

**MILDRED COUNCIL, “MAMA DIP”
Mama Dip’s Traditional Country Cooking – Chapel Hill, NC**

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Date: June 2, 2007

Location: Mama Dip’s Traditional Country Cooking – Chapel Hill, NC

Interviewer: Amy Evans

Length: 1 hour, 29 minutes, 34 seconds

Project: Chapel Hill Eats/TABASCO Guardians of the Tradition

[Begin Mildred Council Interview]

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Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Saturday, June 2, 2007 and I'm in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, at Mama Dip's restaurant with Mama Dip herself, Mrs. Mildred Council. And Mama Dip, if you wouldn't mind saying your name and your birth date for the record, please, ma'am?

00:00:18

Mildred Council: Okay. My—my name is Mildred Council, and my birth date is April 11, 1929.

00:00:26

AE: All right. And we're sitting here in your restaurant on Rosemary Street, and I wonder if you could start with a little background of your life and—and where you were born and your family and growing up in a big family with your father and—and that kind of thing.

00:00:40

MC: Okay. I was born about eight miles out in Chatham County [North Carolina] in the Baldwin Township. And it was seven of us children, uh-huh. [*Mildred is the youngest.*] But my mother [Effie Edwards Cotton]—we—we was raised up on this farm and—but my mother—I don't remember my mother. I don't think but just one or two remember my mother; she passed in 1931, and my father [Ed Cotton] raised us by himself, you know. He—so he—he had a challenge, I think, but I think he enjoyed us, learning us how to do so much and so many things and like planting and harvesting and canning and all this. And he—he had—we had fun also; he

let us do things that we wanted to do also. It wasn't much back then—then, you know in the '30s but it was—it was a lot to us and I guess like the same thing is a lot to people—young people today, you know.

And so we moved to Chapel Hill—our school there—our school was like—didn't go any further than the eighth grade. My sisters and—my three sisters, they graduated in eighth grade and then they moved to—they come to Chapel Hill and some of them live on a lot down in private homes. You know, at that time, people were living on lots, you know, and cooking for families. And so then we moved up here after things got bad—World War II was beginning to I guess, unfold, and they cut down some of Papa's cotton, you know, because cotton and—and tobacco—because we wasn't tobacco raisers; we were more like things that you could bring to Carrboro out here and sell, like peas and string beans and pigs and chickens and things like that. And so but when we—when we built—when we built a log cabin back on our home—our land—his father's land, he—me and my sister, we—we—we cut down the logs, the pine trees and skinned them to make that log house—that log cabin. My brother—my two brothers was in the Army. And so we moved up here in 1945. We left when that happened; we—we moved up here in 1945 and then we—.

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Papa wanted me to go to cosmetic school, the beauty school, and then that's what I signed up for. I didn't really want to go because I was so—I knew I could cook, you know, because I started cooking when I was nine. And so he asked me to—to stay there at the house and fix something to eat. That was the thing, that it wasn't no dinner, supper, in there. It was just something to eat. And so he **[Laughs]**—he—he—I went to beauty school and then I started to work over here [in Chapel Hill]. It was nine months before you graduated, and I got in a beauty

shop over on Franklin Street, and I really didn't like it, you know, because I was kind of shamed of something because I didn't—I hadn't been used to—just a lot of people. When you're on the farm, you just got probably—you go ten miles before you get to anybody else, you know. And so then a lady come up one day and asked—that she was looking for somebody to cook because her son was coming from Hawaii. He was a—his name was Patterson. And I—and I said, “Well, I will take that job!” That's what I said. And so that's how it started—me to cooking, you know. And after that, he—he just stayed here a year. And then I started working down to the Carolina Coffee Shop, and I just started working everywhere then.

Like in '47—'49 that's when my first—first child was born. Another one was born in 1949 and after that I just had a child about every fourteen, fifteen months after that until I had—but I got a set of twins. [*Mama Dip had eight kids in all.*] And so I always did my—I always didn't mind cooking. And—and I worked a lot of places. I worked at the Carolina Inn; I worked at the [University of North Carolina] Dining Hall; I worked at the Carolina Coffee Shop. And—and it was Mr. Ellis, he had a restaurant downtown; I worked there. I worked at the—the St. Anthony Hall [part of the Delta Psi fraternity] and—when I worked at the St. Anthony Hall—what is his name? He was there; he was a traveling editor [Charles Kuralt]. And I worked at Kappa Delta and the one on Rosemary Street, KA, [*Laughs*] I worked everywhere. [*Laughs*] You know, because at that time, when you got pregnant, you had to leave the job and so—but I always get a job [*Bloop*] just like that, you know. [*Laughs*]

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But in 1957, my in-laws—I got married in 1957 [to Joe Council]. Oh, yeah, she [my daughter] was telling me [as she walked by just now] that was—Charles Kuralt was my Kitchen Manager at the St. Andrews Hall. I know you hear tell of Charles Kuralt. So what happened is—

is that he—he [my father-in-law] opened a restaurant [Bill's Bar-B-Q on Graham Street], and it was so funny that when I—they was my in-laws because I get—married, you know, to her son, and I start working for them. And I worked there for a long time. I worked fifteen—probably fifteen years but I always had another job because I was working for the Gidders. I worked for them eight years just everyday but then it, you know—but then it was you work up there because I made the barbecue sauce—the barbecue sauce there and then, you know, I fried chicken, you know. And that's where we—there we just had chicken and barbecue and probably pinto beans. That's what they served there but it was—it just went just like everything, you know. And they had a delivery service. They had about twenty cars out there delivering, you know on campus and around, so it was a good business, you know.

So I—I wanted to get away from the food a little bit, so I went down and put an application in for the—at the hospital. And I got the job. It was like a—I was in central sterile supply. I run the autoclave. That's what—this guy was in the Army and he—in the Reserves and he had to go away and stay two years, and this job didn't last but two years. So after this two years was about up, I was walking the street and there was a little house that had a cab stand and I—I was walking down the street and Mr. Tate across the street—across Mitchell Lane and he—he come up and said, “Mama Dip,” said, “Mr. Tucker is going out of business. Why don't you take this—this restaurant over—over there?” And I thought he was just talking this—you know, anybody—if I wasn't probably a strong woman, I would think he was just making fun of me, you know, something like that. But he was serious and—and I didn't have no money. And so I—the next week—I got paid every two weeks, and the next Friday I come through, and he run out there about the same place and said, “Now he going to leave tonight.” “He going to leave tomorrow,” I mean. “He going to leave tomorrow,” and said, “what you need to do is tell him you'll take it and

don't even worry about the rent," you know. "Just rent the—if you make the rent, you make the rent; it's all right. If you don't, it's all right." He was a really, you know, a talker, that guy. He was a real estate person, you know. **[Laughs]** And so I—I had got to the store—I had went to Fowler's and bought some food to take home for my children for supper, you know. And so when I got home I got thinking about it and we come back up here when—that Saturday. He left and so we come back up here, and we cleaned the place up, you know. When he—he was out at six o'clock, and I guess we was up here at six, too, you know. And we cleaned the place up and—and I didn't have—after—the money was left out of my check was like \$64, you know. What I had. And so with the cleaning and the buying some food—cleaning, my stuff to clean with and buying some food, you know, that's all I had to spend, you know. So that—that night we stayed up here and—'til about two o'clock you know. We went home, and I got up the next morning, I guess about—well, early. I can't say what time it is because I know I was up here when Fowler opened at seven o'clock. I was—I was uptown, you know. I went in and bought something for us to eat. They come uptown later. Their daddy brought them uptown later. And it was like, I bought a pound of bacon and—and some—a little old box of—excuse me—a little old box of grits and—and some bread and a dozen eggs. And I wasn't even looking at, you know, this is what we going to eat. And as soon as I got it done, you know, people—somebody come and says, "Is you open?" And I said, "Yeah, come on in." And that's when the eggs started going, and that's when the children started running back and—just like a fairytale-like, you know. One would go get the eggs and bacon this time, and then one would go the next time, you know—just going back and forth to the store. And about—I guess it was about 11:00 or 12:00—11:30 and I said, "We need to change and get some chicken," you know. And—and so they went and got two chickens, and then they got a long pack of the pork chops, you know. And so I

cooked them with some garden peas and some rice and—and—and it—they had to keep going back and get the chicken and keep going back and get the chicken, you know, and pork chops until that—it was about 8:30 or 9:00—about 9 o'clock and I said—I said, 'You know, we got to get out of here because y'all got to go to school tomorrow,' you know. And so my oldest daughter, Norma—she running the cash register—she could count the money. And so she counted \$135. I'll never forget it, you know. And when she started over to the 50—it was 50-cent pieces then, you know. And when she started with the 50-cent pieces I said, "Just leave that there." I said, "Just don't bother with that," you know. "Just leave it there." So I just—it was just something to think that you're making like \$75 every two weeks, and in this one day, you know, you come up with \$135. And it was probably \$15 in the 50-cent, quarters, dimes, and nickels and pennies and such, you know. It was a joyous feeling, you know. And so it just started out from there.

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And then people's—Mr. Gidder that I had—he was—he was the editor of the—the newspaper and he wrote—wrote a thing in the newspaper. He wrote an article in the newspaper about me because I—I worked there eight years and every—every Thursday I made fried chicken there. I made fried chicken. And so the fried chicken had been up here for like twenty years up to Bill's Barbecue. We fried—when we was there, a half a chicken was just 99-cents. You got a half a chicken and some rolls and—and a lettuce and tomato salad, just one piece of lettuce and one piece of tomato was 99-cents, you know. But it was—that was market price then. It was market price, and so it just began to go from there—all the people that were working around at the Blue Cross/Blue Shield and they would come and the place just got—I guess in—in—I guess in '80—1980 that's when it just kind of exploded, you know. People had to

come at lunchtime and they would have to stand, you know, outside to get in because I didn't have just like eighteen seats, you know.

Then Mr. Tate asked the—it was a guy that had a furniture shop next door and we was—I was having a little trouble with him because he was—he—he—he re-did furniture. He re-done—he did furniture, you know. He—he—and the chemical would come on that side because it wasn't a great—it was a great building, you know. And so Mr. Tate said, “Well, I'll just find him somewhere to go.” And when they found him somewhere to go, that pushed me up to like 90 seats in 19—probably '82. I got up to—I got up to 90 seats, but my kitchen was no bigger than just this little bitty cross right here. I had the same thing in the kitchen that Mr. Tucker had **[Laughs]**, you know, and so it was really hard. It was really hard then to serve them and get them out. And then everybody said, “Well, you got to get a place. You should—.” Then they asked me to serve on the Board of Economic Development, and I got on the Board with—on Economic Development and then they started to look for me a place, you know. And then give me some ideas—things that I need to—the Small Business Administration, you know. They sent me over to Raleigh, and I went over to Raleigh a couple of times and—and the little things that I had to keep up with my—with part of my sales and everything—everyday, you know. And they had this little bitty old thing, you know and when you—and when I come up from going to school, you know everybody wrote big, you know. You didn't write little then **[Laughs]** you know. I had a hard time getting that and it was just such—it was just unnecessary, it seemed like to me. And so then I began to seek out—after something else—and other things for me and that was see what somebody could do for me at the University of—of [North Carolina] Central University. So knowing—knowing a lot of people, they got some people to come from over here, the Business School, and you know talk, and then I began to take some—one-day or two-day motivational

skills topic—at Prentice Hall—in Prentice Hall, that was the best one I ever went to. They said—“You Can Do It. Yes, You Can!” It was—you know, I read that book, you know—a little of it every week now, you know, and that’s been a long time. That’s been like—like twenty years ago, you know.

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And so I just—from there, I just don’t know, you know. It was just—it was just—it—I started delivering because people said, “Now, y’all used to deliver, and we want delivery now.” And I got some people to deliver, and we couldn’t deliver; we didn’t have nowhere to fix the food. We didn’t have nowhere—if somebody ordered ten chicken boxes to go to *[Inaudible,]* we didn’t have nowhere to sit the boxes, you know. So it was—*[Laughs]*—and so it was—it—I never called it a struggle because when you work out things, it’s not a struggle. When you work out things you just—you just take it head on you know. And my children always—some of them always worked. Some of them, you know, had—my daughter, Bon, and my daughter, Norma, she opened up her restaurant, she was—she stayed up there with—with her father up at Bill’s Bar-B-Q and—and they had—my daughter, Bon, *[Julia]* she opened a—she was cooking at a fraternity house *[Pi Kappa Alpha]* and then she—she done got her restaurant down on Franklin Street *[Bon’s Home Cookin’, formerly Bon’s BBQ]*.

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But it’s just—we—we just come up out of a food family. And—and—and it’s—this cooking has just been this kind of food. I’m not a chef. And—and I don’t like people to call me a chef because a chef is more like—I call them the—the artists. They have so much artist in them, artistic, ever what you call it. Artist, I guess, because they can just make things so pretty, you know. And I try to make things good *[Laughs]*. And that’s the difference. Because everything

that I—everything that I have here—like right now, I probably have to get some string beans in the wintertime. I have to get some string beans in the can. But—but I think I have helped all of these people—big companies that can these things. It's that you don't have to cook them to death before you can them, but you know just—. And so other than that, I use everything fresh. Everything is fresh. Everything—most everything is local. This time of year most everything is local, you know, because I get—it's not very much at this market out here [Carrboro Farmers' Market] but the cabbage—people love the—the cabbage, the fresh cabbage in the winter, you know? And so now, probably today when I go out, there they might have—she said she might have some squash. And then but I have the fresh squash all the time but—but it don't come from local—it don't come from North Carolina, you know. But now the people's—you can get tomatoes all the time now because people are using hot house tomatoes, you know, but we don't sell a lot of tomatoes. But most of the things that—in the can that we have is tomatoes and—and tomatoes and—and—and string beans and—and it's something. Just like strawberry time, okay. I have a freezer over there and—and we—we—I don't pick strawberries now but they'll—they'll pick them—pick them. They—they'll pick them and bring them to me, and I freeze the strawberries. And at peach time, I sits back there probably and—and freeze thirty bushels of peaches, you know. And they last me all—all the year, you know. And I was making my jelly, but I stopped. But you know—and now I take and—I make it and sell it here, you know. I don't—because it's—you know—and—. I—it's—like my dessert, all of my kids can cook—cook, and so my son, Joe, he wanted to take on the desserts, so he makes all the desserts, you know. He makes all the desserts and we—we—we might cook—people come in and—and eat a piece of peach cobbler today, and they'll go back and say, you know, “They got peach cobbler.” And when that other person gets here that afternoon, the peach cobbler is gone, so we—we rotate

the peach cobbler, the blackberry cobbler, the blueberry cobbler, you know and—and strawberry and—and strawberries and we rotate them, you know, all the time. But if somebody wants to say, “We—we going to bring somebody in, make sure you have strawberry cobbler,” you know, or strawberry shortcake or something like that, you know, we try to get—.

We try to satisfy the customer because they are—most of my customers are elderly, you know. Yeah, uh-huh. I have some peoples that come in here—walks in here at 99 [years old] and—uh-huh—uh-huh. And then I have—Miss Berryhill over there; she always wanted the potlikker and she come out of a family—she was rich. They gave the University [of North Carolina] a lot of money and like that—they said and—and but what happened is that she—she come in and she wanted to potlikker off of the turnip greens and so it just—she said, “This is what I was raised on,” you know. The older people were raised on this. We didn’t have all the Mexican and the spaghetti and all that stuff, you know. You had just the things out of the garden, you know and so—. It’s—it’s—it’s—it makes me feel good to—to make the older people happy you know. Because one time we were just kind of kicking them aside and—and I said—I think about the struggle that my daddy had with us you know and—and when he was—he was—he was 72 when he died, but he had just worked so hard, you know. He had worked so hard and then he just used his self up with us, you know, until we done everything we could to make him happy, you know. And—and—and he didn’t—he didn’t suffer; he just walked—he just walked to visit and just sat down in a chair and didn’t even fall out the chair when he stopped—uh-huh, when he—when he died. He didn’t even—he didn’t even fall out the chair, you know. He was just—it was just—his death wasn’t a struggle at all.

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But then we went here and—this building here. When I got on the Economic Development Board they began—the first thing they did—they said, “You got to have another

building. We got to see about another building,” you know. And so it was okay, and so I think it took them about three years. They said Mr. Tate said—said Mr. Tate, “Come on Dip. You got to buy that building over there,” you know. “You get that building and you get that—.” It was an old house on here; it was an old—a big old house on here and he said, “You get that—you need to get that building there, and then you can take that building and you can put your restaurant in that building,” you know. And so it sounded good because it just seemed like real. The building here and I know—I liked the way it looked in the front, but when it come up time when I bought it they find(ed) out you have to—the town here rules that you got to abide by, so it had to be checked for what, asbestos? Asbestos? And they find out it had asbestos in it, and they had to tear the whole building down. And—but we got the loan and went to CCB and we got the loan and then they called it Self Help, you know. They—they stood for part of the loan, you know, and they put this building up here.

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And it’s—it’s through that—all of this time I had peoples come in that—like Mr. Craig Claiborne [writer and former food editor for the *New York Times*] and probably—probably—practically—over there—practically all the—the early people that wrote cookbooks, you know. Cookbooks have not been distributed out there like you go in a bookstore and get them now, you know. It’s a lot of bookstores and—but a lot of books in the bookstores now. But it was people that come here over there that—that just heard about me and just come to visit. And so Mr. Claiborne was the—the one that really got on me about not writing a cookbook, you know. Because he had never—since he left home [in Sunflower, Mississippi], he had never ate no food like he at that day over there—over at Mama Dip’s. But he liked to scared me to death because I—you know I didn’t know who he was, you know. But [writer/chef] Bill Neal up there [at Crook’s Corner Restaurant in Chapel Hill]—Bill is passed on now, and he had worked with my

brother, Jim down at the Rathskeller [restaurant in Chapel Hill] and he—and he told me—he said, “Mr. Claiborne has been there and,” he said, “he loves your food, Mama Dip.” And I said, “Who in the world is Mr. Claiborne?” He said, “Yeah, he come out.” And there was a lady with him and he didn’t present himself as no cookbook person and—and no—nothing, you know. He was just enjoying it and he ate chitterlings. And he was a white guy. And my daughter, Lane, waited on him. And she went out and she said, “Mama,” she says, “there’s a white man out here, and he ordered chitterlings. What I suppose to tell him?” I said, “Lane,” I said, “go back and ask him do he want ‘em fried or do you want ‘em boiled,” you know. And he—[Laughs]—it was so funny. And he—and I didn’t have really many dishes, you know—not the little bitty dishes. But you know, he wanted to taste of some everything I got. The—the okra and tomatoes was his favorite and the black-eyed peas. He didn’t have no black-eyed peas because I used dried black-eyed peas. I don’t use the, you know, the frozen black-eyed peas and canned black-eyed peas. And he was just overwhelmed with it. And my peach cobbler, I had made a peach cobbler that day and the crust was on the side of the—the crust—the juice had come up on the side of the crust and when Lane took it out there he had—he said, “Don’t send this out here to me. No, I don’t want that. What is this you’re sitting in front of me?” And like to scare Lane to death. But then I cut him some off where, you know, the crispy crust, you know, and he was really satisfied when he left, you know.

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But then that’s when—after that Bill Neal come. Bill always—he had the restaurant up there [Crook’s Corner] but what he did, he ate down at Mama Dip’s every Thursday. Uh-huh, every Thursday he ate at Mama Dip’s. He got so used to my brother. My brother, Jim had worked for Danziger [Theodor Danziger, owner of the Rams Head Rathskeller restaurant] for 52 years and so he got so used he would just—he was just a fine person downtown. And [Laughs]

he—he said—the telephone rang, and I forget which one it was said, “Mama,” he said, “the telephone.” And I went to the telephone and he said—he said, “This is Craig Claiborne. How are you?” And I said, “I’m fine.” **[Laughs]** And Bill didn’t tell me who he was, you know. And he says, “I just can’t get over,” you know, “coming to your restaurant.” That was about three weeks later and he said, “I really enjoyed myself.” I said—I said, “You did?” I said, “Well, thank you.” And he said, “How you fix the chicken livers and not pop on you?” He said, “Every time I cook chicken livers,” he said, you know, “they pop on me. I have a burn I have to get rid of.” And I told him, I said, “Well the next time you do them,” I said, “stick your thumb in it and pull it.” I said, “Stick your thumb in them to make a hole in them,” you know. He had never hear that. He kind of giggled in there, you know, but it was true when he find it out. **[Laughs]**

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And then okra and tomatoes and he [Craig Claiborne] told me how I fixed the—the—the not the gumbo but the Brunswick stew because in the country every time we would get ready in the fall when we done—done all of the crop and sold all of the cotton we’d have like a jamboree like and we’d take the big black pot outside and then we’d make—get to kill four or five hens, you know and roosters and—and boil them and we’d make this gumbo, you know. It’s just—not gumbo but Brunswick stew. And so—and he had never hear tell of Brunswick stew before but the gumbo he had learned—he had heard about gumbo because down—he was from Alabama [Craig Claiborne was from Mississippi], and they do a lot of gumbo down there. But we have it like Brunswick stew and it was—and he just said, “No, but I—.” You know I don’t think he ever thought he could make it taste like I taste it, but he called me back and asked me could he put some of the recipes I have—tell him a recipe or two and let him put it in his last cookbook. And I done that. And I sent him one of the cookbooks before he died, but he was sick but I still sent him a cookbook.

And Delores—Delores, Edna Lewis [chef/author] and—and the one that had the cookbook—it just—it just a lot of them come through, you know. And I had a lot of peoples come in—and that’s my slogan about when people come in and ask me about the famous people that’s been in and you know—my—my slogan, my response to them is that you’re famous when you walk in this door. You’re famous, you know. Because I just think that—I don’t believe in giving fame and all attention. I believe in making peoples that walk in and—and you know, don’t feel well and that little word will help them, you know. When they—when they read that all the time that Michael Jordan been here, Dean Smith [retired head coach of the UNC men’s basketball team] been here. Dean Smith might walk in here now you know, because they eat and I think that’s for him [the table that’s set up in the back dining room]—probably for him for the night because his sister is sick, you know. She ain’t sick but she got—she got a disease that put—you know, disfiguring her. And he brings her in here a lot and—. And then some of the Governors. I’ve been invited to a lot of places, to the Governor over—to the Governor and I’ve been invited to—I’m a Democrat, but I’ve been invited to the White House with President Bush just—this one in there now [George W. Bush], and so it’s been amazing. It’s been something.

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I travel so much until I think I have wore myself out, you know. I really do. I said my back—I had to have surgery on my back about twenty years ago and—and arthritis has come in and the fun of it is—is that you—that overcoming something mentally, you know, even with you know, I can't walk around and do like I could do. And I understand that I can't on account of my age, you know.

But—but the—when I did the cookbook [*Mama Dip’s Kitchen*], Bill [Neal] come down, and he would say, “Mama Dip, you started on the cookbook? Mr. Claiborne told me to stay on you about the cookbook.” And I—I said, “Bill,” I said, “I’m not writing me no cookbook,” you

know. You know, “I just don’t see it.” He said, “Yeah,” you know. And one day he told me, he said—the Radio Shack had opened down there, you know, and he said, “Go get you a tape recorder and you just—get over here and you just—every time you make something you—you talk in that,” you know. And I had never used a measuring spoon. I had never used a measuring cup; so now I got but these—the equipment, I call it, to make this thing work, you know. And so I guess I got about—about 20 or 25 recipes fixed, you know. And so my daughter, Norma, could type, you know. And so I give them to her and I said, “Norma, you take it and you type these up,” you know. And so Norma got them—come and got them and the next morning she brought them back. The next morning she brought them back. She said, “Mama,” she said, “I can’t do nothing with these.” She said, “I’ll be—it will take me ten years to do this.” She said, “Because you said, ‘Put this in here,’ this minute and don’t say nothing else for three minutes—three minutes down the road.” **[Laughs]** She said—and I said, “What happened here?” Bill said, “Well you just going to have to get you a—a composition book,” you know, “and you just going to have to start writing,” you know. And I did, you know. That’s what I did. When he come back, he said, “You started on that book yet?” And then I just started writing, and it took me about eight, ten years to write, you know—to get it altogether, you know.

00:33:47

But then the UNC Press and Oglong Books? [Meaning Algonquin Books] Ogling [Algonquin] Books, they had it first. And this guy, he was young, and when he looked over it he just said, “I don’t think nobody will buy this book.” You know because he was used to—he had got—things had changed so from cabbage and turnip greens and—and—and coconut pie, and you know and—and fried chicken and all. All things had just done changed, you know, and so he—they didn’t take it over, and so the UNC Press got it, you know. They come and say, “We will take your book over.” And so this man—I don’t know who he was and he come in here now,

and he says, “I never will forget you.” He pointed his finger right at me and said, “I never will forget you.” And he says—he says, “If they hadn’t have done that book, I would have destroyed UNC.” And so he was my benefactor, you know. He was—he’s the one that—he put money out. He never—he never said how much he put up and never said nothing. I said, “I was your benefactor.” And he said—and so he—they got the—they got and wrote the book and then we had to start—the next thing QVC called, you know, called him and told him they wanted me to come up there. And I tell you, it—that was something else, you know, riding there. And I had never really rode an airplane and started riding an airplane it was something. And then I guess we went about three times and then some—then 09/11—when 09/11 come and—and the airplane got small and I—and then you didn’t walk down that little corridor, you know. You had to walk down the steps and go out on the ground. And I tell you one thing. I had—I had to make fun with it because I was so nervous you know that you know after we landed, I said, “Well—.” I told Gina, “One day,” I said, you know, I just feel like you know that—when it landed it was just going to take the skin off my butt back there. I just didn’t know what in the world was going on. Something was going to happen. **[Laughs]** But the little—they keep on, it was—it seemed to me that the little plane, they could—could land a little bit more easier than the big planes, you know. But we would go and sometimes we would go and then come back. It wasn’t no need of us staying there because the QVC, they had a lounge there you could sit down in; they had food and everything, and we would just go up there and then come you know—and then ride back. And that was just a lot you know for me, you know. So but they’re—they’re just used to riding—flying like that and probably you is too—just used to flying, you know.

So then we got through with that book, and I was going to the Sarah Moulton show and you know—and she come here. She had never really, you know, cooked in a small kitchen and

you know, in a small kitchen, my—you know, and she spent a day at my house cooking. And what she wanted to do is when I went to—when I went on her show, a lot of my customers said, when they found it out, when they put it out that I was being on her show, they wanted me to make dumplings so that I could—they could see how I make dumplings. But when I got up there, she had her—what she wanted me to cook, that’s the fried green tomatoes and—and I fried chicken, you know. And—and we—she said that well people had called her about piecrusts you know and—because I made a coconut pie. And said and it just—it just is so easy to make up that little dough and just roll it out, and people have a hard time rolling it out without cracking it you know, especially when you’re making the bottom part of it. And so she come here and I was—I was in—in—up at QVC then and I got her—back here on Wednesday. And so when I walked in the door there she said, “Sarah Moulton called, and she said she would be here Friday.” And I said, “Well she asked me, could she come.” **[Laughs]** So what happened was—**[Laughs]**—nothing I could do. And when I went home and I said, “What can I do? What—what can I fix?” And I—and then I said, “Well I won’t fix nothing,” you know because I mean I just didn’t have time. I didn’t want to get flustered, you know. And so she come in and she—about—I’m looking for Sarah Moulton, but about eight o’clock that morning—she supposed to be there at nine—about eight o’clock that morning the doorbell ring, and it was a lady standing there with two suitcases and she gave—she gave me her name. I don’t remember her name but she—but she said, “I’m the—.” She said she was the person of makeup, and she was the makeup artist. That’s what she said. And I said, “Come on in and **[Laughs]**—.” And so—and then I guess about ten minutes later, here come a van come up and it was the food—you know the food lady, you know, and she come and bring—she had a whole heap of stuff. She had, you know, different dishes and—and everything, you know. And I said—I didn’t said nothing. **[00:39:32]** **But** it was a lady

here in Chapel Hill that I know that comes here, and when she come in you know, I just kind of feel like—pretty good, you know. And then at nine o'clock here comes Sarah Moulton. I said, “Well, I don’t believe you’re standing here. I don’t believe you’re coming to my house,” you know. And so we just got busy doing. And then, when they come up, she said, “Where can we make-up a—where we can make-up at?” Because she had to make us up and I couldn’t—didn’t know. So what I did—I went and got the pillow and put it on top of the stool you know and so she [**Laughs**]*—she made—everybody was happy, you know. But see, one thing about it, you were looking for—you were looking for—you were looking for them to say something of what they’re used to having, you know. Because when I went there, they have this beauty thing here, and it’s just full and everything and the chairs and everything like that—that they use, you know. But they—nobody said anything about it. We enjoyed the day and so—and I think—we got up here about seven o’clock. It was—it was a long day. We got [done] up here about seven o’clock, eight.*

00:40:49

And I’ve been to a lot of places. I go around to the schools. I like to go to the schools and then I—I go—I’ve been to for—to—the thing that y’all have, they have one in Memphis in May. I done a Memphis in May. And it’s—it’s a lot of things that I can’t even hardly remember all the things that I have been in—been to and—and I do it a lot—I do—I have done three or four rather down—Southern Season. They like to have me down there at the Southern Season and—and when I go to the schools most of the time they—excuse me—we cook, you know—I let the children cook and make something, and then I talk to them about—about food, how what hospitality is now in America. Hospitality, you don’t have—you can’t just talk about France now because a lot of people are coming to America. America has a lot of hospitality and then what happens is—is that people are making money at it. The cooking—cooking, chef—chef now is—

is something else. They makes a lot of money and then even—even the business part of it—of—of the hotels and things like that—that you can come into and so I don't know.

I'm just really—I just really—they asked me to look back and I just—I just really don't—I just—if there's ever been a miracle other than the—the man, than Jesus, I think I—that's what I was. I was just a miracle because I just don't—I don't—I understand how I done it because when you have a little, you can make it with a little, you—you know. And so that—that's what I was I think, you know, because I just—just Papa raising us, we—we just sometimes on the table we had a little, you know—especially in the wintertime, like this time of year before anything come just—not just this time of year because we would have cabbage this time of year but back like in January like that when the—all of the loft you would look up there and you done using all of the canned food that you had, and then you begin to make something out of it, you know, and then you take a chicken and a hen and you make dumplings, you know, and you make—make a chicken pie or something like that. Or we didn't call it chicken pie back then; we called it you know—something—chicken pudding we called it, you know. But—but what the taste—the taste of it, the—is—and—and I have a few people—you hear—you hear the noise [in the dining room]? You hear them laughing?

00:43:50

AE: Uh-hmm.

00:43:51

MC: And I have to tell her about joy, you know. The joy in food and fellowship and the joy—I mean, you don't have nothing else. You don't have anything else, but some people just don't like to hear people laughing, you know. They have—they come up in a time—they come up in a time

where you sat at the table, and you have to have a certain position at the table—how you ate, and how you do anything. You know. And you know sometime—I train my waiters now, when they want molasses, you know, you say you sop molasses, you know. And you don't have to eat the chicken with your hand because chicken, the most—one of the meats that you do pick up and eat it, you know. You just—something about it. You can't cut it, you know, and just eat it like that. And so they just really—you'd rather have fun, you know. They really have fun in eating, uh-hmm. And—and one—one of the things that I like—nobody say—hollered out, “My mama did this.” Everybody now, when the younger people come in—my grandma—because see, peoples—children would go and probably spend two weeks in the summertime with the grandparents and then that's where they see all of this food spread out on the table because we just didn't cook two meats and a vegetable—I mean, two vegetables and a meat. You always cooked a lot of food and put it on the table. You'd go—run back in there and get something you know, and it's always some dessert, you know. Now peoples almost scared to—to **[Laughs]** eat dessert but—but you always had dessert and—and children ate—they ate the food so they can get dessert. Because if you didn't eat your food, you didn't get dessert, you know. So it's—it's a lot of fun; they have a lot of fun coming here, uh-hmm. We have peoples coming from all over, and it is such a story—such a—a something to—to think about.

And then they say, “Mama Dip, you need to write something else,” you know. “You need to write something else,” you know. I have a lot of people come in here and have memorial services back here. They said you know—and they're wanting to eat and have a memorial service. And it's amazing, ain't it? I mean I—you just wouldn't think—you're talking about a memorial, you're thinking about a church, you know, or something but they—we have a lot of people coming in here and—and we have—I have a lot of people come in that wants to bring

something that, you know, want me to pray over, and they got peoples really sick and—and you know just praying. But just in a word, you know, a comfort word to—to think about position of other people that's lost peoples you know and—and it's going to hurt for a long time, but time will heal a lot of things. Time will heal it you know and so it—it's—it's amazing, you know—you know what the—how they feel about Mama Dip, Mildred Council. [**Laughs**] And so and I bet you that probably sometimes—we have a lot of church buses come here, and then they bring them from the Living Center sometimes here.

0:47:13

And so everybody wants to know how I got my nickname—how I got my name and nickname. And so Dip is my childhood nick—nickname because I used to—I used to dip the water out the barrels. We caught the water. Papa put two big barrels at the edge of the—edge of the house, and then the water would run down in it, and we'd dip it out and that's what we washed—we had the pots and the tub where we were washing them outside. We would fill it up with water, and then you build a fire under the pot to heat it up to wash in—in hot water. And I had to be the one to dip it out. I know I started dipping it out, probably, when I was five or six years old, you know. And I would get up there, and they'd call me Dip. “Come here Dip—Dip—Dip.” And they started calling me Dip. And when I opened Mama Dip's, well then it was about fifteen hippies living in that house right there [**Gestures down the street**], and they didn't have no money and they come into—My children said, you know, “Mama,” you know—they were looking for everything, you know. They had—they come in here now, and I was telling a lady the other day, one of them was in here, and I said, “You was educated.” But they just was something that they wanted to find, you know, when the hippies was. And so—and they started calling me Mama, and then the customers started calling me Mama. And so that's then when I went to have it—the Small Business [Association] said, “You need—you probably need to put

this in a corporation and make it a corporation, then.” And the lawyer said, “You know what? We’re just—we’ll just name it Mama Dip.” And so that’s how it started. That’s how that got out. **[Laughs]** That’s how that got then. Yeah, I tell you, it’s something.

00:49:02

And then now you know I got four of my children right here, and then it’s two of my grandchildren right here—two of my grandchildren right here [working for me], and so I don’t think that—I think that food has been in my family so long because my daddy said his mother—said, “If you gave her an apple, she can cook it this way today and that way tomorrow.” [He] said, “But if you had wrote apple on a piece of paper and said, ‘Anna, you could cook this,’ she couldn’t read it.” You understand? And so this is—it’s in our family. And so five of us were cooking just in the first block downtown once, you know, my sister, Bernice, and my sister, Cora was at the fraternity house right there and my brother, Jim, was—he cooked for the [Theodor] Danziger enterprise on Franklin Street, the Zoom Zoom the Rathskeller, and then they opened the Ranch House. He cooked all of that in really fifty-two years before he passed. And then my sister worked at the UNC Cafeteria down there, and then I was working for—I was working for Mr. Ellis and so—and so my sister, Cora, was working down at another restaurant. All of us were working now. Do you believe it? Do you—do you understand? And—and every time something comes up, they come and ask me about, you know, the thing that—do I remember this, you know? Yeah, I remember—I remember her walking across the street with that big dog to the thing. Yeah, I remember them going to the—a post office and the chain—gold chains on the—you understand who they were, you know. But I’m getting so I don’t remember their names so much but I—I remember every store and—and about everything now, you know. So you was right there; you was right there working. And so it’s—it’s fun to—to go back over it. And all about North Side here they come and talk about—.

I had a—I had eight children, and then my sister passed and she left me one. And then my other sister, she went to New York, and I took in her children. And so what happened, every time, I had to try to find a big house. There wasn't no big houses but—all of them were small. But I would try to find a house a little bit better than the one I was living in, you know. And so I've lived all over town. I'm up on this end right here. I've lived all over town, uh-hmm. And when they wants to know about was it a gas station here, you know, because Papa come to town every Saturday. What happened was, if it wasn't—if it wasn't for coming to town for—for to bring some vegetables or something like in the summertime, he would—he would bring wood, he would sell wood, he would—you know, we would saw wood and—and he would load the wagon and we'd get up on the wagon with him and you know—and bring—and bring it and he sold it all around, you know the town, and so we've been here a long time, uh-hmm.

00:52:12

AE: Well, I want to ask you, you talked about all your siblings being in—in the service industry and—and a lot of them working in restaurants. But growing up in the country and cooking for necessity—you were cooking for necessity and to feed your family—and then coming out in the world and that skill being a tool for all of you to make a living and—and that food has now brought you so much and what that—that means to you now.

00:52:37

MC: Yeah, it means a lot. [*Laughs*] It means—you see, one of the—one of the things is—is that—is that this is why I try to instill in the—in the children when I go, you know, it—actually, you don't have to be a cook to—to—to not to learn how to cook. You need to learn how to cook because, if you're going to have a family, you need to know how to cook. You understand? And

I think that holds a family together because all the time when Nisa went to college, when Joe went to—I mean, my children been to school—gone to college. But what—they never go—when they is home, they always bring somebody else to my house, you know, because it—you understand? It means—it means a lot and what happened is—it's—[cooking] is a low-class job, you know. Now it's building back up. Once it's a low-class job you know, and I think that—I think that—I think that—that we—we as a—as a black people misunderstood Martin Luther King. I don't think that he thinks that all of us was going to get—be a doctor or lawyer, you understand? But what he wanted us to do was make sure that we pull out of this and get some education and you know—. But—and but then I think that he looked at it also as I looked at it, everybody is not going to go to college and everybody is not going to go—get through high school. But what happened is every human being is built with a skill, you understand, and you take all of the skill out of a community—and this is why we got so much drugs now, you know, because it's so easy—it's—they don't understand they get caught. But it's so easy to do it with not working, with not working. But now I have—a whole stack that high full of [employment] applications because I served on the Prison Board for fifteen years on the—on the—Governor [James E.] Holshouser—and what happened is is that these guys is—they needs work when they come out, you know. If you don't, you can't get them through the crime; you can't get rid of crime, if you can't get out here and get—nobody wants to hire you. You can't build enough shelters to house all of them, you—you understand. And so I—I think that's the most important thing there is—because always got to have a mechanic, always going to have to have somebody to fix a lawn mower, always going to have to have all of these things. Do you understand? And to be wholesome. And this is what they—I think—believe that they—we will have a hard time with the Hispanic population is because they are so crafty that we had a meeting and we meets

with Superintendent and I told him, I said, you know, “They come here, the onliest thing they don’t have—they cannot speak English but so crafty, they are.” They are so crafty. You understand? They can fix anything. They can make a tree look like a dog, you—. **[Laughs]** I’m telling you, I—you understand? And so what happened is that it’s not fair to—not to have some—some—some skilled labor in our school system, you understand? If you got—it’s no—no reason that you don’t have it in there, you know. And so—you know—you know I like to speak out for that because I—I just know that—that just like—now I got—they bring—they bring me—I got four inmates here now [working in the kitchen] and I got three from the—I got three from—three from the—the drug house [Freedom House Recovery Center], the people on drugs. And that’s a good program, you know and you—they have to—they bring you out there. You have to get—they find you a job, and then you have to pay, you know. You have to pay you know—you have to pay for where you live, and it really brings them out of that kink. They can find who they—they self—they are you know. And I said, “That’s a good program.” And from the—from the—. But see I’m the onliest restaurant here and we’ve got all these prisons here, and I’m the only restaurant—they call me from everywhere, from Raleigh and up there by Charlotte and be wanting to send this guy here [to work at Mama Dip’s] because he’s a good guy. [They say,] “We want to send him here because he’s just—she’s a good lady [meaning, Mama Dip]. And what we want to do is get her close so that we can transfer them.” Because they—they transfer them back and forth, you know. They brings them and then they picks them up you know so—.

0:57:12

I don’t know. I just—I just enjoy—I guess we got—I got this—all of it was the same, you know. My brother, Jim, who fixes everybody well—he never charges them nothing, you know. If anybody’s well gives out, the pump gives out, whatever it was—he’s just crafty and could do

that. My brother, Wilson, could fix everybody's car. He never charged them anything. [He'd say,] "You buy the part—now I ain't doing it—when I get off of work I'll do it," you know. And this is the way we were raised up, you know. This is the way we was raised up, uh-hmm.

00:57:42

AE: So how much would you say then is—what Mama Dip's Restaurant is—how much of it is the food and how much is it Mama Dip?

00:57:51

MC: [*Laughs*] I think—I think the food probably is 75-percent and Mama Dip is 25 [percent]. I think, you know, because peoples—yeah, I think it is, uh-hmm. And just some come in here, and there's some wanting to make sure that I'm here, you know. And so I fixing to get me a new knee, and I'll be out two months so—[*Laughs*] I'm spreading the news now, yeah, uh-huh.

00:58:21

AE: Do you still get in the kitchen very much?

00:58:22

MC: Yeah, I do some, you know. I don't do a lot because now I just can't get around that—that much you know and just be—I can do. But Della is right there and has been here 27 years, you know, and on her 28th year, and she can do everything back there. And my daughter, Lane, is back there. And then [my son] Joe, the baker, and—and people like to be trained, you know. You'd be surprised what peoples just come to—I've accepted a lot of students, but they come in for waiting tables, you know. But then they wants to know a little something. You know they want to know something about the food, you know. And so if—and so—.

00:59:03

AE: How do you teach them, and how did you teach your children too when they came to work for you?

00:59:07

MC: My children? I think, you know, what—they did just like me, you know. If I started cooking when I was nine—my—my children been cooking, you understand, they been cooking a long time, you know. I—I opened up—nothing that I had—nothing that I had that I ever felt like that they couldn't handle but my money. I want them to learn how to handle money, you understand? But they can—they could—I could send them to the grocery store. They would shop at the grocery store, you know, and do things. And then my boys, I never could—I don't know what is wrong with them. I never could buy them nothing because if I go out and buy them something, it wouldn't be what they want when I got back. So they've been their own shoppers and everything. I had to take them with me. **[Laughs]**

00:59:55

AE: So have your kids brought anything new to the restaurant—to the recipes—in the way the food is made as—as time has gone along?

01:00:00

MC: Uh-hmm, yeah. The recipes—I just—what I do is there is—I just make them bigger, you know, make—I fix them so that there—we need this many pounds to make this much food, you know. This—like potatoes—we cook potatoes. I don't do it in pounds, you know, for the—for the recipe. I have buckets back there, you know, that you—this is what we need. This is what we

need. We get a catering [order], we'll need this—we need this right here, the squash plate and make a squash casserole you know something like that, you know. I make it easy for them, uh-hmm, yeah.

01:00:40

AE: Do you have a favorite recipe or—or food that you like to make?

01:00:44

MC: No. No, I don't. I just really like everything that I cook, uh-huh.

01:00:50

AE: Do you have a favorite meal that you like to eat?

01:00:51

MC: Huh?

01:00:51

AE: Do you have a favorite meal that you like to eat?

01:00:53

MC: I love breakfast, uh-huh, yeah. We used to get up in the morning at breakfast and before—you know, like six o'clock, we be done that breakfast, you know. And so I love it. I can't do without breakfast. I do. And I—I never, you know—if they was telling me I couldn't eat an egg, I don't know what I would do. Because I just like egg. And I only eat but one but—but my—my doctor told me—Doctor Vreeland told me—she's a lady doctor, and she said that just eat the

white of the egg, she said, you know. And so I—and sometimes I still will eat the whole egg, but a lot of times I just eat the white and that's it, you know. I'm pretty—I'm pretty—I follow rules pretty good, uh-hmm.

01:01:33

AE: How do you like your eggs cooked?

01:01:36

MC: Over medium. *[Laughs]*

01:01:39

AE: And I want to talk about your cookbook again because I wonder, you know, a lot of people that I speak with they have recipes that they don't have write down and they don't—and they don't pass them on and they're such secrets and such prized possessions that they're—they're scared that they'll be copied. And I wonder, for one, what it was like to share that with so many people in your cookbook and then also to have that legacy and have—have your recipes live on.

01:02:03

MC: Uh-hmm. Well, you mean—you mean if I—what, peoples take my recipes and use them, that's what you said? Yeah, I never worried about that, you know, because I think one of the things about that, I really think that cooking needs to be more in America than it used—and now cooking is almost done stripped out. It's always a burger; it's always a pizza; it's always something. And I think—I think the home is wholesome because to cook, you don't have to cook all the time, but then you don't have to cook everyday. I go to *[Inaudible]* and they invites me over there and I tell them—I say, “You can—while you watching TV or helping your child with

their homework—.” Because they wants to—they—they make medicine and what they want to do is to get their children to eat better, and I said, “Well, you can peel your potatoes sitting down beside him with this. You can string your beans put them in the refrigerator, and then you can cook for two days.” And I said, “When you cook and eat your string beans today, and if you wait ‘til tomorrow and just take some of them out and put them in the refrigerator and then end of tomorrow,” I say, “they’re better than the ones that you cooked today because they’ve done seasoned all the way through,” you know. It’s—it’s—.

01:03:21

AE: Have you heard from some people who’ve cooked from your cookbook when they come back and they say it still doesn’t taste like Mama Dip’s?

01:03:28

MC: Some people do and some people say *[makes gesture as if to say that it came out exactly the same as Mama Dip’s]* Uh-huh.

01:03:31

AE: They got it, huh?

01:03:34

MC: *[Laughs]* The only thing about it they have a problem with the dumplings. Uh-huh, they have a problem with making dumplings. So *[for]* the second cookbook I made dumplings with flour tortillas. And I done a workshop down to Southern Seasons, and they just didn’t believe it, you know. You know, because it’s about the same thing, only the flour tortillas have been cooked just a little bit. And then you don’t put no leveling in the dumpling dough. Where people

make the mistake, they put the baking powder in the—in the dumpling dough and you don't—they cause it to swell up. And then the swelled up—it makes them—baking powder makes them tender and so you just—you just make them with flour. You know and so yeah, they thought that was something. The man—one woman says, "I just don't believe it." She said, "You're just telling the truth." And I said, "You seen me cut the thing out. They're in here. I just got the flour tortillas." Uh-hmm, yeah.

01:04:29

AE: How did you come up and decide to do that—to use the tortillas for your dumpling?

01:04:32

MC: Well I just—I—one day they had some—they had some—made some—they had them—the children have a little get-together at the house and they took some flour tortillas and cheese and some pepper chicken or something and they turned it over and they kind of grill them or you know. I don't know what it is because—but you know what it is; you know what I'm talking about, don't you? And so what I did—I just took a piece of that—I just took a piece of it and just started eating you know. I said, "What in the world is this right here?" And they told me what they were because I had never went to the store and bought none because I don't go to the grocery store that much and you know—. And so then I said, "Well this is what I'll do," so I took and—I was making—somebody called me and asked me about something, and I think they said a raisin cake. And I said, "I will go home and try to make the raisin cake." And so I—I took the chicken—a chicken and I got some broth—some broth and cooked the chicken in the broth, and then I made that and it was good, uh-huh. Yeah. And I had made—I got the flour tortillas. Well the first time I had too many floured tortillas in it and then—then what I did, unless I would

take—take some of them out, you know. And I had to—and then I learned how to make them for about six people; that’s about the least as you can make out of it, uh-hmm.

01:05:49

AE: Yeah? Do you still cook at home a lot?

01:05:51

MC: You know, some things that I grew up with, I cook them at home. But then I got some customers now that like pig feet, and they’ll call me and ask me whether I, you know—would I cook some pig feet. And I cook them here, and I eat them. And that’s not often but—but I cook them and they come over, and I eat pig feet and they eat pig feet. And still people just like to eat some stuff like that every now and then; they don’t get it much, you know. And I don’t think it hurts you if you don’t get it much—not like eating it once a week, you know. *[Laughs]*

01:06:21

AE: Well and you mentioned earlier how today people have so many choices in what they eat with Italian food and Mexican food and is there any of that—that you like?

01:06:30

MC: Yeah, uh-huh. We had—we had—we had our Christmas party down at a Mexican restaurant. And I like—I like spaghetti—I like spaghetti, but I don’t like what it—it don’t last me no time. I can eat spaghetti, and then I’m hungry. I’m hungry in two or three hours, you know. I’m hungry again. I can—I can eat spaghetti and I like—the Mexican food. It seems like to me all of it is pretty, you know, good, you know. And the Chinese food, I don’t like that. I don’t like the Chinese food and—but actually, yeah, when they go out and they bring something in,

sometimes they here and they get thirsty for something. I'm not like some people [saying] you can't bring nobody else's food in here. Now I wouldn't want my customers to bring a plate in here like this all the time, but they'll go out and get something or get something delivered here and they sit down because I mean it's—it's right for the—for them to, you know, sit down and—and enjoy other foods, you know. But I—I don't think they really realize the richness of this food. They—they especially, back there in the kitchen. I mean I got—I got three, four—four Mexicans working here, and they cooks it. Sometimes they get thirsty for their food. They like this food because they eat beans every—for breakfast. When they make their breakfast meal, they want pinto beans on their breakfast meal, you know. But what—and then they—they eat a bottle of hot sauce every time they—*[Laughs]* that they sit down and eat, they eat a bottle of hot sauce. And so yeah, I like it pretty much, uh-huh. Yeah, they had—she said she was going to bring me some, the little girl that's working here. She said that she was going to make some at home. You wrap it up in like that—like a corn shuck.

01:08:28

AE: Tamales?

01:08:29

MC: Huh?

01:08:29

AE: Tamales?

01:08:30

MC: Tamale. Well she—this is what we had down there was tamales and—and—and something else. They know what it is. I didn't know what it was. But they—it wasn't nothing much in there, but she said it wasn't made good, you know. And so the lady comes over here now—she sells them—there's a Mexican store over there. She sits out there in the afternoon now and sells them. And I said, "I got to get one." And she said she was going to go over there and buy one and see how hers did. But they can cook. I mean all—you know, they can cook and they use—they use—what they cook back here with the egg—they'll go over there and get a piece of that—you know the thorny—the thorny things?

01:09:11

AE: Cactus?

01:09:12

MC: Cactus, uh-huh. They get the cactus and they take the potato peeler and *[gestures]* like that and peel it. They can really use a knife, you know, and it chops it up and they—they make them an omelet out of it. Now I didn't like that. I don't like that, you know. It just don't have no taste to it, you know. But the guy from—the—the guy from Burma—Burma—the church bring them here, you know. And they—they—they make some fish, you know—everything with like a sauce, you know. They like hot food too, you know, that's really, really hot, uh-huh. They eats rice; they eats a lot of rice, you know. And but I have had every—I don't know how many cultures here working here, you know. Because see America has a way of—of having people in these situations like one town, you know—they gets and they brings them here and they find them a job. And they can work without education about being able to speak—not education, but learn how to speak English because they're so crafty. They know how to do. They have come up

with this, you know—they have come up picking a chicken just like I did, you know, way back yonder when we don't know what a chicken is. **[Laughs]** You know what I'm saying? It is—they're so crafty. They is, uh-huh.

01:10:50

AE: So what do you think the future of Mama Dip's is?

01:10:52

MC: I don't know; it's hard to say. If somebody said something to me—what they're saying to me now—fifteen years ago, I said, “Come on.” But I don't know. I don't know whether my children will want to keep this on, you know. But now they—they—they—they wants me in Durham and Raleigh and Kerry and Charlotte and Greenville and—and everywhere. They wants me to open up a Mama Dip's, you know. But where Mama Dip's is now, you know, it—it needs—it needs—you just can't walk out like I walked in this. It's altogether a different story, you know. It would—it would need some professional help. It needs a manager to know how to go out with—and how to—what area and where you want it to be and all this kind of stuff, you know. But these people write me and they think—they think they know what it is, but if somebody was to come in and say, “Mama Dip,”—I'm supposed to talk to a man Monday. And if he comes in and say to me—says, you know, “I—I would—how could we work a deal?” Because he said, “I just want Mama Dip's in my building.” He—he is building a—he is building like a shopping center—like a shopping mall. “And I just want Mama Dip's out there,” you know. And he said that he—I get a lawyer and how she looked at it and with my CPA, and we'd sit down and look at it. If he were going to take it and take my recipes and my name and write up something that [stipulates] you've got to use this right here because otherwise, it's not going to

make it, you understand? Like that. I would stretch myself out to—to go at opening time. I would stretch one of my kids—children to go and get set up to let them understand the pounds—the pot, the bucket—how we measure by bucket other than by pounds. You understand this kind of thing like that? And let them really know what’s, you know—and you know, I would go for it. I would go for it, but I can’t stretch myself out no more, you know. But I would. I would, yeah. I wouldn’t mind if somebody said, “Look—.” Because I know now that this man that died was coming and wanted to—he was going to do a franchise, you know. But—now he had like 60 places that he could carry Mama Dip’s, you understand? Uh-huh. But it was, you know—it was just—he wanted all of me, and I couldn’t give all—all of me, you know. Uh-hmm. And I think it’s out there enough now to—that—that it could—it could be without me, you know, but—but it has to be my name. And what people don’t know under the cover would be another, you understand. But it could be my name and my food because you fix it—anybody fixes it, they go back in that kitchen. I don’t care if they’re twelve years old and do what—what you take the recipe and do what it says to do, it’s going to turn out the same way all the time—all the time because people—people don’t stay at restaurants, you know. They come and go, you know. It’s one of the fastest moving—and a grocery store—is the fastest moving peoples it is in the—in the industry of—of—of food, you know—in the food industry because they don’t stay on the job long, you know. So and that’s been proven, you know. So I don’t know. I would like to see it—it go further, as far as the children some. Then they would have to talk with them, and they would have to have some counseling and some—how tired are you, you know? What—what—but what happened is that I wouldn’t want—I wouldn’t want them to focus on them cooking. I’d want them to focusing on them training. You understand? One company said what I would do, I would fix food for every restaurant, you know. And he wanted—he wanted to build a company—he

wanted to have his company to build a food for the restaurant, you know. So it's like yams. I pick the yams and just like you buy from Campbell's now, you know, you can get—like my daughter's daycare, sometimes she don't—she cooks about everything but when they cook spaghetti, she orders spaghetti, you know, already in the pan and she just puts in the—in the stove, you know. And this is what he could do. But I don't think with the way technology is now about the—the upgrade on the kitchen wares—in the kitchen—the equipment in the kitchen you would need that, you know, because—you would need it. Uh-huh, uh-hmm.

01:16:36

AE: Are you here at this restaurant just about every day?

01:16:38

MC: Huh?

01:16:39

AE: Are you here about every day?

01:16:40

MC: I'm here about every day, uh-hmm. I'm here about every day. I'm not—I'm not—I can't—I'm not a loner person. I have been around people so much. I just can't be by myself, uh-hmm.

01:16:54

AE: And now you have that table up front, and that's your regular table?

01:16:56

MC: Yeah, that's the regular table I sit at and—and what happened is, I'd be sitting there. Some people come in each and every day. They think that I sits there all the time, but I don't. Somebody said, "I'm—I'm waiting on somebody," you know. Want—I got the cookbooks and I'm going to bring them by here, you know, right here uh-huh. And there's something that they want; I'm sitting there, you know. I'm—then—but I be caught there a lot, you know. But I don't sit there [*Laughs*]. It's funny, ain't it? Uh-huh.

01:17:32

AE: Well you're sharing an awful lot with me today. And I wonder if there's something that people don't normally ask you or you don't normally share that you'd like for people to know about who you are and about your business here?

01:17:45

MC: Uh-uh, no. I don't have nothing that I wouldn't share with somebody, you know. You know you—I think about my—how rich my life has been growing up and—and I think about how they talk about single parents now, you understand. Then I—I go—when—on the Board of Work First, and I will tell them about how—how my daddy raised us—us seven children and I—I think that they don't even think that a male can raise a child now. And I think it's so unfair, you understand, because men can raise a child. They love, too. You understand? [*Laughs*] But what happened is, they can't love if you're going to carry them to the shelter and you're going to build all the houses for the—the women, you know. Some houses has got to be for the men, so they can be a part of the child's life. Because I don't care how sorry a man is, he's not going to take his child to that shelter. You really—uh-huh. And that's my interpretation. I mean that's one of

the things—I'm—I just go to the gut how I was—how I—what I see you know, uh-huh. Because I just, you know—.

01:18:57

AE: What do you think your father would say now if—if he knew your success with—with food and with your way with people?

01:19:04

MC: Uh-huh. He called me baby, and he said that when I cook that meal that—that spring, it was in April—they always go out and if it rained a lot, you know, and snowed. You always go out to the field and you—we kicked rocks over and when you kicked the rocks over how damp it was under the rocks, you can see whether it was time to start plowing or not. And that morning when they would go after we ate and milling around and we got the cows—got the—everything fed and Papa says, “We going to go out and check,” you know, “see—see how things is—how the ground is.” And he said, “Baby, you stay here and fix something to eat.” You understand? And so—and when I—when I got—when I started—when I started and I said I want to go over to Uncle Abe because Flossie—and I think it was about a mile away but it wasn't nothing, just like a step to us then because every—and I said, “Oh, my gracious.” I said, “Papa told me to fix something to eat,” you know. I said, “I got to go tell Flossie. I got to go tell Flossie!” And I started over there and I said, “My gracious alive.” I was so excited. And then—then I turned around and—and—and I said, “I got to go back.” By that time I hear this guinea [hen]—this guinea cackling and the guinea had laid an egg, you know. And what happened is—Papa had always told us, you know—he sold the eggs; he sold the guinea eggs. We didn't eat the guinea eggs. He sold the guinea eggs out here at Carrboro. And—and I said—I said, “I'm going to see

where that guinea egg is,” you know, where the guinea had laid at. And so the guinea had laid down in the edge of the woods; the guinea had laid that egg, but it was two more eggs. It was three eggs in there. And I got those eggs out, and I put my hand in there and got the eggs out. And I thought about Papa. Always what Papa told us when we was sitting by the fire at night, he was teaching us, you know, things. He said, “Don’t ever put your hand in that guinea egg because she won’t lay—they won’t lay in there no more,” you know. They’re real sensitive. “If you put your hand in and take the eggs out,” he said, “you always take the egg out ‘til the stick—take the—roll the egg out,” you know. But I didn’t care that day. I got that egg. **[Laughs]** And I made—I went home—I went to the house and it was damp, you know. The chips were damp and so I went out and fixed me some wood and—and got the chips—dry chips and put them in the stove and—and didn’t have—it was a little paper—newspaper we had to do the fire—cook the fire in the stove and what happened is that the matches, I couldn’t find no more matches, and I was just blowing and blowing and blowing, trying to get that fire—fire started. And so I got so drunk, I couldn’t even stand up in there. And it took me—I was working at the hospital. I was working at the hospital, and I was telling them we were having a little party one day, somebody had a birthday, and I was telling them about it and the—the doctor said, “Mama Dip,” he said—“Mildred.” He called me over there. He said, “Mildred,” said, “you done did every bit of oxygen out of your body. You done blowed—blowed all the oxygen out of your body.” **[Laughs]** Finally got that—finally got that fire started and I cooked this egg custard and—and I cooked some—it wasn’t blackeyes then; they were like whippoorwill peas. They were some little whippoorwill peas. And I went and took the axe, and I cut the hambone in two and cut a piece off of the hambone, and I boiled it and put it in there. And I made some cornbread, and I put just a little bit too much in there. It didn’t have—didn’t have self-rising stuff then—all the plain—we had—if—

you took the corn down at Bynum and had it ground up for meal. And I put just a little bit too much soda in my cornbread, and it was a little bit yellow. It was a little yellow. And Papa said, “Baby, next time just cut it back a little bit,” you know. And when he got to that coconut pie, he just—when he got to—I mean that egg custard, he said, “This some good stuff.” He said—because he just kept on saying “good stuff” and my brother Wilson said, “Yeah. They eat it, too. They just loved it. **[Laughs]** And I’ll tell you, you couldn’t do nothing else with me. You know?”

And I had these little—I had—I always made my dolls, you know, out of the turpentine bottle and the Coca Cola bottle. And sometimes—what is it? Different bottles of stuff, bottles of medicine that we took, castor oil bottles, you know. And so I made me like a little church, you know, because the church—the women’s, you know—and I would—I would take them and I would take the corn shucks, and I’d wrap them and time them around my doll, you know, and then I’d make their hair, and I’d take corn silks, and I’d make the hair with it and then you know—and I would—I would sing to them. You know, I would sing to them a fantasy. That was my steal away period, you know. I have to do it—I had to do it everyday, you know. And so the moss then—you don’t see moss now—but moss, just the little guy right here in the building, they’re fixing to pull up this building; he got moss all around the edge of that. I wish you could just go there and just look at it. And you got moss from out to where he—where—that land that he have up in—in—Alamance County and he got—and get this moss. I built this little palace—palace-like thing. And—and I would—I would—would make them something to eat, you know. I would take the mud—the mud pie. I would just take some mud and, you know, I would just put some water in it, and I’d just feed them and feed them. And I reckon I was feeding these eight youngin’s I have. **[Laughs]**. And so—and so—and at church—at church you’ve got to learn—you learn what you know—and didn’t understand what the women were doing because the

women would shout, you know. They would be shouting, you know. And you know, and—and I fed them and a couple—they fed us—the church, you know. And after I fed them [the corn husk dolls] you know, I would sing to them. And I would shout, you know. And then my brother—my brother was a preacher before he died, you know, and sometimes he—he had to—they had to work a little bit more on the field than I did. But sometimes my brother would come, and he would preach to them, you know. It was just a—it was just you know—it was just something you know. **[Laughs]** And Papa said, “Lord, that’s some good food and that’s—.” He didn’t have no problem with me cooking no more, you know. Yeah, uh-hmm.

01:25:55

AE: If he could see you now.

01:25:56

MC: Huh?

01:25:57

AE: If he could see you now.

01:25:58

MC: Uh-huh, yes-Siree. He would say, you know, “I knowed it, baby.” He said—that’s what he would say, “I knowed you would do it, baby.” I think he would say that about every one of us, you know what I’m saying? Uh-huh, he did.

But me, I was two—I was two when Mama died and I—he—he I was tender-headed, you know, and I wouldn’t let nobody comb my hair. And so he—he—he would take the scissors and the clippers and cut my hair off, you know, because—you know when Bernice was living down

here on the lot—on Franklin Street and she come and she used to [say], “What in the world is going to happen to her hair?” Because sometimes we had cotton the porch, and I would get in the cotton and play, and the cotton it would get in my hair. **[Laughs]** And so what happened was he—he said, “Well I’m going to cut this hair off.” So he cut my hair off and—and so—. **[A woman brings Mama Dip something to drink]** Thank you. **[Back to interviewer]** Jeanette said—Bernice said, “Don’t cut her hair off no more.” Uncle Abe said, “Don’t cut her hair off no more.” He said, “I get it,” you know. And so—and she—she would—she would get this side [of my head] one week and take three weeks before I’d get—let her do anything else to it, you know. So he—he was—he—he just said well—after he left her—after he left her—but, “She’ll be all right. She’ll be all right,” you know. **[Laughs]**

And I guess I was four—I started school when I was four. I remember when I was four and Jeanette finally got all of my hair—I was excited about going to school and—and I was—I was—and I remember Miss Maggie—right beside her and—and but my hair was pretty. And my hair was pretty. **[Laughs]** It was something else. I mean it’s something—it’s something, you know. And—and the scuffles that people is having now, you know, I don’t know, it just bothers me, you know, because I don’t—one of the things about it is peoples cared for us, you know. At church, you know, they would say, you know, just like—just like I was telling Carol the other—the other day or night, I said we—they would—used to sit me in between them and my brother Jim or the next one, my sister—my sister Bea had rheumatic fever and—and—and but they are—they handled it, you know, because she had a cast from here [her chest] all the way down to her feet, you know. And the only thing out was her stomach, but she was just a part of it; she—she wasn’t left by herself, you know. She wasn’t left by—you know, by herself. And when they would ask me, say, “You got to wee-wee,” you know? They asked me these kinds of things, you

know. They just took care of us at church. That's—that's on Sunday, you know. But he never had another woman to come in that house to do nothing. I'm telling you. I mean because we done it all. We done it. **[Laughs]** Uh-huh, that's right.

01:29:08

AE: Well I've taken a lot of your time here, and I really appreciate it, but I wonder if we could end on one last question and that is—what is your favorite dessert?

01:29:18

MC: My favorite dessert? I like a coconut cake, uh-hmm. I really do. I really do, uh-hm.

01:29:25

AE: Well that's a sweet note to end on, then. And now we'll wrap it up.

01:29:27

MC: Huh?

01:29:28

AE: That's a sweet note to end on. Thank you so much, Mama Dip, for your time.

01:29:34

[End Mildred Council Interview]