did Taqueria del Sol come to be?

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EH: It was a project that Mike and I had in mind. We had seen the taco trucks and not only had we seen them in LA, in New Mexico, in Chicago, and Texas and Louisiana. And Georgia didn't have them at the time. And Mike and I thought—we only opened for dinner when it was the Sundown. And I said you know I got all these people working that I'm paying. I need to get something out of it. I said let's open for lunch. We'll sell tacos. And we'll sell six tacos and a couple of soups and that will be our menu. Minimum employees, high-revenue, two cooks, two waiters, you and I—you know you take cash and I clean tables and we'll make money. We were just trying to survive to make a living.

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So we started selling tacos but the idea for us after the first year it's like man there's a market for this taco thing. So I said well why don't we just do taco trucks? You know we'll have one taco truck on Peachtree and Piedmont and we'll have one over here and we'll have one over here and we'll just sell tacos out of the trucks?

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So we decided that's what we wanted to do not knowing how popular the Sundown was going to become. And then all of the sudden the Sundown took off and now we don't have time.

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KM: And what was the Sundown serving?

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EH: Well at the time we were serving Southwestern food, all the way with a twist. For a couple of days we might do fried chicken, Southern-style with a bunch of vegetables. Or, we'll do a Chinese menu for the day or we'll do a Louisiana or we'll do a Texas--but it was all with a twist. In our food when it was Sundown it was the--it was the spiciest restaurant that you can possibly find outside Mexico City. I was not about to give in. It's hot and hotter. And this is the way it is and they're either going to like it or hate it and leave or they're going to be your customers forever. And people was willing to give us a chance and they liked it. And they liked it. We had, I think it was a nine-item menu with daily specials. We had taco of the day, enchilada of the day, where the taco would be whatever I wanted to make or the enchilada—whatever I wanted to make. And never leftovers. I mean everything was fresh for whatever I did. I will not take a steak

that I didn't sold the day before to make a taco today. I will ground the rib-eye and turn it into ground beef before I will use it and try to sell it back to you because that's not how Mike and I are. You buy a taco from us and it's going to be worth \$2.19 and you're going to feel like it was worth more than that. We don't cheat. We do everything right. We've done it for years and we always will.

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And the Sundown became known for that - that we will do you know- that's when we had the Eddie's Pork, one of the most famous dishes that we ever had.

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KM: Tell us about it.

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EH: Well when we were at Azteca Grill in Clayton, County we needed some press. So I decided that I was going to start competing and I tried to get into anything that I could. Somehow I ended up cooking at the US Chef Open. I made the finals with a pork and turnip--well no pork at the time – it was a turnip green tamale. It was a vegetarian tamale with turnip greens in it in a well not-known dish at the time. There was roasted pork loin with ancho mashed potatoes and jalapeno gravy and it caught everybody's eye because it was like they can't relate to this thing. It's pork and potatoes and gravy except with a twist.

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And we went to this competition, Mike and I, you know naïve, whatever—you can call it whatever you want and not knowing what we got into and that is the biggest competition the US has to offer, the Chefs Open [*Laughs*]. We showed up with a couple of plates, a Cuervo hat and t-shirts and we get to this place and everybody has got all the white coats and the big fancy hats and the gold ring plates and carts and more carts of stuff to cook one thing. And so we did this and people came and they were looking at my dish and they had a description and it had *Eddie Hernandez* you know *Pork Loin*, blah, blah, blah. And people were going like come here; you know that's Eddie's pork, meaning that was my dish. And Mike would just happen to evaporate and leave me by myself. [*Laughs*]

00:52:06

So he went outside and he would listen to people going oh no, that's Eddie's pork, meaning my dish. So when we went by to the restaurant we'd run it as a special and it took off. And it became Eddie's Pork for years and it was a prime example of how you do a Southwestern dish differently except I did it in 1993. You know you're talking 17 years ago. Now finally I think chefs are beginning to do things the way I was doing it 17 years ago. Linton Hopkins, Kevin Gillespie now; they all are going back to their old Southern roots but doing it with not only quality ingredients but on a high-scale. I mean I did it for a price that was it was affordable to the masses. We were not a white tablecloth restaurant but we were a restaurant that became known for a different type of food that you will get a dish that looks like \$30 but it tasted like \$40 for \$17, and we became so popular, you know.

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And I think that's when we finally turned the corner where we understood that we had the capability to do things different than everybody and that's how it was—one of the things that we

took on really heavily doing a lot of things you know, Southern things, and then we became known as South—Mid Southwest by doing macaroni and cheese, by doing things that the South had to offer—grits, lots of grits, lots of cabbage, you know things like that.

00:53:57

KM: Circle back to the taco truck. Tell me about that.

00:53:59

EH: Well we wanted to do the taco trucks. And we became very successful. And we went away from the taco trucks. We opened another restaurant called Azuni Grill and we grew too fast. And we didn't know how to handle it. So it backfired. We ended up giving one restaurant away, selling the other one, and we regrouped. Both Mike and I came back to the Sundown and decided we wanted to take it easy for a year and just have the Sundown and enjoy our restaurant the way an owner should enjoy his restaurant by being out there, talking to the people, and having a good time.

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Well the opportunity came in to go to the west side; Michael and Katie Phillips who owned the thing, hand-picked us to do another restaurant at the west side location. In their mind they didn't know that we wanted to do tacos, Bacchanalia was one of the best restaurants in the State, high-end. They thought that we were going to do a spinoff on the Sundown and take it up a notch and get into the \$27--\$32 range. But Mike and I, we had another idea. He says let's open a taco joint. And I said okay, let's do it. And he says put the menu together and I started working

on the layouts and all that. And I said no, no, we've got to do a little research. I mean let me go see what everybody else is doing. Let me take some time off.

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I went to Mexico. I went to LA. And I tried everything that tacos were there. I came back and I said you know this is how their buildings look, this is what they do. And this is what I want to do. And so we laid out the menu.

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KM: And what were they doing in Texas and LA?

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EH: Well in--in LA, Rubio's was very popular with their fish tacos except the West Coast tacos are not like I do them. They use different types of fish(es), a little bit more expensive price-wise, but they don't do fried fish. I wanted to bring the fried fish in Texas-style, Southern style. I had to find a mix in order to produce a fried fish taco that had a little bit of Texas and a little bit of Mexican and a little bit of the South by having corn in the mix, by having jalapenos in the mix, by having a tartar sauce in the mix. Putting a fish taco together is more complicated than people thinks [*Phone Rings*] because you have to think about everybody—what the people want, what the people can understand that you said—fried chicken taco. Who would have thought about it, you know? A Memphis taco, you know, pulled pork, barbecue sauce, coleslaw. You know, I personally took on everybody. But then again with Mike's help like the Memphis taco. You know, he told me about how they do sandwiches in Memphis, so we designed the Memphis taco.

Talk about having a taco there was like they eat on the streets of Mexico. We did a carnita. We needed a vegetarian taco, so we did a bean taco. And everything was designed to fit everybody's needs, because the menu was very thought out. I mean we thought about everything. It can be broken down for anybody. It can be really spicy if you want to and not spicy at all if you want to. You can have vegetarian food if you want to, you can have it with no this, no that; we thought about that. So when we felt like we were ready we went to the Westside and opened Taqueria del Sol in 1980—no, in 2000.

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KM: Two thousand?

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EH: Uh-huh; because this is our 10-year [anniversary].

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KM: And tell us more about what that restaurant was like. Who was your customer-base?

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EH: You know, I think everybody who opens a restaurant wishes that you open the door and the restaurant is full the first day. They work really hard, they advertise, they do this, they do that, but Mike and I don't think that way. We wanted to open a restaurant as we did with this one, the

one we're in right now when it was the Sundown. We didn't advertise. We just opened the doors. And we wanted to have maybe 15 to 20 people come in that day to see how was the best way to run the restaurant, how the kitchen will respond and all that. So we never advertise. We opened Taqueria del Sol. Somehow they knew that was us, but we didn't advertise when we were going to open, so we opened on a Monday.

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We get blown out of the water. We closed at 2 o'clock. [*Laughs*] We were busy. Not knowing who our market was going to be just yet, I always felt that we were going to do good lunches there, because it's a lot of businesses around, but not restaurants. And we did really good the first day. The second day we did even better. We were open for dinner and I'd think we were not going to have anybody. By the third day the media go a hold of it and then it hasn't stopped—thank god you know. There's a line at the door every day. It's been that way since the day we opened. It don't happen to everybody. I think we've just been very blessed and we've been successful with what we do. But we try to do a good job.

00:59:57

KM: When you opened the doors in 2000 were there other taqueria(s) in Atlanta? What was that scene like?

01:00:03

EH: None. There was two taqueria(s) and it had nothing to do with the American public. They were designed for Latin people and they didn't care about whether you ever went

there or not. They were not looking for any other market. They were designed for the Latin people and the Latin people only. Plus, we're talking 2000; where tongue was not even close to being on the menu or brains or tripe, and that was the menu in their taqueria(s). I wanted to bring the taco knowledge to the masses, but I had to present it in a way that they can relate to it.

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Now you put smoked pork and barbecue sauce and if you can wrap it up in a wonton and people are going to buy it. So by putting it in a floured tortilla, it was like having a Memphis sandwich. People would understand what I was trying to do. A fish taco, a chicken taco, with items that they can understand. The little twist on the chicken taco, a lime jalapeno mayonnaise, so see now you still got your little Mexican sidekick in there but also it's fried chicken and people knows about fried chicken and they like their fried chicken. Our job was to present the food in a way that the customers will understand and to try to do a good job where they like it and come back. And we've been very blessed—10 years today.

01:01:32

KM: It's a Monday night in Atlanta and we're at the Cheshire Bridge location. And there's a line out the door. What are people after?

01:01:42

EH: Today the specials, today the specials. Every Monday, Cheshire Bridge is the only restaurant out of all four that is open. They get their email in the computers this morning and it's telling them today we have shrimp fajitas and we got Corona, fish tacos and we got the tostado trio. Now those three things they've seen before. They like it. The only place they can get it today is the Cheshire Bridge [location]. Now tomorrow they can get it in all four of them, but not today.

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So the line of people outside today, they know what we got already. Eighty-percent of our customers, they know what we're serving today. And they're here to have that and the other 20 [percent] don't have a clue what we have on the specials because they don't, but they know what we sell. They're here for the regular fix—the fish tacos and the corn chowder or the turnip greens and the carnita tacos or the mix and match of items that we have. And that's why they're here. And tomorrow they'll be in all of them, you know tomorrow will be a scene everywhere you know, it's just the way it is with these things and you know we're very blessed to have a business the way we have.

01:02:57

KM: And who is in that line out there? What does your customer base look like in 2010?

01:03:01

EH: A mix of everything except not that many Latin people. Not that many people from Mexico. I take that back. There's a lot of people from Colombia who comes to eat with us. They

like it. They crave tacos because they don't have it. The Mexican market, which is the people from Mexico, they have more places to go. They can go to Buford Highway and there's about 100 taqueria(s) now that cater to what they like.

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We give them the opportunity to try something different that we're used to having in Mexico and they like that. But they don't like the line. They're not used to standing in line. You know they want to be able to walk into a place, order, and sit down and be waited on and they're not going to get that with us. I think Mike thought about how we wanted these restaurants to run, and I think the American people understands what you give for what you get. And they're willing to give their time in line to get what we got to serve.

01:04:17

KM: For someone who has never visited one of your restaurants, tell us what the experience is like, what it looks like, how it works?

01:04:26

EH: Chaos. [*Emphasis Added*] Chaos is what it looks like. When they come in every single new customer that we have that walks into that door comes in because somebody told them. They didn't see an ad on a billboard or on the newspaper unless it was an article. So they come in over here and they really don't know what to expect. And I think they get shocked when they see the line. And the first reaction is to walk—is to go away.

01:04:56

There is no way nothing can be worth waiting in line and for that I thank god every day because people stays in the line—snow, rain, shine. They don't care. They stay in line and they come in and they have a good time. As a new customer, they come in – the advantage today – You can go get in line right now and you'll look like you'll know what you're doing, but people in front of you is going to turn around and they're going to say you've been here before darling? And you'll say no. They go well let me tell you. This is what you can do. This is what you cannot do. You must have the corn chowder and the turnip greens or the fish tacos. And the guy or the lady with him will go no, no, no, no; you got to try the charros beans and you've got to have a carnitas taco. And the woman behind you is going to go no, you got to have the fish taco. And for god's sake, don't go get a table before you get to the front of the counter. And please, read the menu. So when you get to the counter, it moves fast.

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So now our customers are our best teachers for the newcomers. When you're in line all you got to say is this is my first time and 75 people are going to tell you how to do it. They're going to tell you what to order. Whether they go as far as like well do you like a spicy food? No, well then order this. Are you allergic to anything? Yeah, well when you get to the counter tell them. They'll tell you what you can have and what you cannot have. Don't worry, they'll take care of you.

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And now I think that's part of the charm. You know they'll tell you go get a drink and come back and we'll talk. And before you know it, we'll be ordering and sitting down and they go, it moves really fast. And I think that's the best advertisement we got—is the line and sell; it's the best advertisement that people who is in line will tell the new customer—they will fill them

in on what to have or what to try and--and they'll tell you get yourself on the email list because when you see the email the first time, you'll be looking at them every Monday. You'll be waiting for the thing to come in and people enjoy that.

01:07:08

KM: Today you have four restaurants in Atlanta and Athens.

01:07:21

EH: Uh-huh, yes.

01:07:23

KM: How's business?

01:07:24

EH: Business is really good. We can't complain. You know these are restaurants based on the price for it that we have they're bulletproof for a recession. I think for business to increase with an economy the way it is right now, you know, I mean when the economy is not as good as it is right now then we become more popular because of the price point. We are affordable. And I think people believes that we keep a good value—that your dollar is well spent when you come to eat at Taqueria del Sol. And I think that is the best advertisement that we have. Therefore, our restaurants are really busy. Our business is good.

01:08:05

You know the one in Athens which is our newest one, maybe it's not as busy as the ones in town. But you have to understand it's only been open about a year and a half and it's doing business like you wouldn't believe in Athens. But then again, Athens is not Atlanta. It's a smaller town. We're having to break new ground again. We're having to prove ourselves that people in Athens is beginning to trust us, to know that we're not there just to take the dollar and run. That we're there to be a part of the community as we're doing right now with opening every Sunday. But a percentage of that is going to the Food Bank. We support charities. We give out a lot. And I think in Athens they're beginning to realize that hey maybe these guys are not that bad, so, you know, they're beginning to give us a chance. They're beginning to patronize our place and I think eventually they'll be just like the ones in town where the line is big and it takes a little while to get in. But then at the end of the line you're going to get a good meal for a good price.

01:09:12

KM: How does the food at Taqueria del Sol, your food, the food you create, how does that fit into the commonly held idea of what is Southern food?

01:09:29

EH: Well I don't think that nobody including ourselves can define what we do. I think every individual has this idea on how they see our cuisine or the things that we cook. And I think at the end of the day everybody just comes in and they see it now like I see what I need the most, a

good home meal which is—it's just a good meal, something that is going to fill your stomach with a good flavor on it and affordable, which is really hard to get now these days. And I think that's why they don't see us—they can see that we do Southern-style food but they also see us doing Southwestern food or Cajun food or Asian food. And we try to do a good job whenever we take on a different cuisine, not me, personally because I'm the Executive Chef, but the guys that work for me. They have to see the idea as I see it or they need to—or they will tell me it's like I don't think this—we're going to be able to either duplicate what you want or I don't think we can do a good job, it's wrestling, putting out what you got in your head, breaking it down, and making it where we can do it so that we can do a good job.

01:10:50

And that's why we do a good job. Everybody gets involved. It goes from Mike Klank to me, from me to the people with us, to the managers, until by the time he's a customer, it's already been put through a bunch of things. you know it takes a little while for us to do things but when we do it we do a good job on it, and I think that's what people appreciate is the fact that we do a good job with whatever we do and they trust what we do, whether it's turnip greens today or collard greens tomorrow or we do it on Sunday. We do turnip greens and pork crackling tamales with refried black-eyed peas.

01:11:35

KM: Tell me about that.

01:11:36

EH: This is the end of the Sunday things, and I wanted to do a Southern meal with a Mexican flair. Y'all pork cracklings with Mexico pork cracklings. Y'all eat turnip greens; we eat quelites. Tamales – our tamales is no more different than cornbread except ours is soft. So it has all the ingredients of a Southern meal with a Mexican flair.

01:12:13

So instead of doing cornbread with turnip greens, I'm doing a tamale. So you still get your corn, your turnip greens and your pork cracklings and we're doing a three—four block a piece this time, but we're going to come back with a—instead of doing a gravy I'm going to do a green chili sauce, which is another form of gravy except this is a Southwestern gravy and not the typical Southern gravy but a Southwestern gravy. So at the end of the day we're going to create a meal that all the Mexican people in Mexico will want to eat and the people out West will want to eat. The people in the South will want to eat it because they can relate to the items and the ingredients in the plate. They know the ingredients. Just the cooking technique is different. What I'm doing with it is different, so I think everybody on Sunday is going to have a great time with us you know because of the things that I do and the way I see the South and how I think I can combine my roots from Mexico with the Southern roots of the United States. I can bring them together and put up a good meal for one evening.

01:13:26

KM: What would your grandma think of the food you serve here?

01:13:32

EH: Well she got to taste my food, and now she would tell me to make lunch. I think that's the biggest compliment I ever got and she said why don't you make some corn and cheese? And I said you make it better than me. Not really, it tastes better when you make it, so make some. And I said okay. And that was the first one she teach(ed) me how to make, the corn and cheese.

01:13:56

So I think that if she sees what I do now she will be proud of me for one thing, you know because she always believed that I will be the way I am today because I think she saw how much I liked the food. And I treat the food at an early age with the respect the food needs to be treated. In order to enjoy it you have to treat you know and do things good and I always saw food for what it was. And I learned how to deal with it and I became what I am today based on the fact that I just like to eat and that I like to eat good. So if I'm eating good you're going to be eating good.

01:14:39

KM: Corn and cheese?

01:14:42

EH: Corn and cheese, yeah, we done that. It's a thing that's called in Mexico now they do as a street food, and anyway, all it is that they steam the corn.

01:14:54

KM: They what?

01:14:56

EH: They steam the corn and they get all the corn kernels and they mix it with—back then we used to mix it with cheese and a little lime and salt and ground chili powder, paprika, whole cayenne pepper. And it's as the years are going they call it troles in Mexico. Now it's a street food; they –you walk to it and they'll fill your cone with corn and they put mayonnaise now or sour cream and they put the lemon juice, the salt and the cayenne pepper on top of it or ground chili in my case and they mix it altogether. But my grandmother used to use like good cheese you know instead of using the regular you know street food cheese. You know she would get like a real good cow milk cheese from a ranch somewhere or from one of her friends, or when she went to pick up the charcoal in the truck, she'd be back and she'd come in smiling with a bag of cheese or some sour cream or butter like you've never seen. Butter in Mexico is yellow. I mean deep yellow, because it's pure. It's like you've never had it before and that was my grandmother. You know she loved cheese, cheese and corn, cabbage, pickled things, pickled feet. Believe it or not, she loved pickled feet [*Laughs*], pickled chicken feet; I said I think you're going a little off the cuckoos [*Laughs*] abuelita. And she's like yeah; you'll be eating it in a little while and yeah, I was. I had pickled chicken feet, pickled pig feet, and pork skins and everything there was. Where people could not see 10 years ago, guess what? It's becoming popular.

01:16:49

I was talking to a chef from Memphis this morning and we were talking about food and things. And he asked me, how my food has changed so much in the last five years and I said for two reasons. Five years ago, everybody was into watching the cholesterol level, so I had to

design the menu. I took all the fat out. Now I'm having to learn how to cook gluten-free because now everybody is on this low carbohydrate diet. You know how I can tell that? My customers come in and they go, I'll have a fish taco in a cup. That means they don't want the tortilla and instead of wasting the tortilla, they get it in a cup and then in return we'll put a little bit more fish, because they're giving away the tortilla so we'll replace it with more fish. They still get that value you know what I mean and they appreciate what we do because we take notice that they say they want it with going without the tortilla, so we'll repay them by adding more fish or more whatever they want. And so now we're learning how to go a little bit better gluten-free.

01:17:58

Most of my entrees now are trying not to have any gluten on it except for meat or pasta
[Laughs].

01:18:08

KM: I think that's all my questions. Are there things that I haven't asked you about that you want to tell us about?

01:18:16

EH: No, I think basically that's pretty much it. I mean there's nothing else to tell. I mean we just a restaurant you know who just happens to like Southern food. Me, personally and my partner, Mike, we've always been keen to Southern food. You know, we love baked corn and baked cabbage and fried chicken and all that. And we're trying to represent the South with the items you know many that they can understand. And I don't think there's no way to describe it. I

don't think we can and our customers have been trying for 10 years to describe Taqueria del Sol and to this day if he can tell us, I'll take it.

01:19:07

KM: Well thanks for sharing your story with us today.

01:19:11

EH: Oh, thank you, Kate.

01:19:11

[End Eddie Hernandez Interview]