

JOHNNY BALLAS
2nd Generation Owner / Cook
Crystal Grill – Greenwood, MS

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Date: July 18, 2003

Location: Mr. Ballas' residence, 617 Sumner – Greenwood, MS

Interviewer: Amy Evans

Length: 45 minutes

Format: Analog Cassette

Project: Greenwood Restaurants

[Begin Johnny Ballas Interview]

Amy Evans: Okay, it is Wednesday, June 18th, 2003. And I'm at the home of Mr. Johnny Ballas, son of Mike Ballas of the Crystal Grill and—if you wouldn't mind saying your whole name and your age for me, Mr. Ballas. For the record.

Johnny Ballas: My name is John Mike Ballas. I kind of go by the nickname Johnny. Known by "John." And I've been in the restaurant business since I was a child. And was more or less groomed to take over my dad's position at the Crystal Grill. And I graduated from college in seventy-four. I came back into the business and began my career in the restaurant business. Shortly thereafter, we had an opportunity to run another restaurant and we actually worked for, a doctor in town called Milton Person. Dr. Person owned the Holiday Inn and the Holiday Inn restaurant. And we called my sister and my brother-in-law, who were at the time in Florida, and they were working for some cousins of ours in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. And we approached them with this idea of—they were moving back to Greenwood and going into business with me in this Holiday Inn restaurant. So they moved back, and then in seventy-five we took over the Holiday Inn restaurant—out on Highway 82. Which is, of course, no longer there. And it was sold and then it was torn down. But we worked there for two years. And when our lease ran out, —basically the business was bought out by a family from Iowa. And they ceased to employ us, and my dad, out of the goodness of his heart, took us—took us back into the family business and basically bought my uncle, Jim Leolio, out and he retired to Memphis. And Yianni and Elaine and myself more or less came into the business then in

nineteen—oh, think it was about 1977. And we stayed there until they parted in—I'm having trouble remembering the exact date but it's sometime in the eighties—they decided to go out and do their own venture, and they opened the restaurant called Yianni's. And they continued to run it until about two years ago when they sold out, and they retired to Greece. I stayed at the Crystal with dad, and continue to run the Crystal Grill—as it is. And that's kinda *my* story on how—how I came to, you know—to stay at the Crystal and be in the business.

AE: The way your dad tells it, he sounds kinda supr—he sounds like he *was* kind of surprised that you wanted to work at the Crystal.

JB: I really kind of had made up my mind coming out of school that—I'd thought a while about what I really wanted to do, and I really enjoy the restaurant business and I really thought my dad wanted me to move in and take over for him, so. You know he wanted a successor and someone to leave the legacy to, and I think he was more or less disappointed that I don't have an heir to carry on the tradition. Because, unfortunately, I didn't have a son, I had a daughter. And my daughter is really not in any—any least interested in going into the restaurant business. I think she's—well, she's actually a pre-med major and she's hopefully going to med school sometime in the near future and is gonna make a career of that, so. This, the Crystal's history is in doubt as far as, well, how long the legacy will go on as far as when I'm—you know, when I retire out of it. It—whatever time I, you know, have had enough of the business then it'll be no more family to come along and continue the business. In the Ballas tradition, anyway. So I think

that's a little disheartening to my dad but, you know—I kinda talked to him about it one day, and I said well, dad you really *[laughs]*—it's not gonna matter because by the time I get out of it, you shouldn't—you will probably won't be around, so you're not *[laughs]*—you're not gonna know so—But I said I'll keep it, you know, I'll keep it around as long as long as I feel healthy enough to carry it on. But I enjoy it, and it's, you know, it's a real—it's a grind as far as the workload and the dealings with the employees. We employ over forty-something employees and if you ask anybody that is in any kind of business now, probably, that's the toughest situation is dealing with employees and trying to keep that part of your business where it's not a—it's not a headache to the point where it makes your life miserable and unfortunately, with the advent of the—when the casinos came in, I think they took a lot of the quality employees out of the mix because of the higher pay scale they were able to give them. And I feel like they got the cream of the crop to go over there because of that, and that left us with a—I would think a smaller pool of individuals—of quality individuals to put into our business. And that's probably been one of our biggest headaches over the last ten years. And I'm sure my sister [Elaine] would tell you, you know—if you interviewed her—that was one of her biggest problems. Employee relations were really, really tough. That's probably the least pleasurable part of the business. The people and the interaction and the cooking and the food and that end of the business is the pleasurable side of the business. But staffing and putting a contin—continuously good product out for the public is a tough part of the business, and it's time consuming and tedious and—it's got to be a labor of love—to be honest.

AE: Well, your dad was telling me a little bit about a couple of waitresses you've had there for— a few decades now.

JB: Yes.

AE: Frances and Rivers, I believe.

JB: Frances and Rivers Coleman, yeah.

[Counter: 76]

AE: Can you tell me a little bit about them?

JB: Rivers has probably been there longer than I have. Probably upwards of thirty years. And—I would say closer to forty than thirty. And she's actually been a fixture in the restaurant. And she's kinda like all of us in that she enjoys it and loves it. And I don't think she would do it—it's not strictly a financial thing for her now, at this point in her life as much as enjoying seeing the people and being out in the public, you know, and, graduating kids from toddler size to having their own families and seeing their kids and grandkids. So Rivers has been there long enough now to see a lot of passing of generations, so that's kind of a thing that I never expected—that I would be in business long enough to see people grow up and have their own families and bring their kids in and it's kind of neat to see that part of the business that you grow to know the families and know everybody that you deal with and serve over the years. It's a real enjoyable part to see that happen, you know. [Sniffs] I enjoy that a lot. I enjoy seeing, you know, and

talking to everybody and—you know, taking a special interest in their families and their growth and, you know, with what they're doing in their lives. And made a lot of friendships through the restaurant that have gone on for years and years. And it's, you know, it's kind of part of the community. It's kind of like the Crystal is more like a little social club because the people come in there and—dedicated customers—a lot of them have been in there all their lives, and it's, kind of neat to see that evolve over the years.

AE: And that speaks a little bit to what we were talking about before we started recording about—kind of an end of an era of these—

JB: Yeah.

AE: —family-owned restaurants. Can you speak to that a little bit?

JB: I really feel like the times have changed in, that restaurants have gone more specialty-type restaurants and chain oriented restaurants that I think a lot of the friendships and the camaraderie and the—and the closeness that family owned businesses have with their clientele is gonna be lost somewhat to the corporate side of the foodservice industry is what I would call it. It's—I don't see how they can have that closeness or the family touch that family restaurants brought in. I think, in a way, a lot of the Jackson [Mississippi] restaurants—there are a lot of Greek families in Jackson that have passed down over the years their—kind of running out of the younger generation coming up—a lot of that younger generation has moved on to other fields and not stayed in the

restaurant business, such as my daughter probably won't be in the restaurant business. And those restaurants, you know, I think will slowly, you know, change hands and I don't think it'll be the same as, you know, the original owners passing down to their relatives and their children.

AE: What is it, do you think, about Greenwood that makes it a place that has held on to these family restaurants? Or that the family restaurants have held on to Greenwood?

JB: I think Greenwood started with these restaurants that just had great—that really had great food. And Giardina's, and Lusco's and Crystal have been there since the early thirties. And the founders—my father and Mr. Giardina, and Miss Lusco, they were great cooks. And they were great at—they adapted well to the changing of the times and being able to add—you know, add new entrees and keep the menus fresh and that kind of thing has really evolved into the restaurants that we have now, I think. You know, in the old days, their menus were much more limited. The menus have broadened out. I know in—in our business we've tried to—since we're in a small market, we try to have a real diversity in our menu because we feel like our clientele is more or less in a small town. They want to have—see diversity in the menu. And that's what we try to give them with a family run business is something that chain—oriented restaurants are unable to do because they try to deal with a more limited menu that their staff can handle. The larger your menu, the more your work load, the bigger your staff has to be, and it creates problems for corporate-type restaurant settings that they can't deal with because it's too tedious. It takes too much time, too much dedication and too much labor and, you know, I

think those chain-type restaurants are all about, you know, how much—how much money they can make for the business. And you know I think, you know, the larger your menu the harder it is to make a lot of money, but the more you please your clientele with your diversity and your, you know, originality and being able to change your menu at will where, I don't think your chain restaurants, they come up with changes occasionally but they're very limited in what they can do. And I think that's something that we bring to the table that they're unable to. You know, that we can change on whatever whim we have and give people something different, something new.

AE: And you do have an enormous menu.

JB: Yes, it is. It's—it's vast. I think—

[Counter: 147]

AE: What would you say the most popular things on there are?

JB: Oh, wow. Over the years I've tried to really improve the quality of the food. We've always had good food but I think my dad and my uncle over the years tried to put something out—some kind of food out that was economically inexpensive enough for their clientele to be able to afford. I think since, our philosophy has changed a little bit in that we're trying to put the very best food out and—and if the price is a little higher than maybe some people are willing to pay, we feel like there's clientele out there that's willing to pay a little more for a finer meal or a finer cut of beef, or a little fresher fish, or—such as that. And we brought all that to the table in the last fifteen, twenty years. And

upgrading our menu to the point where we serve the finest cuts of steak and just a broad spectrum of seafood that I've had so many people from the coast tell me that we never see this kind of menu as far as seafoods and the freshness of the seafood that you serve is really not equaled on the coast because the places I've eat at—eaten in Florida and the coast are—well, they've got a very limited menu and very few selections and their preparation is not always what I deem of the highest caliber. But then again, they've got tourists and they're gonna get the masses in there. And they're gonna get the groups, you know, the big groups of people and irregardless [sic] if their food is great or just mediocre. But, of course, they've got a lot of competition down there, and I know that's tough, for one, so if a restaurant down there makes a name for itself, I think if they just keep their food at a moderate price and a decent level of quality, they'll always be, you know, filled to capacity. Here we kind of strive to try to build our clientele from—our clientele has been built over sixty years and many, many of 'em come here from forty, fifty miles. I know we draw people on the weekends that drive anywhere from thirty to fifty miles to come eat with us. That's partly the history of the restaurant and people learning, you know, that you have good food and they're willing to travel a long distance on the weekend as—more as an outing and a great, great meal. And that's kept our business at the rate it is now because basically Greenwood has not grown in the last ten years, and it's—our population has kinda stagnated. And if we didn't have that—that draw from our wider ranges of various—I don't think we would have been able to, you know, keep our business at the capacity that it is now. You know, we're one of the largest—probably one of the largest seating capacities in North Mississippi, I'm sure. We've got two hundred and fifty seats, and there's not many restaurants that seat that

many on a sit down serve basis. They might have that many in the banquet areas, but I don't think there are many places that accommodate over two hundred in a—just a normal seating atmosphere.

[Counter: 192]

AE: Do y'all host many special events?

JB: We do some catering and we do some small parties. But on the weekends our normal crowd is so large that we normally don't have room for large parties because of the seating accommodations don't allow us to put down many seats. But, this last little recession we began taking, some forty and fifty seat parties that normally we didn't ever take on the weekends but now, with a little slump in business, I started booking more and more events like that that we normally didn't take. And tryin' to keep our capacity full all the time.

AE: What's your earliest memory of the Crystal? Being there?

JB: My earliest memory was when I was probably about six or seven years old, my dad brought be back in the kitchen and at that time they—Cokes were bottled in wooden boxes. And he stacked two boxes of wooden crates of Co-Cola—Co-Cola cases on top of each other, and I stood on top of 'em and I had a little butcher knife, and he had me whackin' on some ground beef back there, which I thought I was really a big deal, you know. And that's kind of one of the earliest memories I had that my dad, you know, had

me back in the kitchen doin' something, you know. And I was just a little kid, you know. And I had to have the Coke cases to get up high enough to reach the table. But that's one of my earliest memories of being in business. And then, all through my high school and college career I basically worked every weekend. I would come home from college or when all my friends were out playing on the weekends in high school, I was—Friday and Saturday night I was at work helping in the family business, and kinda learning the ins and outs of the restaurant business. So that's when I say—I was kinda groomed to go into it. And enjoyed it, you know. Maybe not as much as a kid as I did later on when I got out of school. But as a kid, you'd look—much rather be playing with your buddies or going out with your girlfriends than down at the restaurant working 'til ten o'clock at night. So it made for late-night dates, unfortunately. But, I guess it—it gave me—my dad tried to give me a good sense of work ethic and what it would take to succeed in the restaurant business, you know. Hard work is you—is the only option. And he kind of drilled that in my head. If you want something, work for it, and you'll be able to get it. And I remember when I was in high school, I loved to fish. And I asked Dad, you know, I said, “Gosh,” you know. “I really need a boat.” And I said, “I just—I want to fish some tournaments.” And I said, “I really love to Bass fish, and I want to fish some tournaments.” Unfortunately, Dad didn't give me much groomin' into the outdoor world because he worked seven days a week and had little time to take me out. And so I kinda learned—picked it up from my friends and anyway, I asked him if I could have a boat, and he said, “Sure, you can have a boat.” He said, “Work, save you some money and buy you a boat.” *[Laughs]* So that's kinda what I did. I saved up for a couple of summers, and I bought my first Bass boat and—and have ever since. But that's—

AE: I've seen some of your trophies in the office in there [at the Crystal Grill].

JB: *[Laughs]* Yeah. That's kind of, you know I—they gave me a good sense of the value of a dollar and what I had to do to, you know, to achieve what I wanted and the goals I wanted in life. And it was a great lesson to me. Our kids now, I don't really think they have any idea what the value of a dollar and how it translates into what they spend, and I think all parents would probably say that now. Kids are just—it's all on handouts, and one day they're gonna have to go out and fend in the world. And *[laughs]* my daughter's gonna be one. She's gonna have a realization that, "Gee, I can't spend all—everything I've got." But, she's been a great—great kid and she's done well in her schoolwork, so I can't complain. But it's been fun. It's been a fun ride, you know. I kinda feel like I'm in the twilight of my career. I hope I don't have to work into my eighties like my dad.

Although my dad does it strictly for the love of it. But, he's never acquired the hobbies or a big group of friends, like I've got to enjoy the outdoors or anything else. His hobby is more or less the restaurant. And he's down there every day irregardless of whether he needs to be or not. He just enjoys coming down, and it's just, it's basically his hobby.

And my uncle before him was even worse of an—of a workaholic than my dad. He had no hobbies of any kind. In fact, I used to laugh. He had customers bring him wild game of some kinds, and he'd come out of the kitchen and hold 'em up and tell us, "Look what I killed today." Well, he'd be lyin'. *[laughs]* He'd never been hunting in his life. This old guy, "I killed it on my way to work this morning." I'd say, "Okay." But, he was very comical. And he loved to play jokes. He was a—April Fool's day was probably his

favorite day of the year, and he would always play jokes on the waitresses. And he was quite a personality. He really was. Dad was a little more low-key, and my uncle was more of a—of a jokester, and a—he was a little more high-strung too.

AE: *[Laughs]* Well, when the day comes that you think about deciding to retire, would you like to see Crystal sold, or would you rather just see it closed?

[Counter: 264]

JB: Ahhh. I would rather see someone either buy it, or I would rather probably lease it or rent it out to someone, you know. Kinda still take a small part in the business as far as PR-ing for the business or, you know, any capacity they would allow me to be around. But, unlike my dad, I'm looking forward to retirement and I bought a farm out in the Carroll County hills and, got lakes and gonna build a house out there in the next year or two and I wanna be able to go out there and just relax and be out in the woods and out in the fields and buy a little tractor and just do the kind of things that I've never had the pleasure of doing. But I enjoy the outdoors. The outdoors has always been precious to me, and that's probably the reason I'm still in Greenwood. 'Cause Greenwood's got a—just a great, great resource in its wildlife and fisheries are just tremendous and there's, you know, there's never been a lot to do here. So if you weren't interested in the outdoors, you were kinda lacking for things to do. You were, you know, when I was growing up you were either a ride around town and drink beer or you went out and fished and hunted, and we were in the fished and hunted group. And the rest of them were the wild ones that rode around and drank beer *[laughs]* and had a big party. So, that's kinda where I categorized our group growing up, when I was in school. But Greenwood's a

great town. It's got so many great people and it's got the small town atmosphere and everybody knows everybody, and everybody's concerned about, you know, anybody else's welfare. It's a great town to live in. I enjoy it. I wouldn't think of leaving. You know, it's not where I was born. I was actually born in Clarksdale before Dad moved to Greenwood, but I think I was two weeks old when they brought me here, so I feel like I was born and raised here.

AE: Well, do you have any other memories of—from the restaurant that stick out?

JB: Uhhhhmmm. You know, it's—after this long, it's kind of a blur. You, of course, you remember the transitions and the—when we added on and we enlarged. Of course, we enlarged several times and I kinda remember all the enlarging ventures and the changes that we went through when we enlarged. And the last—the last time we added a room was about the time my sister and brother-in-law left on their venture, and so it was a—that was a pretty tough time because our business was really booming at the time and I lost two people that were really, you know, a big part of the business. And I kinda had to pick it up and carry it on my back for a good while after that. And that was kinda tough. It was real, real stressful but I survived, and now I'm trying to groom a young guy that's been to culinary school, Robert Gillespie. He's a great kid. He's young—his early twenties and he worked with us a couple of summers ago and, uh, he's really interested in the restaurant business and wants to make that his life. And I really, I like him. He's got a great attitude, and I think he will do real—real well and, but—he's learning like I learned, you know. It's—a lot of things you pick up from the school of hard knocks. So, but he's

got—he’s got such a great attitude about it and that’s what you gotta have. You know, you gotta be able to overlook the bad parts of the business and look at the positives. That’s always kinda been my attitude. Try not to harp on the negatives and you try to straighten the negatives out, but dwell on the positives and the positive aspects of your business and the positive aspects of your employees and try not to dwell on the negatives and—we have the people that are a continuous problem to you. That’s been the hardest—hardest thing to do because, you know, deleting people that you’d really rather not delete, but the headaches they bring were not worth the effort of keepin’ ‘em on so. That’s probably one of the harder parts of the job is lettin’ people go. And, you know, I hate to ‘cause I feel like you want everyone to like you. And at some point you, you know, you have to stand up and—and go, “This person’s not right for our operation, and I have to let ‘em go.” And then you’re kinda cast as a villain then. *[Laughs]* Just—it’s a bad deal. You don’t wanna ever have to be in that position but it happens, and I’ve learned to deal with it more over the years than I used to. I used to hate to fire anybody. I kinda left that up to Dad. He was the hatchet man. *[Laughs]* But I’ve gotten better at being’ the hatchet man now. You do what you have to do.

AE: Well, what is a regular day in the life of Johnny Ballas at the restaurant these days?

JB: These days it’s up at seven in the morning, down at the restaurant at seven thirty. We go through preparations for lunch. I try to do the butchering and the steak cutting during the morning. And then, before you know it lunch is there. And you’re goin’ through lunch from basically ten thirty until one thirty to two o’clock sometimes. And then in the

afternoon, you have parties that night. You got more prep work to do. If you have a catering job, you've got even more prep work to do. Fortunately, I'm curbing my catering schedule down. That's—that used to be a real headache for us because we had enough regular in-house business, and the catering just added, you know, another two hundred—three hundred meals sometime in a day. That usually took a couple of days of prep work and then that day it was a full day. You'd start at seven thirty in the morning, and you'd get through at ten thirty at night. And it was really a grind and a long day, and it was a lot of runnin' and a lot of goin' and liftin' and probably why I've got a hernia now. But that's, you know I'm trying to slowly wean myself away from catering and just do the in-house thing. And I'm at that age now where I really don't need to be in it that hard—any more.

AE: Did I hear right that you make the yeast rolls?

JB: Yeah I don't personally make 'em. We—a friend of mine's mother was a home ec teacher and we hit her up for a roll recipe. And we started making her recipe years and years and years ago. And that's basically the recipe we still use.

AE: What was her name?

JB: Her name was Ruth Alice Smith. She was home ec teacher at Greenwood High, and her son was one of my best friends growing up. And that's where we came up on the roll recipe. A lot of recipes were acquired from different people [coughs]. A lot of them my

dad just—our spaghetti sauce recipe—he wrote off to Heinz Company, and they sent him a recipe for spaghetti sauce, and that’s still the recipe we use. He didn’t know how to make spaghetti sauce, so he said, “I’ll just write the Heinz Company, and surely they’ll send me a recipe.” And they did, and that’s what we do.

AE: Well, it did sound like your father is a businessman first and a cook later.

JB: Yeah.

[Counter: 371]

AE: *[Laughs]*

JB: Yeah.

AE: That’s a good addition to the story.

JB: I don’t know where he learned all the things that he, you know, but he taught me all the—taught me how to make gumbo. I don’t know where he learned to make gumbo so well, but it—but they made great gumbo and we basically kept that same recipe over all these years. And you know I’ve eaten on the coast. I’ve eaten in New Orleans, I’ve eaten all over Louisiana, and our gumbo is about as good as any I’ve ever had anywhere else so. He—he did a great thing when he came up with that—that gumbo recipe. It’s super.

AE: How ‘bout those pies y’all have?

JB: The pies started—probably started back when my uncle was there. And I have no idea who came up with the mile high pie as—as a lot of people call it. But I’ve seen very few with meringue that high. I think I’ve—I was in Texas once fishing and we stopped at a restaurant that had some coconut cream pie with real high meringue and it just kinda—it kinda stunned me, when I looked over and I saw it and I said, “Man, I’m back at the Crystal. This is amazing.” But I think—down in Destin there’s a—the H—I think the Harbor Docks has got a coconut pie with a tall meringue on it. So, uh, it’s around, but you’re not—don’t see very many places that still do that kinda thing.

AE: Well, I think I might just have one more question for you and that would be the sign out front? That—

JB: The sign out front?

AE: Uh-huh. When did y’all install that? And what was there before?

JB: You talkin’ about the neon sign or the—

AE: Yeah.

JB: The neon sign—

AE: The lighted sign.

JB: Dad came up with that years ago. We actually had—there's one that was hanging outside the Crystal back in the fifties and sixties. It was an old neon sign. In fact, we still got, Alan Hammonds did our menu artwork and it's—actually, he's got a copy of that old neon sign that said Crystal Grill. And it said “Never Sleep.” Because back in the early thirties, forties and fifties, the Crystal was open from four a.m. in the morning until midnight. They basically only closed four hours. And shift change was kind of a strange thing 'cause some of the employees stayed in overnight cleanin' up between midnight and four a.m., when they opened for breakfast. And I think one night my uncle— basically what my uncle did, I think he locked 'em in, and he would go home and take a break. And one night they caught a griddle on fire or something, and they broke the front windows out to get out. *[Laughs]* So it was kinda comical. But they did get the fire put out, and the place didn't burn down. But that's kind of the way—the old C&G tracks had a group of railroaders that use to come through there and eat at eleven or twelve o'clock at night. And they basically waited on them. I don't know how often they did that, but I still remember they would stop the train out front, and they would come in and eat late supper at ten thirty, eleven, eleven thirty at night. And of course they were open 'til midnight. And then my uncle would open back up for breakfast at four a.m. and Rivers— Rivers was there in those days, serving breakfast. She stayed for breakfast and lunch and—go home, take a break, and come back for supper so [coughs] she had some really long hours. But when Rivers finally decided she had had enough of breakfast, we kinda decided we had had enough of breakfast, so we got out of it. We used to be open seven

days a week, they finally started closing Mondays. Then they decided the weekday breakfast was not worth doin', so we started only doin' a weekend breakfast, and then finally—it was a hard decision, but we gave up weekend breakfast too. We just couldn't concentrate on lunch and dinner. And that was a—I guess it was kind of a sad time because it kinda ended an era—of the Crystal being open three meals a day. But, we had a lot of clientele at that time that were very upset that they had lost their sit-down breakfast place. And we hated to do it, but economically it was not really gettin' us anywhere—financially for sure. And it was really givin' us a lot more workload, and it was working our employees harder so we decided we'd just come in in the morning and cook lunch and we're done. So that's kind of the evolution of it and you know—I've thought at times about adding another day off.

AE: *[Laughs]*

JB: But *[laughs]* I don't know if we could afford it. I really hadn't ever been able to figure out what day it would be. Sunday would be the prime candidate, but right now Sundays is probably our third largest grossing day of the week, and economically it doesn't make sense. So, gonna continue—

AE: Kinda got yourself in a pickle there with that one.

JB: Yeah, it's kinda tough. I hate to do away with Sundays.

AE: I had Sunday supper there—Sunday dinner there a couple weeks ago, and it was packed.

JB: Yeah. We're—that's a big day. Normally, it's a big day. Sunday nights aren't always very busy, but occasionally they're pretty big too. 'Cause there's—it's kind of a captive audience on Sunday night. They're either eating fast food, or they're gonna eat with us. 'Cause there's no other restaurants open.

AE: Would you say generally your lunch crowd is better than your dinner crowd?

JB: Yes. In sheer numbers, yeah. Dollar-wise on the weekends, no. On the weekdays probably we gross more at lunch than we do at night. But on the weekends we gross more at night than any day, so. It's a big part of our business, and we put a lot into it. In our vegetable selection, and the—in the selection we come up with, and the speed of our service and being able to get people in and out and back to work. And we've worked hard to keep that. It's a big part of our business, and I'm sure that's still the backbone of the Crystal is having that great lunch.

AE: Well, on that note.

JB: Finishin' up?

AE: Anything else you'd like to add?

JB: No. It's been a great ride. I've enjoyed it. And I hope I'm kind of at the end of the tunnel when I can sit back and enjoy the fruits of the labor. You know, 'cause I've been—I've been full-time at it now since, really since seventy-four. There've been a lot of fourteen, fifteen hour days and, you know it's—you reflect back and you know, there's not much family time. You know, little girls grow up and go away. And that's kind of where I am now. You know, got a twenty-two year old daughter, and she's fixin' to be out of the house and I don't have a lot of memories of her because I spent twelve and fifteen hours a day at the Crystal.

AE: That's quite a career.

JB: It's is. It's been different. It's been different. A lot of sacrifices. So that's what I advise people that come to me and ask me about the restaurant business, and I say you have to have a dedication that I think not very many people have 'cause you almost have to be raised in it to be able to give that much of yourself. Otherwise, you know, I've seen too many people get in it and get out. Just, they didn't ever realize how much work is involved. And you talk to a lot of people that walk in and go, "Wow. Look man, you're really makin' a lot of money. Isn't this great." And I say, "You've only seen the tip of the iceberg." You know, they see the [unintelligible] and all these people walking in the door, and I say, "There's a reason they're all walkin' in the door." And I say it's all the hard work. And all the preparation and everything that goes into it that—that makes this happen. You know, and like most people really don't, unless they've been in the

business, don't realize what—what goes into the finished product. They only see what—what happens at the end, and the people that are in there and the food that comes out, and they go, “This is great.” Of course, a lot of people come in and go, “It's amazing how y'all serve this many people and this quality of food.” But, you know, it's again—that's the—the dedication and sacrifice that brought all that on. So. It's not for everybody but, like I said, I—that's why I say, I think the chains are taking over 'cause I think there's fewer and fewer people want to dedicate their lives to—to working. It's a tough, tough business.

AE: Well, the Ballases have certainly made their mark on Greenwood.

JB: I think so. I think, you know, Dad'll be remembered a long time as a hard-working guy that put out a great meal for a great price and, you know, I think the people of Greenwood owe him a great big thanks for all the years that he's dedicated himself to doing a great job. And that's kinda—I feel like I'm following in his footsteps and basically doing the same thing. And, it's been fun.

AE: Well, I appreciate your time, sir.

JB: Enjoyed it.

AE: Thank you.

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