

Interview of: Charles Signa  
Interviewer: Amy Evans  
Interview Date: July 20, 2005

August 17, 2005

**Charles Signa, Owner  
Doe's Eat Place  
Oxford, MS  
July 20, 2005**

**Interviewer: Amy Evans  
Length: 1 hour, 20 minutes**

**[Begin Charles Signa-1]**

0:00:01.3

**Amy Evans:** This is Amy Evans on Wednesday, July 20, 2005 and I'm in Oxford, Mississippi at Doe's Eat Place with Charles Signa and we're here to talk about Doe's Restaurant here in Oxford and also the original Doe's in Greenville. Mr. Signa, would you mind stating your name and your birth date for the record please?

0:00:20.8

**Charles Signa:** Charles Signa. I was born June the 26, 1947.

0:00:25.9

**AE:** All right; and you're the older brother of--

0:00:27.9

**CS:** Doe.

0:00:28.6

**AE:** Doe. And you have another brother and a sister?

0:00:30.6

**CS:** Doe, Junior. Well an older brother, Carmel, and we have an older sister, Martha.

0:00:36.5

**AE:** And I wonder if first you could tell me a little bit about your father and kind of just tell me what kind of person he was and his character and personality, so that we can kind of fit that into what we know and learn about the restaurant?

0:00:48.7

**CS:** Yeah; I'll be--I'll be glad to do that. Well he was a--first of all, he was a hard worker. He was--he--momma died real early in life and so dad kind of had to be the momma and daddy. And so he did a great job on you know just raising the four children and he worked hard. He--we had--he would always make sure we had everything that we needed and you know school wise and--and all that. But he worked all the time; at--at night, he worked seven nights a week. We were open seven nights a week during that--that particular time that we were growing up--all the children were growing up. And--and he just provided for us, just like no other person could do you know and he--he was just a great guy. He took us fishing all the time and just did a lot of things with us and--but he didn't really--he--he went somewhere like sports events and you know

stuff--but a lot of it was at night, and he was--you know hey, he had to cook and he couldn't get to all of them, but he was--he was just a great guy and you know he just took care of us.

0:02:05.5

**AE:** Uh-hm; and it sounds like he was pretty outgoing and interacted with the customers.

0:02:10.3

**CS:** Oh he was; everybody loved him. I mean I didn't know anybody that didn't--didn't like daddy. They always wanted to see him when they--that was kind--they wanted to see him when they came to the restaurant and that's kind of the way it is now; they want to see Doe or--if I'm there, myself, and then now we--the third generation has come along, which is you know our sons, you know and my two sons work here with me. And so--but yeah, it--it--being the family restaurant that it is, you know it--I don't know if anybody could you know cook that wasn't in the family where you know our regular customers wouldn't say like what are they doing here, you know. **[Laughs]** I mean but--and that's--it's a good thing and it's a bad thing, you know. It--it kind of makes you feel like that you can't get off a little bit you know more than you want to, but with--with my two sons here, I mean we--we can kind of do what--what we wanted and we can go work for Doe in Greenville and help out there. So we can kind of do about anything we want to right now; so--

0:03:25.8

**AE:** And what are your son's names? I know you have a Charles--

0:03:27.9

**CS:** Charles, Junior and my--Paul--Paul is my youngest one.

0:03:31.6

**AE:** Okay; and does that happen very often where one or all of y'all go up to Greenville?

0:03:35.7

**CS:** No.

0:03:36.8

**AE:** Or down to Greenville? *[Short laugh]*

0:03:36.3

**CS:** No, not really. Doe is kind of--he's a workaholic. *[Laughs]* He loves--he loves to--he loves the physical work and he's--you know we've asked him you know several times, you know do

you want us to come work for you and this and that, "I'm fine, Charles," you know trying to run the place up here and, "I'm fine," and he loves it. I mean I like to work, but I--I don't like to--the physical work as much as I used to. You know I--I worked of it like it was like this past Saturday and I helped Matt Florence and my son worked for Doe. He cooked. Well Monday I had to go back and I cooked and I--and I told myself and I was going to tell Doe, I says, "How do you do this every night," you know. I mean I did it--we did it--I did it for 30-some years and I just--I did it you know half the time and he did it half the time, you know and I just don't see how --how he does it all the time; so--

0:04:46.5

**AE:** Well how--now how long were y'all together over there before you came up here?

0:04:50.4

**CS:** Probably 30 years at least, you know; he graduated from--I graduated from high school and then went onto college and I never graduated from college so I stopped going to college in '68--1968 and I started working with dad and I've been working ever since. And Doe graduated from college in like '75 or 1976 and he came on, so he's been working from like '75--'76 on to--to right now. So we've been working with each other over 30 years probably.

0:05:32.1

**AE:** Yeah; and when your dad started the restaurant in '41 was it--?

0:05:37.7

**CS:** Nineteen--mom and dad started in 1941.

0:05:39.7

**AE:** But it was a grocery prior to that, right?

0:05:40.9

**CS:** It was my dad's daddy's--my grandfather, my daddy's father that had a grocery store there and then mom and dad start--started it as a restaurant in 1941, and I'm almost sure that it was like in the '20s that they--the grocery store started and it might have been earlier than that and so in 1941 mom and dad took it over so it was a restaurant.

0:06:10.8

**AE:** Do you have any idea what made them decide to do that?

0:06:14.1

**CS:** Well yeah; I kind of do. Daddy was working at the Air Base. We had an Air Base in Greenville and that Air Base is where they trained pilots for--well jet--they were jet pilots, they trained like to go fight in the--maybe World War II or whatever it was, and so daddy was working as a civilian in the cafeteria on--on the--at the Air Base and so somebody happened to give him like--for some reason--a tamale recipe, and so daddy and momma doctored the recipe up and they started making tamales with their--daddy's maybe brothers and sisters or sisters and--and then my mother, she had a sister that they would all come and roll and tie the tamales up and they'd—they'd make them by hand and they--they started selling them. And so one day one of daddy's doctor friends said well you're selling these tamales, why don't you get a steak and sell it, you know. And so actually I think maybe the doctor-- **[Interruption: Charles' son Charles, Jr. walks in.]**

0:07:36.6

**AE:** You're fine; go. I can pause if I need to.

0:07:37.0

**CS:** [To his son, Charles] Yeah, what you need Charles—[Back to Interviewer] Actually I think the doctor friend bought a steak from like the grocery store and--and brought it to daddy and he cooked it for him and--and that's kind of how they started selling steaks. And it was like just a little area--little area where you could probably sat maybe 20 people--25 people and because the other part of the--the--the grocery store was where we lived at one particular time. You know I



didn't live there but maybe a month, but I think my brother and sister lived there for a little while longer, like for maybe a year or so--

0:08:25.6

**AE:** Is this that the side dining room?

0:08:27.3

**CS:** Yeah; that side dining room, right. And so they got to sell the steaks, and they were cooking steaks in this little--it was a little residential oven, those little--that was hooked onto the stove and it probably right now one of my big steaks, it probably would hold maybe one of the big steaks, you know. So for some reason the--they started--they put the spaghetti in like gumbo with--and then with that menu items with--with the steaks and then they started making this salad with this fresh lemon juice so that--that became our house salad. And so I asked Ma--I--nah, I didn't ask Ma to do that; I was too young, but I asked Dad--I said why did---I might have asked one of my aunts; I says you know why did y'all put--I mean why did gumbo--how did gumbo and spaghetti and--I know we're Italians, you know we're Italians--spaghetti of course maybe but some of like the other few menu items--why do they put that on the menu, you know and they said well they just thought maybe it might just be a good--good choice. So they put the gumbo in the chili and, of course, the chili kind of went with the tamales and then the spaghetti I guess because we were Italians and so we--we had spaghetti on the menu and then they started selling fried shrimp. And so after that--that--we did that for like 30 years or 40 years and then about--or

even longer; we just had those like five or six little items. You know we had like garlic toast and fried shrimp and those five or six items. So about 15 or 20 years ago, my brother Doe said why don't you start selling broiled shrimp? Why don't we start selling broiled shrimp? And so he made up a little garlic butter and lemon juice and a little recipe for the broiled shrimp and I kind of got mad at him, and then what I did--and when I was cooking, nobody would--the customers wouldn't order the broiled shrimp because I didn't like to cook them. You know I mean the reason I didn't like to cook them is I guess it was like a one step--I was cooking steaks already and then I'd have to get the broiled shrimp and put them on top of the--the oven and then get the--the steak broiler to get them--you know to melt the--the butter and stuff and get the bottom of the shrimp cooking and then I'd have to put the shrimp under the grill where the steaks were and I just didn't want--I really didn't want to fool with it, you know. So this went on like five or six years; I never cooked them. And so I finally broke down and started cooking them and that **[Laughs]**--I mean you know people like order like shrimp--broiled and fried shrimp lately they order that for appetizers and then they'll start--and then they'll eat a steak, you know.

0:11:45.4

**AE:** But for years and years and years people walked in and saw that you were cooking--

0:11:48.8

**CS:** Cooking--and they wouldn't order the raw shrimp. **[Laughs]** I mean it was really bad.

**[Laughs]** So--

0:11:55.3

**AE:** Well to each his own. *[Laughs]* Did your father have brothers and sisters and did they ever work at the grocery--?

0:12:02.7

**CS:** Oh did he; they--they--he had--there was 12 in their family--

0:12:07.5

**AE:** Okay.

0:12:08.5

**CS:** And he--most--I think it was like seven sisters and five brothers or eight and four or something like that, but it was more sisters than there were brothers. And probably seven--six--six of the seven were working in the restaurant at one time or the other. One of them like maybe cooked and one of them were--was cashier and one of them maybe waited on--I don't know if they waited on tables; they might have. And one of them--but at one time or another like most of them worked here except for maybe one--one or two. And then my mother, she had a sister that worked--and a brother that worked there. There was four in her family and one of her sisters, she

had--she had two sisters and a--and a brother and one of the sisters and one of the brothers worked there.

0:13:04.3

**AE:** Was your father the oldest of those kids?

0:13:06.4

**CS:** No; he was like maybe the fourth oldest--the fourth or fifth oldest.

0:13:14.1

**AE:** So how do you think it came to him to be more or less the proprietor of the restaurant?

0:13:20.9

**CS:** Well he's the only one I--that was probably interested in it, you know because one of his brothers was--worked for the Post Office and one of them worked for the power company and one of them worked for U. S. Gypsum Mill and--and then one of them lived in Vicksburg and he--he worked for just different people in Vicksburg, so nobody other than him that--that worked at the restaurant--I mean fooled with the restaurant, and then the one that worked at the power company, my Aunt Florence's husband who is my daddy's brother, at--at night during oyster

season he'd open oysters for us. So--but daddy was the only one that was really available or wanted to do that you know.

0:14:13.0

**AE:** Do you remember any stories about the days when your aunts and uncles and your father were--in the--growing up in the grocery business?

0:14:20.1

**CS:** No, you know--no, I really don't remember stories about the grocery store. Like itself--like--the only thing I remember about the grocery store is like the--the blacks would come in the front and the whites would go in the back. And they would cook--would cook like buffalo fish or something where they'd--you know they'd sell fried buffalo fish and they'd drink beer and this--but I never heard of any stories where like the--the siblings would you know work there and you know do stuff; I never heard any stories about that.

0:15:04.1

**AE:** Well and can you speak a little bit more to the fact that you say you know the African Americans came in the front and--but when I was speaking to your brother, he was saying that it was primarily a white neighborhood that side of--?

0:15:18.0

**CS:** Yeah; it was.

0:15:19.1

**AE:** But the grocery catered to the black community or--?

0:15:22.6

**CS:** Well just in maybe a different way. See I don't really know much about that, you know but I do know that if they had to go to the bathroom or something they couldn't go to the bathroom there. You know they had to use--go somewhere else--the blacks, you know and--but then after a while it changed, you know. Even--I mean it--the--the neighborhood changed and--but then you know as far as blacks coming in, I mean everybody came in--blacks and whites, they all come in and they all still--you know still do you know, but--but that particular period of time back in the early part of the restaurant, I don't think the blacks could even go to the bathroom. I mean I might--but we never had any--during the restaurant days, I mean when the--when the restaurant started, we never really had any blacks because--I would think maybe because the price, you know even the--the price wasn't a lot it was a lot for then, you know--that--that particular time and I don't think--think they came in there, you know.

0:16:38.5

**AE:** Well let me ask you this because somebody suggested to me, and it was a long time ago and clearly remember who it was, but that it may--that maybe for some reason your father got a tamale recipe to cater to that black clientele because it was so prevalent in the black community?

0:16:57.0

**CS:** No, no, I don't know if it was prevalent in the black community. It--it was prevalent in the community itself, in the--in the Delta, because what I could understand because I've had oh numerous people ask me well how did tamales you know--how did you get tamales in the Delta, and one of the reasons that I've heard is that back in the '20s, '30s, and '40s and '50s--whatever, when they didn't have cotton pickers they would--they would have manual cotton pickers, they would--when it was time to pick cotton, they would get cheap help from Mexico. And they would come in and during the cotton picking time and pick cotton and I think they introduced tamales while they were here at that particular time for however long it took them to pick cotton whether it be two months or a month and a half, or what, and I think that's how the tamales got in the Delta where when they were here they made tamales and then I guess people in the Delta kind of--you know ate them, and they liked them and they got kind of caught on. Now, I mean--back then they had you know--and they still do--people making--we probably have 15 people making tamales just in--in Greenville. And that--I think that's how that--that happened.

0:18:35.6

**AE:** Yeah; and well the tradition has stuck with the African American community so much and there aren't a lot of white folks who still make them, so I mean your name comes up a lot, the-- the Signa name, because of your Italian heritage and that you're still making tamales in that area.

0:18:52.4

**CS:** Well that was our first--the tamale was our first menu item, so that's kind of what we're-- other than the big steaks, you know the porterhouses and the t-bones and the--the tamales you know--everybody gets tamales.

0:19:11.4

**AE:** That's where it started.

0:19:12.4

**CS:** You know and that's--you know when people go out and eat at the restaurant they--if--they might have three tamales as an appetizer and then they'll either eat steak or shrimp, you know and my son Charles commented last Saturday that--that--he said daddy, we've sold about 40--dozen tamales in 30 minutes--40 dozen.

0:19:39.6



**AE:** Oh, my land. [*Laughs*]

0:19:41.3

**CS:** These people came in Saturday night and one person got six dozen, one person got five dozen, another person got three dozen, somebody else got four dozen, another person got three dozen--before you know it, this--this all happened within 30 minutes time. We--we sold about 34--35 to 40 dozen tamales in about 30 minutes. And that particular day, last Saturday, and this-- I mean it's like 90 degrees out there and we probably sold 100 dozen tamales that particular day or 90 dozen.

0:20:19.3

**AE:** Lot of tamales.

0:20:21.8

**CS:** When it's summertime, yeah.

0:20:24.1

**AE:** What do you think that is? Why do you think people--?

0:20:26.3

**CS:** Well they--we've done this--see, in Greenville--here in Oxford, we--we get--every so often we'll get like somebody will order three dozen for four dozen to go. Like tomorrow, we've got somebody ordering five dozen to go, and but--in Greenville, I guess being the first menu item and that kind of caught onto people that you know we were first known for our tamales you know and steaks are--steaks aren't secondary but that was our second menu item. And so everybody [*Laughs*] for some reason in Greenville they come in and get tamales and I mean in the winter-time, I mean you might get people getting 20-dozen tamales, just to--I mean like they'll be visiting, they'll be from out of town visiting--maybe visiting a--their relatives or something and--and they'll come in and say well my neighbors found out and my friends found out I was going to Greenville and I've got six different orders for tamales. So they've got to bring them back to their friends in maybe Jackson or somewhere in Tennessee or something, you know and it's just caught on, you know.

0:21:45.4

**AE:** Those are traditions.

0:21:47.2

**CS:** Yeah, I'll tell you; we have family owned restaurants, we have the Greenville and here--in Oxford, and then we have seven franchises that are active right now and the seven franchises that

are active, together will not sell as many tamales to-go as the Doe's in Greenville will in one--I mean like in one week as the Doe's in Greenville will in one week. They'll--they--they--if they come in the seven franchises and to here, too, in Oxford, if they--if they eat tamales they go eat them in-house as a--as an appetizer and then they'll get their main meal. But in Greenville, there's something different about the Greenville deal at Doe's is they just come in--I mean they only come in and get tamales like give me three dozen tamales and three salads, you know and they go home and--and that's their meal, you know.

0:22:52.5

**AE:** Well when you sell a franchise, do you sell the tamale recipe? I mean is that part of your--?

0:22:56.7

**CS:** No, we--we--there's a tamale that they get that--

0:23:04.8

**WOMAN:** Amy Evans, how are you? Oh!

**AE:** *[To Woman]* You're fine; I'll pause. *[Recording stops for about five minutes]* Okay, we're back and I happened to ask about the franchises if they get the tamale recipe, which it sounds like they don't.

0:23:13.7

**CS:** No, they don't. **[Laughs]** Well we have--the only--the franchise that--that we have that makes their own tamales is Hot Springs, but they--but we send them the spices. We--we send them spices and they mix their meal up--the spices that we send is a little special--that's our little special ingredient, so they--

0:23:36.1

**AE:** So you still have control over that and--?

0:23:39.2

**CS:** Yeah; but as far as the other franchises, they have a tamale that they use and--with our approval because we're not set up--well first of all if they made their own tamales, it would be kind of too labor intense for them. I mean it would be--it would kind ruin the franchise. So--and we're not set up to do it; we're not federally inspected to--to ship them out to other states and so we have a tamale that we approve of and they get them from this particular company, yeah supplier and so--

0:24:24.3

**AE:** And so--I mean do you know how many they sell of those? Is it--?

0:24:28.4

**CS:** Yeah; I can—no--it's not really that significant because when--when the franchisee pays us then they kind of--then they're paying us mostly on just their percentage of their sales. So if they sell 100-dozen tamales or 200-dozen tamales, it doesn't make any difference as long as their sales are up with--with our steaks and stuff like that, you know. I mean it does make a difference because you know the more they sell the more we get, but as long as they--you know their sales are up, you know. If they sell 100-dozen a week or 50-dozen a week that doesn't really--that--make that much difference to us, just so long as they--they have--you know they're a good business with other you know menu items; so--

0:25:20.9

**AE:** Has that ever interested y'all to wholesale tamales?

0:25:23.0

**CS:** It has but you know we--we got to thinking about it--we've been thinking about it for like *[Laughs]* 20 or 30 years you know but as far as cost wise it might be a little expensive, like you know--we might have to spend \$150,000 to \$200,000 to get us into a building--well the building wouldn't cost that much but the equipment and before you turn around it's going to be \$200,000

you know and then we got to talking about it here recently--got talking about it with my two sons, and even if we could do that, I don't know who we would sell them to other than our franchise restaurants because we couldn't sell them to anybody as far as a restaurant--another restaurant, because if one of our franchises sees that the restaurant down the street from them has Doe's tamales, then so it would be kind of--they wouldn't like it, you know. So our--I guess you could say our customer base would have to be maybe like grocery stores or places like that other than restaurants because we couldn't really sell them to other restaurants which would be a customer base, you know that we could tap into but we can't do it because we've got restaurants that we're selling, you know and we couldn't sell franchises then, those particular locations because you know well this restaurant where you want to put a franchise, they're selling our hot tamales. What am I going to do--tell them they can't sell them anymore? I mean you know so it--that would be--that would be--it would get complicated and so we would be cutting off our nose to spite our face I guess you could say. So if we opened up... now if we got like 100--if we got 50 franchises and they all had to buy tamales from us it might be different. Then you--you're talking about they might have to buy 2,000--3,000 dozen a week, you know that would be okay, you know but we--right now it's going to be--it would be hard because we'd be cutting out a--a possible avenue to make money, you know because we couldn't sell them to restaurants, you know; so--

0:28:00.8

**AE:** Let me ask you about the style of your tamales. When I walked in here your employee over here happens to wrapping tamales in shucks which they don't do in Greenville anymore. And I

wonder if you could talk about that transition happened in Greenville and how that transition happened here to go back to shucks.

0:28:20.8

**CS:** All right; we used to sell tamales in corn shucks from 1941 until about 19--I would say in the '80s--the early '80s and the early... now daddy would--his friends, his--that farmed, if--if they you knew grew corn then he'd get the--they would save him the corn husks and he would get the corn husks from them and that's what we'd wrap them in. It would have to get all the silk off of them and you know clean them off and you know--so then after his--his friends stopped you know growing corn and they had started maybe cotton or whatever--beans or--they would--we'd get them from a company out of Texas. And so we got them from a company out of Texas for--for years and all of the sudden they couldn't get them anymore because when they got them from Texas--we got them from Texas they would get them from Mexico, so they would be from Mexico to Texas and then we would get them. Well when--one day or whatever the--when they were shipping shucks from Mexico to the United States they found marijuana in the corn husks smuggling over to the United States, so that automatically just stopped the sale of--of corn husks. So we had to go to something different so we started--we found this parchment paper that we went to. And they were all cut uniformly you know like--with our sized tamale, we cut them six by six--six inches by six inches, and so it was a lot cleaner process and it was a lot easier to do. You didn't have to clean them--the corn husks and you know the corn husks would sometimes tear and this and that and so we never went back to it after they got--everything got straight with the corn husks and back in Texas and Mexico. We never went back to them. So about eight

months ago--no about six months ago, the place where we were getting paper--this paper, because see they would have to--we'd get it from Jackson Paper Company and they would have to get the sheets of paper and then they'd have to cut them with a cutter at the--at the paper company in Jackson. And so they couldn't get that particular sheet of paper in anymore; they--they had a heavier type paper so we had to subsidize--substitute, I guess you could say, and so I ordered some corn husks and the--the corn husks I ordered kind of fits our tamale and now they--you can buy corn husks at--in like four or five or six different sizes and they're already clean and trimmed, so all we got to do is just put them in water and--and roll them, you know--just soften them up and roll them. So we got to doing that and we kind of started--we kind of liked it you know and so we never--we--we hadn't gone back yet. Doe has; we haven't--those in Greenville has.

0:31:49.5

**AE:** They still--still use the parchment?

0:31:51.4

**CS:** Yeah; and I still got--I got a case of parchment in there in case we run out of these and before I you know order some more that I can go back to but you know--

0:31:59.6



**AE:** Do you think Doe will change back to this?

0:32:02.6

**CS:** No; because he doesn't like the way we tie them. We tie them--see we used to tie them with the open ends with the--the open ends--the up end--the end that we put up with the hole, you know it's got a hole in it. Well we do that with the parchment paper because it's--for some reason it doesn't--with the shucks it cooks--the tamales cook out a little bit and so we lose a tamale or so every you know every bundle sometimes or every other bundle of--of threes that we put them in. So we start tying them at the top and close at the top.

0:32:40.2

**AE:** Of each tamale or each bundle?

0:32:42.3

**CS:** Yeah; each bundle, so they--the bundles of three where--where they're opened, well we tie it where they close so they can't--nothing can get out of them. Well it dries the tamale out just a little bit and makes it firmer, and my brother Doe thinks that they're too dry. But most of our customers here, they know the difference, you know. They think they're good, which they are good; they're real good and--but Doe thinks they're too dry and he don't want to serve them that way.

0:33:12.9

**AE:** Have you had any customers who are used to the Greenville--

0:33:14.2

**CS:** No complaints.

0:33:14.8

**AE:** --used to the Greenville tamales that have had these since they changed it?

0:33:18.6

**CS:** Uh-huh, yeah; as a matter--I'm not going to say that, because I don't want--as a matter of fact though the girls that work for us in Greenville, they like--they like these tamales better.

0:33:30.4

**AE:** [*Laughs*] Uh-oh.

0:33:32.1

**CS:** They do.

0:33:33.9

**AE:** Say why?

0:33:34.0

**CS:** We season them better.

0:33:35.7

**AE:** You season them differently than your brother seasons them? [*Laughs*]

0:33:38.7

**CS:** Well no, we put--no, it's just about the same but we put red pepper in them--in the juice where he doesn't. It makes it a little bit spicier, you know.

0:33:53.1

**AE:** Has Doe tasted some of these?

0:33:55.2

**CS:** Yeah; he don't like them. He don't like them because he didn't cook them. **[Laughs]** He didn't make them. He likes them but he doesn't you know--

0:34:03.2

**AE:** When I talked--when I talked to Doe he said that he had never had anybody else's tamales, ever.

0:34:09.4

**CS:** Yeah; he doesn't--he's not a big tamale eater. You know he'll eat them like maybe--he probably will eat one--eat them maybe once every three months just to taste them or something. But he's not a big tamale eater. I could eat them every day. You know--but and he's a diabetic also and he doesn't--he kind of watches what he eats and that's why--he said he likes to work because he wants to keep active and he doesn't want the--you know I said Doe I mean if it's hot over that stove in the summer-time. I worked Monday night and I said man, get me out....

**[Laughs]** But anyhow--

0:34:44.7

**AE:** Well have you tasted many tamales around the Delta or--?

0:34:48.5

**CS:** Yeah; I eat--look, I can eat anything. It doesn't make me any difference. I love--as long as it halfway tastes good I'm going to eat it. It doesn't--

0:34:56.3

**AE:** Do you have a favorite tamale somewhere?

0:34:58.5

**CS:** No, other than mine--no; I mean because I just--but I can eat all of them. I mean I've eaten different tamales and I'll--I like them all. As long as they taste good I can eat--I mean if it's-- whoever's hot tamale is in front of me, if it tastes good I'm going to eat it. And I'm not going to you know shy away from them.

0:35:18.4

**AE:** Are you of the school that thinks that the--the shucks make the tamale taste better--that it-- it changes the taste?

0:35:25.5

**CS:** I think it does a little bit, but I--I mean but--it wouldn't bother me to--to go in, if I was like a customer here, if they had them in corn husks or they had them in paper, I'd order them either way. It wouldn't make any difference, you know because one tastes as good as the other, you know. It doesn't make any difference to me. But you can tell--you can tell the little flavors is different you know. I think it might be a little--the corn husk might make the tamale a sweeter type. I mean it's--it sounds funny but it's--you know that shuck kind of makes it sweet, you know and it is a good little distinct taste to it.

0:36:05.4

**AE:** Is the machine that you have here is that different from the one your brother has?

0:36:08.4

**CS:** Well it's older. I mean the one my brother has got--we got in Greenville is older. I mean the one we--the one in Greenville--the one here is about three and a half years old and the one in Greenville is probably over 30 some years old, and all the parts for that--that one in Greenville have been redone by a company in Greenville that serviced our machine for us and they redid like all the cylinders and they made it--the cylinders like heavier steel or--or metal or whatever it is you know and they--they redid--actually they almost built a whole machine, you know. I mean just having to work on it you know and the tamale here in Oxford is bigger. It's--it's a little

fatter because the hole that the tamale--the tamale extrudes from is bigger. So if you get a tamale from Greenville and a tamale from here, the one from Greenville is going to be smaller.

0:37:22.3

**AE:** Okay; and did your father always have an extruder of some kind or--?

0:37:26.7

**CS:** Well no at first they did them by hand and then they finally--I think they got like a hand machine where you'd have to just put stuff in there and then they finally got electric back probably about 40 years ago or so--45 years ago.

0:37:41.5

**AE:** Growing up were y'all on tamale duty? Did y'all sit and roll?

0:37:45.1

**CS:** To be honest with you, growing up neither one of us worked at--what we did--I mean what I did growing up--all I did was get drunk every weekend. You know you want to know the truth? I mean it just--I mean every weekend I would go out and get drunk--I mean I'd drink, you know I mean because I played ball and Doe played ball. Doe didn't drink a lot because he's a juvenile

diabetic and he doesn't--you know he--he watches his--he didn't drink a lot but we used to go out and-- **[Laughs]** when I was 18 years old--from 15 to whatever, 30-some, I mean they just--we just--I mean I just--now I just started working when I told you I stopped going to college. That's when I really started working full-time in 1968. So I've been working for 37 years. And we used to work seven days a week when I first started working because it was open seven days a week, and I used to work with daddy seven days a week. And then we started closing on Sunday and daddy liked to have had a fit, you know and so--but no, we didn't--I didn't work growing up. I just --I mean I don't remember doing anything, like waiting on tables or--or dishwashing or--or you know helping out at the restaurant. I don't remember--I don't--I didn't do that. I don't think Doe did either. I almost know he didn't.

0:39:17.4

**AE:** Can you tell me about some of the other employees down there, like the servers Judy and Sue and all them?

0:39:22.6

**CS:** Yeah; they--they've been there for like--like how long they've been there? Like they've been there--you know they--of course that's all they know is to serve. You know they've--they've been doing that all their lives and Judy who is Debra's--Judy, Debra, and Sue and Tina are the four servers that we've got. That's the only four we've got and Judy is Debra's mother. And then--okay, Judy has been there for 37 years, Debra has probably been there for 22 or 23 years at least.



Sue has been there for probably 24--24 years and Tina has been there for about 15 years. And they don't ever--I mean not unless they move away or retire or something happens to them, you know they're always going to be there.

0:40:33.1

**AE:** What--do you have an idea of what the customers--regulars think about them and say about them?

0:40:37.5

**CS:** Oh they love them. Oh I mean like--like last--like last Monday night I heard Judy and Sue say--and that's--you usually don't get them don't you? And Judy said yeah, I get them. You know they have their--you know people that--the customers that they always you know get and they like the--the customers like them to wait, you know. But the customers like everybody.

**[Interruption: Two women come in to say hello to Charles]**

0:41:06.9

**AE:** You've got somebody who wants to say hey; can we pause this? **[Phone rings. Charles debates answering it. Decides to sit back down.]** Okay; so we were talking about Debra and them.

0:41:18.6

**CS:** Oh yeah--yeah; so and they have their favorite--I mean the customers like have their little favorite waitresses and they have like their little--you know, like if say Bill comes in and his family--well that might be Judy's table that all the time. Well I've got--I've got one--like Charles, this guy named Charles Coglin, he comes in all the time and the only one that really waits on him is Judy because he likes Judy to wait on him. I mean not that he don't like the rest of them, but Judy has always waited on him and so she always waits on him.

0:41:59.8

**AE:** And that's just the way it is.

0:42:00.0

**CS:** Right; so that--you know--

0:42:02.7

**AE:** Well was--was somebody Judy is she somebody who is one of the first hired employees that was a transition from the family really working the restaurant?

0:42:10.3

**CS:** No, Tommi was probably--Tommi that used to cook for us. She cooked--she cooked probably for 40-some years.

0:42:19.9

**AE:** And what was her last name?

0:42:20.7

**CS:** Tommi Dodgen, but she's--she's dead now, but she cooked for like 40 years and she was probably one of our first--I guess you could say nine kin-folk employees. *[Laughs]* And then we have--I mean we've had like several of them, you know that wasn't kin to us but why--they worked for us--but I guess the first several years of being opened most of them were just family people. And my Aunt Florence--

0:42:57.6

**AE:** Yeah; tell me about her.

0:42:59.4

**CS:** Yeah; Aunt Florence--I'm 58 years old and she was there before I was born and she's still there. You know I mean--and everybody is--she's like a--I mean [*Sighs*] she's part of the place, you know. She'd be like the cornerstone. I mean she'd be the rock of the place right now; you know what I mean? She's--everybody loves her. There's nobody--nobody that comes in here that--that don't like her; they--they just love her, you know and she's--and she loves to be there. I think that's what keeps her you know going so much. She's like 78 or 79 years old and she just loves to be there.

0:43:42.4

**AE:** Does her--how has her role in the restaurant changed over the years? I mean does she--was she the salad maker for so many years or has she just kind of like been the personality of the place where you've done different--?

0:43:52.0

**CS:** She kind of--she was probably most--I think maybe she waited on tables a couple of times, but she was mostly the cashier/salad maker, you know. I mean everybody that comes in you know that's been coming for years; they'd say I want Aunt Florence's salad. You know I mean they want--you know they just think she makes the best salad, which that's wrong because I do.

[*Laughs*]

0:44:20.3

**AE:** Uh-oh. *[Laughs]*

0:44:22.2

**CS:** Charles Signa does. *[Laughs]* I'm kidding.

0:44:25.5

**AE:** We were talking about people taking their salad bowls to the restaurant and bringing the seasoning--?

0:44:28.4

**CS:** Yeah; they'll take--the seasoning yeah they have.

0:44:30.6

**AE:** Do they do that here?

0:44:30.7

CS: No, see we ain't got to that. I mean they--they just don't; I mean because see we've got [Sighs]--it just amazes me because we've got like right now--people--the younger people that come in even like--I'm saying younger people; I'm talking about children that maybe are three and four and five and six years old, they--some of them are like fifth generation of families--generations coming in. You know like their great-great-grandparents came in back in the '40s. I mean and these families are still coming in. I mean like Saturday night, there was like I guess you'd say over half the people came in Saturday night were people that come in once a week and sometimes twice a week for years. They've been coming in like that for years. I mean it's just remarkable. I mean this--you know we've thought about you know changing--you know maybe going out to the south end of town you know where everything is out that way because we're in such a bad neighborhood, but you know it wouldn't be Doe's anymore. Because Doe's is--you know I mean--because we're kind of caught between a rock and a hard place at that place [on Nelson Street in Greenville]. I mean we have a great business--I mean a real--I mean we couldn't ask for a better business, but if we were out--out on the other end of town with our same setup, you know walking through the kitchen and—and the whole building--we could do probably twice as much business. I know we could with our same setup. Now I'm afraid if we ever try to do that and close the--that place down and just did another place where we could seat maybe fifty more people, because--yeah, fifty more people and have a bar, and just you know--just a little bit more help, a little bit bigger kitchen, and to serve more people, I think maybe we'd probably lose our business, you know.

0:46:50.6

**AE:** Yeah; well that history is part of--part of the place.

0:46:54.6

**CS:** Right; and see like Saturday night it was like eight o'clock and 25 wanted to come. Well I couldn't--we couldn't take them because--well I think maybe it might have been like maybe a little baseball team and their parents maybe or something like that you know. But that's still 25 people. I couldn't take them. If I was at a bigger place and this happens not just--you know I've had almost every weekend that I know of you--you'd have to tell people we can't take them anymore. You know and that might be 10 or 15 or 20 or so--or more a week--weekend, you know. You get--that gets to mounting up and then of course you would rather turn some down then to looking to see where the people are that's not there, you know. I'd rather do that than you know--but it's just remarkable of how that place--it just amazes me.

0:47:54.0

**AE:** Well and speaking of tradition, when you came here to open this place in Oxford was there anything besides a tamale recipe or salad or anything that you took from that place here--a skillet or something or--?

0:48:05.1

**CS:** No, no, as a matter of fact, when I came here I didn't study the--the place that I was coming to, you know the--the town and where we--I probably wouldn't have come here. I probably wouldn't have come here because first of all it--where our location was--

0:48:33.5

**AE:** Uh-hm, down on University?

0:48:34.4

**CS:** Yeah; I didn't--it ended up not being a good location and in the Delta it doesn't make any difference. In the Delta, you can--I mean people in the Delta will drive 30 miles to go eat. In--in here they won't. If you're on the square--I'm talking about a nice restaurant--if you're not on the square or--you're not going to hardly do too much. Now sandwich shops might like you know Obie's or McAllister's or Newk's or whatever, they'll do good but--and--and Yocona's [River Inn] will do good and Taylor [Grocery] will do good because they've got some atmosphere. Even though they're out of town, they've got the atmosphere and then you bring your own liquor there, too. And also they've got good food. But those two places are--are unique because you can bring your own drinks there--I mean liquor there and--and they've got a nice atmosphere, you know plus their food is good. And that would be more like our place in Greenville--Yocona's [River Inn] and Taylor [Grocery]. So--and there's more competition here; there's a lot more competition. I mean we've got good food but you've got--I mean you can walk out the--this door right here and you can walk within four or five minutes to ten restaurants that would be--or more that--that



you could eat at and enjoy eating, you know. So we've got a lot more competition here than we did--I mean in Greenville, I mean we don't have like maybe two or three restaurants that we--I mean we don't have anybody that we compete with as far as steaks wise--nobody, you know.

0:50:15.6

**AE:** Well and then when you moved over to this location here at the hotel--?

0:50:18.7

**CS:** Oh it's a lot better. It's like our most--to be honest with you about 70 percent to 80 percent better.

0:50:23.7

**AE:** Yeah, because I remember I--I think you called when I was talking to your brother Greenville months ago and--and you were so surprised at the bar business that you were getting over here.

0:50:33.3

**CS:** Yeah; and of course we--we just--we get the most--like last night we had like six or seven or eight people at the bar just sitting there drinking. You know they didn't eat but they--they had

a drink before they did something else and you know--and--but our business has gone like from here to--to there, you know. I mean and it's like last night and the night before last we wasn't busy but that's because of the time of the year. Now tomorrow night we're going to be real busy.

0:51:05.4

**AE:** How many people can you seat here at this place?

0:51:06.9

**CS:** One hundred and thirty with the bar.

0:51:09.2

**AE:** And that's--that's a lot more than down at University isn't it?

0:51:11.1

**CS:** We sat 140 at the University.

0:51:12.6

**AE:** Oh really? Oh, okay.

0:51:13.1

**CS:** Yeah.

0:51:13.8

**AE:** It seems like it's smaller somehow.

0:51:14.9

**CS:** Yeah; it does seem like that. Well we've got little these little rooms where it seems like more people than you know sit at you know and--and--but here is a lot better, you know. You know the motel--you've got people coming in and out and you know there's more traffic and you got everybody that checks in the motel that has to come like fifteen feet from that door right there.

0:51:35.7

**AE:** Yeah; so new people are finding you all the time.

0:51:38.1

**CS:** Yeah.

0:51:39.0

**AE:** Do you do better tamale take away business now that you're over here?

0:51:42.6

**CS:** No, not really you know; I mean--look, Saturday night in Greenville our--our take-out business was unbelievable. I mean, like in that place where the worst neighborhood, I mean the worst neighborhood you can get--get in Greenville, we had \$1,300 worth of take-outs. You know with the take outs--Saturday--Saturday night, \$1,300.

0:52:15.7

**AE:** I mean. Wow.

0:52:15.3

**CS:** That's a lot of take outs and you had about 100--you had about 200 people eating in--in the worst neighborhood there was--there.

0:52:24.8

**AE:** That's a good business. Well, let me ask you about how things have changed for--for Greenville, too, because you know when I was talking to your brother he was talking about your father and even you were talking about him getting corn shucks from a friend and the tamale recipe from the Air Base and then you got his meat from the grocery stores and the cans for taking away tamales--

0:52:45.5

**CS:** Yeah; he never--he never cut his meat. He never cut steaks--never. And like probably 20--18, 20 years ago we started--Doe and I started cutting steaks. We just got a ban saw like--like we did--like they do at the grocery store and we started cutting our own steaks.

0:53:06.2

**AE:** Yeah; just to save on money or do it the way that you knew you wanted it done?

0:53:09.8

**CS:** Same--both, but see Greenville has got--it's a unique--it's just unique because--what were you going to ask me? Hell, I don't even know--I probably cut you off; I'm sorry. What were you going to ask me?

0:53:20.2

**AE:** No, I was just--I was just wanting to bring up how it seemed like, you know all of his suppliers and people he worked with--your father--were so local and it was a real kind of network of friends who provided different things for this business.

0:53:30.0

**CS:** You're absolutely right--absolutely right. The--well Kroger's, even though it's a national you know company we still got--got Greenville, you know the Kroger's in Greenville, you know. And--and then Stareka they're still open, Stareka Grocery, they--it's a family owned store--grocery store but it's like a meat market, too and they cut meat for us sometimes and we--the problem is in Greenville is everybody in Greenville when we cut our own steaks, you have--with loins, short loins, and they go from your large t-bones all the way down to your small t-bones. All right, well when you--the way we cut them--short loins we get like nine—eight steaks, nine steaks out of one loin because we cut them and inch-and-a-half thicker. All right, well the last four steaks of that loin, it's hard for the Doe's in Greenville to sell. Now, I mean, here we sell it—here we sell them because people don't buy as big a steaks here as they do in Greenville. They just don't do it, you know. So, what happens it-- ***[Knock on door. Recording stops for one minute while Charles speaks with someone.] [Recording resumes.]*** So anyhow—

**AE:** You were talking about the cut of steaks in Greenville.

CS: Yeah, so anyway, he has all the se butts left over, And then we sell so many steaks in a night's time, he might have ten or twelve butts, left over, and all his large steaks are gone. Well, he can't order any more large steaks the next day, because then, you know, he'd have more butts left over. And what you going to do with the butts? So then—then he has to go to Kroger's or Stareka and get bigger steaks that they cit for us, which cost more than we would—than it would if we cut our own. So that's where it gets kind of screwed up, you know, as far as cost on the steak-wise deal, you know. And if we told—the only way we—we could do it if we didn't buy it from places like that is, you know, I mean at seven—seven o'clock at night, I mean, one of my good customers comes in for a Porterhouse, "Oh, we don't have them any more. You're going to have to eat a small t-bone." Then what's going to happen?

FEMALE EMPLOYEE: They're going to walk out.

CS: you know what I'm talking about? So, and this—sometimes he has to put those butts—he has to cut them up and put them in tamales. Which is cost—I mean, you're—you're paying five dollars and something cents a pound instead of a dollar and some cents a pound. Know what I mean? See, that's—again, you just--- [Laughs] you Know? I mean, here we kind of—we go through all of them, you know, because we sell enough large steaks to take car of the small ones, because we sell a lot of the small steaks. You know? And I can't—even if I could get some of Doe's steaks there—the smaller ones? And bring them here and, you know, and use them? Where he didn't have to buy from—in a week's time, we'd have so many here, we couldn't do nothing with them. Because we don't sell as many steaks as he does. You know, he might sell in

a regular week—in our regular week—he might sell in two nights all the steaks we sell in a week sometimes.

AE: Man, That's quite a difference.

CS: It is.

AE: Do y'all have the same suppliers pretty much or—

CS: Um-hmm.

AE: Yeah?

CS: But see, we just—we cut all our own meat here. The only meat—we'll cut—no, we cut all our own. Now, the only time we don't cut all our own meat is when we're like when—during football season or [when] we know it's going to be like, having four hundred people in here or something—a night or something or—then we'll get some pre-cut filets that, you know, that—that's already pre-cut? So we won't have to cut—so we won't have to trim all the filets out and—but otherwise, we cut all our own. We cut all of our own t-bones, all of our own sirloins, all of our own ribeyes. We do all that. Cut all our own. We make our own tamales, everything. You know, Daddy never—we—going back to Daddy? When he—when he was running the place, like if—when you made meatballs, he'd make his own—he'd make his own bread—breadcrumbs. We go buy the—here, now we go buy the like the, Italian



breadcrumb—cases of the Italian breadcrumb mix and just throw it all in the—in the meat.

The—the—the meatball meat. Well, he used to make his own breadcrumbs. What he'd do is he would save the—the ends of the French bread and harden them up, and he'd grind the—that bread up and make his own. He'd make his own breadcrumbs, he'd—he'd get cheese from—like Parmesan cheese that he would use or Romano cheese that we would use for the spaghetti and the meatballs, he would order from Central Grocery in New Orleans and—by the—the blocks. And he'd cut the cheese and get the skin off of it and he'd grate his own cheese and he'd do—he would put up tomatoes—fresh tomatoes sometimes. And he'd make a—some of his sauce out of the fresh tomatoes. He'd do all this stuff. Everything like—I mean, *everything* was from scratch. Even some of the ingredients he put in there was from scratch. You know? But we make everything from—we make our—we make our own gumbo, chili and all. We do that too. And, I mean, he made a lot of stuff—unnecessary stuff that he thought, you know—which was good. You know?

AE: How did your mom contribute to what y'all served at the restaurant?

01:00:0

CS: Well [short pause] Other than making tamales, you know, I don't—you know, she died in 1955. We opened up in 1941. So I'm sure she helped with the tamales and all that stuff, you know. The forty—the fourteen years she was alive. But, uh, I don't really know, which is kind of bad, I don't really know whether she was like mostly a housemother or whether she really helped a lot at the restaurant, you know? And, uh, I—for some reason I'm not much on like, you know, like family tree type stuff and history-type stuff, you know and what went on back in the old

days and, you know, it—it interests me but it never really interested me enough to find out about it, you know?

AE: Or ask when they were around, yeah.

CS: Yeah, so.

AE: Most families are like that, I think. Do you know where in Italy your parent's families came from?

01:01:04

CS: My—my dad's parents came from Sicily. I don't know where Mama's parents came from.

AE: Do you know where in Sicily your fathers--?

CS: No.

AE: Because there are so many families—

CS: I know there are so many little different ones. Yeah, I don't—I don't know. See, I mean that's why, you know, I should know how to speak Italy—I mean, Italian for—you know, I don't know how to speak, you know, and I'd much--

AE: Did your parents speak Italian a lot?

CS: No. They—my grandparents would speak a little bit but my parents never, you know, spoke. You know how you—you get parents, if they were to come from that—their parents came from another country, they might—some of the parents might just speak that language—just speaking sometimes. Well, they never spoke that language. You know, they never really spoke.

1:01:47

AE: Well what do you think about the Italian community in the Delta in general and so many families being involved in grocery businesses that then evolved into restaurants? You know, Lusco's [restaurant in Greenwood, MS] comes to mind and—

CS: Right. And who else—oh, Lillo's [restaurant in Leland, MS].

AE: Um-hmm, Lillo's.

CS: I don't know if they were in the grocery store business, but I know that they're Italians and Lusco's and—but then there are a lot of Italians that, uh, like—they settle, like, in the Delta, and then they also settled like in the Delta over in Lake Village [Arkansas], which is across the river—the Mississippi River [from Greenville], you know, which is not twenty-some miles from—and they—those Italians farmed. And there's a lot of Italians in the Delta that farmed too. Like people from Shaw, people from Leland, and there's people from Greenville that—they farmed. Now, the only restaurateurs, I guess you could say, that—that were Italians that—that had—had a restaurant—well, there was a place called—well, Fermo's from Greenville. Have

you heard of Fermo's?

AE: No.

CS: They—they—they—they haven't been open a very—a long time, but they're Italians. They have a restaurant. And then our place, uh, then we're open. But we're not really an Italian restaurant. You know, we just—I mean—but then, uh, there was a place called the Venetian. You ever heard of the Venetian Café? Now they were—they were in Oxford. That was a good Italian restaurant.

AE: Was that in Greenville?

CS: Yeah, that was a—it was an old—it was an old restaurant--well in Oxford.

AE: Do you know the family's name that had that?

CS: Mmmm, uh, shoot. Powell was the—well, that was—the—the mother was Italian, and the daddy—I don't know what he was.

AE: Okay.

CS: But—Brocatos [Charles pronounces this Bruh-kay-tuss]. Yeah, that was my mama's name but they weren't—Brocatos was the last name but they wadn't really kin to each other. I don't think. But that was the Brocatos that had the Venetian.

AE: Do you know how you spell that, or your mother--?

CS: B-R-O-C-A-T-O. That was my mama's maiden name.

AE: Okay.

CS: But they didn't have the Venetian. Now I think there was a Brocato family that had the Venician at one time but I'm not sure.

AE: Right, but different.

CS: Yeah, right. I think and because a lot of Italians that farmed--and still do. But other than the restaurant business and grocery store business, I don't know any of them that, OH! My mama and dad--my mama--my mom's mom and dad had a grocery store, but it wasn't a restaurant, but they had a grocery store down right on the next corner from my res--our restaurant. They were Italians that had a grocery, but they didn't turn it into a restaurant, but they had a grocery store.

AE: Do you have any idea when that closed?

CS: Probably in the early sixties.

AE: Really.

CS: Yeah, well you see there was a lot of Italians that had grocery stores. A lot of Chinese people too. 'Course there was big--big Italian community, uh, Chinese and, uh, Jewish, there was a lot of Jewish people And a lot of black[s] But other than that there was Italians that had restaurants and groceries, but the only one I knew was us. Lusco's [restaurant in Greenwood, MS]. I don't know, was that a grocery store?

AE: Uh-hmm—

CS: Lusco's? Is that what it was?

AE: Uh-hmm. It did start out as a grocery.

CS: Yeah. I don't know what Lillo's, I don't know if it started out as a grocery store or not but I'm not sure.

1:05:44

AE: Well, what do you think the future of Doe's is--Doe's Eat Place?

CS: Well, the future of Doe's Eat Place right now?

AE: Uh-hmm.

CS: The future right now is selling franchises. And uh, were going to three more open up in the next 5 to 6 months. So we'll have a total of ten franchises before the years up. Then our two restaurants here, Doe's of Oxford and Doe's of Greenville. So that will be twelve, but two of them are family you know—

AE: Uh-hmm.

CS: --belong to the family.

AE: How did that name come about?

CS: Dominick is Doe's real name. D-O-M-I-N-I-C-K--and they called him Doe, off the Dominick, I don't know how they got the 'E' to it but, I saw on our building back in Greenville back years ago it had D-O Eat Place—Do Eat Place, you know, but I guess somebody just put an "E" on it to make it Doe, you know—and that's how it came about. He's name was Dominick and they just called him Doe.

AE: And they just started calling it 'Eat Place' as sort of a casual way of saying—

CS: Yeah, that was it, just Eat Place--Doe's Eat Place [*Laughs*].

AE: Um, did your father garden or farm at all?

CS: No, dad, before he worked at the cafeteria there at the air base, he worked with the Corps of Engineers, and so that's what he did before that. Now I don't know what he did before that but that is what he did—did, um-hmm.

AE: Well, I ask you because when I was waiting for you up front I saw him in a picture with a big squash, I guess, but—

CS: Oh, well that, I tell you what happened with that. My daddy used to like to plant things in his back yard, and he'd get what's called a cucuzzas [or calabash], which is an Italian squash, it's real long. And he would raise tomatoes, and that was a gourd that you saw like—a big gourd or whatever [in that photograph].

AE: Okay, it was as big as a three-year-old [child].

CS: Yeah, and he'd raise eggplant in this little garden at home, but, daddy had some good friends over at Lake Village [Arkansas, across the Mississippi River from Greenville] that farmed, the Peronis. And he was real good friends with uh-uh, these two Peroni brothers. And the two Peroni brothers who were Italian--were Italian they-they married two sisters—

AE: Okay.



1:08:21

CS: --and they lived--they're families lived in the same house out in the country, and one of the brothers--one of the Peroni families lived in half the house and others lived in the other side of the house. They had one of those kinds that went long-ways—and each had about four to five kids. So the two brothers married the two sisters and the four, five kids lived in the same house and they all farmed. Now they're dead, the older people like daddy, are dead but um, they used to uh, **Dad used to go over to Lake Village about two, three times a week, and in the summer time they would grow a big garden. And daddy would bring all the seeds and the plants and they'd grow a big garden. And then daddy would go back over there when the things started--the eggplants and tomatoes and squash and they would get coming up and he would go over and pick big bushels of eggplant and onion, and fresh tomatoes and squash. And he'd bring them back to Greenville and give them to his customers.**

AE: Oh, really.

CS: Yeah, he'd--he'd and he'd--he'd--he'd--with the customers--like uh, with the tomatoes. That's why I say he'd put up his tomatoes and cook fresh tomatoes. I'm not talking about two three bushels, I'm talking about four, five bushels a week and this would go on for like ten, twelve weeks, so he'd have about eighty to one hundred bushels of tomatoes. So they had fresh tomatoes for the salad. And when my mama died, my aunt came and helped with the restaurant so they would, uh, ripen--would get the tomatoes real ripe, not rotten, but just real, real, real ripe—they would cut them up, wa—wa--wash them and then they would cut them up, cook them

down and then they would strain them, and put them in gallon bags and freeze them. And if they wanted to make soups, you know, homemade soups or homemade spaghetti sauce or gravy, whatever you want to call it, so they would use the fresh tomatoes. And she'd do the same thing with the cucumbers, you know, pickling them and all that kind of stuff and then she'd have eggplant that she would cook and uh--we--we just had fresh vegetables all the time. So Daddy did that every summer—Daddy did that every summer, and he'd go over there and pick them fresh vegetables and so he used to do that all the time.

AE: Uh-hmm. So with your family being so involved, do you see a time when you and your brother might retire?

CS: I want to do it now. [*Laughs*]

AE: [*Laughing*]

CS: My brother Doe says he can't afford to retire, he said you might want to but, yeah, you know, being in the restaurant business, it's kind of hard to let it go, you know, you know, because you get used to seeing people, talking to people, everybody likes you, you know. Like I was in the coffee shop the other day and this guy came up and said that he was in the restaurant the other day and didn't see me. Well I was in Greenville, and then this girl came in and said that she was in the restaurant and that "I didn't see you" you know, and it's just hard to retire, well not to retire, you know, but just to be away from it.

AE: Yeah. What do you think that your father would say with all these franchises now?

CS: He'd probably say, "You crazy little monkey, you."

1:12:58

AE: *[Laughs]*

CS: To be honest with you, he'd probably say that, "Your crazy!"

AE: Yeah, you're bighting off an awful lot.

CS: You know, your putting your name out there and what if some of these people don't do it right. But you know what, this is what I found out: People forget a lot. Some of them don't, some of them do. I mean, we had a place in Jackson that we tried to do back fifteen, twenty years ago, but we were never there, and it didn't work, because we wasn't there and we didn't do it right. That didn't keep people from coming to our place in Greenville. You know, I mean, it doesn't bother me.

AE: Yeah.

CS: I mean, it does because my name is out there, my daddy's name is out there but they can always come to Greenville. And here to, in Oxford, there are a lot of people that like us being here, you know, and we're just getting our customer base built up, we'll be here four years next month. And we're in the weakest and hardest market because there are not a lot of people,

unless there's the students, but the students aren't going to come to eat unless their parents bring them, you know. And the hardest thing because you got a lot more restaurants for the size town and so we are in the weakest market out of all the restaurants that we have.

AE: You think you'll start serving lunch?

CS: No. Yeah we probably will, we stopped two weeks ago.

AE: Oh, you were up until two weeks ago?

CS: Uh-hmm. But maybe you didn't know because we weren't getting but fifteen people in here.

AE: Because weren't you also serving over there [at the old location on University Avenue] and it didn't work?

CS: Yeah, it just didn't work. You know, Doe's has always been known as a night place, and the lunch—we serve the Lions Club on Tuesdays but that's a buffet type deal—

AE: Uh-huh.

CS: And I can just put the stuff out on those little hot plates that we have, and they can just go get their stuff and there not real picky, you know. They don't want to be served, they just want it out on the table.

AE: Uh-huh.

CS: And they have their little meeting and that's all they need, you know.

AE: Are you prices different from your Greenville prices at all?

CS: Yeah, a little bit. Like our steak prices come with salad and baked potato or fries, and their salads are a la carte. But their steak prices might be just a little bit cheaper. You know, and I told my brother Doe, I says, you know, he sells tamales for six fifty a dozen and you could sell them for seven fifty.

AE: You could sell them for ten [dollars].

CS: I mean, if you knew how hard they are to make you could sell them for fifteen! I mean it's horrible, I mean like her [the female employee who is sitting in the corner tying tamales], because she's watching TV [*laughs*].

AE: I can't blame her.

CS: No but, it's going to take her like an hour and a half to make enough for one pot.

FEMALE EMPLOYEE: It takes like two hours to roll enough for one pot, and then another hour to tie them and put them in a pot.

AE: How many go in a pot?

CS: Twenty-five dozen, you see, but we sell four or five of those [pots] a night sometimes in Greenville.

AE: Yeah?

CS: And just think, it's taken her one hour--three hours to just get one pot—

AE: Yeah.

CS: --where--where in Greenville we got about nine people that can do enough for like twelve pots--ten or twelve pots like-like in one day because they start at nine [in the morning] and maybe get done around four-like three-thirty but there's nine of them—

1:17:45

FEMALE EMPLOYEE: And just one me.

AE: [*Laughs*] And just one you, that's the truth. [*Laughs*].

CS: And then it's real labor intensive, you've got to cook—you know, cook the meat and whatever--the stuff, and then you got to grind it up and then you got to grind it all up and then you got to season it and then you got the--put it in the refrigerator, in the freezer, and you got to let it cool off, and then you got to re-grind it after it cools off, which it takes a while to cool off. And then we got to that the next day, you got to re-grind it, you got to mix it up then put them in the machine. You got to run the machine then you got take them off with your hands and then-- have you seen the machine?

AE: Yeah, I've seen the one at—

CS: Yeah, you seen the one at--except ours it just a little bit bigger, but it's the same thing.

*[Female employee is heard sneezing]*

CS: Bless you, and uh, then you get to that process right there [points to the employee tying bundles]. Then you got to roll them and tie them, you got to back them in the pots and cook them. So it takes a lot of crud, I mean to me they're worth nine dollars—

AE: Yeah.

CS: --I mean to me they're worth ten dollars—

AE: No doubt.

CS: --I told Doe, I said, "Doe, you could sell them seven-fifty, eight dollars a dozen, and ninety-nine percent of the people don't even ask the price."

AE: Yeah.

CS: And he said that, "Well, I don't want gouge people." I said, "Doe, you're not trying to gouge people, your just trying to make some money." We're selling them for too cheap right now. For the amount of work that he does, he doesn't sell them for enough, you know.

PAUL SIGNA: Well, I'm about to get out of here.

CS: Yeah, what time is it?

*[Recording is paused for about one minute, while Charles speaks with his son before he leaves.]*

1:19:23

*[Recording resumes]*

AE: Well, I don't want to take up you whole afternoon.

CS: No, no your not. To be honest with you, he loves to cook. He even told Doe—

AE: Who? Paul told--?



CS: Yeah, Paul told Doe that he would come and work full time for him so he didn't have to work so hard. You know so—and uh, but he just wants to do it himself right now so. I mean eventually we're not going to be able to work anymore. I mean eventually—I mean I'm 58, he's 52. I mean, do the numbers, I mean [*Laughs*] you know, if you can't work anymore, somebody has to work, or there won't be another Doe's. Original Doe's, anyhow.

AE: Would you ever sell that space for somebody else to run it?

CS: Well, you see I've got to think, say I sell the restaurant in Greenville to you and somebody else, and I got to think are my regular customers going to come because we're not there anymore, you know? Of course you'll get a lot, I mean, do you want to buy a place where it's in a bad neighborhood. So there's two--

1:20.53.0

**[End Charles Signa-1]**

**[Begin Charles Signa-2]**

0:00:00.0

**Charles Signa:** Okay, that's-- That's it.

0:00:14.5

**Amy Evans:** This is Amy Evans again with Charles Signa and this is our second tape for our interview. And we were just talking about if and when something happened to the restaurant in Greenville if you would sell it or whatnot, and would y'all ever consider selling the tamale recipe or have you?

0:00:29.3

**CS:** No, no, no, no. Somebody said don't give up the hot tamale recipe whatever you do.

**[Laughs]**

0:00:38.0

**AE:** Well but you can't take it with you--you know. So I just--

0:00:40.8

**CS:** Well they know it; the boys know it.

0:00:42.5

**AE:** Because there's some folks I've talked to--because in addition this Doe's Oral History Project, I'm also working on a tamale project in the Delta.

0:00:48.7

**CS:** The two boys--my two boys know it--know the recipe and they--they actually they make the tamales here.

0:00:53.9

**AE:** Yeah. Did your father purchase the recipe or somebody just gave it to him?

0:00:57.0

**CS:** Somebody gave it to him, and they--

0:00:57.2

**AE:** Okay; because there are a lot of folks in the Delta who purchased recipes over the year from California and Arkansas and--

0:01:02.9

**CS:** No, these--this guy gave it to him and then mom and dad doctored it up a little bit and changed it up a little bit and that's how they kind of got to what--you know but I've--I've eaten tamales. You was asking about tamales. I was in Washington, DC when we were trying to open up a little satellite place in DC back several--several years ago and these people were going to incorporate some of their food with--some of our food with their food, and because it was a southern type cuisine like; they had fried chicken and--and potatoes and creamed potatoes, and I mean everything was served like in a community bowl and so they thought our big steaks since they--we cut them and split them that it would be you know--and they--some girl that was working there brought me a tamale that her and her mom had made and it was real different. I mean it was like--the texture was like a rubbery type texture with--it had olives in it; it had shredded a lot--you know like tamales in Texas, the meat is shredded instead of ground and they had like shredded maybe chicken or something in it, you know. It had all kinds of different stuff in it and it was real different. It was like three times as big and the tamale actually was--was white. The color was really like a white looking color and I don't know what it was made of--some kind of dough type stuff, but it was a different texture. So everybody makes tamales different.

0:02:45.2

**AE:** So your sons like making tamales?

0:02:46.6

**CS:** Oh yeah, they do.

0:02:48.1

**AE:** They're proud of that, huh?

0:02:50.2

**CS:** Uh-hm, and they like all--I mean--and they like--I mean like--like I said, the--the restaurant business is fine, but now that the--the--we're getting some of these franchises, if we could get several more then I mean--it's nice to get a check every day--I mean every--every month from these places. I mean you know I just as soon do that than having to go cook tamales, you know. I mean after you do something for 30-something years it gets kind of old.

0:03:23.9

**AE:** Yeah, well what's turned out to be the thing that's been the most different about having a Doe's in Oxford than the one in Greenville?

0:03:30.4

**CS:** Well the people are different. I mean I'm used to the Delta--the Delta people and the Hill people are just different. I mean here--here it's more of a--fu-fu type stuff, you know what I

mean. In Greenville--in Greenville it's a meat and potato deal, you know. You go get you a bunch of French fries and get you a steak and lap that juice up--that steak juice up with them French fries and that's it. You know here you've got to be a little bit more--I'd say sophisticated or they want a little bit more kind of more upbeat--I mean that and the atmosphere needs to be a little bit more--not laid back but you know a little bit more--how can I say it? They want--they want--I think they kind of want it like New York or something, maybe like a city type atmosphere you know or I kind of feel that way. I mean--

0:04:39.9

**AE:** Yeah, a little more cosmopolitan.

0:04:40.4

**CS:** Yeah, something.

0:04:40.7

**AE:** Did you have--when you built this out and moved over here does--did you have that in mind because I remember the--the place over at the University was a little more casual with checkered tablecloths and stuff like that and this place is really sharp?

0:04:52.9

**CS:** Yeah; we had a little bit--we had to maybe compete a little bit with some of the other restaurants in--you know nicer restaurants and you know just kind of make it just a little bit better. I mean not a little better than what's up--over on the University you know. My brother hadn't seen this yet.

0:05:13.3

**AE:** Oh, yeah?

0:05:14.4

**CS:** Yeah; we--well he hadn't--he hadn't--the only time he came here was since we've been here for four years is I made him come here one day. I made him come--because I worked for him one day like three and a half years ago, him--we worked for him, me and my son, and I brought the money home with me back to Oxford and he was in Tunica, so he had to come--I made him.  
**[Laughs]** He got so mad.

0:05:39.1

**AE:** Gave him a carrot-- **[Laughs]**

0:05:44.7

**CS:** [*Laughs*] So--

0:05:45.6

**AE:** Well that would be a good time for you to entertain him up here.

0:05:49.3

**CS:** He doesn't--he don't want to come here. I mean not that he don't--he just--he don't want to be out of--he wants his own little--little--I mean his deal is if he's not hunting or fishing he'd just soon go home, go back to the restaurant and do a little--maybe a couple little things, go home, go back to the restaurant and then he can maybe go hunting and fishing and I mean he just--like when we do the--the franchises or when we--any time I had to go out--we had to go out of town for something even if it wasn't the franchise business or something, we had to go out of town for something, I always did it because he wants to--he just wants to be there and do the physical work. That's what he likes, you know.

0:06:37.2

**AE:** Was franchising your--your idea?

0:06:38.8



**CS:** [*Sighs*] Well we had thought about it before and then somebody called us up in 1987 and right after daddy died, I think and daddy died in '87 and this guy from Little Rock and he said have you ever thought about selling your name or something? And I said yeah, we've thought about it; we just ain't done it you know--just--so they--he was our first little franchise. So--and then we went on for a while and had a few more like one in Hot Springs and everything kind of--kind of started in Arkansas, the franchise stuff--stuff you know--Little Rock, Hot Springs, and then we went to Fayetteville and Bentonville to Fayetteville. The guy in Fayetteville owns the Doe's in Fayetteville--that owns the Doe's in Fayetteville, our franchise, he also owns the Doe's in Bentonville. And he also sells franchises for us; he works for us. He's our franchise--he's like a salesman for us--independent franchise salesman and he got the franchise in Fort Smith that--for us and then he got the one in Tulsa and he got one in Lafayette, Louisiana--those three are open right now and then he got the franchise in Brian, Texas, which is right out of College Station. They going to open in about three weeks, and he got the franchise in Tuscaloosa, which is going to open up in about a month and a half, and he also got the franchise in--but he sells them. I mean he--he does that.

0:08:23.9

**AE:** That's what he does, yeah.

0:08:24.2

**CS:** Yeah, that's what he does. He--they--like I say he works for us. We give him a good--good salary percent--you know good--yeah; he--he gets a good--he works on commission, so he does real good. And then we're going to get one in Manhattan, Kansas and got one maybe in Springfield, Missouri and maybe in Columbus, Mississippi, which this--the guy in Columbus--I mean the people in Tuscaloosa might do the one in Columbus. Nobody else can--just them because it's too close, you know. The--the mileage is too close, so the only one that could do something in Columbus would be them, and--

0:09:14.4

**AE:** So I'm interested then in you know we were talking about how much history is in the original Doe's and you know just what's in those walls if those walls could talk.

0:09:23.0

**CS:** Oh gosh--yeah.

0:09:26.5

**AE:** But then the food is obviously so franchise(able). I mean you're really franchising on--on the caliber of the food that you are making.

0:09:34.3

**CS:** We're franchising on--well actually to me we're franchising on the big steaks because tamales is just--tamales are something that our franchises that--that you--whoever goes to the franchises they get the tamales made mostly for appetizers.

0:09:55.2

**AE:** Do they ever ask why hot tamales?

0:09:59.5

**CS:** Uh-um, not that I know of.

0:09:59.1

**AE:** I mean have they ever requested that that's part of what...

0:10:02.5

**CS:** Well they just part--well they--and then they say and then they will tell them that's just what Doe's is, you know. That's what they started; that was their--their signature menu item was a tamale, and then they went onto to--to steaks and actually when--when people think of Doe's

they think of the big old t-bone, you know. And even a pound and a half t-bone is big to--to most people. That's little to the people in Greenville. That's--we can't--we can't hardly sell them.

0:10:36.0

**AE:** Is there--has there been the biggest piece of meat that you've ever served to a person or anything like that?

0:10:43.7

**CS:** One day--one night a long time ago, we had five men who came in and they had five--five four and a half pound sirloins. They ordered five--four and a half pound sirloins and--and some of them you know took some home, but they ordered four--I mean five--four and a half pound sirloins--pounds now.

0:11:07.5

**AE:** Yeah, that's hard for me even to imagine. How big would that be if you're looking at it?

0:11:10.1

**CS:** Sixty-four and--that's seventy-two ounces; that's huge.

0:11:15.9

**AE:** As big as the dinner plate at least?

0:11:16.3

**CS:** It's--it's bigger than that.

0:11:17.9

**AE:** Bigger than that file folder, yeah--big steak. [*Laughs*]

0:11:20.2

**CS:** Yeah, they ordered five of them.

0:11:23.8

**AE:** Man, do you have people that come in and order anything well done and you don't do it?

0:11:28.0

**CS:** Oh, gosh yeah. No, we do.

0:11:28.3

**AE:** You do--do it? [*Laughs*]

0:11:28.5

**CS:** Yeah; I had--as a matter of fact, Monday night my first six or seven orders, you know different tickets and different tables, they had--well they had a medium well which is almost well done--not quite, and I mean they had a medium well on every ticket. Every ticket had a medium well the first five or six orders--every--every ticket.

0:11:50.2

**AE:** Does that just kill you? [*Laughs*]

0:11:52.6

**CS:** It's horrible, you know. But yes, a lot of people have come in and ordered them medium well or well done.

0:12:02.4

**AE:** Yeah, when making French fries do y'all still use skillets or--?

0:12:06.4

**CS:** No, here we don't; we just use a deep fat fryer.

0:12:08.5

**AE:** Are there any--do you know of any skillets that are down in Greenville that have been there for decades or do they go through them?

0:12:13.9

**CS:** Hmm, well I think we go through some--most of them like every 15 years or something like that--10, 12, 14, 15 years. I don't know of any of them that's really been there for 70--I mean for 50 years. I don't really--there might be maybe one you know but I don't think so.

0:12:33.0

**AE:** Do you think the fries are real different in the fryer?

0:12:35.3

**CS:** Yeah, they are--you can tell the difference in the skillet and in the deep fat fryer. The skillet it just seems to fry them a little bit--you know it just seems to be better in a skillet. Of course, people like them here, too, but you know they--they still like them in the skillet. I mean I can tell the difference if I fry them in a skillet and then fry them in a deep fat fryer.

0:12:59.8

**AE:** Are they cut the same those big--?

0:13:00.7

**CS:** Yeah, the big--we get the bigger cut and we get the--we have a potato cutter and it's the same size holes, same size.

0:13:10.7

**AE:** Do you have--

0:13:11.6

**CS:** Because they like the big--you know they don't like the real big French fries--I mean the steak--the real big steak fries, but they said it's the same size we use in Greenville.



0:13:20.4

**AE:** Do you have any memories of your time down in Greenville at that restaurant of people coming in or things that happened? What sticks out in your mind--some good stories from those--?

0:13:33.0

**CS:** When--well no, just everybody--I mean [*Sighs*] it wouldn't be one night that I didn't go there and say well gosh I don't know any of those people. I mean you know like [*Sighs*] I consider like my customers, my real good customers that's been coming here for years, they're almost like relatives. I mean they--I mean every time they come we would hug them and kiss them and they--you know they--everybody wants you know to know what's going on and it's just like--almost like family. I mean and--of course we never really had time to go to the tables and talk to them a lot because we were always doing the cooking, you know because when I didn't cook I wasn't there. But I knew Doe was there and when Doe didn't cook he wasn't there because he knew I was there. So actually when we came--when--when I cooked--I mean when--when Doe cooked, if I didn't come in of course I didn't see the people coming in that night and I didn't go around the tables and sit--and I don't like to sit down and talk to people. I mean I like to sit down and talk to people but you know when people come in they--a lot of times they won't--they don't want nobody--they don't want nobody sitting down talking to them that are not--that are not with them a lot of times. You know they might want you to talk to them for a minute or so but they want to you know just enjoy the meal, you know and don't you--I mean are you that way?

0:15:10.0

**AE:** Yeah, sometimes depending on what the occasion is, yeah.

0:15:11.8

**CS:** Yeah, it all depends on what the occasion is, right--you know. And--but as far as like memories, the only memories I have of--of being there for 30-some years is just--just I just enjoy seeing the people and of course you know people have birthdays there and they had just special occasions. They'd come here to eat and my daddy said hell they was like--he said many a deal were made there over like different--you know business deals were made there and you know millions of dollar deals, you know were just made in that restaurant there and you know people would just you know come in and have a good time. I mean like there was so many people that I know that came in that's never been in there before and I mean they live--hell they thought--it was like I've been coming here for years and that was the first time they had ever been there, you know because everybody is so nice. All my family, all my aunts and uncles and you know dad and all them, they were so--I mean it just--it is still kind of halfway family there. I mean my brother is there and my sister-in-law is there and my aunt is there, you know. I mean even though we have three--the servers aren't family but they're almost like family to people because they've been there for years and everybody enjoys seeing them, too, you know. I mean they enjoy seeing Jeanie and Sue and Debra and--and Tina, you know because they've been here so long.

0:16:58.1

**AE:** You can count on seeing them?

0:17:00.2

**CS:** Oh yeah; that's like, I guess you could say maybe the Beacon; those old ladies have been there a long time you know. So but-- **[Interruption]**

0:17:12.8

**AE:** No problem. Did your father ever advertise?

0:17:17.3

**CS:** No--word of mouth that's it; he never--the only thing he did advertise wise--advertising wise was like schools, like football programs or something like that I mean you know for the schools or the kids, yeah. And as far as putting something in the paper, the only things that was put in the paper was something that maybe somebody wrote about.

0:17:42.0

**AE:** Yeah; and you've got a lot written about you over the years that's for sure.

0:17:46.5

**CS:** Yeah.

0:17:47.6

**AE:** And do y'all advertise now? I mean I know y'all have--I've seen some billboards around of you like--

0:17:54.8

**CS:** Yeah, we--we took them down though. Well the wind blew one of them down but we took-- we was going to take it down anyhow. And--and--I'm about getting out of the advertising. I mean you know word of mouth is better than anything, you know. I don't--sometimes it's kind of a waste of money to advertise. I think it is; I might be wrong, but we had a little TV ad that we do but you know I don't--I don't like to advertise, you know. You spend about \$200 and say oh, did I really get something for that \$200, you know? **[Laughs]**

0:18:27.4

**AE:** You'd rather just have the people find you and know they found you.

0:18:29.2

**CS:** Right.

0:18:31.5

**AE:** Do you sell a lot of t-shirts?

0:18:32.6

**CS:** Doe's in Greenville does. We don't--we haven't had t-shirts here in a while. So we do if we get them, you know; I just never got them. I ain't got them lately.

0:18:41.7

**AE:** And in Greenville they give out that little history of Doe's and--?

0:18:45.1

**CS:** Yeah, we have--well we used to have it here. I don't know if we've got it here or not.

0:18:48.1

**AE:** Did you come up with that? I feel like your brother said that was your idea, but--?

0:18:51.2

**CS:** You know I don't know; I don't know whose idea it was. It might--it might have been my wife's; I don't know. So I don't know.

0:18:57.6

**AE:** Is your wife involved in this place?

0:18:59.5

**CS:** Uh-hm, but she--you know she's--she likes to keep--keep stuff like this to me and my brother.

0:19:06.3

**AE:** Yeah.

0:19:07.8

**CS:** You know she doesn't--you know me and my brother and me--because we--that's who--I mean even though she does help, you know she doesn't--she said that's you and your brother's bill. I don't need to be--you know, which she could be doing it, I mean if she wants to. But she doesn't--you know she just--she just wants us two to do it.

0:19:31.8

**AE:** Uh-hm; and what is her name?

0:19:33.4

**CS:** Mary--Maryanne.

0:19:37.9

**AE:** All right. Well we've covered a lot of ground here. Is there something that comes to mind that I didn't ask you that--?

0:19:43.2

**CS:** No, I'm sure like--you know if--you know you asked me about somebody buying the place in Greenville and I'm sure that--that it could be--somebody if it was the right price, it could be sold, I guess, yeah. But you don't know; hell the sentimental value, I mean you know you don't

never know whether you want to sell it even if you could sell it, you know and you know and people, they want--if somebody already had somebody that wanted to buy it they probably would buy it anyhow because it's such an established business and that's what people like. And it's an old building and they like that type of stuff. So I'm not that--so sure whether it will be hard to sell or not. Nobody has really come up to me and I wouldn't know if somebody came up to me what I would you know say--what, give me--I don't know how the rule of thumb is or how you would sell--sell a business like that, you know. It would be worth more than what somebody is willing to pay for it.

0:20:49.5

**AE:** Yeah; but I wonder, too, if anybody would interested in just preserving it you know kind of as--?

0:20:55.4

**CS:** I know what you're talking about--just like--like the Elvis Presley home or something

**[Laughs]**, you know like--

0:21:02.7

**AE:** Yeah; because that's a relic of Greenville.



0:21:03.8

**CS:** Like Faulkner's home here or something; charge to get in it. **[Laughs]**

0:21:10.1

**AE:** Yeah, there you go. You never know; I mean there is a lot of history packed into that little place.

0:21:13.6

**CS:** Yeah, because I mean I had flashlights going out--cameras going off the other--last night, I mean Monday night.

0:21:21.9

**AE:** Yeah.

0:21:23.1

**CS:** You know I mean these people--these people, I mean they just like that. I mean--

0:21:27.4

**AE:** And there are no places like that.

0:21:29.7

**CS:** No, no.

0:21:30.8

**AE:** So it's--

0:21:31.3

**CS:** It's like Jane and Michael Stern, they--they're--you know who I'm talking about from Connecticut?

0:21:36.4

**AE:** Yeah.

0:21:36.9

**CS:** They love it and they always write it--they write it in their books; you know what I mean.  
But you know... it's amazing to have that little old place you know and it survived.

0:21:51.5

**AE:** Surviving.

0:21:54.2

**CS:** No, it's kind--I mean because it's--you know when the towboats went out of business that was one of our main deals there, the towboat business. And that was one of our main--they were our main customers. They had about 30 businesses--32 businesses and they would all come in and bring all their customers out that you know from different towns and stuff and all of them had charge accounts. We'd bill them at the end of the month and--and that took a lot of--from a business, you know from the sale--as far as sales--gross sales, but then, you know, everything--everything is turned around here the past eight or nine years and it's--it's back up--it's up about as good as it's been in 25 years.

0:22:43.9

**AE:** Yeah, was there ever a time when y'all even kind of thought maybe about closing the doors over there?

0:22:50.1

**CS:** No.

0:22:51.4

**AE:** Greenville has always kept you going.

0:22:54.3

**CS:** Yeah; and the good thing for the bridge across the--the Arkansas Bridge, that bridge, because we get a lot of--we have--this--Monday night there's a--his name is Doc Perrier from Mc Gehee—Mc Geehee, Arkansas, and he said Charles? He said I'm 70-something--78 years old, something like that or something; he was--he's old, you know 78 or 79 or 80 or something and he says I bet you I'm one of your oldest living customers. That's what he just--he said to me the--the other day, you know.

0:23:30.2

**AE:** Could be.

0:23:34.0

**CS:** [*Laughs*]

0:23:35.9

**AE:** [*Laughs*]

0:23:36.6

**CS:** That's wild though.

0:23:38.0

**AE:** Yeah.

0:23:38.6

**CS:** And he's been coming in for years. He started coming in--in 1951 I think he said.

0:23:43.4

**AE:** Oh yeah?

0:23:43.4

**CS:** That's a long time; that's 50-some--that's--that's 53 years--54 years he's been coming in.

0:23:51.9

**AE:** That's amazing.

0:23:55.0

**CS:** A long time.

0:23:56.9

**AE:** Well---

0:23:58.2

**CS:** I don't know what else I can tell you. I mean we just--it--the--it just amazes me is what it does, you know. And that--and--because people love it, you know; I mean it was three people that came in Monday night and said oh I've--we've heard about this place; is it good? And I said yeah, it's pretty good. And when they left they--they just loved it, you know.

0:24:31.1

**AE:** No place like it.

0:24:33.1

**CS:** [*Laughs*]

0:24:34.5

**AE:** Well Charles I sure appreciate you giving this much time.

0:24:38.9

**CS:** Oh I was glad to do it, you know.

0:24:39.6

**AE:** It was nice of you. And so we'll call it a day for now.

0:24:44.1

**CS:** Okay.

0:24:44.3

**AE:** If I think of anything I'll call you back.

0:24:45.0

**CS:** If you--if you think of anything just let me know and I'll--I'll answer something. I mean I don't know what else to answer other than you know mom and dad and their families help out when they started out. I mean mom and dad started the place and--and with the help of their families--their immediately families, their siblings, some of their siblings, it kind of you know--that's how it kind of all began, you know. Everything was family. And that's how it's been for 60--64 years.

0:25:17.9

**AE:** Well I'm certain that's much of your success right there.

0:25:20.3

**CS:** Yeah.

0:25:21.0



Interview of: Charles Signa  
Interviewer: Amy Evans  
Interview Date: July 20, 2005

August 17, 2005

**AE:** All right.

0:25:24.1

**[End Charles Signa-2]**