

CHARLOTTE BOWLS
Charlotte's Eats and Sweets - Keo, Arkansas

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Interviewer: Sherri Sheu
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[Begin Charlotte's]**00:00:01**

Sherri Sheu: All right good afternoon; it's August 1, 2013. It's roughly 3:17 in the afternoon and I am here in Keo, Arkansas at Charlotte's Eats and Sweets in the back room. And I am sitting with Mrs. Charlotte Bowls and can you introduce yourself?

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Charlotte Bowls: Yes; I'm Charlotte Bowls and I'm the owner of Charlotte's Eats and Sweets in Keo and I'm—I make pies as fast as I can in this place let me tell you. **[Laughs]** We have been—we had our twentieth anniversary July 15th and if you could see where we're at it's a very small little town and people would come when I was opening this up. It's in an old drugstore and they would say I don't think you'll be open six months. I don't think you're going to get customers down here. And I got kind of worried. And then I—I just continued to do it.

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Of course I had a job and this was just supposed to be a—kind of a weekend thing. And somehow it turned into a business that I was running that I had no idea what I was doing. And I begged a lady that I knew real well that was a wonderful cook, and I said, “Would you help me for six weeks just to show me what I need to do?” And she ended up staying with me for about seven years. I—I love what I do; I've always liked—I always wanted a pie shop. And I—I worked keeping books at a grain elevator and someone came to me and said, “We're thinking about going”—they sold antiques and she—they said, “we're thinking about opening a little antique thing and would you like to like have a little place for pies kind of like—set off like a little tea room thing?” And I went, “Oh yeah I'd love that.” And then they had to back out and it

was—and I thought I can't do that. But the lady that was going to open this with me, she encouraged me so much to go on and she thought, “Yes, you can do that; you can do it.” And so I did. And the—the gentleman that owns this—owns the building—I do not own the building—and he—he was the one that said, “I don’t—I didn’t give her six months.” And he was so excited. He sent flowers on our—on our anniversary. And I just—the first day that we opened, in the backroom where we’re sitting now, there were Dee Morris who has Morris Antiques here in Keo, who is well-known, and he brought pieces over here to fill up this back dining room because I had no idea what was going to happen.

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And the first day we had to move everything out of the back. I had not advertised at all. I know a lot of times when something new opens around everybody comes to see what it’s like and what is going on but they just kept coming. I mean I—I was so amazed that they were coming from Memphis, they were coming from Dallas. We have [had] helicopters park out here on the helicopter pad in Keo, Arkansas. And I don’t know; it’s just been—it’s been wonderful. I mean I have not had to advertise that much. I’ve—I’ve got a lot of publicity from *Southern Living* and different magazines and stuff, but as far as paying for advertising, I’ve never paid for any advertising. And I have a—a great crew that works with me and we’re kind of like a family here.

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SS: So let’s go back a little bit; did you grow up in Keo?

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CB: I grew up in Toltec and I went to—to grade school. They only had a grade school. And I went to—well I went there. And I used to come to this old drugstore that we're located in when I was in elementary school. And I just—I thought it was just so amazing in that—in this drugstore. And then when I came back and looked at the drugstore when I—it was—I thought this isn't big at all. This is kind of small. You know how when you're young—but I don't know. It was just—it was appealing to me, just thinking what could be done in here. And it—you know it's not fancy. It's just people a lot of times when they say Charlotte's Eats and Sweets, they think of it is a tea room, but it is not a tea room. It is more—it's just family food and we have wonderful fruit plates during the summer and we have a special that I cook—hot plate lunch during the winter. But it's just kind of how I got here.

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SS: And what was the name of the pharmacy that was here?

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CB: Leak's Drugstore.

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SS: Lake's?

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CB: Leak's—L-e-a-k-'-s and he patented Leak's Liniment and he cooked it in here and he didn't drive, so he had a driver that took him all about three or four states and he sold his liniment. And everybody loved that liniment. So and then when he closed in 1963, everything

was just kind of left as it was like he just walked out the door and all the pharmacy was here. It was all kinds of bottles, nice antique bottles and a lot of stuff that probably shouldn't have been here still but it was—and it was all closed up. But—

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SS: And how did you decide to sort of keep a lot of the old pharmacy stuff around?

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CB: Well some of the—we had barrels of prescriptions. I found—I actually found a prescription of when I was a baby, of my prescription, and there was just—there was just lots of memorabilia here. Some of the things that are in here was—belonged to my mother-in-law that had been here since the—in her upstairs since the 1900s—early 1900s and it's here. People love to look at antiques. They come to—they come to Keo for antiques and now pie. *[Laughs]*

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SS: And how did you start making pie?

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CB: My grandmother was a very good cook and I always preferred pie to cake. And then when I married myself I found a recipe in a cookbook and I tried it. And I just started messing with it and I finally—it was just mostly coconut pie. That was my favorite pie—was coconut meringue pie. And I would kind of put a little of this and put a little of that in it and take out a little bit. And everybody just loved it. I didn't—when—when my children were young we didn't—I didn't cook very much sweets. They were always dieting. Everybody was dieting. We were all

overweight. And I always took a coconut pie when somebody passed away. I mean it's hilarious. My kids would get off and come in from school and they would see me cooking a coconut pie and they would go "Uh, who died?" **[Laughs]** And I was like, "Oh my gosh;" you know but that was the truth. **[Laughs]**

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So then I—I kind of—I really didn't know—I mean I could make pies. That was my specialty and I didn't really know how to make a lot of different pies until the lady that came to work for me and she—she was wonderful. And her name was Norma Morris. And she lives in Keo. And she showed me—her sister gave me a recipe for a caramel pie. And people go, "How many caramels do you put in that?" Well it's not—it has no caramels in it; I caramelize my sugar and I—I make caramel pie. And it's a cream pie and it's an old timey pie that they used to call burnt sugar pie when my grandmother used to make those. And but she taught me a lot. Of course then she retired on me—that I don't know; I just I like—that's the best part of this. It kind of—it turned into a restaurant. But the best part for me is making the pies.

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My husband makes the cakes. And so we just ended up here and—.

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SS: So how did you—so when you first opened up for business how many types of pies did y'all have? Did y'all only start with the coconut pie or—?

00:10:22

CB: No; we had coconut, chocolate, and caramel meringue, and that's—that's the only three pies that we had. And then we—people you know you can only eat so many of those three pies

so much **[Laughs]** so I started—we started adding ones. So now as we work here every day you know when we're open we always have—we call them the three Cs, which is chocolate, coconut, and caramel. And then every day we add a different sweet to it or a pie of some kind. And like on Tuesday we—we're open from Tuesday through Saturday. And we—on Tuesday we add egg custard and the three Cs. On Wednesday we have lemon meringue and then on Thursday we have a cobbler, you know peach or blackberry. Today I made apple cobbler. And then on Friday in the wintertime we have pecan pie out of the—the pecans are out of our orchard. We have a pecan orchard. And so they're always fresh. And then in the summertime like now we have fresh strawberry pie that's really a big hit. And then on Saturdays we have cherry or apple; we alternate those and banana pudding. And so we have a pretty good variety. And people you know call and—if they don't—if we don't furnish that for them to eat that day they call and order it and come pick it up, so—. We stay pretty busy.

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SS: And can we go back to you getting into—you starting up this business? When you started, who was it that actually spurred you on to start the shop?

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CB: Her name was Carolyn Hovis and she was—she's a friend of mine and she—I don't know. She just—I was terrified. I was just like, "I know nothing about a restaurant. I know nothing." And she just—I called her and—one night and I said, "You know, I don't know if I can do this." And she said, "Sure, you can Charlotte; you can do it." And she really just—I guess it was her that really gave me the—the courage to do it. And we—we've done it. **[Laughs]** The Lord is helping me, I'm telling you.

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SS: And were you still working at the granary when you started?

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CB: No; I—I decided that if I was going to do it I was going to do it all the way. And after about three weeks of being opened I was like, “Oh, what have I done?” My feet were killing me. You know I was used to sitting. And my legs were killing me and these are concrete floors. And but it got better. And so now it’s just part of everyday love.

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SS: So take me back to this—the first day that you opened for business. You didn’t have any sort of advertising. It sounds like you literally just started making pies and opened the doors. Is that—?

00:14:01

CB: Well people would come. I have you know friends and they would tell friends and they would tell friends. And like I say, we—we were so unorganized that day. I mean things that I didn’t know that I needed and things that I didn’t need was in there and that was probably a bunch of people in that little kitchen trying to help and we just had stuff everywhere. But um, I guess we had been—we had been opened about I guess it was in September. We opened in July and in September Channel 7 came down and did a show or a piece and we were—I was making fried pies then. And they were you know televising all this stuff and it was raining outside that

day and it was—it was on a Saturday and we had people come—we had—that got a lot of people in here, too.

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And I've had some that have just been customers—they've been here ever since the beginning. And we had one little couple that drove from Pine Bluff. They were—I mean they were real elderly and they drove from Pine Bluff to get a fried pie. And when they got here they were all gone. I felt so bad. **[Laughs]** But we just—you know—.

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SS: And you don't do any—you don't do fried pies anymore, correct?

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CB: No; I don't have time to do that anymore. I—I—when it—everything started picking up I—I—there is just no time. I mean I—I cook. Other people help me cook. And we are watching and racing the clock all day long. We get here at 6:00 and I mean we're going full speed until 11 o'clock.

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SS: And can you work—walk me sort of through this workday when you come in, what you start doing and what needs—what goes into preparing the restaurant for the day?

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CB: Well we come in. I—I do my dry ingredients in the afternoon to be ready. And we crack our eggs in the afternoon for the next morning. And then the first thing we do is get everything

out of the refrigerator that's to go into the pies. We start—there's three of us that start stirring pies and of course that's because we make like seven and eight pies at—at one time. And that takes a lot of stirring and you can't let it burn so you're—you're busy doing that.

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While we're—I mean you just want to know the pies or what—everything that's going on?

00:17:15

SS: Everything that's going on.

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CB: And then I have one lady, she's cutting meat. We don't get our meat pre-cut for our sandwiches. And she's cutting meat. One is washing the lettuce, all—and cutting up all the fruit. We don't—I think the only thing we get on that fruit plate is—that comes already cut up is the pineapple. And we cut everything up. And then there's—we have to do the tomatoes. We have to do the lemons. We have to make the tea. We have to—we clean the tables in the afternoon but everything is washed down again and cleaned up and sanitized. We—for salads, we cut up our ham, we cut up our turkey; bacon is—has to be fried and we get our meat fresh, so we have to pat—we pat out the patties that—because we usually can kind of tell how many we're going to have. We have wonderful hamburgers. And let me see; then we have to—I usually—you know the dishes have to be washed. We—I kind of get that going while some of the girls are—they will make dough. They—I showed them how to roll dough. They start mixing up the—the flour and all that stuff and they're doing the dough and making pie crusts and by that time I am usually

starting to put—my fillings have cooled down a little bit and I am starting to put the pies together.

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And so then I put the pies together and they help me wash the utensils and do everything to kind of keep me going. I have two ovens. The main oven that I use is a convection oven for the meringue but I fill it up and I put the meringue on five more and I put it in our standard oven and then I have to put it back over into a convection oven to get it evenly browned. And then we help whoever needs the help on doing things. And we usually take a break for just a little while and since we're here so early we get here at 6:00; they will usually try to find you know—cooking something to eat right quick and then we have to start setting up for lunch, putting everything out in the trays to make the sandwiches because we make specialty—we have specialty sandwiches. And then—of course we have to cool the pies down before we take them into the—where—we call it the waitress station until—in there where they all slice the pies and—. But and then usually we have maybe five minutes before 11 o'clock, so—.

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SS: And I take it people are already waiting at 11:00?

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CB: During the summertime right now when we open the door it is full. It is full and people are waiting for a table. And it's you know they wait; I mean I don't know—they know these people have just sat down so it's going to be a while before they can get a table but they do. They do wait and there is not much room up there for them to wait, you know and sometimes tempers can flare. **[Laughs]** But as a whole it—it usually is pretty—pretty good. But like—in the

summertime it seems like we have a lot of groups. Like, I think it was Tuesday we had seventy-two people reserved places and we—I can only hold ninety-three. So I mean you know it was—the—the back room is usually always full. And then they filter out into the front room because they're smaller. But yes; we're—we're usually—they're waiting when we open.

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SS: And will you turn people away at the—when you run out of pies or what's the procedure on that?

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CB: Well they also like our food; they do. But they do—you know I try my best to have enough pies. Now like today I had—I had a lot of pies, but someone came in and they bought a lot of pies. They bought a lot of whole pies. And they didn't—you know I try to get them to call twenty-four hours [in advance] so I have enough pies for the customers and they have to pay more for it if they don't. They have to pay the price that I would get for a slice of pie. They don't care. They—they you know—and so that—that runs us a little short. But no; they don't—they come until two o'clock or whatever time you know and they will eat a piece of cake or we always usually have enough cake. And they will have cake or they will have ice-cream or a sundae, you know a sundae or something like that. But there's disappointment when they didn't get the pie, so—.

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We've had—we've had people—I had an article in a—I didn't even know what it was honestly, Associated Press did an article and of course it went all over everywhere and people were calling. They were—they were coming in from different places and because they were

talking of course about the coconut pie. And—and like I said I didn't know—I didn't know what it was even—really, you know I didn't really know what you were about when—when—. But I agreed to talk to them. They came in and asked me. They were here and asked me if I could talk to them for a few minutes. And I—I said okay.

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And then the next thing I knew it was—people were calling me from all over sending me the article that—the article that was written and thought I would like to have it and they were planning on coming during vacation. And it was—I don't know; it's just strange, you know it is to me that all this happened and it's happened like it has.

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SS: And how many pies will you make in a day?

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CB: I make—now you have to realize we're just here for like—from 11:00 to 2:00 and I make—we usually have like seven coconut, we have like—well sometimes we have more than that but on the normal day we have like seven coconut, we have about the same thing as chocolate and three caramel and like I said we have the other pies that go with it. And but—and like when I make strawberry pies I make like seven strawberry pies and then to go with—like tomorrow we will have seven strawberry pies and seven—and like I say, sometimes I make more. If I—if the—if it's full and I know it's going to be full then I will because we—we get older people and some of them are diabetics and they—they can't eat. They want to eat it but they—we do have some that cheat but—. You know they say it's worth it; I'm just going to watch what I eat the rest of the say, so—. **[Laughs]** But that's—well we make other; you know

we make other pies and sometimes I have to make other—something else sweet but that's mainly just about what we have a day.

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SS: And it's—I'm trying to do all the math in my head and it sounds like it's well, between letting everything cool, between prepping everything, it takes about six hours to make a pie—six or seven hours?

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CB: Well yeah; if—you know if you go from the crust, making the crust homemade—we make homemade crust—and yeah. I mean it really does, if you—you know you have to let it cool and you put it together and then you have to let it cool again or—. The meringue pies are really hard pies to cut. Sometimes they cut real well and sometimes they don't. But just a normal person going in there and trying to cut it, it just—it's not like the meringue you get on like in the grocery store. That—that is like meringue powder; it's not really meringue—egg meringue and we actually use eggs—egg whites. But—

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SS: And well a couple years ago *Southern Living* came in and named your coconut pies the best in the South. What was the impact of that on—that you saw?

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CB: Oh you wouldn't believe. I mean we had the customers just flogging in but the people calling and of course the coconut pie recipe was not in the magazine. I had given them—I had

given them my caramel recipe and I have given them my chocolate recipe but I do not give anybody my coconut recipe. And I heard—I mean I heard everything about—“my mother just died and she was the only one that knew how to make a coconut pie and yours looks just like hers.” Or, “our house—or it burned up our recipe;” it—I mean you couldn’t believe the excuses and they wanted me to ship a coconut pie, an egg coconut meringue pie. And I can't imagine what that would look like when it got to—and it was in California and Oregon and they were—they were just calling from everywhere. And that went on probably for three months that we just had—and we—we would get tickled because we would go, “Well, what is it now?” But I mean I know—and I know they wanted—they wanted the recipe. But that’s the way I make my living, so—. I didn’t share it. Maybe I’ll share it when I retire.

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SS: Are you the only person who works in the restaurant that knows the entire recipe?

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CB: No; my daughter does. And she helps me a lot. She’s—she doesn’t work and she lives here in Keo. She’s married to Dean Morris and Morris Antiques and she’s kind of my fill-in. So when I get to where I can't be here for whatever reason—usually it’s health-wise, something is going on, she—she always helps me.

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SS: And is Dean Morris a relation of the Mrs. Morris that helped you out? Are they the same family?

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CB: They're—they're cousins. Her husband and Dean I think are cousins. So and I didn't even know that when I asked her. I didn't really know Dean that well actually. But he—he would come over when I was working on—in here and he—in the front behind the soda fountain is a big mirror. And the original one was just—it was bad. And Dean got me a mirror and had it put in there. And but like I say I didn't really even know him then. But it was just so nice. It looked so much better. So but I guess you noticed that we had all the—these are all the original fixtures that were in here, all the cabinets, this—the soda fountain, it—it doesn't work because the copper was all bad in it and the motor that ran it was so loud. And the girls couldn't keep up now if I even had it running. I just—I only have three waitresses and they are on top of each other trying to wait on people. It's—but they get the job done, so—.

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SS: And you have mentioned that your daughter and your husband both work also in the restaurant. Are there any other family members that are involved?

00:31:07

CB: My—I have another daughter and she lives in Ward and if I'm—she comes in. She's helped me; she's worked—actually worked for me before. And she knows—not in the kitchen; she works out on the floor and helps do that. She had waitressed before so she—she knew what she was doing. But now when I get in a bind I can call her and she comes in and helps me. Just about—there's a lot of people in my family that has been in here. But sometimes it's just not real good to have family working with you. **[Laughs]** But we're—we're fine now; we're doing good.

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SS: I was going to ask you because it seems like having family is always—is always a struggle trying to balance personalities and can't necessarily fire them because they're—.

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CB: Oh yeah; you can. *[Laughs]* You can.

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SS: And what would—your customers, can you tell me a little bit about your customers?

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CB: Well as I said they come from everywhere. I don't get that many customers from England [AR] or Keo. They—you know I couldn't stay in business, but they, like I say they just come from everywhere. And it—it amazed me that people will drive so far for a pie, for a—just a piece of pie and they do. And we used to have—excuse me—we used to have some customers that would come in from Memphis, about every three weeks. Here they'd come and they would—they would go over to Morris [Antiques] and then they always had lunch with us. And they just made a day. You know we had a little dress shop here and antique lamp shop. And of course we have—people were fascinated; we had a gin and it was running then. And but it's—it's closed down now. But then, as I said, a lot of my customers are—are senior citizens because senior citizens know what a pie is. They know what it's supposed to taste like and they know what real crust is. And they appreciate it; they do. And—and I appreciate them.

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But my daughters, you know the people that come here, some of their children's children, say their grandchildren they don't really know what a—you know the generation now they really don't know what a homemade pie is. You know, they can say it's homemade and it's coming out of a chain, you know but not really a homemade pie.

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SS: What would—what do they usually assume a pie is supposed to be?

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CB: Out of a box I think. [*Laughs*] Or well if I was to go to eat in Little Rock, they would probably say you know this is Italian cream cake—let's say Italian cream cake. And they think that—that they made that back in the kitchen. But it normally comes from a food service. And mine do not come from a food service. So I do—I do have one thing that comes from somewhere besides me making it and that is a New York cheesecake because they can make a better cheesecake than I can and but we have you know—we brew it up and they—they love it. They love the cheesecake. But they're told that it's not homemade, so—.

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SS: And where do you source the fillings? Do you source them, the fruit that you use, do you source that locally?

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CB: Now what?

00:35:42

SS: So the fillings that you use, so when you're making an apple cobbler or whatnot do you get the apples locally or where do you get those from?

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CB: Now the apples, I buy them; I do buy the apples. They're already sliced. When I first started this I sliced the apples. I would—when I could I would get them locally. But most of the time I don't know; I guess you're in a restaurant, you do what is the easiest as far as your supplier on getting produce and I would get them from—some of it comes from California but when every—you know if the farmers' market has it then I get it there. But I—and I made the apple—my husband's mother could make a wonderful apple pie and I had her recipe. And I made that to start with. And it took longer. And time was of essence. You know I was—so then Norma Morris again, she said, “Charlotte you can—you can make a wonderful pie out of canned apples, not canned apple pie filling, but canned apples, sliced apples.” And they've been kind of par-cooked. They're not you know—and so we—we made those and everybody loved—they like them. So but I do—do that. But as far as you know my cream pies, you know I use the best ingredients that I can get. I don't skip on—you know the coconut is a lot of coconut. It is extra-large eggs. I use extra-large eggs. That's the only thing we use here is extra-large eggs actually. But we just—I don't know; I never—. When we started this I didn't go to the cheapest coconut I could find, the cheapest flour I could find. You know I tried to get quality stuff too, to make my pies with. And I think that pays off. You can tell the difference.

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SS: And especially for your summer pies, I'm guessing that—I'm not very familiar with making pies. Unfortunately I'm from that generation [*Laughs*]—

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CB: Okay; you know what I mean.

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SS: —that gets the pies in the boxes. [*Laughs*] There's some fruits that don't work very well unless they're fresh, correct? So for instance, can you make a good strawberry pie in December when the fruit is not in season?

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CB: Oh we don't—we don't make them in December. We—we make strawberry pies when we're—the season that our fruit plates—we start them like in March, the middle of March and we go through September and other than that we have like our winter pies like pecan pie, sweet potato pie, pumpkin pie, something you would you know think of for Thanksgiving and Christmas and—and—oh and that is something else, oh, we have so many pies at Thanksgiving and Christmas. But—but they're—no, I couldn't get—that's why I do not do strawberry pies then because you cannot get really quality fruit and that's why I—. A lot of people do fresh fruit plates all year long, but I don't because the watermelon starts looking white you know and the cantaloupe is hard as a brick and so I—. No; we just have our little system and we—we've made it so far with it.

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SS: Fruit can start tasting very wonky once you're out of season.

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CB: Yeah.

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SS: So during the—during the winter season, so Thanksgiving or Christmas you'll—will you start making more whole pies? I'm guessing that a lot of people might come in and order to have it at Thanksgiving or at Christmas.

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CB: Oh no; they—they order their pies ahead of time. And we—we usually do around up to 150 pies for Thanksgiving. And that—that is our busiest time. And that's—I have to cut it off because I can only do so much. But we—and that—we have started closing that day and doing nothing but pies and that—that works better because you know you try to have everything ready at eleven o'clock and that does not work—150 pies. So you have to get here really, really early.

00:41:01

My poor family doesn't even get any pies. [*Laughs*]

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SS: Around the holidays are there any—any desserts that are at your table or have—by that time are y'all just—“We do not want to see any desserts, we'd rather have something else—?”

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CB: My family was not—they—they are so sick of pies. Well some pies, I'll take that back—the ones that we have every day; now, they like sweet potato but normally I don't do pies at my Thanksgiving table. I might do a pecan, or like I say, a sweet potato. But there's usually some other dessert that they really like, like four-layer delight or you know something that's fluffy but I don't—I don't buy stuff. I will make it. But they like things like that.

00:42:07

SS: What's been your most memorable experience working here?

00:42:14

CB: I guess the day we started; that was—I guess the day we first started, which would be the most—. I don't know; I was just—I was overwhelmed. I just didn't know what to do. I just—I was expecting not to have any business and it just—it just took off from day one and I just—I was overwhelmed—I was just overwhelmed. I didn't know—but that was probably—. And then when we moved from our little tiny kitchen into a bigger kitchen and that was—that was really exciting for me to have some room to do something. And we—I can remember when too this—this—I loved this; when Mary Steenburgen and Ted Danson come, they used to—you know they have her mother was a—a customer of mine and her aunt for years and then she came. She's so nice; both of them are so nice. And she always when she came in, she always wanted chocolate pie and a hamburger. And he loved strawberry cake. But that was always nice when they came in. But I guess—I guess it's just my customers. My customers are just you know you come out and you see them, you know them, you talk to them, and they're—like I say, they're not from here. But they've been here so much that you know them and you—you know the waitresses

know what they're going to order before they sit down and they have their tea or their diet Coke or whatever. They have it ready. And that's what they—they have the same thing.

00:44:13

We've had some customers that have never eaten anything else but a Keo Classic. And that is a specialty sandwich that we make and I mean they eat pie, but we know when—. Tickets that are hung back there for us to do, I know who it is by the ticket. That's how often customers come here. And they know what dessert what they want. They know what pie and they walk in the door and they'll go oh, we're out of it; we're—you know. And but they're—they're so—the customers are just so nice. They are; it's just a—it's a family restaurant and we're just all family, just like the customers, we're family. And that—that to me has probably been the best thing.

00:45:03

Now some of them they're—I never realized how upset people can get when they're waiting to get a table and they're marking pies off the board, but then when they get seated they're better. *[Laughs]* Oh it's just—

00:45:34

SS: It's really interesting that so many of your customers seem to be regulars even though as you said, many—most of your customers are from out of town.

00:45:42

CB: Uh-hm.

00:45:44

SS: So I did notice a sign when I was—one of the billboards when I was coming in that said Morris Antiques and then Have Pie. Who came up with that?

00:45:54

CB: I guess Dean. *[Laughs]* I didn't even know it was going to be on there and so I guess I have got some—it's been on there three or four years and he's always—Dean is always trying to promote business for Keo just in—in general, just for Keo in general. And he—I don't know; he's—he's been really good for this town. That was even before I was here, so—.

00:46:32

SS: And what do you think that the impact of this restaurant has been for Keo?

00:46:36

CB: Oh I think we've helped. I think we've helped enormously. Sometimes—a lot of times when we're closed, everyone else closes because they use the—like they'll either antique and then come and eat and they want us to be open when they get through over there or they will eat here and then they will go and shop different places.

00:47:07

A lot—we do have customers that when they come and if they haven't made a reservation and they're in line they'll go, "Here's my name. You know it's on the list. Here's my name. I'm going over to Lisa's and we're going to shop until—call me when my table is ready." And we do and they—they're you know—two minutes, they're here. But we—I mean just things like that, just—it's just little things and we—we kind of go a little beyond what some other restaurants might—I guess because we're—we're just a mom and pop you know and you know

we have people. They come in—walk into the kitchen and tell you it's wonderful or it's good.

And I don't know; I just—I've never done that anywhere. I thought well, maybe I should.

[Laughs] But I just never thought they wanted me in their kitchen. Of course ours is open to them, so they see—.

00:48:20

SS: I just have a couple more questions to ask. Arkansas seems to be known for pies more so than other states are typically known for pies. How do you think that came about?

00:48:32

CB: Well I mean in Arkansas I know that I—I will say like when I was raised, we didn't have dessert so much during the week. I mean we—I mean we—but on Sunday—pies. We had pies. And I mean like where we're around is like farming country—farming and on up in the, you know northern—cattle, you know hard—hard-working people. And this—a pie and a cup of coffee with something to sit down with and enjoy—enjoy the fellowship with the people, and I don't know. It's just—and like my grandmother, when she started out, she'd make a pie. We might not have the ingredients for everything, but I mean like a burnt sugar pie, you know it was—it was a-custard but more than likely you had all the stuff for that. And so I don't know; pie is just better. I mean you know; we just know what's good. **[Laughs]** Pies are good. I think that's the main thing; they are just, you know—. I guess our ancestors liked pies; I don't know, you know.

00:50:10

SS: And it's—it's interesting that people will seem to be willing to travel so far for pies. And I think you've alluded a little people that don't know what a pie is supposed to taste like but it doesn't seem like people will travel that far for a cake or for a—

00:50:27

CB: I know; well it's the coconut pie. You know they—if that coconut pie—they saw that coconut pie in *Southern Living* and they just—they had to see if it tasted as good as it looked in that picture. And when they would come here they would go, “Oh my gosh, it does;” you know and we've had people—we had a lady and you may have read some of this, but she came in here and she parked over by the antique place. She was going to do little stuff. And she said then she started noticing the cars pulling up. And she didn't understand really what was going on, but then when she got in here and she tasted the desserts and stuff, she said she understood. And we've—we've had one person from I think it was *Tri-Lakes Paper*, they wrote—she wrote an article about her grandmother's pie, her coconut pie, and she had seen the *Southern Living* and she came in and she said, “Oh my gosh; it's just like—just like my grandmother's pie.” I mean there's so many childhood memories about when you had a good pie. You know there's childhood—this brings back—I mean I had—had women that sat right here at this table and had the pie and I had two women crying in here that—that reminded them so much of their grandmother. They had me crying too.

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But I mean you know it's good to—it's a good feeling knowing that you can help, just—just a childhood memory. And so—I don't know; but it—they seem to always be pleased when they leave. They—well if they get the pie [*Laughs*] they're pleased.

00:52:52

SS: It does sound like from the stories that you've been telling me that a lot of people come here for the pie but they also come to be transported by the pies to their grandmother's kitchen or someplace else.

00:53:03

CB: Oh yeah; yeah. And I've had men especially—men, they're—they're really more on—oh this pie is better than my mother's but I never would want her to know that I said that because my mother always made a great pie. And but they do; they—they're comparing it to—to mother's. They're looking for you know that pie. And I will say the coconut one is the one that stands out to them, to the customers. I have some people that—that they don't like coconut and they love the caramel pie. They love it. And that's—that brings back memories for them because of the burnt sugar pie, just like it did me. And after my grandmother died there was no recipe, just like these people say that they call me, and I never thought I'd ever have another one of those until a lady shared it with me and showed me how to cook it.

00:54:16

And it is; it's a memory. It's a memory from my grandmother.

00:54:25

SS: And what was it like when you finally—when you hit upon that recipe and had that pie again that you thought you weren't going to have again?

00:54:32

CB: Oh I was—I was excited. I was—you know she called it a caramel pie, okay. And I guess I was expecting her okay, like your generation, to put caramels in it or I had—had a pie that you caramelized like Eagle Brand Milk you know and you could caramelize it some way and they called it a caramel pie. But I didn't expect it to be like my grandmother's. And it was. And it is just—just a piece of the past, a piece of pie, a piece of the past.

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SS: Now am I correct in that most of your staff is—are women?

00:55:28

CB: Hmm?

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SS: Are most—is most of your staff women?

00:55:31

CB: Yes except for my husband. And yes; they're all women.

00:55:38

SS: And the theme of the Southern Foodways Alliance this year—every year we have a theme; the theme this year is Women and Work. Can you talk a little bit about being a—running your own business as a woman and especially as it relates to the food business? Is there anything you can tell me?

00:55:57

CB: Well I really—like I say, I didn't know what I was doing when I started. And it's hard work. What—what I do is really hard work. What the girls do is really hard work. Most of the people that I have hired to help me through the years did not know how to cook anything, you know really. A lot of them were right out of high school. They—but they learned; they learned how to do it and they learned what a good pie was, what a good crust tasted like. They—and a lot of times you know in a little mom and pop place you know they don't want to be a server for the rest of their lives. You know and it's just a place to—if they can start out and can get some skills on just dealing with people, dealing with customers, dealing with just the world is what it is and some of them are not real nice you know sometimes if things don't go their way. And they get a pretty good idea of what it's like to be in business. And they always say, "I'm glad you're the boss and I'm not."

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But they leave; they—some decide—"I think I'll go back to college," you know. And as far as the different things and from when I started the prices, you know the prices have gotten really—. And you hate to keep raising your prices, but you know I can't just feed people for nothing. **[Laughs]** So but they—they don't—they don't really seem to mind. I mean as long as they're getting good food they don't mind paying for it. So I don't—I don't really know what you want—what you're asking me I guess. But everything is pretty much the same except that I'm getting older and it's getting harder to do.

00:58:40

SS: So what do you see as the future for Charlotte's Eats and Treats?

00:58:45

CB: Oh I don't know. When I retire, I—one of my little girls here, “Oh I'm going—I'm going to take it over,” and of course my granddaughter, she's—she's off and about, so she—she is not really interested in the restaurant business. But you know I would love when I—when and if I retire, and I don't just die over there in the corner with an apron on, I would love for someone that really loves to make pies, that really likes this kind of business to have it, you know to have—to buy it or to do whatever to—to run it like, you know not like the big—the big restaurants in the—. Not—we're not that; we're just like I say—we're a family restaurant and I would like to know that it will continue like this. People like this.

01:00:00

SS: All right; is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you would like to add?

01:00:05

CB: I don't think so. I think you've been pretty thorough. [*Laughs*]

01:00:10

SS: All right; well thank you so much for sharing your stories about pies and food with us and helping us document the history of pies in the South and especially in Arkansas. Thank you so much for your time.

01:00:20

CB: Thank you. Oh I have rattled on.

01:00:26

[End Charlotte's]