

KAREN PINKSTON
4th Generation Owner/Cook
Lusco's Restaurant – Greenwood, MS

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Dates: June 12, 2003 and June 19, 2003
Location: Lusco's Restaurant, 722 Carrollton Ave, Greenwood, MS
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Length: 180 minutes
Format: Analog Cassette

Project: Greenwood Restaurants

[Recording opens with Karen Pinkston coughing]

Amy Evans: Okay. It is Thursday, June 12th, two thous—two thousand and three at about eleven o’clock in the morning, and I’m at Lusco’s with Karen Pinkston, interviewing her about the history of Lusco’s restaurant. And we’re sitting in the, grocery waiting area here on a little couch and lounge chairs, and I wonder, Mrs. Pinkston, if you could first tell us, if I may ask how old you are and how you’re related to the Lusco’s restaurant tradition.

Karen Pinkston: I am fifty years old, and I married Andy Pinkston, who is a fourth generation Lusco. And he and I took over Lusco’s. And we actually came into the restaurant business officially, on October first, nineteen seventy-six. We actually worked here a year or two before that, part-time—helping the older sisters, because at that point, they were getting on up in age, and they needed some younger blood and some younger assistance. But, we—we started working here full-time in nineteen seventy-six. We worked *with* his mother BeBe until nineteen eighty-one, and then in nineteen eighty-one she left and we took it over completely—just the two of us by ourselves. So, I’ve been here—twenty-seven years?

AE: And you run the place pretty much and cook in the kitchen?

KP: Andy and I, split jobs. He is in—he—he cooks, the steaks and all the fish and makes the gumbo and does the onion rings. And he does the things that his family did—that they

taught him to do. he does pretty much most of the food prep in the mornings himself. he inventories all the food, orders all the food. He shops around, looks for—for, things. Just like he's been on the phone trying to find pompano. So—and he's in charge of that aspect of it. I'm in charge of everything else. I think my—my jobs outweigh his, but, I handle all the employees. I do all the hiring and the firing and the training. I keep the books. I make the—all the salads, salad dressings, the pasta gravy, the pastas, the desserts, any kind of specials that we have. I'm in charge of all the advertising and the PR. I'm in charge of, what else? I guess that's pretty much it. I do everything else that he doesn't do.

AE: A lot, sounds like. *[Laughs]*

KP: It is a lot.

AE: Had you worked in a restaurant or anything before you came here? Before you all got married?

KP: Actually, when I was in high school, I had decided that I wanted to major in Home Ec. So, I took three years of Home Ec. Now, this was when they offered it in high school. Oh, they don't do that anymore, which I'm really sad they don't. But then, when I got to college, I found out that I had to take all those sciences, and I changed my mind and went into accounting, which was—I was good at accounting. I changed majors, BUT—Ogden High School—I worked at what used to be Malouf's Delicatessen—and, I worked at night. Before school during the day, and I worked part-time at night. And I actually, with

a friend of mine—the two of us actually invented some of the sandwiches that they now serve on their menu. And, it was really funny, the only reason we invented them was just because we were bored at night, and we would start putting stuff together. And Dewey Malouf had a liquor store next to the delicatessen, and he got tired of eating, you know, just plain ham and cheese and this and that, so we started making stuff up and sending it to him. And he’d say, “Oh, I like that.” You know. “Call that a Papa Malouf.” And so, that was how some of the sandwiches at Malouf’s came about was because we were just playing around and making sandwiches for him. And he liked them so much that he would say, “That’s my sandwich,” you know. So we’d name it Papa Malouf, and that was it. I did that while I was in high school, and I also worked, —my boyfriend’s family opened, a hamburger joint. I worked there for a little while and helped them. I really didn’t—I really wasn’t on the payroll. He was working there, and I just—in order to be with him, at the time, I would work with him, you know? So, I was—I was free help. Well, also—before that—many years ago, my aunt and uncle—I guess when I was about in junior high, my aunt and uncle opened a hamburger place. And she would cook, vegetables and have like a—like a blue plate special or something—a vegetable plate. And, they didn’t do that very long. They found out how hard the work was and they quit—quickly went on to something else. But I remember helping them with that. You know, just a little bit. So, I guess—you know—yeah, I guess I’ve been in and out, working around restaurants and working around food all my life. My grandmother was a real, real good cook. And, I regretted the fact that she died, and she never shared any of her recipes with me. And I have often craved some of the things that she made. She made everything from scratch. She had a garden in the backyard, she made—raised all her

vegetables, we would have to spend the summer, putting up green beans and peas and all kinds of vegetables, you know. She would fill the freezer. And, that was what I did in the summer was help her with her garden and help her put up vegetables growing up. And I just—never had an opportunity to learn her recipes. [Counter; 59] Like her homemade biscuits, and—and different things. She made homemade gravies, and—so when—when took over—when I married Andy and we got involved with Lusco's, I was fascinated with what wonderful cooks all three of those little old ladies were. I mean, they could—as old Doctor Lucas said, “They could cook a rat and make it taste good!” You know. Anything that lady touched was going to come out just melting in your mouth. And I thought, if nothing else, I want to learn their recipes. I—they—these recipes cannot go, you know, and be lost. Because at that point, nobody else really seemed to be interested in learning the recipes. Because the other kids were younger, and they weren't concerned with it. And, they told me—I thought this was funny—they told me that they wouldn't teach me any of the recipes until I had been married to Andy for five years.

AE: *[Laughing]*

KP: And so, I had been married to him for five years before they ever started teaching me any of the recipes. Because they wanted to make sure I wasn't going to leave and take their recipes with me.

AE: Sure.

KP: You know. So, anyway.

AE: Well, can we go far back into the Lusco's—

KP: [Coughing]

AE: —genealogy, and can you, tell us a little bit about the Lusco family and where they came from? I know you typed that out for me—

KP: Yeah.

AE: —earlier but.

KP: well, some of this has been a collection of, things that were—I—that Marie [Lusco] shared with me, and Mrs. Gory [second generation] shared with me before they died. And I talked with Jes, Andy's daddy, and I also spoke with Sam, Junior [third generation]. So, that's where that information came from. originally they were from Cefalu, Italy. in Sicily. And, they—I don't really know *why* they came to the United States. I've often wondered about that. I don't know if there was a famine in Italy or what. I don't know what was going on with the, with the economy of Italy. I'm sure there was a reason for so many Italians to migrate to the United States, but—uh, all of the children were born except Marie, and she was the only one that was born in the United States. And she was born in 1904. But, they came into Louisiana, and there's—there's a question there about where they settled. Marie always told me they lived in Jeanerette, Louisiana. But then,

Jes says that they lived in Franklin, Louisiana [Franklin (St. Mary Parish) is approximately sixteen miles Southeast of Jeanerette, Louisiana (Iberia Parish)] because there was a brother, Giovanni, who had a farm down there, so they came and worked with him and farmed. And, let’s see, there were two other brothers. It was Charles Lusco, then it was Frank Lusco, and Tony Lusco. And they lived in Louisiana for a while. — now, supposedly, Sam Junior—this was the oldest of the children—married a girl from Ar—married a girl from Vicksburg. what was her name? [Karen waits for me to look on the page of information she typed earlier that morning] Betty Sanson? I know it’s—

AE: Bessie Sansone?

KP: *Bessie* Sansone, that’s it. so he moved to Vicksburg. And then Uncle Frank came up here to work, with his son-in-law, Frank Marzulla, who was a banana man. And I have a picture back there on the wall of the banana men. The Italian banana men?

AE: Oh, great.

KP: I’ll have to show you that. and then, of course, Charles and Marie came up with their three daughters, and they opened a grocery store on the corner of Johnson and Main Street. And that was in 1921. Now, that building’s no longer there. It burned, and I’m not really certain when it burned. when they opened the grocery store, that’s when—it was during prohibition at that point, and that’s when Papa [Charles Lusco] started making homebrew. And, then Mama and the three daughters were—were cooking in the back. And actually, I always thought the booths began here, and I think they did. But a semblance of a booth began there, because they had a table in the back in a room by the kitchen, and I guess you could say that was the first booth? I’m not really sure. But that’s

where all the cotton men would come, and they would drink the homebrew and eat whatever Marie and them were cooking. And they would hang out there and play cards and play dominoes and, I know they hung out there a lot. And there was a real strong bond between them and all the cotton men.

[Counter: 104]

I learned that over the years because of all the cotton people that would come through here. And some of the older men who would say, “Oh, I remember Mrs. Gory. I used to visit them when they were down on so-and-so.” You know? And I used to think—I—at that point I didn’t really understand or know about the Johnson Street location. I had just learned about it a good bit in the last couple of years. Because, to me, Lusco’s began here in 1933, and I didn’t realize that they actually started what was called Lusco’s Grocery. And it was in 1921.

AE: Do you have any idea if that was one of the only groceries around at that time?

KP: I don’t think so. I mean, I think it may have been the only one that sold homebrew. And where all the people came and, hung out. I—I. I—I’m not certain. I know there were anot—another couple of grocery stores. Because there was one in—right here that they rented one out to this one. Odom Brothers was right here. But, because that was before they moved here. They started building this building in 1924, and, they rented it out for a while, until Mrs. Gory’s husband died. And then, when he died—well see, she lost her daughter first, Margaret. She had polio. And, I forgot how old she was. She was very young. And they said Mr. Gory just died from a broken heart. He never got over losing the child. And he died of a heart attack right after that. And so, here she was left with

three children to support. And the only thing she knew how to do was cook. You know, and she knew she did that well. So, she ended up—they moved to this location here because it was bigger. And added the other booths. And this was a grocery store out front. And right there where that door is [points to the door that separates the front room from the smaller booth dining area and the hall that leads to the kitchen], there was a screen door with a curtain over it. And Uncle Lee used to sit up here in a chair. Philip or either Papa or whoever was around at that time, and c—came in, you know. They only let certain people through that screen door. I guess mainly the cotton people, or the people that they knew, you know—that they wanted back there. I don’t know how that system worked. But, they had a grocery store out here. [Phone rings] And, of course, the locals would come in and buy groceries. But other people would come in and—and they would know the password [phone rings again] and they would let them in the back, and they would go back in the back and drink the homebrew. And then whatever Mrs. Gory and Mrs. Portera and Mrs. Correro were cooking—or Mama Lusco—that’s what they were eating. You know, they would be—might be cooking pasta or—their menu evolved, and—and the cotton people played a role in the evolution of the menu because a lot of these cotton factors traveled a lot, and they would bring things back and say, “Mrs. Gory, will you cook this and see how it—see how it turns out?” That’s how pompano came to Lusco’s, is Tony Gregory’s granddaddy—fact, Bob Gregory that works at Viking. His granddaddy. And I’m not sure which granddaddy it was, whichever one was a cotton factor. You—you can ask him that. He introduced the pompano to Mrs. Gory. He had had it in New Orleans, and he brought some back and had her cook ‘em. And, she just came up with that fish sauce recipe, and he ate one and told her it was the best thing he’d ever

had in his life. And he said, “That’s better than anything in New Orleans. You’ve got to start serving pompano.” And so, she found a connection, and she started serving pompano. same thing with the shrimp. I’m not sure which one introduced—well, they knew about shrimp because they had been in Louisiana. And see that’s— that’s why the sauces—our sauces—a lot of people say, “Your sauces have an—a Louisiana influence.” And they really do. And I think it’s because of them living in Louisiana first before they came up here. But, that—that’s how their menu evolved.

AE: Do you know much about the homebrew that, was made?

KP: No! I would love to find that recipe. You know, we have an old safe over there that was papa’s that’s never been opened.

AE: You’re kidding?

KP: Mm-mm. We have no idea what’s in it. And I keep telling Andy, I want to get it opened, because I want to see if Papa’s recipe for his homebrew is in there.

AE: I can’t imagine standing—not knowing what’s in there. *[Laughs]*

KP: Well, I want to do it, and he won’t let me do it. He’s telling me, “No, leave it alone.” I’m going, “I want to open it!” I’ve been dying for years to open that safe to see what’s in there. I know it’s not money. *[Laughs]* But—even if it was just the recipe for his homebrew, I’d love to find that. I—I’m not really even sure what homebrew is, except that I guess it’s like beer.

AE: Well, I was going to ask if it was a beer or maybe a wine homebrew?

KP: I think it must be more like a beer. I'm not sure because that was *way* before my time, and—and yours too. I mean, I know that, they refer to moonshine as moonshine, and I—that's more of a liquor.

AE: Mm-hmm.

KP: So I would assume that *homebrew* is more of a beer.

AE: Sounds like it.

KP: I'm not sure. I—I—I don't know. I'd like to know. I'd like to find the recipe. And I—I feel like it's—might be in that safe. I keep—

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: —thinking we're going to open it one of these days.

AE: You be sure to let me know if that opens any time soon!

KP: Well, I really—Well, I'll show it to you. It's really pretty. But it's real strange 'cause nobody—well, ever since we've been here. Since 1976—and this was when the older ladies were here—uh, they don't even know how to open it. When Papa died, he took the combination with him. So whatever year he died, that safe has not been opened since then.

AE: Huh. Well, it's kind of interesting *not* knowing. Kind of—

KP: Yeah—

AE: —keeps the mystery alive but—

KP: But I've got to know what was in there!

AE: —curious. Heck, yeah! so do you think that was kind of a little business strategy to have homebrew in the back of your grocery in Mississippi in—since this was a dry state for—decades.

KP: I don't know. I don't know how that came about. I don't even know where he learned to make that. Unless he—unless they made it in Italy. I mean, you know. And that was just something they grew up knowing how to make.

AE: Yeah.

KP: I mean I—you're right, it could be sort of like a wine too. However, I don't know if—where they would have gotten the grapes.

AE: Yeah.

KP: I don't know. I just don't have my information about that. I'd like to find out about it. I probably should sit down and go to the library and research it but, —

AE: *[Laughs]* 'Cause it's interesting that—along with the—the food that's so famous here is that that's kind of a cornerstone of the evolution of Lusco's is the homebrew—

KP: —homebrew.

AE: —and, you know, behind the curtain and all that.

KP: Mm-hmm.

AE: That would be interesting to research a little more, I guess.

KP: Yeah. And see what the—if you find out what the homebrew is, you let me know.

AE: *[Laughs]* Well, okay. *[Laughs]*

KP: Since I would like to know exactly what it is too. If it’s made with barley or hops or what—you know, how—how they do that. I know now people make homebrew all the time—brew their own beer all the time. But, you know, you would think that back then it would have been difficult. But I guess not. I guess they—they did everything their—themselves. I mean, if they weren’t able to get it. You know.

[Counter: 178]

AE: So let me ask you this: Since, the Lusco’s family is from Cefalu, Italy and the Giardina’s family is from Cefalu, Italy, do you know—what the relation is there. Or any?

KP: There *was* a relation, but I’m not sure what it was. I will tell you *[laughs]* this. That I do know that Mrs. Gory and Mrs. Portera and Mrs. Correro were very angry at the Giardina’s when they opened their restaurant on Park Avenue and put booths in it. Because they copied them. And they didn’t speak to them for several years.

AE: Really?

KP: Yes, I *do* know that. I remember them being very angry about that. They said, “They copied us!” And they were even *more* so angry because they copied their menu too—gradually. And I could—I mean, I—I can attest—I sat right here and here the—the whole discussion about the sisters about that. And they were very upset with them for doing that. And, of course, the only reason they did that was because Lusco’s was a very

popular place at that time, so that's why, when they opened up over there [the original grocery on Johnson] and—and—they went that route, you know. Was, because they wanted some of that business too. So—'cause the original Giardina's did not have the booths so, I know that they didn't speak for many years. They were mad. Mad at 'em.

AE: What do you think of the new Giardina's that's opened at the Alluvian Hotel?

KP: Do you really want me to tell that on this tape?

AE: Yeah.

KP: *[Laughs]* Well, it's just a continuation of what they always did. They copied Lusco's.

AE: Yeah.

KP: So.

AE: Well, it's interesting because the booth thing seems specific to Greenwood, and it's interesting to hear how it was originated with the Lusco's family and was copied and then now it's been—kind of reinvented at the new Giardina's because it's such a—a contemporary twist on an old Greenwood tradition.

KP: Well, I'm not certain—and I could be wrong—but I have been told by several people who have been there and who've described the floor plan, and I understand it's the same floor plan that I sat down with his [Fred Carl's] draftsman and designed for Lusco's. He may have changed a few things, but it's basically the very same floor plan that I worked on with his draftsman that would have been Lusco's had we been there. So—

AE: And why weren’t you there? Was there a moment when they were thinking about having Lusco’s?

KP: Yeah. We had discussed, for almost a year and a half, we worked—I guess we started working—I don’t remember. It’d be like two years. when he first was going to buy the hotel, he approached Andy and me about moving Lusco’s in the Deloach’s part of the building. And I had told him—because we had been, approached by him several times before—about different things, and none of them ever came into fruition. And I told him this last time when he approached us, that—as I did when he approached us about the building now where the [Viking Range Corporation] training center is? When he was looking at buying that the first time, he came to the kitchen and said, “I’m thinking about buying that building, would y’all be interested in putting Lusco’s there?” And my response was, “Only if I can live there.” You know. Because I live *here* [at the restaurant]. **[Laughs]** You know, practically. And my goal was: if I’m going to move Lusco’s, I want to live upstairs above it. And, —Will you check my flan for me? [To Andy, who walked in the front room and was standing behind the hostess counter].

Andy Pinkston: Okay.

KP: All right. But I want to live upstairs above it, and so it would simplify my lifestyle. You know. Because it’s just really difficult, having a home and having a house and a yard, and trying to keep it up and keep the business up too. And so, that was our goal. If we ever moved Lusco’s we wanted to have it all under the same roof. We wanted to live upstairs, and we wanted to have the restaurant downstairs. And it would eliminate the headache of the yard and the house and everything. So, when he came to us and

approached us about moving into the, Deloach's building, I—I told him, I said the only way I'll move is if we can live upstairs. And at that point, there was discussion of having condominiums—in the hotel. Having a certain part of it hotel rooms, and then having a certain part of it for condos. And, he said that—that would be possible. And I—he said that—because we are going to have some condominiums. And I said, well that sounds great. I said, we'll consider it, you know. Andy and I both discussed it, and we said well, that would be great. You know. We could live upstairs. And I mean, I even spent months working with Todd, his draftsman, on designing my condo. I had to design it three times. I had designed it one time on one level, and then we came back and they said no—Are they ready? [To Andy about the flan in the oven.]

AP: I guess they are. They're starting to bubble—

KP: All right. Cut 'em off and take 'em out. Uh-huh, they're ready. Okay. And so, I had to design it the second time and split on two levels. They were going to have to add it on to the back above the kitchen. And, that's because they needed as much space in the hotel to get the rooms in. And then, as time went on, he came back and informed us that we would not have a condominium. We couldn't live there. They were going to need all the space for rooms. And, at that point, you know the question arose about us moving Lusco's, and we would not have been able to own the building. We would have had to lease it from them. And, I don't know. E-everything changed. [Pause] Over a period of time. And it seemed as though every time he came to us again, the plan changed. And, I won't go into any more details at this point, since Viking's paying for this.

[Counter: 248]

AE: *[Laughs]* Well, wh—what—I’m just amazed that you would consider leaving this building that Lusco’s has been in for seventy-five [seventy] years.

KP: As I said, the only way I would leave is if I could live upstairs.

AE: Right...?

KP: I would like to get my life simplified. I would like to be able to go upstairs and I—you—I mean unless you’ve been in the restaurant business, you just don’t understand. I wouldn’t have a problem separating the two because, when I go home, I try real hard to—I have an office at my house. My sunroom. When I go *into* my office, I’m at Lusco’s. When I go *out* of my office, I’m *not* at Lusco’s. You know. I can cut it on and cut it off.

AE: Mm-hmm.

KP: And I do. And I could do that he—if I lived there too. Just cut it on and cut it off. Now, Andy’s not quite as easily a-able to do that. He, he tends to do it twenty-four hours a day, and the only way he can get away from it is just to leave it and go out in the country and get away from it, you know. He’s just a little different person than I am. But, that would be the only reason I would leave at this point, was if I could live above it.

AE: What do you think your long-term customers would have thought about that?

KP: [Short pause] I think that my customers—and I have been told this *by* my customers—they would have gone where we would have gone. Most of the people—they love Lusco’s for what it is now, but seventy-five percent of Lusco’s is the food. And—if maybe not more—and—and then us, you know. And they all have, been very verbal over

the period of time, and they had all told us, you know, “We’ll go wherever you go.”

And, I mean, that was the general synopsis is that we had to be there. You know, I would like to get out of the business at some point in time, but I’m not going to just turn it over to someone who has had no experience, and be there for a couple of months and then walk out the door. Because I’ve given twenty-seven years of my life to this. And I wanted to have the opportunity to work for like two years, or—or three years—whatever—and teach these people everything that we know that we learned from his family, so that everything would be done right. You know. And, Andy and I both are sticklers as far as perfection on doing it. I mean, like if I’m— have people that I’m training in the kitchen, you know—uh, to garnish. If they don’t garnish it the way I want it garnished, I’m going “Uh-uh! We’re doing it *my* way. This is the way it’s going to be done!” You know. Every plate that comes out of this kitchen needs to look nice, you know. So I mean, I want it—I have certain expectations, and so does he. And I’m not just gonna to sit and turn it over to somebody and be there for a few months and walk out the door. It means too much to me. It’s been my life-blood. It’s been his family’s life-blood. You’re talking about seventy years. You know, so if it’s going to be turned over to somebody, I want it to be turned over to somebody who’s gonna do it right and do it justice and keep it up. ‘Cause Andy and I both know we can’t do this forever. And right now, all of our children say they don’t want to do this. However, I will say that, with all that’s transpired in the last couple of months, it has tended to bring a great deal more emotions out in my children, regarding Lusco’s than I ever anticipated. So, you know—you know how everything you think might be bad in your life, sometimes some good comes from it? So my children have realized what Lusco’s means to them. *All* of them. And, it’s been real interesting.

Because before that I always thought, you know—“Lusco’s was nothing,” you know. “Oh, I hate Lusco’s blah, blah, blah.” “All it did was take you away from us” and “We never got to see y’all” and “You never got to come to my football games.” It was always what was wrong with our lifestyle at Lusco’s, but then all of a sudden, when you start seeing things from a different perspective, and you start thinking about losing it, and then you start thinking about somebody threatening it, you know. Then—“I can’t believe that!” “I’m very upset” or “This means a lot to me.” And I’m sitting here going, “Okay, this is interesting. I haven’t heard this. This is a different response from y’all.” You know, so it’s been, it’s been positive in the fact that my children have risen to the occasion. And it’s surprised me.

AE: That’s great. I’m sure more people—I mean, your children and more people all over—can’t imagine Greenwood without Lusco’s so—

KP: Well, I don’t know. It won’t be here forever. Unless somebody intends to come in and—and figure out what they’re gonna do with it. I’d really like for someone to do something with it because I feel like there’s potential there for some—a future for it. It’s just that right now Andy and I are doing what we can o—the only thing we *can* do, you know. And I don’t know, maybe it will be one of my children, maybe it won’t. You know, but I do hope that in some way in—in the future, that maybe it will continue. I’d like to see it continue. ‘Cause I hate the thought that—Well, I’ll get emotional if we start talking about this.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: Because, you know—I mean, I know that what may come—that if one of us dies
[Karen starts to get choked up and stops speaking. The recording is stopped for a few
minutes while she composes herself. Sound of recorder being moved in background.]

[Counter: 313]

[Recording begins again with Karen apologizing for getting emotional.]

KP: —I just get emotional.

AE: I understand. Because this place is like a museum. I mean, as it stands now
because— which is part of my amazement when you were talking about maybe moving
it—that just looking around here, it's just *filled* with history. I mean, just every little thing
in here. It's really incredible.

KP: Well, and it's really got some valuable old—old pieces in here. Every time collectors
come in, they offer me money. *[Laughs]*

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: “Can I by that?”—for so many *thousands* of dollars! And I said no, just give me your
card. ‘Cause if something happens to one of us and we die, I’m gonna have to auction
everything off, and I’ll cal you and you can come back! *[Laughs]* And I say, “I’m gonna
remember what you offered me for that!”

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: But, —it's really funny ‘cause like, people are always wanting to buy the Falstaff
men, or the Co-Cola clock, or the box in the back or memorabilia in that case over there,

you know. And, they love it. They always—it—I mean, ever—every body that's ever offered me anything, it's always been with a—three zeros behind it—

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: —and I just am tempted to take it sometimes! *[Laughs]*

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: So.

AE: Are some of these things—like I know the—the counter and the stools, original to the grocery part, I would imagine. Uh—

KP: Yeah, they are. I don't know, —where they got that from. it was not there when it was a grocery store. They added that—when they closed—actually closed up the original grocery store. I've got a picture. I tell you what—hold on. [Karen gets up and walks to the main dining room.]

AE: Okay. [I follow her.]

KP: Let's find that picture. I'll tell—I—have a picture somewhere—that shows you—I don't know if it's back here. it shows you what it looked like originally. [Karen's voice trails away from the recorder. Sound of door into dining room being unlocked and creaking open.] And I don't remember that counter being in there. Let's see. [We're both walking into the dining room.] All right. Here we go! Now this is the picture of the banana men I was telling you about. [Karen points to an old black and white photograph of about five cars lined up next to the railroad tracks, filled with bananas and men

standing next to each car. Looks like it's from the thirties.] The Italian banana men. They would go to the railroad tracks and meet the train coming in with all the bananas.

AE: Uh-hmm.

KP: And then load 'em up and take 'em out and sell 'em. All right, now this [Karen points to another black and white photograph hanging on the wall in the dining room] was over there by the jukebox—that was a dance floor.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: And they used to have the piano and an old jukebox over there, and people would dance—sometimes all night long. *[Laughs]* now this was the original way it looked. See, that—

AE: I see.

KP: —that was a *wooden* counter, right there. And then they had, other stuff over here. And then this is the showcase that's right there. [Karen points back into the front room.] That was the original showcase that's right there. That's the original refrigerator—the box that's in the back [still describing what is in the old photograph]—right now.

AE: Uh-uh.

KP: We still have that. We still have the fan [that's in the photograph]. And then those are the old signs. Most everything that's in that picture, except the—I don't know why they took the—that out. That is so beautiful. The carpentry?

AE: Uh-huh, those cases?

KP: Of those cases. It looks like it was, much prettier than what's out there right now. I don't know why they added that other.

AE: Hmm. And so when do you think— [you can hear a ceiling fan turning slowly in the background] they stopped using the stools at the bar?

KP: I don't really think they ever used 'em. I think they just put that out there—to have seating for people that were waiting.

AE: Waiting.

KP: Or people that—they always—they've always had a television up front.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: In fact, we had—when we took over Lusco's, we had one of the very first color TVs *ever* up front. People would walk in and go—

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: “Where did you get that TV?!” And it still worked. it worked for a very, very long time. I don't even remember what kind it was. Andy would. [We both are walking back into the front room. Karen closes the door to the dining room behind us.] Because people would, —were appalled that it was still working. it was here for so long. And, a lot of people would come out front to watch games.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And they'd be back there eating, and there's be a game on TV and they'd come up front and hang out, and people would sit on those stools and watch games. I don't know why they put that there. Unless it was just for that very reason. [Karen is walking in front of me, back to the chairs we were sitting in front of the TV]. Or people coming out to watch games or whatever.

AE: Huh.

KP: Or see something on television. that's always—I mean, people were shocked when we finally got, [we both sit back down] a more modern television.

AE: Uh-huh. It's a nice one. And what about this phone—

KP: [Coughs]

AE: —this phone booth right here?

KP: Well, that phone booth came from an old department store in Greenwood. In fact, the building is for sale right now. It's on the corner—of, Market Street and—What's the street that comes along by the [Viking Range Corporation] training center?

AE: Main?

KP: No, Main—Is it Main? No, Main's the street over. It's the next street.

AE: Between Main and Howard?

KP: Yeah.

AE: I don't know what that street is.

KP: Well, there—it’s right there on the corner. The name of the department store, I believe, was Nelm & Blumenthal?

AE: Okay, yeah. I’ve seen that building.

KP: Yeah. Up at the top? [The building still has the name of the department store, Klein & Blumenthal, in cement at the top, and it’s on the northeast corner of Market and Main Streets. The building’s last occupant was an auto parts store and now sits empty—for sale or rent.] And that phone booth was up there. Alan Wood and Dick Meek and, Alec Malouf had purchased that building.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And, that phone booth was upstairs on the second floor—of that building. And when we started having so much business and people tying up the business phone and—it really became a problem ‘cause I started taking credit cards, and it was the same line and people would get over there on the phone. I couldn’t run a credit card transaction so—I said we really needed that phone booth. I said but, you know, we just can’t put a *modern* phone booth in there. We’ve got to get an old phone booth. So they were out here one night, and I said, “Do y’all have an old phone booth in any of your old buildings?”

Because they had also bought the old Midway Hotel. And back then, in the Midway Hotel they had phone booths that looked like the old [phone rings] wooden phone booths like where [phone rings again] Superman used to change, you know? And that was really what I wanted. And, [phone rings] they said, “Oh, yeah!” They said, “We have a [phone rings] phone booth.” They said, “You’re gonna love it. It’s a *real old* phone booth.

Wooden. It’s unlike any you’ve ever seen before.” And I said, “well, it’s not—it’s not the

folding door kind?” And they said, “No, no, it’s better than that.” And they said, “We’ll get it together for you, and tell Andy to come pick it up.” So, Andy went to pick it up. **[Laughs]** And he brought it in, and I looked at it—you know, all apart—and I’m goin’ “That’s a phone booth?” And he said, “Yeah, isn’t that strange lookin’?” And I said, “It really is. I mean, I’ve never seen anything like that before.” It was really a much earlier version of a phone booth, than I asked for and even expected. [Long beeping noise in the background] But, we put it together and we were appalled. I mean, it—it has a really beautiful doorknob. But—someone stole the doorknob. It fell off and they stole it. So then they returned it. So we—we can’t get it to stay on, [phone rings] so we just have it put up cause we didn’t want anyone else to walk off with it. ‘Cause it’s very, very ornate [phone rings]—ornately done. And [phone rings] they had a big dinner out here. And they said—now that modern phone booth [actual payphone] just does not look right [phone rings]. I said I know, but we have no choice. **[Laughs]** It’s the only phone booth—phone that we could get to put in there. But they had a real big dinner out here on night, and they had that plaque made up. [There’s a small brass plaque attached to the top of the payphone booth door] And so, we had a, a screwing of the plaque dinner. And—and that was the night that, they all came out to eat. We had a little ceremony up front.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And they put the plaque on and—

AE: **[Laughing]**

KP: And they promised me that, if we ever, you know, decided that we didn’t want it anymore that—to please give it back to ‘em. And I said, don’t worry. I will. But, now, you know, they’re getting ready to discontinue payphones. Did you know that?

AE: No, I did not.

KP: Bell South is putting—you know, because the cellular phones—

AE: Oh, yeah.

KP: —made the payphone almost obsolete. So, we received a letter not too long ago, telling us that they would be coming by to take our payphone out. And Andy’s going, you know, “What are we going to do?” I said, “We’re gonna leave it right there. And if somebody—

[Counter: 413]

AE: *[Laughing]*

KP: —wants to go in and talk on their cell phone—

AE: On their cell phone!

KP: —they can go on in there. ‘Cause it’s real quiet. And of course all the kids love to go in and close the door and hide and play. But I said, it’s been there so long, we can’t take it out. It’s just become a part of Lusco’s.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: So. That’s where the phone booth came from.

AE: *[Laughs]* It's great. . Well, can we go back for a second and talk about, a little more of the history of the restaurant, and maybe some custom—long-time customers or employees—Some stories there?

KP: You want to talk about the waiters?

AE: Yeah.

KP: See when—we took over Lusco's, I did not realize for many years that most of the waiters that were here—those old black men? I never saw them really write anything down. And I always wondered, you know, why are they not writing the orders down? They did it most by memory. They were illiterate. They didn't know *how* to read and write. And they were able to go into—especially Richard—He was able to go into that main dining room and there would be twenty people there. And you would have had to see him do this to believe it, because the first time I saw him, I was appalled. He would take that whole order, and he would come to the kitchen, and I would sit down with a pen and a pad, and he would go through seat one, seat two, seat three, seat four—he would give me every order. Exactly as they ordered it. Never had it written down. And I just looked at him and said, “Are you sure this is right?”, you know. And he said, “Yes, ma'am.”

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: You know, “I'm positive.” And so I would consolidate the order where they could cook it and get it together, and I was just always waiting to see if there was a mistake. Never made a mistake. And I couldn't believe it. Well then when we took over in 1981, I

started doing the tip slips and stuff and having them fill out their tip sheets and—and I would h—give ‘am to ‘em to sign? And it would have an “X” on it. And I realized, they can’t read—or write. And that’s why they able—they’ve been able to memorize so. Richard was better than Dan—at mem—And Dan had his own version of writing. he could write his name where you could read it. But if you ever looked at any little pieces of paper where he may have taken notes on a—on a large party? You couldn’t have figured out what it was. Because he had his own little system of writing. And it was—it was very scribbly, but he knew what each sign represented, you know. He had his own system. So he really never wrote. Now as far as Howard was concerned, and Ned—Ned was one of the first ones. He was the one that was probably the most famous. He worked here—Well no, not Ned. Booker. Excuse me, Booker was the one that was the most famous. Booker was here, and everybody loved Booker. however Booker made one very big mistake. When they started the, marches back in the—I guess it was the sixties? When they started doing all the marches for, Martin Luther King and several—? Booker was in one of the marches downtown, and a television crew—I forgot the news—it was a—I think it was the news station that was like ABC—it was a pretty big one. focused on him. And supposedly, he said some things in reference to the fact that he was black and that, he was—he served white people. And—I don’t know what, exactly, was said but I *know* that whatever was said, they paid him to say it.

AE: Really?

KP: Because he came back later—that afternoon he came to work. And it had not been on the news yet. And, he had told somebody that eh was afraid he did something that he shouldn’t have done—that day. But that he got paid for it. And he said what they told him

to say. So, the next day it came out on the news. [Hear plate clanking in kitchen]. Well—the phone started ringing off the wall. *All* of the customers were calling out here and telling Marie [Lusco] and Mrs. Gory, “We *never* want Booker to wait on us again. Never.” And at that point when Booker came in, he heard the phone and he heard the calls. And he just turned around and he told them he was sorry, and he just walked out the door and left. And, he was very close to my husband. D—Andy was a little boy at the time, and he and Booker were best friends. But Booker ended up going over here on, — maybe on McLaurin, I’m not sure—uh, and opening up a little dive called Booker’s Place. And he stayed there for the rest of his life. That’s what he did. When he died—well, when he was real, real sick—he called and asked for Andy to come to the hospital and come and see him. And so Andy went up there and visited with him—about three times before he died. And, he told Andy he was leaving everything he had to him. Which was really not that much. It was a savings account at—at the old Bank of Greenwood, which is Trustmark now. But he ended up leaving that to Andy when he died.

AE: Wow.

KP: So, he never really—he realized that he hurt those people very badly. And it *did* hurt them. It—it—I remember Mrs. Gory, Mrs. Correro how they just cried when he walked out the door, you know, that it broke their heart that he would get on TV and say something like that because he—pretty much waited on the whole place. And, he made a ton of money. *[Laughs]* I mean, he really did. He had a lot of white friends too. And it hurt the—the—he hurt all of his friends—feelings, you know. That he would say that about them. Because they didn’t—I don’t think they—they felt that way about him. At

all. 'Cause had a real outgoing—an outstanding personality, I understand. I never knew him. But he was the first one. He was the most famous one.

AE: How long had he worked here before that happened? Do you have an idea?

KP: I don't know. I can ask Andy that. he-he had—he was really the first one. He and Ned. Ned is the man that's in that picture right there. [Karen points to a framed 8x10 picture hanging on one of the shelves behind the old bar in the front room. It's a picture of Ned in his waiter uniform, standing in the front room of Lusco's.]

AE: The black and white picture?

KP: Yeah, the black and white. I don't really know anything about him except that eh was gay. *[Laughs]*

AE: Really?

KP: And that was before people acknowledged that they were gay. And I do know that Dan, the one above there [a color 8x10 of Dan in his waiter uniform, standing in the front room of Lusco's] that came later with Richard—

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: —uh, people would always call him Ned *[Laughs]*

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And he would get so mad. *[Laughing]* He got very upset when people would call him Ned. He'd say [Karen feigns a deep voice], “They called me Ned.” And I'd say,

“Well, what’s wrong with that Dan?” And he’d say [feigns deep voice again] “He likes—he like the men. I like the women.” *[Laughs]*

AE: *[Laughing]*

KP: He used to get real upset about that. he’d get angry when people referred to him as Ned. So—some people would come in and say “Is Ned here?” And I’d say, “No, *Dan* is here.”

AE: *[Laughing]*

KP: I thought, please don’t call him Ned! *[Laughs]* because he gets his feelings hurt. But, Richard and Dan and—Howard were the next ones. There were three of them after Booker. And, Ned. Now Howard was a character. He was not here that long after I came—I guess about three years—and then his health—he—he was very old, and he was in bad health even when I came. Howard would show up every day and always come out here in the morning ‘cause he wanted to help Andy fill the drink box—with beer. We thought he was just great, you know. He is such a nice helper! He comes out here to help in the morning to straighten up the beer box and do all that. And, then as time went on, we realized that the reason he did that was because he was drinking the beer every morning! *[Laughing]*

[Counter: 527]

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: And then, he always had certain customers that he always waited on. He would look at the reservation book, and if he saw that they were coming, then he would go by the cemetery and pick some fresh flowers off the graves of people that had *[Laughs]* just died! And bring flowers and put 'em in bud vases on the table. I didn't realize that that's what he was doing, but he would come in here with flowers, and I would say, "Oh, Howard!" you know. "You went and bought those flowers for your customers? That was so nice." And he had me believing that *forever*. And then, finally, Dan told me. He says "Miss Karen. He did *not* buy those flowers. He goes by the cemetery and picks them off the graves and brings them here." And I'm going "Oh! That's not nice!"

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: "He shouldn't be doing that!" And so I told him, I said "Howard, don't do that anymore, please. That bothers me." I said, "I just don't think that's appropriate," you know. And, "Well my customers like it. They tip me good," you know?

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: And I—and I said, "Well, I don't care. I just don't think that's appropriate. I would prefer you not to do that." I said, you know "I've got some artificial flowers back there, and if you want to get those and put 'em in a bud vase, that's fine, but I just don't think you should be taking the flowers off people's graves in the cemetery."

AE: *[Laughing]*

KP: I mean these were *fresh* flowers. So I mean, that was somebody that just died. I just didn't think that was appropriate. But he did that. And, I mean I—I was educated at

Lusco’s. Those guys educated me because I didn’t know there were people like them in the world. They enlightened me every day of my life with things—and stories that I just, - I had lived, I guess, a sheltered life, so I didn’t know about the ways of the world and Lusco’s and those waiters taught me about *[laughs]* the ways of the world. I just didn’t know there were people like that. Dan—his wife was the cook for the Billups family, who were a very prominent family here. She was a wonderful cook. she would make rolls for me at Christmas and do different things at Christmas to help me out—for my family at Christmas dinner. But, Dan was sort of like, the aristocratic black at Lusco’s. He had probably more money than anybody that worked here. And he *made* a lot of money. And even in—in his own—old age he worked here, until just right almost before he died. I saw him, I just saw—I saw him go down. And I thought it was his age. And I didn’t know u—until one day he was late. The first time he had ever been late He worked here almost forty years, and he had never been late. And I had been here at the point, a—probably about I—I—what? I don’t even know—what? Fifteen years or so? And he had never been late. And this particular day, he didn’t come in—on time. And I knew something was wrong. So I called his house and his wife said, “He’s comin’ Miss Karen. He’s really sick.” And so he walked through the door, and I looked at him, and I said, “Dan, you are *really* ill.” I said, “you go home, and you go to bed.” I said, “I knew when you weren’t here, something was wrong.” And, at that point I had already started hiring other younger help because he could only handle, a couple of tables of two. And he didn’t necessarily do that real well. But he was in his seventies so, I mean, it was—past the time of waiting tables. I mean, he should have been retired. I couldn’t tell him, “Don’t come in.” That, “I don’t need you.” Because he was part of this place, and people *wanted* to see

him. You know. Even if he didn't wait on 'em, people wanted to see Dan. And he would sit right there on that stool [points to one of the stools at the end of the old counter in the front room] and, he would make more money sitting on that stool than everybody that was waiting tables. They would get so mad. Because at the end of the night Dan would be counting a wad of money and they'd been running their tails off, busting their butts waiting tables. And they wouldn't make nearly as much—

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: —because everybody tipped Dan, you know. He wa—he just—he couldn't wait on very many tables, and they knew that. But just his presence. The fact that he was here. But anyway, he left that day. Well, I went to see him the next day, and he couldn't even get out of the bed. He looked *terrible*. And I was so worried about him, so I called, —I said, “Who is your doctor, Dan.” Because they didn't have any children, and so we had been kind of like their family. So I went over there and, he couldn't get out of the bed. And I said, “Who is your doctor?” And he said, “Doctor Webb.” So I called Doctor Webb, and said he needs to see you right away. I said, “Can I bring him up there?” And Dan was very proud. He said, “Oh no, Miss Karen. I'll take myself up there.” And I said, “I don't think you can do that, Dan.” He said, “Yes ma'am, I can.” So he made himself get out of the bed and go up there. Well, later on I called to Doctor Webb to find out about him, and he had put him in the hospital—in intensive care. And, I had to help take care of his wife, Mary Alice —take her food and stuff, 'cause she was also in bad health, and Dan had been taking care of *her*. So with him in the hospital he had—she—she had no one to take care of her. But, come to find out, he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer a year before. And the doctor had given him six months—when he was diagnosed

with it. He had begged him to take chemo because he said that it would help him with the—

AE: [Coughs]

KP: —um, the pain—at the end. And, he refused because he was very superstitious. He didn't like doctors, and he didn't like hospitals, and he didn't want to be there when he was there—there that time. But, I convinced him that he needed to be there, and that they were going to build him up and make him better. And that when he got better he could go home. And he—he was adamant about that he wanted to go home and die. So that's basically what they did. They built him up and, gave him lots of vitamins and liquids and he was very dehydrated and he literally went home to die. And he died shortly thereafter, but—he was diagnosed with it a year before, and they had given him six months. So he—and he was still *working* here.

AE: Huh.

KP: Can you imagine that? It—I don't remember the age, but it seems to me he was seventy-four or seventy-six? You know, and I couldn't tell him not to come in, so I kept him on. But, it was very, very sad when he died. He had a lot of friends. And there were a lot of white people at his funeral. 'Cause Dan was—

AE: I imagine so.

KP: Dan was very well respected by—all races. He was never—he was never one who displayed any kind of prejudice towards white people or black people. I mean, he was, he

was a different kind of man. I wish I could find somebody like him right now. *[Laughs]* I really do. He was very special.

AE: Mm-hmm.

KP: And Richard was an alcoholic. He died before Dan did. He drank himself to death. So, he's the one, though, that had the wonderful memory—that could go into a booth. But he also talked to himself a lot too. He would stand back there at that door [door that leads to booths and back to the kitchen] and mumble all the time. And I would think—I'd pass by and I'd say, "Richard, did you say something to me?" "No, ma'am. No, ma'am. No, ma'am." You know. And he'd just be talking to himself all the time. And, a lot of times he'd get mad, and I could hear him cussin'—under his breath, you know? And I'd be going, "Richard! Don't be talking like that. Customers walk by, they might think you're cussin' them." "Oh, no ma'am. No, ma'am. No, ma'am. I'm—I'm just talking to myself. Just talking to myself." But he would talk to himself and cuss under his breath. And, you could hear him! You know, I'd have to get onto him about that.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: So.

AE: Some characters in through here, huh?

KP: There *were* some characters. Very much so. And, I mean, I could go on. There are tons of stories about all of 'em. Howard's teeth jumped out one night and landed in my hand and—

AE: *[Laughs]*

[Counter: 663]

KP: Just all kinds of things. and we had another one: Joe Martin. He was here briefly. He was a much younger one. But he was an alcoholic also. We had to let him go. He was really—he got very, very bad. And, —R.C. was the last one. And he was not an alcoholic. *[Laughs]* Surprisingly so. he worked at Baldwin [piano company], and then he worked here at night. And he worked here until just a couple of years ago. He had to quit because he was injured on the job at Baldwin—he hurt his shoulder—and he had to have surgery. And unfortunately, even after the surgery and the rehabilitation, he was still not able to lift his arm very high. So he couldn’t pick up plates or platters or anything like that. And, I felt very badly for him because he had worked at Baldwin for like twenty-something years and was getting ready to retire when they closed and shut down and declared bankruptcy. And he had always thought that when he quit working at Baldwin and retired from there, that he could wait tables at Lusco’s. And unfortunately, because of the injury he couldn’t do that either. So he ended up, he went in with several other employees from Baldwin, and they filed a lawsuit to get their retirement. They didn’t get all of it, but he did get some of it. But, he’s still around, but he’s just not able—he bartends a little bit in different circles, but that’s about all he’s able to do.

AE: What’s his last name?

KP: R.C. Robinson.

AE: R.C. Robinson. all that conversation makes me want to ask a question, which I think is really three questions. And that is, how did the Lusco's start with waiters and waitresses—or just waiters, I guess. And why waiters, and why so many black me and how and when did that trail off? 'Cause I know you have a bunch of young art—creative, artistic waiters right now.

KP: Uh.

AE: And you have a female waiter.

KP: Actually, I think that it originated when they—when they moved here to this location, and as long as they were on this side of the building [before they expanded into the building next door], I don't really think they had waiters. Because I think they cooked right back there, and they had these three booths and they kind of waited on the family. 'Cause there was—all the family was here. All the three sisters, Mama, Papa and GiGi and BeBe were even here—and Moosy. So I think that they kind of all pitched in and did that themselves. But then, when they added this other side—when the man that had the pharmacy closed up, and they decided to put the doors in and make that side booths, I think that's probably when they first hired waiters. And, of course, they hired black waiters because that was probably all they could have—all they could have found at that point. I mean that's what the [pause]. Back then, I mean, I imagine that was what the workforce, consisted of. And—I don't know why they chose men. Except I *do* know that, uh—[Andy walks into the front room from the kitchen and stands at the hostess counter]. Andy, do you know if Booker had ever waited tables before he came here?

[Pause] [Andy's answer is unintelligible]

KP: [To Andy] Do you know how long he was here before that happened with him on the television station and he—left?

Andy Pinkston: Uh [pause]. I don't—I know he was—I know he was here when I was born [in 1950]. .

KP: And how old were you when that happened?

AP: I think it was nineteen sixty—sixty-two? Sixty-three?

KP: How old would you have been?

AP: I was—thirteen? Fourteen?

KP: All right, so he [Booker Wright] was here from the time Andy was born until Andy was about thirteen years. So, he was here about thirteen years.

AP: It'd been longer than that.

KP: Oh, it was longer than—

AP: Sure.

KP: Oh, really?

AP: I don't know how long ago—I don't know when he started—

KP: Now Dan used to work at the old place—what was—what was the name of that [first name?] Malouf had?

AP: Rising Sun Club.

KP: Rising Sun Club. You know, there used to be clubs back then. And, Dan—Dan had worked—and I think Richard may have worked at the Rising Sun Club too. And I don't know if that's when that closed up and they came to Lusco's? I don't know how that evolved or how that happened. But, the reason that I ended up having to go from the old black me to the other was because I had such a problem trying to find wait staff. I really tried to find black guys to be the waiters. And you heard me mention Joe Martin. He was an alcoholic. I had Dwayne Young that I brought in here. I tried to train him. He was a cokehead. He had a problem with cocaine. I caught him in the bathroom. S-snortin'. I had another guy I brought in, tried to train. He was a thief. I just had such horrible experiences with the younger ones, trying to, —I wanted them to be like Dan and Richard and all of the other ones, but they weren't. They had been raised in a different generation. They didn't like saying yes ma'am and no ma'am to the people that they waited on—because their skin was white—the majority of 'em. They had a problem with that. They changed—You can go ahead. You don't have to wait on me [to Andy, who walked into the front room again, ready to go home]. I'll—I'll be home in a little while.

AP: [Says something about the alarm]

KP: I'll put the burglar alarm on.

AP: Thank you.

KP: Uh—but, [noise of Andy leaving in the background] I really did try—to find 'em. And every time one would come in, I would give him a chance. And, I just had such—I had several others. Let's see, Roy Curry, Johnny Meeks—I just—like—I just didn't have good experiences with them at all. They just, —they weren't—they weren't from the

same era that Dan and Richard were from. I realized at that point, Okay. I’m a businessperson here. Who said I always have to have a black man. You know, that’s *me* doing this to myself. The main thing I’ve got to have is a wait staff. So I’ve got to put aside *my* prejudices and the fact that I want a black man—and open my eyes to the fact that I’m gonna have to accept white people, whether they be women or men, you know.

[Counter: 789]

And I was real, uncertain about doing that because I didn’t know how people would receive it. And the first white person to ever wait tables at Lusco’s was Patrick Malouf. He’s now an attorney in Jackson [Mississippi]. And it was real funny because, he was very—he was in—in school at, in New Orleans at Lay—is it Loyola?

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: I believe that’s where he was in school. Might be—I might be wrong. But he was in college, and he had been working at the Olive Garden down there. And he had been training and he—he just happened to be here [phone rings] eating with Pat and Alec [?] one night and looked at me and says, “Look, Karen.” He says, “I’m going to be home during Christmas.” A he said,” I ha—[phone rings] I have training as a waiter. He says, “If you get in a bind and you need some help, please call me.” He says, “Because otherwise, my Dad’s gonna make me be [phone rings] loading and unloading furniture at Malouf’s [furniture store].”

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: And I said, "Okay." And he said, "And I really don't want to do that." I said, "Okay. [Phone rings] I'll call you." And it just so happened that this was during Christmas, and, Joe Martin came—

[End of side one]

[Counter: 812]

[BEGIN SIDE TWO]

[Opens with laughter]

KP: But anyway [Karen rubs her hands together]—I had only two waiters and a packed house. And I'm sitting here thinking, Oh, my God. What am I going to do? I sent Joe home 'cause he was just [beep of answering machine in the background] too drunk to wait on the tables. And I said, "I'm gonna call Patrick." So I picked up the phone—this was like at—about five forty-five to six o'clock—and I called and I said, "Patrick! What are you doing?" And he said, "Oh, I'm just sitting down getting ready to eat dinner." I said, "Well, I need to see if you could come work for me. I need some help." "Well, when do you want me?" I said, "Tonight!" And he said, "Tonight?" And I said, "Yeah!" He said, "Like when?" I said, "Like as soon as you can get here! I'm in an emergency situation here!" And, he said, "Well can I eat supper first?" I said, "Yeah, eat supper and come on." I said, "I'll—I'll—I'll change some things around." So I went around and I—I did the booths where I figured out—I used psychology. I had a lot of women parties coming out here—secretaries and stuff. So I went around and every booth that had women in it—all women in it—I gave those to Patrick. And then all the other business

people that was accustomed to Richard and Dan, I gave them them. All right, so Patrick comes running in the door and, I had been getting beverages for people that came in—the girls and stuff. And, he was *real* good lookin'. And he said, "Karen, I don't even know what you have." You know. "I don't know the menu." I said, "Look Patrick. As cute as you are? All you gotta do is walk in there." And I said, "When they see you, they're gonna be in such shock that they're not gonna care what we have to eat." I said, "You just go with the flow." I said, "Just tell 'em that you're here helping me in an emergency situation." And I said, "Just give 'em the menu, and if you have nay questions, come ask me." Well, the first booth was number four and I thought, I've just *got* to see their expression when he walks in that booth. So I gave him a tie, and him it and he—he walked in the booth and all those women were sitting around there. See, they were planning on an old black man comin' in and waitin' on them. And, he opened that curtain and stepped in, and I'm sittin' outside goin'—the look on their faces was worth a million dollars [siren goes by outside]. And their faces [siren gets louder] went—their eyes opened up, smiles came across their faces, and at that point I realized, this'll work. You know, having white guys and white girls—this is going to be okay, you know. But, they loved him. I mean, he was *so* cute, and it was like the whole night—just, you know—transformed into something completely different from what they were expecting. And, he came out, and I had given him four tables of all women. And at the end of the night—and he did great. I mean, he just didn't know the menu. But I worked with him through that. at the end of the night he came back and he said, "Man! This is great!" He said, "I made more money waitin' on four tables here than I made workin' at the Olive Garden for a week!" And I said, "Well Patrick." I said, "A little bit of that had to do with the fact that

you were so cute and you waited on all women, you know. So I knew then—I thought this is going to be okay. So he worked during Christmas and helped me. And he was the first—actually the first white person to wait tables here. I tease him about that all the time.

AE: *[Laughing]*

KP: Now that he is a rich lawyer in Jackson.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: But, he really was and it—it wa—it—it—it made me feel—I—I came to the conclusion at that point that it was going to be okay if I changed and—and had to hire white people, you know. 'Cause I had been uncertain about it at that point, and I got to the point where I realized, I just want someone that knows what they're doing, and that they're honest and they're hard-working and that they want to be here. That became a—a goal instead of the color of their skin or their sex. So. He kind of opened the door for me at that time—at that point.

AE: And your servers you have now? How long have they been here?

KP: Chad's been here about five years. Nicki's been here about a year and a half. Kim's been here about a year and a half. Sabrina has only been here a year, and she's leaving in August 'cause she's going to Mississippi State. She's gonna be a veterinarian. who else is there? Drew [Karen and Andy's son], of course, has been here all of his life. He started working here when he was about tw—eleven to twelve years old. And he opened oysters and bussed tables with Dan. He helped Dan, when Dan couldn't do a lot of that stuff.

And then I gave him to Dan when he was thirteen years old and told Dan—I said, “Dan, make him a waiter.” So Dan trained Drew to be a waiter. So Drew—to this day—I watch Drew, and I see things that he does that are exactly the way Dan did ‘em. He still has the napkin in the back pocket like Dan always had. He always said, “Keep a napkin in your back pocket, and keep a napkin in your apron cause you never know, you know. You might need ‘em.” And, he al—he has things like that that I watch, and I realize he’s doing that just like Dan taught him. and I always told him, I said, you know, “You really learn how to wait tables, because waiting tables teaches you how to deal with people and interact with the public.” I said, “It teaches you to be organized, it teaches you about timing.” I said, “It will help you in everything you do for the rest of your life.” I said, “plus, when you’re in college, if you’re at Ole Miss or wherever, you can always get a job waitin’ tables at a restaurant there, you know, to make extra spending money.” I said, “It’s just a—a good job to know how to do,” you know. And so that was why I made him learn how to wait tables. And he—he waited tables during Christmas when he was in high school and some on the weekends when he was in high school. Of course, he played football. He had the normal life. You know, he went out and did this—so he didn’t work all the time. Then, when he was in college, he decided that he didn’t want to wait tables anymore. That he wanted to do something different. So, when he when he went to Ole Miss, he worked at the marijuana facility—

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: —for two years. And he loved it. It was a real experience, and he enjoyed it a lot. But then after that, you know—I think they only allow you to work there for so many years, and then they don’t let you stay after that. And he had worked his two years, and it

was time for him to move on. And I said, you know, “Are you gonna get a job in Oxford?” And he said, “Well, actually I figure I can come home every other weekend and wait tables on the weekend and make enough money to, you know, to do me for the next two weeks—to, you know, spending money—blowing money. So that’s what he did. He came home every other weekend and waited tables here. And then he would have his weekends that he would party in Oxford and play with all the rest of the kids, so he did that while he was in college.

[Counter: 66]

AE: And he’s here now full-time?

KP: He is here, but not necessarily full-time. He is here right now part-time—‘cause it’s the summer. He’s also helping his grandfather’s, —has a pool business, so he’s helping Jes also build swimming pools. He’s doing some work with him. But now, when the pool business is not good, during Christmas and the fall and all that, and when my business *is* good, he’s here full-time. So he really, is not certain what he wants to do. He has two businesses that—he can go either way. He can either take over his granddaddy’s pool business, or he can take over Lusco’s. And, at this point, he’s not certain which one he wants to do. And I’m not puttin’ any pressure on him. I’m just gonna give him the freedom to decide what he wants to do. And, that’s why I’m lettin’ him just do his thing part-time with Jes and see how he likes that. And then, he’ll be here when I need him when I’m real, real busy. ‘Cause that’s—that’s when I *do* need him here. All the time.

AE: Yeah.

KP: And see, he did that internship for Viking with, uh—at KC's [restaurant in Cleveland, MS]. He did that for, let's see—he started, when he graduated in May. I think it was in May—No, he went to summer school at Ole Miss and took hotel and restaurant management. He did that for summer school. Then he started working at KC's from August until May. April? No, April. Then he went to Memphis to help Wally open Wally Joe's [a restaurant] in May. And he stayed there from May until October. And that was when he jus—he did not like Memphis, at all. He's a Delta boy, what can you say. Like I told somebody: You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy. He likes to hunt. He likes to fish. He likes to do all those things. Memphis just was not his cup of tea. Plus, he was working sixty hours a week. He really had no life. he was exhausted on Sundays. So—so tired on Sundays that he never came home to see us. If we wanted to see him, we had to drive to Memphis. And a lot of times, we were exhausted too, so we didn't want to drive to Memphis to see him so—we really didn't see much of him. he was having a real hard time. The cost of living was a lot more in Memphis than it, had—would have been here. And, even though it looked like he was making good money, he was having a real hard time making ends meet with his rent and all—all that. I was really having to put money in his account for him to eat. he had no food—money for groceries, so I was still having to pay for his food. And, he just finally called one day, and he had wanted to quit earlier, and that was when we were still in the process of negotiating with Mr. Carl about—about Lusco's moving. And I told him, I said, "I would prefer you not quit at this point." I said, "I would wait for you to—like for you to wait and, and stay there and just—let's se how this all unfolds." I said, "And then you can make a decision as to what you want to do when this ends, whichever way it

goes.” And when it all came to an end, right after that he wanted to quit, and I said, “No, you can’t come home yet. I’m sorry, you’re gonna have to stay there a little bit longer.” And, finally, he just called me one day and he says, “Look, I’m comin’ home whether you like it or not.” And he says, “I’d like you to give me a job and if you won’t, I’ll find another one,” you know. And I said, “Well.” I said, “I guess I don’t have a choice, do I?” I said, “Okay, come on home.” I said, “I’ll give you a job.” So he came home, and I gave him a job. And I will have to say that I was glad he was here because we had just gotten that system. And I had a lot of kinks I hadn’t figured out about it.

AE: The computer system?

KP: The computer. And, he knew all about it. So when we were having emergencies, and I was in the kitchen—really busy—couldn’t come up and deal with it, he was here to help the wait staff with them ‘cause he knew ho to do it pretty much. So it was nice having him here. Plus, he took care of some situations out front, you know, that needed handling. With the hostess, like, got moving and transferring booths and this and that. So I realized right then this sure is nice having Drew here. It takes the pressure off of me. Because I have to manage the kitchen and manage the front and manage the restaurant *and* cook. And there are times during the holidays when I feel like I am going to just explode, you know. What next! And it’s nice just going, “Drew! Handle that!” You know. *[Laughs]* But—and he would handle it. So I really liked having him here. And I really hope he stays. But I don’t know that he will. That’s his choice.

[Counter: 112]

AE: Are y’all open every night?

KP: Tuesday through Saturday.

AE: Just for dinner?

KP: Uh-hum, just for dinner. We used to be open on Sunday nights many years ago. We've always been closed on Monday. But I don't know. I had a real problem with that—on Sunday nights? For several reasons. First of all, I just did not believe that it was right to work on Sun—the Sabbath. That's my conviction, as far as my religious faith. And also I had a problem because of my children. I didn't—I wasn't seeing them at all. And it was re-I mean, Tuesday through Saturday work was the bulk of our business anyway. We had just a few people that always came out on Sunday nights, and they had always been the Sunday night crowd. I mean, you know. And—and that crowd was diminishing because a lot of them were getting older and in bad health. Some of them were dying off. I realized—I said, you know, we could be at home with our children on Sunday nights. We could have dinner Sunday and Monday night. That would give us two nights with our kids. And so, we just decided to close on Sunday nights when we took over, and I have never regretted that. Because we always made Sundays the day with our—our children. they played soccer, we did the—we went to church, we went to—did the soccer thing, we had dinner at night, you know, we went—would go to the movies. We always made Sunday the time that we would spend with them. You know. Or we'd take them to Memphis to go shopping. whenever we needed that—that was our day to do—because Mondays they're in school and, you can't really spend any time with them on Monday except after school—or in the summer. So Sundays just turned out to be the better day to be with our kids. That's why we elected—to be closed on Sunday.

AE: Makes sense. can you talk a little bit about how the neighborhood here has changed?

KP: Well.

AE: On Carrollton [Street].

KP: It hasn't changed that much since I've been here. Most of these buildings have been dilapidated and vacant since I've been here. now in it it's day—earlier, you know—there used to be some businesses. Right next door was where McCaleb furniture that's out here, originally started. then there was—after they left—this other man, Mr. Young had a furniture store there. Of course, the Josephs have always been on the corner down there. That little bitty, building on the end, where they have the lounge and stuff like that. They've been there forever. next door to them and in the—the vacant lots up there there used to be, a Reverend Childs, and he had a furniture store—No, no, no. He didn't have a furniture store. . [Pause] I cannot remember the name of the people that had the furniture store. There used to be a furniture store there too. Used to be furniture stores along here. and across the street—I don't really know what was across the street before. Mr. And Mrs. Carlisle—that building sat vacant for quite a while, and then Mr. and Mrs. Carlisle bought that property over there, and they put *their* furniture store down there at that end. And then they opened the nursery here, and I was delighted to have the, Oh, I know! Mr. and Mrs. Taylor had something down there—upholstery shop. So it's been lots of different things over the years. All these buildings on this side right here, [pause] need to—what's left needs to come down, except for this other one right next door. The church purchased that, and they renovated it. We bought, what used to be the old furniture company building and bought it. Tore it down. And then, there are two buildings still left

down there that, we're discussing buying. We talked to them but, nothing's been finalized. So. And we hope that eventually—maybe—we can buy those and tear those down and put a parking lot. 'Cause we already own one of the lots down there. And if we bought those other two buildings and tore them down, we would have enough to have a— a fairly nice parking lot. So, the property across the street's for sale also right now but, I'm not sure that we're interested in that because of the price.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: We'll just have to wait and see what unfolds with that.

[Counter: 157]

AE: 'Cause I know that now, you know, this once was a real ethnic neighborhood, with the Lusco's here—an Italian family and all that. And now it's kind of a rough part of town. And was—is that a bullet hole that's out in your front window that's taped up?

KP: No. That's where a rock was hit.

AE: Oh, okay.

KP: It's really *not* rough out here—

AE: Yeah.

KP: —now. Obviously—now it used to be. For a while there, it was.

AE: Yeah.

KP: But now, unfortunately, most of the gang issues—which that seems to be the biggest problem that's going on as far as that—in Greenwood—is over off of Main over there in what they call the railroad area. it's about five blocks down from the [Alluvian] hotel, actually. It's the—over there like, you know, where you go under that railroad trestle?

AE: Yeah, uh-huh.

KP: To the right. That's where a gang hangs out—over there in that area. And then to the left of there. And that—the problems stem between this gang and that gang. And that trestle thing is sort of a—the line right there.

AE: Right.

KP: And, those are—those—that—that, . Those are the two gangs that seem to have some conflict. And then a lot of the other stems from out there, unfortunately, by Greenwood High School. Over in what used to be on Washington Street. But then that all runs into that side of Main—over there.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: So most of the danger is out there, actually. Which is why I really don't direct my people in through Main Street right now. I usually send them around the bypass and bring them—

AE: Huh.

KP: — down Carrollton when I give them directions. Just because, there have been things that have happened over there in that neighborhood that, I felt uneasy with. And I

wouldn't want my customers coming through there. But I—I know lately, nothing's been going on with them. Most of what's been going on, has either been kept quiet, and I don't know about it, or it's going on somewhere else. But with me having—my kitchen help keeps me informed.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: They tell me, you know, what happened last night and what happened this past weekend, and—and they tell me things that you never see in the paper. So, basically, we've really not had any problems out here. At all. if there's any crime that occurs over here in this area of town, it's black on black crime. It's very, very rarely black on white. The black on white crime occurs at Wal-Mart, and in places like that. So, I don't feel threatened in any way. And really don't think my customers—a lot of my customers feel threatened anymore because they realize that we—I have—of course, I have a security guard. I have that for piece of mind for them, so they see him and know that he's there. And we *did* need one at—at—for a while there. But, I don't know. It's just—it's not—it's not been a problem. I'd better knock on wood 'cause that could change [Karen leans over and knocks her left hand against the wooden china cabinet along the wall] at any given moment but, we haven't had a problem—in a while. Of course, anywhere you go—and I mean, I've been on Park Avenue and had a drunk come in at a convenience store. You know. And I mean, I have—occasionally I'll have one walk in here, and I just turn him around and redirect him out the door, you know.

AE: Yeah.

KP: So that's just kind of commonplace. I don't think—I don't think there's anywhere in Greenwood at this point that is immune to any of that.

AE: Any city.

KP: Right! I mean, you know, I've had people that, —well, just like Andy for instance. His truck parked in front of my house. It got the—the window knocked out and his raincoat stolen out of it. And I'm going, this is crazy. This is over here in front of—sittin' right in front of my house. And, —that—I mean, it happens up in north Greenwood all the time. People have their cars broken into in their carport and—I mean, so it's just like you said. There's just nowhere—

AE: Yeah.

KP: I mean that's perfectly safe anymore. So I don't—I don't really feel threatened sown here—at all. Most of the people, that walk by here are very nice. I walk out the door and, they'll say, "Hello Miss Lusco." And I'll say, "Hey, how are you?" And they don't know that my name is not Miss Lusco.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: They just know that I'm the lady at Lusco's, so they call me that. And a lot of times I'll pull up, and I'll have a lot of stuff that I'm unloading, and I've been really surprised because people will stop and say, "Could I help you with that?" So, you know, there are some very nice people over here too. a lot of people—these people get a bad rap but, you know, they're—they're not all bad.

AE: Yeah. Do you have many black customers who come in? Locals?

[Counter: 206]

KP: Yeah. We do. We do. we used to have more—from Valley [Mississippi Valley State University] when Doctor Boyer was there. He was one of our real good customers. when he was the president of—of Valley, he brought all of his professors and all of his guests over here quite a bit. I don't know. I think some blacks feel uncomfortable coming here because in the past we had black wait staff, and they saw that as a sign of the times or whatever. And maybe there's a history with that. But I really try not to show any prejudice. I mean, I graduated from Greenwood High School when it was integrated. Some of my friends turned out to be, some of the—the black people in the community right now, you know. I tried to raise my children, even though they went to Pillow [Academy], which was really not my choice—they went to Bankston, which was a public school for elementary school—and then they went to Pillow later on. I mean I—I've tried to always, remind them that we're all equal in the eyes of God. And I—I hope that they, —and I think they do—I think they respect people regardless of their race. You know, I don't think I've ever heard any of my children say anything demeaning or ugly about somebody because of the color of their skin. I can't say that about my husband but—you know, I—I don't think I've ever heard my children say anything.

AE: Yeah.

KP: Now that I think about it I don't—I don't think so.

AE: And the restaurant business is a unique business in that way. You have such an interaction with the community—

KP: Uh-hmm.

AE: —that you kind of—

KP: And I really wish that, you know—I do wish I that had some more black customers. Because I know that there are some people that can afford to come here that, —that would come here if maybe they didn't h—if it didn't have that, —

AE: History?

KP: Right.

AE: Yeah.

KP: And I think that's why they don't come. And I—and I regret that. I hate that. Because I think they find it very different. I have a couple from Grenada that come over. And, to eat with me quite often. And they're really good customers. And they're very nice people, and we love to see them walk in the door. We used to have some from Itta Bena that weren't associated with the university [Mississippi Valley State]. I'm trying to remember. We just don't have a lot.

AE: Yeah.

KP: I think they've always thought that this was a white person's place. And it's really not, you know. It's just like anywhere else now. I mean it's open to every race, creed or color. So.

AE: And food's food.

KP: Food's food! That's right!

AE: Everybody's gotta eat.

KP: And money's green!

AE: Uh-huh! *[Laughing]*

KP: So, you know, I have no problem at all.

AE: Well, do you have maybe a few minutes to walk around and maybe talk about some of the stuff—

KP: Yeah.

AE: —in the restaurant?

KP: That'd be fine.

AE: Okay.

[Both get up from their seats to take a walking tour of the restaurant]

KP: I didn't realize it was that long. I'm just glad Andy didn't—got my flan out so I didn't burn 'em.

AE: *[Laughs]*

[Counter: 238]

KP: Uh, of course, this was the first side. Now, I will tell you, the first two booths are right here. [We're standing in that back of the front room at the door that leads to some of the booths and on back to the kitchen]

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: Number one and number two. And—and, uh—number four, excuse me. This—these started. This booth right here was here. But you know, oddly enough, when they moved here, Marie and her husband, Phillip, didn't have anywhere to live.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: They lived in this room. This was—

AE: In booth three? *[Laughing]*

KP: In booth three was their—their bedroom.

AE: Oh my goodness! *[Laughing]*

KP: And Marie used to tell us—and this was the kitchen right here. The original kitchen was right here [the closeted door next to booth three].

AE: Okay. What's back there now?

KP: Right here? this is a junk room.

AE: Okay.

KP: it's awful. It's Andy's junk room. But, and that was not added on at that point [Karen motions to the kitchen at the back end of the building].

AE: Okay.

KP: But, they said that Phillip used to go out back and take his showers with a water hose.

AE: *[Laughing]* Wow.

KP: So that was, —originally, that was how they lived when they first moved down here. 'Cause they had just gotten married, and they didn't have anywhere else to live and—and Mrs. Gory had bought a house and, that's when Mama and Papa—you know, they all lived *together*.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: Practically. And, uh—and except Marie and Phillip and so they lived in number three.

AE: My goodness. And I have to ask you about all these stuffed and mounted animals around.

KP: Those are Andy's. [Walking back towards the kitchen area]

AE: Okay.

KP: My husband. [Sound of Karen unlocking the interior door that goes from the hall just outside of the kitchen, where the wait station is, into the back of the second dining room.]

He—he is an—he used to be an avid outdoorsman. He loved it all, just like Drew does.
That's where Drew, got his love of hunting.

AE: Uh-huh.

[Both standing just on the other side of the door to the second dining room.]

KP: He used to hunt every season, everything. And I mean, like I said before, the only reason he'd ever get away from Lusco's was to get in the woods.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And he would just go to the woods at, and just walk around and just—now he goes and plants trees and tries to, —My son-in-law has some acreage out in Carroll County, and Andy goes out there and works on his land and he's planting trees and, uh—uh, doing food plots for all the animals. He's got feeders out there for deer and, turkey. It's real funny, he doesn't hunt as much as he used to. He's gotten older, and he's found out he can't work all night and get up in the morning and then hunt all morning and work all night. He can't do that.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: But he's gotten into turkey season. That's his big season now, and that's because our business is slow during that time of the year.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And he's found that he can turkey hunt. So he's an avid turkey hunter. But—Drew, loves to hunt, but then again, Drew loves to take photographs of wildlife too.

AE: Really.

KP: And so he, a lot of times he'll just take his camera, and Andy will take his gun and—

AE: Huh.

KP: —they'll go out to the woods and—if it's a season, Andy might shoot something, and then it may not. He might just let it sit there and let Drew photograph it. So—that's—I mean, it's just—it's just gettin' away, I think, that they enjoy. You know. And bein' out in nature.

AE: Sure. Sure.

KP: So, that's where all that came from. He—he was on this kick where he had to, stuff everything.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: Now, *that* deer? [The stuffed deer that hangs high above the door to the kitchen.]

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: We don't know where that deer came from except that we think Uncle Lee killed that deer, and it had to have been killed back in the twenties—or thirties, or something like that. And, as you can see, that's dust [hanging off of the stuffed deer head]. *[Laughs]*
That's not fur.

AE: *[Laughs]* Hanging off there. With the light bulb on his nose?

KP: He’s been there so long. But Andy put the light bo—light bulb up there for our children.

AE: *[Laughs]* Uh-huh.

KP: For Rudolph at Christmas, and we cut it on at Christmas.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: And, they always thought that—they would say, “That’s Rudolph!” and they would go, “Oh!” And then all the other little kids would come in, “Where’s Rudolph,” you know. “We hear Rudolph’s here.” So we never took it off. We just leave it there, and we cut it on every year.

AE: *[Laughs]* I like how that’s integrated into your, fancy wiring system too over there.

KP: Yeah, uh-huh. Don’t you like that?

AE: *[Laughing]*

KP: Everything about Lusco’s is pretty plain. But you know, it’s real interesting, the architectural school at Mississippi State—for years they have been bringing groups of architects. And this started back in nineteen seventy-something that they started bringing, uh—now they may not come every year—but they come, fairly often. They’ll bring groups of, architects over here to photograph and to study the architecture at Lusco’s. And I had noticed how over the years a lot of the restaurants that are being designed now—being designed very simplistic, just like Lusco’s is. it’s amazing ‘cause, they s— some of them still have the, —duct work exposed and—

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: —and—you know, before you would have never thought about that.

AE: Yeah.

KP: Everything was into dropped tin—I mean dropped ceilings, and you covered everything up. But now, you look back and the last what? Fifteen, twenty years has been an evolution where, a lot of the restaurants don't do that anymore. They're just—their duct work is there. It might be concealed in certain ways, or—

AE: Yeah.

KP: —but—but some of it is exposed ,uh, or its not as—it's not—it's not like it was.

AE: Yeah.

AE: You know what I'm saying? With the dropped—

AE: I know what you're saying.

KP: —dropped ceilings.

AE: They've integrated everything.

KP: People kind of appreciate the—the natural aspects of it, I guess you could say.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: But, this is the side—see, this is where the dance floor was. [Walking into the back part of the second dining room.]

AE: Okay. There's the jukebox.

KP: And this booth was not here.

AE: Okay.

KP: [Karen walks over to booth number five and taps on it.] This booth was not here. We added this booth. This was mine and Andy's booth.

AE: Booth number five.

KP: We added that for our—for us. That was our booth. and the reason we did that was because when we were dating—

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: We'd call to come out here, and they'd be busy—

AE: {laughs}

KP: And they wouldn't have anywhere for us to sit. So Andy said, "Well, I'm—can I come out there and build my own booth?" And his grandmother said, "Yeah. If you want to that's fine." So he went and bought the wood and stuff, and he built that booth, and that became our booth.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: And so, that's our lover's booth. That's what we call that. So that was added—see this was a pretty big dance floor. They had a jukebox—

AE: Yeah.

KP: —and everybody would dance out here.

[Counter: 305]

AE: Did they have somebody come play that piano? [The upright piano that is against the back wall in the dance floor area.]

KP: Every now and then, people would get on it I put that note on there because I have a lot of people that want to just sit there and bang on it.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And it can be quite annoying to the other customers. Especially—

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: —if they're having a business meeting.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: So I put the note on there in the hopes that the people that would play it would be able to *play* the piano and actually—

AE: Would you mind reading that sign for the tape recorder? *[Laughs]*

KP: *This piano can make beautiful music if the person playing it plays a beautiful song. Otherwise, it is noise to those who have to endure it. Please, beautiful music only.*

AE: *[Laughs]* That's great.

KP: I mean, I didn't know how—that's as diplomatic as I could think of.

AE: I—

KP: In other words, if you can't play a song, —

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: —please don't just bang on this piano!

AE: I think you got your point across. Do you have a lot of customers who come in and request the same number booth?

KP: [Walking down the hall of booths in the second room, towards the front of the building.] Yeah, I do. I mean, there are some—well, not as much now as I used to. There were certain people a long time ago that would request number six, number five and number ten. Those s—seem to be the most requested booths. I—number—number ten was always Maude and Mr. Cooper's booth. And that's a whole chapter—

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: —of a book. My—I could give you a whole chapter on that. She had been coming here for years and years and years. And, she was a widow, and she had two men that she dated. And she always came to Lusco's on every Friday and Saturday night. she would come Friday night with one guy, and Saturday night with the other guy. And she always sat in number ten. In fact, right here [Karen walks into booth number ten and points to the back wall]—and I really was apprehensive about painting over this—but right there between those two planks of wood—

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: When she ended up marrying Mr. Cooper? They always sat in here—every Saturday night. They had written on the wall—*they* wrote on the wall, now. These people were older. Like in their seventies.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: They put: *This is Maude and Bill Cooper's booth. Get out.*

AE: Ah! And you painted over it.

KP: And—and I had to paint over it. I told Andy—I said, “Why can't we just kinda frame that.” ‘Cause I really didn't want to paint over it. It had a lot of sentimental value to me because they were here every Saturday night. And what was so funny was, if she was going out of town, she would call me and tell me that they—that she was going out of town—they wouldn't be here that Saturday night.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: But, uh—But when she was dating before she married Mr. Cooper, she dated these two men. And she had two things that she really loved. She loved the fried shrimp, and she loved the—the Porterhouse or the t-bone for two is what we called it then. It's now Porterhouse for two. And so—so that she wouldn't hit the same guy up every week for the expensive steak, she would alternate.

AE: *[Laughing]*

KP: Like, you know, if she came out on Friday night with one guy, that week she would eat the fried shrimp, and the next Saturday night she would get the t-bone for two. Well then the next week, she'd hit the Friday night guy up for the t-bone for two and then other guy—She was very considerate! Yeah.

AE: Uh-huh. Smart lady.

KP: She really was. But she was one of the most unique people I ever knew, and I loved her dearly. I mean, she invited me and took me out for lunch at the Country Club. She was just, uh—she was precious. She was so cute. she was dressed to a “T” every time she walked in the door. she had *tons* of jewelry. Real and, cosmetic. I mean just, frivolous stuff. she had beautiful clothes, and every outfit she had she had the shoes and the jewelry to match. And she was just the cutest thingy you've ever—she had a lust for life. She enjoyed every moment of her life. I don't really remember at what age she died. She and I shared a maid for a while, she became one of my best friends. And I loved here dearly. That's why when we had to paint over that, I really had a lot of doubts about doing that. I didn't really want to cover that up 'cause it was real special to me.

AE: Hmm.

[Counter: 352]

KP: 'Cause this had always been their booth.

AE: Yeah.

KP: And then when they married, you know, she married—she ended up marrying Mr. Cooper. And I laughed for a long time. I said, “Well, Mr. Cooper,” you know. “I guess you’re the best man. You won the prize.”

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: And they, he ended up dying I don’t know how long that they ended up being married, but he died and was in real bad health. But they were just real happy together. And as I said, they were here every Saturday night unless they were going out of town.

AE: Hmm.

KP: And then she called to tell me she was going out of town and she wouldn’t be there. And if I didn’t hear from ‘em—if she was sick or something like that, you know, and I hadn’t heard from her, I would be calling her to try to find out, “What’s wrong? Are you sick?” You know, and I’d take her gumbo or whatever, but she was really a—a real special person. [Karen walks into the front dining room that is full of tables.]

AE: Well, let me ask you about these buzzers while we’re s—still in the booth area. When did those get installed?

KP: I’m not real sure. I know that, [pause] I don’t know. I don’t know when they started those. I know that, I think that it was when they took this side in and made the whole thing a restaurant. Because that was when Marie told me that they—realized that they were making it a restaurant and doing away with the grocery store. And that’s when they put the buzzers in. And I—she told me whose idea that was. It was one of Uncle Lee’s

brother's idea. And he may have done the work, but I don't remember—I know it was when they made it a restaurant—and did away with all the grocery store stuff up front.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: But I'm not sure—now, I mean, it became a full-fledged restaurant—not just Lusco's with the front and the booths in the back—it became a restaurant all the way around.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And I—that was just that evolution, you know. We're not sure at which point—it was always a grocery store with the booths in the back with food and, I guess it's when they took this side in.

AE: Huh. Do you know—are there ever people who abuse their buzzer privileges in their booths?

KP: Oh, yes.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: Kids love to buzz it, you know.

AE: Yeah.

KP: In fact, Sabrina [server] last night she had the child in number three that she made the mistake of—he said, “What's that for?” And she said, “Oh, that's for you to buzz me. For me to come and, when you need something.” And his mother looked at her and said, “Ohhh, you shouldn't have told him that!”

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: And then by the end of the night, that buzzer—I kept sayin', "Sabrina, you need to go see that number three." And she said, "Mrs. Pinkston, it's just that little boy. He's found that buzzer, and he loves it. His mother told me I shouldn't have done that."

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: But he was buzzin' all night long, and we were in the kitchen and we were goin', "Would you *please* go see about them." 'Cause she's—you don't know whether—you know, it's like crying wolf.

AE: Yeah.

KP: You don't know if they need anything or he's just playing with it. So, anyway. But he was playing with it.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: He was having a real good time with it. He was a little bitty fella, so. [Walking into the front dining room with the tables.] Yeah, that happens all the time. We just live with it. And you know, I was here for almost, —I don't know how many years I was here— and I never knew this buzzer was here. [Karen walks over to a buzzer that is on the wall above one of the tables in the front dining room.]

AE: Oh, yeah.

[Sound of Karen pressing the buzzer.]

KP: I never knew that buzzer was here. I never even knew the main dining room even had a buzzer.

AE: Huh.

[Sound of ceiling fan turning slowly in the background.]

KP: And one day—well, I guess it was when we were back here, painting or I was hangin' something' and I looked and went, "Where'd that come from?" And then I buzzed it, and I realized, we have a buzzer in the main dining room. I never knew that.

AE: Hmm. Was this ever one big party room, where you'd have private parties?

KP: Yeah, that's what it—that's what it usually was used for. And then we ended up, uh—we—when we took it over in seventy-six, there weren't but a—I think there were four tables, four or five tables. That was it back here. No, no—in eighty-one. And I said, "Andy, we need to—" You know, big tables. And we were turning away parties of twos and fours, and I'm going, "We don't need those big tables." I said, "We need to get rid of 'em." I said, "We'll leave two." And we left this one and that one. [Points to two big tables in the room] And, so we went and bought the smaller tables.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And put 'em back here, and increased the number of people that we could seat. You know, plus it's great 'cause like we have like a lot of twos and fours that walk in, and we can turn the tables over. So if they don't have a reservation we have this, available.

Unless they just absolutely want to wait for a booth. But a lot of times—someti—some

people want—don't care. They'll just want to eat, and they'll come in and sit down back here and eat. So, it—we've never regretted that and doing that and gettin' rid of the big tables—

AE: Yeah.

KP: —and having the smaller tables.

AE: 'Cause I'm just noticing now that I asked you that question, this big party in this picture right here? Do you know who they are? [Pointing to an old black and white photograph on a wall above one of the tables.]

KP: Now that's not even in this booth [dining room].

AE: Oh, really.

KP: That's in fourteen, fifteen and sixteen.

AE: Oh, okay.

KP: See, that's always opened up. [Points to an outer wall of a booth that faces into the main dining room] They had the, little partitions—

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: —that opened up and made one long room. And that was in there. And that was the cotton men [in the photograph]. Those were all cotton men. I have some more pictures but, I took 'em out of the frame because they had a—a meeting of the cotton association at the Country Club.

AE: Uh-huh.

[Counter: 410]

KP: And, Mr. Sale came by and asked me if he could take the pictures out there to, hang up and display for the cotton association. So I gave 'em to him and, unfortunately, the frames got broken, and I've gotta have them reframed. But I have a couple more of those. But those were all the cotton men back in the, in the early days. I—Mr. Hicks gave those to me. And he's in there, and he can tell you, a lot about who some of those people are. I know that's Hugh Crites and—

AE: There are a whole lot of liq—liquor bottles on that table!

KP: Aren't there!

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: Think they liked to drink?

AE: Maybe so.

KP: But that was fourteen, fifteen and sixteen.

AE: Okay.

KP: That's what that was. And then see, when we started having, people that wanted rehearsal dinners like for—for fifty plus?

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: I would have to turn 'em down because I couldn't get fifty people back in here. And I told Andy, I said, "We need to knock this wall out right here. Because these booths all open up to seat like twent—twenty-so—or so, and then we've got to where we can seat like, you know, like thirty to forty back here." I said, "We could be getting some of this business from rehearsal dinners." So we knocked that wall out, and he just built that wall, and we move it in and out.

AE: Oh! That's a great idea.

KP: And it really worked out great. So you can open this up and it's been great for— 'cause all these years that we've had Viking [Range Corporation] dinners, when they had their big groups?

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: It worked out great because we could open it all up. They would have up to forty or fifty people, and we could put 'em all in the same room. And then I'd give 'em number ten and number nine for bars, you know. And so they were able to have all this area for their din—their suppers.

AE: Oh.

KP: On Tuesday night. And, it—I've never regretted doin' that either. And see, this door was not here either [the door from the main dining room back into the front/grocery area of the restaurant]. When we first took over—

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: —the only way you got to this room was to come all the way around [up the hall past the booths toward the kitchen and then back down the second hall of booths into the main dining room].

AE: Oh, my.

KP: This was—that counter—I mean, that cabinet right there—

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: —that you see? [The free-standing china cabinet in the main dining room.] Was right here. [It was actually part of the large built-in china cabinet that is along the side wall in the front/grocery area.]

AE: Okay.

KP: And, it was attached to this. [Walking into the front room] It was all one big piece.

AE: Oh, I see.

KP: And Andy's stepfather was, in the construction business. So when he moved here in 1989, we were getting ready to paint and re-do and everything right before that. I said, "Andy." I said, you know, "It's just ridiculous because anybody that's waitin' on tables in the main dining room has got to run all the way around here and all the way—"

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And I said, "That is just is just ridiculous." You know. I said "We need to put a doorway in here. It will make that room so much better, people won't mind sitting in

there, they won't feel like they're closed in, they can see the outside." I said, "You know, there are just too many reasons for us not to put that door in." So he got Papa out here and asked him can we do that? And he said, "Yeah." [Sound of large truck driving down the street out front] They redid the cabinet and moved that one over there. And put the doorway in. And we found that door in Andy's grandmother's attic from their old house.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And it matched perfectly with these doors [the set of doors that lead to the outside and front door of the restaurant] that we also found in her attic.

AE: Sure do.

KP: So we enclosed that. D—we added this and—

AE: The little alcove.

KP: —uh, that. We did that because we were having such a problem with it—with it during—in the winter, when it's so cold.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: All my hostesses, as well as myself, we would be up here freezing to death—

AE: Yeah.

KP: —'cause of that winter—that, door opening and closing. And so we added that partition to help with that, but I have never regretted that door. And it's interesting because, people that came out here for years—for *years*, now—they had—and they knew

where the main dining room was—but they always thought of the main dining room as being in the back.

AE: Uh-huh, 'cause they felt—like they were stuck back there.

KP: because you're going down the hallway, turning, and there's nothing there.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: And it was like, they walked in the door and *[laughs]*—I never will forget. They walk in the door and go, “Where'd that room come from?”

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: “When did y'all add that?” You know. I'd be going, “It's been there all along. That's the main dining room.” They're going, “I never knew that room was there! I thought it was in the back.” I'm going, “No, we did not move the room. We just added the door.” And it's amazing how much difference that—adding that door made, to that main dining room. No one ever wanted to sit in it. But would you want to sit in a room that had four walls and no windows?

AE: I don't believe so.

KP: Uh-uh.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: I mean, it drove me crazy.

AE: Yeah.

KP: 'Cause I don't like not being able to—to see, you know.

AE: Well, but then all your booths have no windows and curtains. The same kind of—

KP: Well, that's just a little different concept.

AE: Yeah. A little cozier and more personal.

KP: Yeah, if you're—if you're just a couple and your sittin' in a room with a lot of other people, you don't want to—I mean, you want to be able to look out and see something.

AE: Yeah.

KP: You know, see some people walking by or something. So it worked out that that was the best solution.

AE: Huh.

KP: So ever since then people don't mind so much. I mean, there are some people that still won't sit back there just because they want to sit in a booth. But, there are other people that come here that—it doesn't bother them. They sit back there all the time

AE: Yeah.

KP: It doesn't make any difference to 'em. So.

AE: Has the, restaurant always been this mint green color?

KP: Actually, we painted it this mint green color. Before this it was an *awful* green color.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: I'm sorry I don't have my pictures to show you. It was—it was the—

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: —worst looking green I've ever seen. I can't even describe it. It was an old-timey green. It wasn't mint green, it was like, it had a lot of yellow in it.

AE: Like an avocado green kinda?

KP: Well, I don't really know how to describe that color. All I know is that—

AE: Just ugly, huh.

KP: —we were beginning to paint, —I had hired Georgiana Smith, who was an interior designer—I said, “Okay.” I said, “I need you to help me, pick out a color scheme to use throughout the restaurant.” And I said, “I want to go greens.” And the curtains that had been, originally on the, booths had had that burgundy and green and all those tones, and I had looked for fabric everywhere that was similar to it. I ended up—I found that fabric with the roses on it at, —used to be—it's in Jackson, but now they have one in Memphis. Uh. What's the name of that fabric store? I can't remember. But anyway, I found it, and I ordered all that they had—they could get me. so we closed in 1989—un—yeah, it was 1989 to refurbish the place. Georgiana had helped me pick out the different greens based on the green in the curtain. And then, I—we closed for two weeks. I had gallbladder surgery—the new procedure? The laproscopic procedure. the first three days. And then the next three days, I stayed at home and made all these curtains—

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: —for all these booths. And, while they were out here—the painters were out here painting—and what turned in to till, uh—one week paint job, turned into two weeks.

Because there was so much butter on the ceiling—

AE: Oh, my goodness.

KP: It took thirty-two gallons of paint thinner to get all the grease off the ceiling—to prep it.

AE: *[Laughs]*

[Counter: 502]

KP: And then we couldn't find a paint that would stick—on the tin. Nothing would stick. And, we didn't know what to do. 'Cause we said we *have* to paint it 'cause we got it all off, and it was ugly. It was just awful. And, —we've got to paint it. And we had planned on painting it this off-white color. So we called a friend of ours, Graham Burkes, they had Burke Hall in Memphis. And we said, "Graham, what can we paint a stamped tin ceiling with—that will stick?" And he said, "Well, I don't know." He said, "But let me ge—find—get my, some people that work for me and see if they can figure out what will work." so he called us back and said, "Well, I found out what you need to paint it with." And we said, "What?" And he said, "Swimming pool paint." And I thought that was pretty ironic because Andy's daddy's been in the swimming pool business all of his life.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: And we never even thought about that. And so we ended up using swimming pool paint. And so that's what the ceiling's painted with. And it has—that was like in 1990, and as you can see—[car horn in background]

AE: Yeah, it looks good.

KP: It looks good.

AE: Huh.

KP: It has not come off. So, hopefully it'll last another twenty years. *[Laughs]*

AE: Yeah, let's hope so. Was this neon Coca-Cola clock original to the grocery? [The blue neon clock hangs in the front room above the doorway that leads to booths and the kitchen. It's one of the first things you see when you walk into the restaurant.]

KP: Yes, it was. And we have another one at home that they had in the kitchen, that's a little different. It has the yellow lighting in it.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And the lady drinking the drink lights up. [Sound of bus breaking to a stop outside]

AE: Cool.

KP: But I have it at home.

AE: Yeah.

KP: So. And we took it out of the kitchen because it was too big.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: And it, was just pulling to many amps, and we wanted to add a microwave and some other things, so we just—took it out.

AE: Huh. well one last thing. Maybe, since I'm looking at your Lusco's boiled shrimp sauce, and your Lusco's t-shirt, when did y'all start making those things for sale?

KP: [Takes a moment to think] Let's see. [Long pause] Right after we took over [another pause] The reason—I had been the hostess up front.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: From 1976 until 1989. And I would always have people ask me, you know, "I wish I could get some of your shrimp sauce. Can I buy some?" And this and that. And I—I al—I really should—let's see, when did we start doing that? Sara is sixteen years old. [Pause] I was pregnant with her. [Pause] Seventeen years ago. finally Andy and I—I said, "Let's—let's do that." You know. at that point really, none of the restaurants had done that. And I said, "Let's just try it." You know. And see, you know. We'll sell it here on the shelf at first. Well, we started bottling it, and we worked with Mississippi State—the cooperative extension service. They helped us a lot. We had three different, doctors, and I wish I could remember their names because they were all fantastic. One guy helped us, develop the recipes. Because at this point there had not been recipes. It was just a matter of mixin', mixin'—and we had to sit down and—and measure out everything that we mixed and actually come up with a formula. then the second doctor helped us with the bottling. The—and the labeling. And then the other doctor helped us with the pricing. So they

had—they had three different people that worked with businesses on doing that. And they helped us get that started. when we first started it, we thought we would just sell it out of the restaurant. Then, people started calling us. Carol Daily was our first customer at Everyday Gourmet [in Jackson, Mississippi]. And she said, “Well, y’all come do a tasting.” Now, Susie Foote had told her about us. We had met her through the—we started the Mississippi Specialty Foods Association. So, —through Mississippi State. So we went down there and did our first tasting at Everyday Gourmet. That—the original one right off of Old Camp Road. And she started carrying our sauce. Well then, other people started calling us. “We want you to come do—.” And so it just kind of evolved that we started—we would—on Saturdays we would get up real early in the morning and drive out of town and do a tasting until like two o’clock, and then throw everything in the car and come straight to Lusco’s and open up that night for business.

AE: Hmm.

KP: That was when I was young. I couldn’t do that again now.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: It would kill me. But, Andy and I both did that—several times. Well then, Carol and Susie Foote—she had the Great Flour Tortilla Company. She—was a friend of Carol’s—encouraged us to go to the food show at Jacob Javitz. The International Fancy Food and Confection Show with—and split a booth with Susie. So—we did. And that was a wonderful experience. In fact, I was pregnant with Sara at the time and didn’t even know I was pregnant. And so, we went and we did that. It was great. We were received very well. And, we did the—we did real well on our orders also, but we got burned a couple—

on a couple because they—we never got paid for ‘em. *[Laughs]* and we realized right then, we’re gonna have to take a credit card, you know. We can’t have people placing thirty case orders of not payin’ for ‘em. We won’t be in business very long. fortunately, it was not our only source of income, either. We still had Lusco’s taking care of us at that point. So, we did the food show for three years—the International Fancy Food and Confection Show. I did Chicago by myself the next year. No—no—we did New York the next year. And then when, uh—the next year I did Chicago by myself. Well, we realized—I had to leave Andy at home to take care of a baby and two other children and to run a restaurant by himself. And then I’m up in Chicago trying to do the food show by myself. And when I got home it—we sat down, and we realized, we’ve got to discuss this. This is impossible for us to do. We can’t do this on a steady basis. I can’t be flying off and doing food shows and having to leave a maid with a baby and two children and him trying to run a restaurant by himself. we said okay, wha—who pays our bills? And, of course, the restaurant pays our bills. And we said well, we’re just gonna have to put this on the back burner, and we’ll sell what we sell, and we’re just not going to be able to promote and market it like we would like to. You know, because the restaurant comes first. So that’s what we did. We just sort of, had it on the shelf here, and we had a few customers like Everyday Gourmet. there used to be a place—another place on Lakeland. What was it called? I can’t remember the name of it. And we had about four or five customers that sold our products, and so we just kept them and kept selling to them. And, basically just—we’d go to the—we went to the Mississippi Market, I think twice. And, we—that was a vacation. We literally closed to do that. And we realized that, you know, we just couldn’t do both. But now see, Drew came home and he expres—expressed an

interest in doing that. And we just got back last week. He did the Mississippi Market. I helped him, but he did that show by himself. Just to see if he wanted to do that. And that was an experiment. And, we real—we really haven't discussed whether he wants to do that or not because the show was not a real good show. It was a very poor turn out. I think it was a very bad time of year for it. I—I mean, we've been twice before, and it's been much, much bigger. And, of course, that could be a sign of the economy as well. That may have been why there wasn't a big turn out. Bt, he hasn't decided. He—he's getting ready to do some work on it. He has done some work on it already. He's done the, labels—the nutritional value labels. He's had those done, and he's having those printed up. And then I think his next thing is he's going to, establish a website and start marketing 'em over the Internet.

AE: That's a great idea.

KP: And, —but that's his thing. I've told him, I said, “You do that. We can't do a restaurant and do that.” So, that will be his thing that he does.

AE: Hmm. [Pause] Well, I believe I've taken quite a lot of your time here. and I sure appreciate it.

KP: Well, you're welcome. I hope I told you what you needed to know.

AE: I think so. I think I have a—maybe a few more questions. And I bet, after listening to this, a few more will come up.

KP: Okay.

AE: Maybe in the next week or so I could come back and talk to you a minute more.

KP: That’d be fine.

AE: If you don’t mind.

KP: Okay, that’d be fine.

[Counter: 635]

[END OF TAPE ONE]

[BEGIN TAPE TWO]

Amy Evans: it’s Thursday, June 19th, and I’m back again at Lusco’s with Karen Pinkston to talk a little bit more about Lusco’s. And she just gave me the run-down of the family tree with all these Lusco names and married-into and nicknames, and—I was just informed that she used to be called a “gordorusa” by the family, which means redneck. And, how did they get to call you that?

Karen Pinkston: Well, when I married Andy—or when I started dating Andy—I noticed that, I noticed that when he would say something—somehow something would come up about “Andy and that gordorusa coming out to eat.” I didn’t really know what “gordorusa” meant when I married him, and I would come walking in the door, and his grandmother would always look up and say, “Gordorusa! Gordorusa!” You know, and I’m thinking *what* does this mean? Nobody would ever tell me what it meant. And, finally, after I had been in the family for a while—and I did love Andy’s grandmother

very much. Mrs. Gory and—well, I loved all three of ‘em. But I would come out here in the a—when I was, like working, I would come out here in the afternoon at like two o’clock and have coffee with Mrs. Gory. And that was where I learned most of the stuff that I learned about Lusco’s was in the afternoons when we would have coffee. But finally, after she had grown attached to me, she finally told me what “gordorusa” meant. And it meant redneck in Italian, so all that time they had been calling me redneck. Okay, and I had no idea. I thought it was funny. I was laughing. You know, “Gordorusa! Gordorusa!” So now, I refer to my children as gordorusas, you know.

AE: *[Laughs]* Much prettier sounding than redneck.

KP: Doesn’t it! It does sound better. Much better. The funny—the—the—what I was gonna tell you earlier about Uncle Shaway—about Sam Portera, that story?

AE: -hmm.

KP: when I—the first time—when I was dating Andy—uh, I do have like Indian blood in my background. And I was—I’d get very, very dark in the summer. And my hair was very, very long, and I had it in braids. I don’t know if I should say this on this recorder, what he said. Anyway, Andy took me over to meet Uncle Shaway —this was the man that came straight off the boat, you know, from Italy. He spoke broken English. And, Andy said, “Uncle Shaway, I’d like for you to meet Karen. This is my girlfriend.” And he was looking at me, you know. Kind of eyeing me up and down, and he turned around to s—to Andy, thinking, I guess, that I didn’t hear him. I don’t know why he didn’t think I could hear him, but he pulled Andy over and he said, “What, you bring a Goddamn squaw?” You know. And I just died! I was so upset. He hurt my feelings so bad. And, I

thought his—did I hear him right? Did he say that about me? You know? And, so finally I said, okay. Just forget about it, you know. He's—he thinks I look like an Indian, I guess. You know, 'cause I was all tan and dark and had my hair in braids. And so from then on when Andy would, uh—when we would go out there he'd say—you know, he'd look at me and he'd say, "You're hair's not in braids." **[Laughs]** And I said, "No, it's not in braids." But he always—from then on, called me squaw. I walk over, "Hey, Squaw!" And so, I mean, it really—after—after a while I got over it. I realized that was Uncle Shaway's way. That, you know, he was very honest. He said *exactly* what came to mind. And, that was what he saw. **[Laughs]** So I didn't—it didn't bother me anymore. He was a character. He w—he really was. I had to tell you that about him, because when we were talking about spelling his name. He would *not* have been happy to know that we didn't know how to spell his name. [Before we started recording, I asked Karen how to spell the last name Portera. She couldn't remember—said she'd not really thought about it or had reason to write it down—so she called Andy's mother, BeBe McAdoo to ask her, and she cleared it up. Even though Karen pronounces the last name 'Pittero,' the spelling is Portera.]

AE: **[Laughs]** But we finally figured it out.

KP: Yeah.

AE: and so why did you name all your children—you and Andy—um—

KP: Lusco?

AE: —give them the name Lusco Pinkston?

KP: When I had Andrea, we had agreed—I thought—to Andrea Marie Pinkston. And Andy thought, Andrea Lusco Pinkston. So, when we got down to it, we were really locked up in an argument about this. And I said, “Okay, I’ll solve this problem right now.” So when they brought that form in to fill out for her birth certificate? I put Andrea Marie Lusco Pinkston. And I just looked at him and said, “Are you happy? I am.” You know. So, after I named her that, I got to thinking about it, you know. And then I got pregnant with Drew, and we were discussing names for Drew. And I always thought, well, I don’t want any of my children—I never, ever tried to show any partiality to any of my children. I try to let them know that I love ‘em all the same. And may be a difference in personalities, but I try to always do the same thing for all of ‘em. And, so I decided well, his name’s just gonna have to be Phillip Andrew Lusco Pinkston. Because if she’s got a Lusco, he’s gotta have a Lusco. Plus, I thought, at some point in time later on, you know, when—if someone is for some reason looking up to try to find out who owned Lusco’s? And who the f—who the descendants of those people were? That once they saw that their names were Lusco Pinkston, that they could trace it back to Andy and me, and they might figure out—in genealogy at some point—that okay, those were the people that had Lusco’s. And then—of course, when Sara was born, the same thing. I said well, the other two have it. She has to have it too. So, that sort of became the trademark with my children was they’re all—they—they had their—the names that they’re supposed to have: Sara Corene, Andrea Marie, Phillip Andrew. But then the Lusco Pinkston was put on—at the end. So that’s why.

AE: All right. and we were talking a little bit about the menu before we started recording again. and price changes and stuff, when y’all took the restaurant over.

[Short pause]

KP: Well now, where do we want to start on the menu? You want to go back—way back?
Or do you want to start with when we took over?

AE: We can go way back.

[Counter: 58]

KP: Well, I mean, I don't know that much about *way* back. I know that the, —they started out with like Italian food and steaks, and I think shrimp, and then of course they added pompano when Mr., Tommy Gregory's great—Tommy and Jim Gregory and Bob's great granddaddy. I told you it was their granddaddy, but it was their great-granddaddy. [Phone rings] liking the pompano, then they just can't, uh—of cou—oh, wait. Let me take that back. [Phone rings] They had spaghetti, chicken, steaks. Then they added [phone rings] shrimp, and then they added pompano. I think that's how Mrs. Gory told me they did it. Now, when we [phone rings] took over in 1976 with BeBe, there was no written menu—at that point. Everything was just, —verbalized. The—all the waiters gave the menu. Of course, the menu was not as big as it is now. It basically consisted of—and it didn't even have Italian food on it at that point—it had steaks. Maybe three: a ribeye, a strip and a t-bone. They had, —we had—pompano, and we had, uh—that was the only fish.

[Karen's daughter Sara leaves a message on the restaurant's answering machine]

Sara Lusco Pinkston: Mom, hey. This is Sara. I'm going out to, the Chamber right now to take those [unintelligible] and then probably after that I might go—get—grab some lunch or something and then go [last bit unintelligible]. Bye.

KP: Okay, that was my daughter checking in with me. All right. Then, broiled chicken and fried chicken. Broiled shrimp and fried shrimp. oysters—baked or raw. Oyster cocktail, a crabmeat cocktail, a shrimp cocktail, a seafood gumbo—by the cup or bowl—um, oysters brochet, we had that. I'm trying to think what else. I think that was basically the menu right there. We did not have baked potatoes or rice, we only had french fries. And you really only had maybe three—two—three kinds of salad. That was a house, a ranch or a thousand island. That was because they made everything. That was it. And so those were the choices for the menu, so it was not a very, very big menu. The only problem that I foresaw with us being here during that five-year period, was that BeBe would cut the steaks and weigh 'em out. And she would price 'em herself in the kitchen. And if someone came in that she didn't like, she might kind of go heavy on that weighin' that—that steak sometimes. That price was a little bit higher. Because I had to do the tickets, and I would notice that the price—I'd be thinking, why is that steak so high? You know, I mean that was the same size as the one right before it, you know. And I couldn't figure out. And there was a big joke, with one of the guys th—that's an attorney in Greenwood. He represented her ex-husband in the, divorce. He always laughs about the time he came out here and tried to order an order of onion rings and, she sent him a bill in there for fifty dollars. *[Laughs]* And so I don't—I think it was in—in jest. I don't think she really charged him fifty dollars. But anyway, I realized that our customer base was diminishing, and that we really weren't getting any new customers. Because people

wouldn't come out because the menu wasn't written. You didn't know what the prices were. So as soon as she left in 1981 and we took over exclusively, that was the first thing we did was we sat down and did a menu—a printed menu. So that people could see what we had on the menu and would know how much they were going to pay for it. And we always tried to have everything, you know, —have a price. Like we just u—figured out an average weight on—of the steaks. You know, this is like fourteen, sixteen ounce, and this is what it would cost. And then if anybody would order a large, you know, we'd ask them usually, you know, “How large do you want it? How many ounces?” And then we would cut it accordingly and weigh it out. And, we do—we do do that, you know, now 'cause we cut 'em in-house but, everything else is pretty much a set price. And we found out that our business increased when we did that. It made a big difference. Plus, over the years, Andy and I have more or less changed the menu. I think about three or four times. We have, uh—the menu is—well, actually it's more than that. Let's see. about five or six times. The menu has evolved. We, had to take oysters brochet off the menu because of, problems with the oysters, and they weren't—the eyes weren't good, and you have to put 'em on a skewer. And, [clears throat] we changed some other things up—just because of availability. And, then we added a few things. I would experiment. And I'm—I'm one of these people that always likes lots of different kinds of salads. So, once I went to the kitchen, I started making different kinds of salads and—and adding those to the menu. then I also started doing some pasta and experimenting—doing some different things. We don't have all those on the menu now, but I offer them from time to time as specials. Like, primarily during the winter months because pasta's heavy, and not a lot of people like to eat the heavy stuff in the wi—in the summer. . [Clears throat] I also—now, Marie

added the flan as a dessert. That was her recipe. That was basically the only dessert we had back then. That, and ice cream. And she taught me how to make the flan. And then I added the other desserts over the years. And I alternate. I change those. I experiment from time to time. I find a recipe that I like, and I think, okay, I'd like to try that. And I may try it, and I'm thinking, okay, I'd like to change this. So I change it. And then, experiment and send it out to people around and taste it, you know, and tell me what you think, and they say, "Yes, I like it" or whatever. And then if they like it I start serving it, so—I have to watch myself because I really like to do desserts. And I would end up having about twenty-five desserts on the menu if I had my way. And then I would be cooking desserts every day. So I have to be real careful and not allow myself to get too enthralled on the desserts. 'Cause I do like to cook desserts.

[Counter: 123]

AE: Do you have a favorite dessert?

KP: [Clears throat] Favorite dessert? Ooh, that'd be tough. Not really. I like 'em all. That's my problem.

AE: And what about this "Crabmeat Karen" that's on the—the menu?

KP: Well, that started because many years ago Gail Flautt would come out here and always ordered jumbo lump crabmeat, and she would want it broiled, and she would want the fish sauce on it. And so we would fix that just exclusively for her. It was not on the menu. Well, it got to the point where other people would see her eating it, and then they would ask for it also. Well, I decided that I wanted to try it, but I wanted to try it with the

shrimp sauce because I love the shrimp sauce. I like the fish sauce. It's okay, but it's just—I have to be in the mood for that. Shrimp sauce I can eat every day. So I did the same thing with the crabmeat, and I put the f—shrimp sauce on it. And I loved it. Well then I sent that in to a couple of people to taste, and they all loved it. And so the next time I did my menu, I added Crabmeat Gail, which is named after Gail Flautt, and that's the crabmeat with the fish sauce. And then I added Crabmeat Karen, which is from me that has the shrimp sauce. So basically, that's what that is. And, it's amazing because, a lot of people didn't know—even the ones that came out here now—don't realize that Crabmeat Gail was Gail Flautt. I mean that was—that was her thing. That's what she always wanted. So. And they'll ask—people always ask me what's the difference in the sauces. And I always tell people, well, if you don't know which one you want, just try it dry and then we'll send you t—both sauces, and you can dip and decide which one you like. So. [Coughs]

AE: did you ever come here to eat before you and Andy got married?

KP: Never. I couldn't—I couldn't have afforded to. I cam—I was a poor girl. I came from East Greenwood. And, I say poor in money. I was rich in blessings. I used to ride my bicycle down this street [Carrollton Avenue] when I was a little girl with, there was a friend of mine. Vicki Carpenter. She—she got killed several years ago, but. Many years ago there was an old city pool that's down by what used to—it's Davis. And, it was where everyone went to swim. And, I would ride my bike every day—down this street, you know. Right by Lusco's. And the funny thing about it, I remember seeing the place but never really knowing what it was. And, the only thing I remember is Mr. Joseph down here on the corner. He used to always get a broom and come outside and tell us to

get off the sidewalk with out bicycles, you know. And, I mean we were s—like ten and twelve years old. Maybe even younger. And, I remember telling him, “My mother told me to ride on the sidewalk. My mama wouldn’t let me ride in the street.” You know, because were going all the way to, the city pool, which was probably—I’m trying to think. [Karen asks Andy, who just walked into the front room from the kitchen] How far—how far is the city pool from here? [Short pause] Where it was. About a mile?

Andy Pinkston: Not far down the street. Uh.

KP: About a mile?

[Short pause]

AP: Be—

KP: So it was bout t—

AP: About—about eight, ten blocks.

KP: It’s—it’s about two and a half miles from where I lived. So that was a good little ride but, that was the only way I had to go. And Vicki and I always—we were—we were pretty good. We were good kids, and so our mothers trusted us to ride our bikes there. And we would spend the afternoon there—go every day—when the pool opened at one and stay till it closed. I think it was like five o’clock or—six o’clock that we had to—no. it closed later than that, didn’t it? [To Andy, who was still standing behind the hostess counter.] We had to be home by six o’clock.

AP: It had lights in it, though. What they used to do—they used to, have, swimming team practice and—

KP: That was in the mornings. Yeah.

AP: That—that was the only time that, uh—[unintelligible].

KP: They had swimming team in the mornings and in the late, late afternoon. Yeah.

AP: My daddy builds swimming pools, so we had one. So I was—I didn't have to go to the city pool. *[Laughs]*

KP: And so we had to go down there—we had to go to the city pool. You had to pay. I mean, it was not free. You had to—it was like fifty cents or something like that. It was not much. But everybody that wasn't afforded the luxury of having their own swimming pool—

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: —went there to swim.

AP: [Unintelligible]

AE: well, how did ya'll meet if you didn't meet at the city pool? *[Laughs]*

KP: Uh. [Pause] When did we meet? [To Andy] Actually first meet? I guess the first time I met him—Charlotte, his sister, and I are the same age. And we were in school together. And I was invited over to her house to go swimming and to lay out. And I guess the first time I met him was, he walked out there one day by the pool—he was four years older

than I was—and she introduced me. And of course there were several girls there. It wasn't just like I was by myself, but—I guess she just introduced all of us to Andy and said, “This is my older brother Andy.” The only thing I ever knew about him was I always saw him in a sports car driving very fast and heard that he was—

AP: A sports car? {Andy is still standing behind the hostess counter, looking at paperwork]

KP: Yes, and I always—

AP: I didn't have a sports car.

KP: You always had—you had a Mustang, or you had that Grand Prix.

AP: Those aren't sports cars.

KP: *[Laughs]* Those are what I would call sports cars. A Mustang or a Grand Prix is a sports car—back then, you know.

AP: I'm buyin' some tomatoes. Be right back. [Andy walks out the front door. Sound of door squeaking]

KP: And, it was real funny because I always—I always thought he was being very bad. I always heard stories about him. And he was pretty bad. He was pretty wild.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: And I was not. I was very, —I'd come from a long line of Baptist missionaries [sound of front door squeaking again] and preachers, you know. And I wasn't even—I

mean I didn't drink, [door squeaks] and I didn't smoke, and I didn't do anything like that. You know, he was my downfall.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: 'cause I was just raised that you just didn't do that and, I mean seriously. I—you know. I was also raised that you never, ever, ever marry a Catholic—because I was from a Baptist upbringing. An, I don't—it was really strange how we started dating. It was just—a fluke. I guess God works in mysterious ways.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: So.

AE: For sure.

KP: But that was the first time I ever met him. And I really didn't even—I wasn't impressed by him either. *[Laughing]* I don't know—I don't know why we got together. [Still laughing] That's so funny.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: It really is. I don't know how we ended up. [Short pause] But—you want to hear *that* story, or you don't want to hear that story?

AE: If you want to tell it, I'll hear it.

KP: It's strange. It really is. —

AE: Okay.

[Counter: 195]

KP: I had gone with this boy, Jimmy Fan, from the tenth grade until I was a sophomore in college. And we were engaged to get married. Well, his family joined this religious group, and they moved to Kosciusko [Mississippi], where they became very, very involved in this. And it was, I don't really know the name of the, —it wasn't a cult, but it was—because it was Christian and—oriented and—but it was just that—the people live off the land, and they pool their resources and they worship and—and study the bible, and they help people in need, you know, that, have drug problems. And people would bring their children over there that had drug problems, and they would help straighten them out and, —I just don't know what it was called. But anyway, Jimmy decided that, that's what we were gonna do. Except that we were gonna move to Alaska—and do it. Well, when it came right down to it—I'm an only child. My mother is all I—I mean, is all I—I'm all she has. And, my grandmother and grandfather were getting real old, and I realized, you know, I thought, I can't go off to Alaska! I mean, you know. If something happens to any of them, I have to be here—to take care of things, you know. And to handle things. And it was—it—when it—when it—when you right—well, when you get right down to it, I mean it was a choice of him and Alaska or my family. And I just said, “I can't do that.” I—I—you know. It was against everything I was raised and believed in, and I just couldn't—I couldn't leave and go off like that. And it's a good thing I didn't because he left and went to Alaska and stayed until just about two years ago! **[Laughs]** Which is a *long* time! But, anyway. Right after we broke up, I was *real* depressed. And I remember I—I—we'd go out—'cause I thought this guy, you know, from the tenth grade—six—that's six years. And I mean, I've never had another date during that time.

And so I really—I—I—said no, I'm just stayin' low-key. I'm just gonna go to school—finish school—concentrate on my education, and that's gonna be it. Well, this friend of mine, Sharon Frazier and Bubba Frazier, they were—married? I think they were married at the time. And I was real good friends with her 'cause we were going to school together. We were commuting together. And, she had said, “Well, why don't you, come go with me”—this was on a Saturday morning. She says, “We're gonna go out to the farm and ride horses.” And I said, “Well, I'd love to do that. I haven't done that in years. “ I said, “Let's—I'll go.” So when they came to pick me up, Andy was with Bubba. And I'm sittin' here—and I didn't like this at all. I thought this is a set-up, you know. I'm w—and I—I was very angry with her. I said, “Is this a set-up? Is this a date?” And she said “No, no, no, no, no! Andy and Bubba are gonna ride horses. They're gonna go one place, and you and I are gonna ride horses and go to the other place.” Well, we got out there—there were only three saddles. So—the other saddle, the strap was broken. So Bubba said, “Well, Andy and I are gonna saddle up, and we're going this-a-way. And y'all just ride one horse together. Y'all saddle up and just ride this one horse.” So Sharon said, “Okay. Well, we'll do that.” So we, saddled up this one horse, and both got on and, of course, she was sitting on the saddle, and I was sitting off the saddle—holding on to the saddle. Well, Andy and Bubba are saddled up, and Bubba hits the horse, you know, and makes that sound “Yeeeeeeee!” You know, and the horses take off! Including the horse that we were on. Just took off runnin'. I mean, we were barely on the horse, you know. So they're way ahead of us, Sharon and I are—are galloping along, and, she said—I can hear her—she says, “Does that saddle feel loose to you?” I said, “Yes it does. *[Laughs]* It feels very loose.” So we're riding along, and the next thing we know—I'm holding on to the saddle,

and the saddle is sliding like this-a-way. And we fall off of the horse. And—I hit the ground, and I hit my head a little bit on a rock. Well, Bubba and Andy turned around and came back, and—you know, I'm sittin' there. Well, I don't know any of these people. I don't know where I am. I don't know what I'm doin', you know. And they're all talking to me and going on—Well, at that point I didn't want to tell them, “I don't know who you are”—or anything. You know, I was—I—I was in shock. I had amnesia is what it was. I just didn't know anything. I mean, it was—'cause I kind of went out for a little bit, you know. And then when I came to, uh—and I just really—my head hurt really bad. I'm thinking, this is crazy. so we go on and—and I said, “I'm not—I—I don't want to ride horses. I don't want to ride horses. I'm just gonna go up here to the barn and sit. And so, Sharon said, “Well, I don't either. And the saddles torn,” you know. She says, “Well, let's just go up here. We'll walk around.” And we—we just walked around. And finally I told her, I said, “You're not going to believe this, but what's your name?” You know. And I said, “I don't know who you are.” I said—and I said, “What just happened?” And so she proceeded to tell me [Door squeaks open, and Andy returns from buying tomatoes] what just happened. I really didn't know anything. Well [door squeaks again] she said, “Well, we just won't say anything about it.” Well, when we got through we got in the truck—and he was sittin' there, and so I proceeded to tell [Laughs when she sees Andy walking in]—

AP: You still on that story?

KP: I—well, I just started tellin' it. I told you it was strange. But, we got in the truck and so we were talking and everything and meanwhile, Sharon had told Bubba, "Karen has amnesia. She does not know anything right now. She's like out of it! She has no clue

where she is, who she's with or what she's doing," you know. "And she really n—needs to go home probably." And I guess he told Andy. So we're sittin' there in the truck, and Andy said, "Are you still gonna go out with me tonight?" [Pause] And I'm sittin there, and I'm lookin' at him like, what are you talking about? And, I said, "Did you ask me to go out with you?" And he said, "Yes, I did." I said, "When?" And he said, "Earlier." And I said, "Well, what did I say?" And he said, "You said yes." I said, "I did?" And he said, "yeah." And I said, "Well, if I said yes, I—I guess I have to." You know. I'm sittin' here thinking, I don't want to go out with him! I don't remember this! And I really didn't remember anything. Well, I know this—Bubba had this grin on his face. I just should have known at that point. But I was really—my head was hurtin' and I didn't feel good. So—they took me home. This was like by noon. And he said, "I'll come back and pick you up about seven o'clock." And they were going over to someone's house to cook out and we were just gonna, you know, hang out and have some game or whatever. And, I thought well, you know, what the heck. I can do this. Don't know who he is, don't know who I'm with, but I'm going anyway. So I get home, and the first thing I do when I walked in the house is tell my mama, you know, "I don't know anything. I don't know who I am! Will you please—" So she sat down, and for hours we sat down, and she told me who I was, who she was, where we lived, what had happened, why we did—I mean, you know, just kind of filled me in. So then it kinda—you know, I started thinking. Okay, this sounds familiar. This sounds familiar. Well I took some aspirin, and I laid down and took a long nap. Well, I woke up, got dressed, and we had a date. And he picked me up. And it was a strange date. I wanna—have to tell you it was a strange date. Because I had no recollection of him asking me out, I did not really want to go out with him in the first

place. But I went, you know. And I had a good time after I got there. It was fun, but I really didn't talk to very many people 'cause I didn't know who anybody was. And, I mean, I was in college, and I sat down that next day—on Sunday—to look at my books. I did not know where I was. You know, I did not remember what I was supposed to do for homework, what chapter we were on or anything. And the next day when I went to school, I had to tell the teachers, you know. “I—I fell off of a horse, and I really cannot remember anything. Will you please bring me up to speed on where I am?” I was fine once somebody would tell me where I was; it was just like some parts were erased that I just couldn't remember. And, —but the funny thing about it was, after that date I got up the next morning, and I went to church. And when I came back out of church, there was this big arrangement of flowers sitting on my seat. And I thought, where are these flowers from? And, I thought it was really strange. And so I got home, and later on the phone rang, and it was him. And he said he had brought me a bouquet of flowers *[laughs]*, so I guess he kind of—that was it. We started dating after that. But, come to find out, the only reason he had those flowers was—was because someone had had a wedding party at Lusco's the night before and left the arrangement up here. *[Laughs]* And he came out here and got those flowers and brought them to me. And he *never* asked me for a date. He only asked me for a date after I got amnesia and didn't know that he had asked me for a date. So, anyway. Is that strange?

[Counter: 306]

AE: That's a good story.

KP: *[Laughs]* It was strange. We've been there—we've been together ever since so—

AE: Good thing you didn't go to Alaska.

KP: *[Laughs]* I'm serious! I mean, he did not come back till two years ago! [Phone rings] he had been in Alaska twenty-five years! *[Laughs]* So, you're right. It's a good thing I didn't go to Alaska. I've had a lot more fun here.

AE: I bet. So, it's a good thing that, a Pinkston married a gordusa squaw who—

KP: *Gordorusa squaw.*

AE: Gordorusa squaw who hit her head on a rock. *[Laughs]*

KP: Amnesia. It took me—it took me two or three weeks before I got everything all in the right. You know, together. I just couldn't—and—and—things would still crop up and people would say, “Don't you remember that?” And I'd be goin', “No, I don't.” Things that would have happened, you know, and I was—“I don't remember that.” And to this day there are certain little things back then that I don't remember. And I guess, basically, I had a concussion but just didn't have enough sense to know that I had a concussion. But I was—I really slept a lot during that time because I had a horrible headache.

AE: -hmm.

KP: And, I would go to class and come home and go to bed, you know. I just—I didn't do a whole lot for a couple of weeks there. You know, I guess that's why. I just had a concussion and didn't know it. Never went to the doctor, never went to the hospital, just—just ignorant. *[Laughs]* Ignorance is bliss.

AE: *[Laughs]* well back to the restaurant. You were telling me last week about—y'all are redoing the front—

KP: Uh-huh.

AE: —of, Lusco's outside. And you're replacing that old opaque white glass [that is original to the building. It's being replaced with white Plexiglas]. Did you happen to save any of it?

KP: Yeah. I have it in the back of Andy's truck.

AE: Good.

KP: I did. It's, —I—I talked to someone—I wish I knew what it was called. there's a name for it. and it's very expensive. You really can't find it. it's—it's a special order. And sometimes, they said, it takes months to even get it. So, I don't know if—you—if you look out there right now, you see a—and you tell me if you can tell a difference.

AE: I can't. I was looking at that when I walked up. It looks good.

KP: It looks just like the glass, doesn't it?

AE: -hmm.

KP: It really does. I was real pleased when they were putting it up yesterday. I was thinking, "That looks just like the glass."

AE: Yep.

KP: And you would never know that it was Plexiglas.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: And it won't break like the other. But I want to take that glass and, break it up and maybe do a tabletop or something.

AE: You should definitely do that.

KP: I want to save that. That's why I told him I said, "Don't throw that away. Save it." 'Cause then one of these days in my old age or, maybe someone will be industrious enough to take that and tile and make a tabletop with it.

AE: Yeah. 'Cause most people would throw that away. I think that's very special that you would do that.

KP: Yeah, well I can't throw that away.

AE: And so what else are you gonna do out there? You're gonna paint?

KP: We're gonna paint and, just spruce up the outside a little bit.

AE: When was that sign that's out there now—when was that put up?

KP: That Lusco's?

AE: -hmm.

KP: That was actually put up there when they filmed the movie *Mississippi Masala*. In nineteen—it was either the end of 1989 or the beginning of 1990. I think it was the end of eighty-nine. Yeah, it was in—the end of 1989.

AE: Are you talking about the painted sign on the window?

KP: Uh-huh.

AE: Okay.

KP: That—the Lusco's?

AE: Okay, I was talking about—

KP: Is that what you're talking about?

AE: I was talking about the Coca-Cola—the hanging sign.

KP: Oh! That's been up there, oh, for God—oh, I don't know. I guess since they took in the other side or at some point. Mr. Harrison Curtis, who built the first Co-Cola [sic] plant that was over here on, —Henry Street? Was a very, very good customer and a good friend of theirs. And that's why we have so much Co-Cola memorabilia stuff out here was because he always was bringing them stuff and giving them things to put in. Because, you know, I mean they were just, poor immigrants trying to make a living. And, he was a good customer, and he was the type of person that he was very generous and always kind to them. So he was always saying, "You need something there." You know, and he'd end up bringing them something from Co-Cola to put—like that clock right there [above the doorway that leads to some of the booths and the kitchen]. We have another one just like it, so there were actually two clocks out here. But it has a yellow face. And, then we have some stuff over there in that showcase that's Co-Cola—Cola

stuff. Original. Then, of course, the sign out front. The big Co-Cola sign up a the top. And, then there's another one that's right up on the corner of that building—

AE: Uh-huh. I've seen that.

KP: —outside. That I want to have refurbished. That's one of the things I want to do in the future. But I really don't know who does that. because I—I mean it's gonna have to be someone that knows what they're doing. Just because it's been up there, and it's so weathered and—I mean, I guess you could find a picture maybe of, that original picture. It's—I think it's a person drinking a Coke. But I want to get that done—redone. But yeah, all that stuff came from Mr. Harrison Curtis.

AE: And so then you were talking about the Hollywood folks wanted you to paint Lusco's on the window. Were they—

KP: -hmm.

AE: Just so you could get more advertising or so—

KP: Well, I think because they were filming the movie, and they wanted, you to see Lusco's in the movie. They—they used the outside right there by the front door in—in a couple of scenes. And so that's why. They put that up there. And, right after they put it up there, they came and took it down. And the people that did it, Jones Sign Company—I said, “Oh, I really liked that. I want that back.” So we had to pay to have it put back. So I just always left it there. I liked it out there. They—there used to be neon in the windows, and there's still some remnants of it left. But over the years it was broken and, originally they had neon around the inside. And I think they had something hanging down that said

steaks and seafood and Lusco's, but it all got broken up and—it—back then there was really no one around Greenwood that repaired neon, so they ended up just throwing all of it away. I really wish I had still the pieces that they had, you know, what was left. To see if you could get it fixed. 'Cause it would—be all lit up at night.

AE: Uh-huh.

KP: When you would drive up.

[Counter: 381]

AE: and you said—you were telling me earlier that you used to stay open late for Denzel Washington when he would come in while they were filming [*Mississippi Masala*].

KP: I think they've always, —whenever there's been a movie here—um, a lot of the people like to come here to eat because of the booths. They liked being able to eat in private and not be disturbed. Plus, they liked to get in there and act pretty crazy. Some of 'em did. Let's see, I'm trying to remember the first movie that was made here. I don't really remember. *Home from the Hills*, I think. It was back when, George Hamilton and, uh [pause] what's that man's name? They ate here a good bit. This was when—do you know which movie I'm talking about?

AE: I have no idea.

KP: It's—I think it's *Home from the Hills* is the name of it. There was, of course, the one with, uh. [Pause] Oh gosh, my mind is just gone. *The Reivers*. That's the next one. Then *Ode to Billy Joe*. all those people that were here filming the movie—the—the—some of

the crew members and the director and—they all would come out here to eat and, Marie and them would stay open late—for them to come out and eat. ‘Cause usually they worked ‘til like about nine o’clock, and sometimes they wouldn’t even come to eat ‘til nine-thirty or ten o’clock. And then when they were doing *Mississippi Masala*, they asked me—several of them. And Maria, the one that was the, she was the d—the initial writer of the, screenplay. And she was the director—the director or the producer? The d—director. And, she asked me if we would consider staying open late for them. I said, “Well, as long as there’s enough of you.” I said, “I wouldn’t do it for like one or two people.” But used to when they came, they came in six, eight or tens. So it was worth it to stay open for them. They would come in about nine thirty or nine forty-five. And they ate, and then they left. Because they had to get up early the next morning and shoot so, you know, you knew they weren’t gonna stay out all night and keep you up all night. And now, that’s not like the group from Ode to Billy Joe. I think it was Max Baer? Was that the one that was associated with the—you know, the one that played Jethro on Beverly Hills. He was a producer in that one, and I think he used to be pretty wild. And when he used to come out here, he would keep ‘em up all night. They would stay out all night. There’d be mornings when, it’d be like two or three o’clock in the morning. Either that movie or *Nightmare in Badham County*. Did you f—are you familiar with that one?

AE: No. *[Laughs]*

KP: There were a lot of old movies made here! Now that I’m thinking of ‘em, you know. There—there were several that—right during that time frame, you know, that there were, they were made. And the last one, of course, was *Mississippi Masala*, but there have been

several crews that have come through here since then, checking out Mississippi. But they always go to Canton [Mississippi] or somewhere like that.

AE: Well, and I see in the back there too you have a bulletin board with a lot of pictures—a lot of pictures in the back by the kitchen of people who have come through here and, —that Willie Morris tablecloth. Can you tell the story behind that—that's in the hallway next—in the next dining room?

KP: Well, that was when Willie Morris, was here with William Styron, and they were having dinner. And, you know Willie used to come here a lot before he remarried. And then he and his bride—I think her name's Joanne—is that right? They came quite a bit too and, you know, everybody loved Willie. Willie was a lot of fun. Did you know Willie? Did you ever have an opportunity to meet him?

AE: No.

KP: Well, Willie was so entertaining. And of course he loved wine, and he loved to drink. And, I think they were eating dinner back there one night, and—with William Styron [sound of train in background]—and he just decided—he'd had enough to drink or whatever—and he just decided to start writing, so he just wrote on the tablecloth, you know, right there. And it's an excerpt from one of his books, but I'm not sure which one. someone told me, but I don't remember it. And when he left, the waiter brought the tablecloth back there and said, "Mrs. Pinkston," you know. "Look at this. That man wrote all over this tablecloth." I said, "Well, wait. Let me read it." So I sat it down, you know, and I started reading it, and I realized. I said, "Wha—who wrote this?" And they said, "Mr. Morris." And I said, "Well, we can't throw *this* away," you know. "We've got to

save this. This might be valuable one day.” I said, “We’ll have to do something.” So we got the scissors and cut it out, you know. And then we cut out the write-up that came in the [Greenwood] Commonwealth about when Styron was here and—so that I would remember when he wrote it and the circumstances. That’s why I had ‘em framed together. And, more people comment on that. And now that Willie’s gone, I’m so glad I have that.

AE: Yeah.

KP: I really am. I wouldn’t take anything for that. He was a lot of fun. He brought a lot of people here. And, he—would tell stories, you know. I could sit down and listen to him forever. In fact, Andy would get mad at me because I would be hostessing and I—he would threaten me, “Don’t go in that booth with Willie.” Because he knew that if I went in there, I wouldn’t come back out. Because I’d sit down and listen to him. You know, he was just so interesting to talk to and so interesting to listen to all the things he’d done—he’d start talking about his New York days, you know, and tell you stories about restaurants in New York and what this one did and that one did and—and the 21 Club back when—in his youth. And I mean, it was always real interesting to listen to him. And with me—he was always telling me stories that had to do with the restaurant business. I guess because he knew that I was in the restaurant business, and he was at Lusco’s, and then he would tell me things ab—about that, so. I found that interesting.

AE: Do you have any other stories kind of like that? About famous Mississippians coming through here?

KP: Mmm, famous Mississippians.

AE: Famous anybody, I guess.

[Counter: 463]

KP: I'd have to think about that for a little while. . [Pause] I don't remem—I—I mean, there are lots of 'em. I could spend days talkin'—tillin' stories about Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top. We had a lot of memories. Then there's other people that come through here. There were businessmen that used to come through here. Mr. Takahashi, form Osaka, Japan and—there—there were a lot of people back then. When I was a hostess I got to know them. They came a good bit. regularly—on business. And, I got to go sit in the booth and visit with them occasionally and talk to 'em and—yeah, I mean I—there are lots of people that came through here in my lifetime that I've met. There are some that just stood up at the counter and talked to me—for hours. And would tell me stories. one of the most interesting things that I know, there was a guy that came up here—and I do not remember his name. He was from New Orleans, and he was Italian. And he had been researching his Italian heritage. And his family had come in from Louisiana just like the Luscos had and, so he had been down in Louisiana researching his family tree, trying to find out, you know, what the name of his great-great grandfather and grandmother were, and where they came from and how many children came with 'em and this and that. So we were talking and—he just happened to bring up the subject of “wop.” Do you know what “wop” means? And I thought this was real interesting. I knew that when Uncle Lee, Marie's husband, if anyone ever used the word “wop,” he would get infuriated. And most Italians would. If you ever called an Italian a “wop,” you would seem 'em get very angry. And you wouldn't understand why they were gettin' angry, you know. And I never knew why they would get mad. and this man had researched it, and he said, “Do you actually

know what 'wop' means?" And I said, "No, I have no idea. I just know that it makes Uncle Lee angry, and a lot of people get upset when you refer to them as a 'wop.'" Just like, you know, the Lebanese would get upset when you refer to them as—some other—I'm not going to repeat it because they don't like that—that slang any either. But, he said, "Well actually, when the Italians would come in from Italy, they would come in through the center, and they would have them like line up in two different lines. They would say, everyone who has their papers get in one line. And then they would say, everyone without papers get in the other line. And then they would make this little tag that they would hang around their neck that would say w-o-p, which meant "without papers." And so, all the ones that were coming from Italy without papers would get in this line, and it would have w-o-p, "wop" on it. And it got to the point where the people that were doing it would say, "Okay, come on wop." You know. In reference to you without papers. So it became like, you know, not necessarily a—a good memory, I guess you could say. People would refer to it as "entered without papers." And they called them a "wop."

AE: Hmm.

KP: So and then—from time—over the years, it just grew to where Italians would not like to be called "wops." And you don't want to call one of 'em a "wop." They would get very, very upset with you, you know. 'Cause I—I had seen Uncle Lee get mad 'cause this m—uh, this man one night said something about a "wop" up front and oh! Uncle Lee got furious. And I thought that we were fixin' to have a fight. *[Laughs]* And I—Uncle Lee was an old man. He was not able to fight. I mean, he did have a cane, and he could hit him with it, you know. But I thought, mmmm. I was sitting there watching him, waiting for him to do something, but he didn't, you know. Marie walked over and was patten' his

hand goin', "It's okay, Phillip. It's okay, Phillip. Jus—just sit down. Just sit down. Just sit down." And then, you know, that man just stood and walked out the door, telling a story about a "wop." And finally, he got outside the door and, you know, we had Uncle Lee calmed down. But I didn't realize it was such a touchy subject—until then. That's what that means: without papers.

AE: Hmm.

[Counter: 525]

KP: Over the years, I just would talk to people. As you see, I love to talk. And I love to talk to people that I've never met before because you just always find out and learn something new every day from 'em, you know. And whenever people would come through that liked to talk as much as I would, I would sit up there, and they would sit on that stool, generally right there and talk to me for hours and tell me stories and tell me things, and I would just absorb it. Loved to hear it. So. There are lots of those stories. I have lots of different things that people have shared with me over the years.

AE: Yeah. And stories are important. That's why we're doing this.

KP: Yeah, they really are. And, like I told you, one of these days I'm gonna write 'em all down, and I can remember them.

AE: You should, definitely. Well, do you have anything else to add? I think you told me that you wanted to correct some things.

KP: Yes. You know, you asked me if we were related to the Giardina's because they all came—they were not related. I asked BeBe [Andy's mother]. But back then, you know, I think when they all immigrated to the United States, it was kinda like all the Lebanese hung out together, and all the Italians kinda hung out together. You know, they were all here for the first time, and they really didn't know anyone. And so they gravitated toward the people that were the same as they were. And then, after a while, of course, they all started—I think all the immigrants lived together and, knew each other, and then all the other people *[laughs]* lived on the other side of the track and lived together. And, of course, all the Lebanese and the Italians were the ones that were usually—and the Jewish people—were the ones that had all the businesses downtown. They were the ones that, more or less started Carrollton Avenue and Johnson Street. Because of all the, little haberdashers and—and, military [?] and whatever different kinds of shops. And it's kind of sad because I drive down there now, and in my day—even as a child—I can remember what downtown Greenwood used to look like. And we had some *great* shops—down there. [Sound of children playing outside] I mean, we really did. And it's just a shame that it's not—that they're not like that now. My children will never know, you know, what it was like. We had Abide's, we had Nayman & Nola, Field's Dry Shop was down there, we had a couple jewelry stores that were nice, we had—we had our first—I don't know if you remember Sterlings? Was a dime store. It was down there. what was the other store that—I mean, there were lots of stores. Like right down there from Crystal Cr—Grill?

AE: -hmm.

KP: on down that stretch right there? That was where—I think there was where a Giardina's was too.

AE: -hmm.

KP: Right in there. And, there were lots of stores down there. Nice stores too! A B&R department store, —she had wedding dresses upstairs. And formals. That's where everyone went to look for a formal in Greenwood. a hardware store and—that man, I think his name was Mr. Cenillia? And he used to sit upstairs with the window open—he lived upstairs—on Sunday afternoon and play a saxophone out the window.

AE: Huh.

KP: You could ride down the street and hear him playing the saxophone. And he was really good too. it was nice. It was really nice back then. I'm talking about old stuff now.

AE: Well, let me ask you. You hard working restaurant families, did y'all ever eat around? Did you ever eat at Crystal grill or Giardina's, or did they come here or—

KP: Yeah, as a matter of fact—you mean like Andy and me?

AE: Yeah.

KP: Yeah. well, we never ate at Giardina's because we were always working when they were working, and they were open basically the same hours we were. Now, we eat at the Crystal Grill. When my children were little, we always ate—we went to church and ate Sunday lunch at the Crystal. And, even now on Sunday nights we order out th—from there. Or, if something comes up. Like for instance my granddaughter had her

christening, and we had to do it because Andrea was in Oxford, and it was a real quick thing, and I couldn't really plan a big meal, so I just took the whole family to the Crystal. Reserved a room and had a set menu and did that. And, so yeah, we eat at the Crystal. I don't really eat—I've been to Flatland [Grill] once. We used to go to Webster's. We haven't been there in a long time. we go around in the Delta. We try to eat around in the Delta and try out the new places. And, w—of course, they have to be open on Sunday or Monday. I mean if they're not open on Sunday or Monday, we can't go.

AE: Which is hard in Mississippi. *[Laughs]*

KP: Yeah. And we do go out of town. well, we go to Memphis and Jackson. We go out of town a little bit to eat—uh, to places like that. And Oxford. I love to go to Oxford to eat I think I've just about covered everything in Oxford. There might be a couple that I hadn't—well, I—I don't go to the bar-type places, you know, but, as far as the eating establishments. I'm—I'm trying to think if there's anywhere that I haven't been. I think I—

AE: Do y'all like barbecue?

[Counter: 597]

KP: Pardon?

AE: Do y'all like barbecue?

KP: Yeah.

AE: Do you have a favorite place here in town that you like to go for barbecue?

KP: Oh. [Pause] Not really, that would be tough. My favorite barbecue is Tennessee barbecue. And the best barbecue I ever had came from Tennessee. It was some barbecue from a little old man in Tennessee that BeBe, my mother-in-law—Papa's from Tennessee. And he used to cook the, butts and—and do the meat for her. And make the sauce. And she would bring it down here for us to have. I think that man died, and I think his recipe died with him, and I really hate that because it was wonderful barbecue. And to be honest with you, there's nobody around Greenwood that fixes barbecue like that. They're all good in their own way. They're all different, you know. You have Steven [Steven's Bar-B-Q], and it's good. But it's—it's—it's smoky. Then you have, The King [Bar-B-Q King] on Park Avenue, and it's completely different. You know. I've never been to Spooney's. Have you been to Spooney's?

AE: No, I haven't.

KP: John T.'s been there.

AE: Yeah, I—

KP: So you need to ask him about that. I've never gone there. then you have Q-Ball's down here. It's—and it's okay. I mean they're—they're all—they're all okay, and they're good, but they're just not Tennessee barbecue.

AE: Yeah.

KP: And if you've ever eaten Tennessee barbecue, then you know what I'm talking about.

AE: I do, definitely.

KP: It's just something about Tennessee barbecue. Why is it so good? Is it—

AE: Well, we just did a big project up there, and they do all that whole hog barbecue.

KP: -hmm.

AE: And it's just—they devote the time to it, I think, is the biggest thing.

KP: Really? It's just good!

AE: Yeah. [Next phrase unintelligible]

KP: I mean, you can definitely tell a difference when you've eaten that. And I don't know if it's the wood they use when they smoke it that gives it a different flavor—

AE: Yeah, I'm sure that has a lot to do with it.

KP: —or what. But if you—the people down here, when they barbecue, it's just not the same. It doesn't taste the same.

AE: Do you remember a Lucas barbecue that was around here? I've been hearing—

KP: Yes! Yes! Yes! my grandfather was good friends with Mr. Lucas. And—this is going to sound really funny. I was twelve years old and, you know, all I wanted for my birthday present was two slabs of ribs from Lucas Barbecue.

AE: No kidding. *[Laughs]*

KP: That was like gold. I would—my granddaddy would take me over there and give me two slabs of ribs. And I would eat on ‘em for about two or three days. I mean, they were wonderful. I would give anything if someone knew that recipe. He had the best barbecued ribs you’ve ever put in your mouth. I’m serious. My mouth is watering just thinking about it.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: That was like a treat. It was right—was it down this street? [Karen points over her left shoulder towards Avenue F] I think? On the corner? It’s since then been turned into a house. I could show you exactly where the building was. I can describe it to you. ‘Cause you walked in, and it was a white building with two black screen doors. And then—it had the double doors—and you walked in, and he had a meat case over to the left. And he would have all the barbecue that he did in the meat case. It would be cold. And then over to the right he had a couple of tables where people would come in if they wanted to sit and eat. But we would always—we would—my granddaddy would never let us stay in there and eat. He would—we would always pick it up and take it home. But, we’d—you’d go in and order it, and he would wrap it up in white butcher block paper and tape it, and you would take it home. It was really good.

AE: Well, and everybody’s been talking about it. And I’ve been asking about it because, it’s sounded so legendary. And also because I’ve been hearing about it being an interracial couple that ran it.

[Counter: 657]

KP: Were they? See, I never knew that. I knew that Mr. Lucas looked white. And I never understood why he was, in a all black neighborhood. You know, I mean this was right back then—this was I—like—he was in the middle and—most of the people that had businesses in these, black neighborhoods back then were the Orientals. You know, ‘cause you have Chinaman stores. You ever heard of that? Chinaman stores? ‘Cause I said that to one man one night up here, and he was freakin’ out, “*What* kind of store?” I said, “A Chinaman store.” Because he wanted some cigarettes. And, he said, “Could you get me some cigarettes?” And I said, “Well yes, sir.” I said, “If you’ll give me the money, I’ll send down to the Chinaman store and get you some cigarettes.” “The *what* store?” I’m goin’, “The Chinaman store!” And, he said, “Do y’all do that? Do—you know, if—if it’s a white man’s store, is it a Whiteman store? Or if it’s a red man’s store—” So a—I said, “No!” I said, “It—all those little shops are called Chinaman stores, you know, in Mississippi. And he just thought that was just wild. He had never heard anything like that before in his life. But anyway, there were nothin’ but Chinaman stores over here. And Mr. Lucas was the only white person, you know. So I guess his wife was black?”

AE: That’s what I understand. And I’ve heard that maybe he was part Lebanese, or maybe he was Asian, or maybe he was—nobody seems to know for certain what his ethnicity was.

KP: Well, to be honest with you, I think he was h—uh, half and half. I think he was half white and half black. I remember him. And I don’t know how he and my grandfather got to be fr—such good friends. my granddaddy would—I guess my granddaddy would just go in there and—and get barbecue and talk to him and drink a cup of coffee and stuff like that. But, uh—and my granddaddy was a real loving person. I mean he had lots and lots

of friends from all different levels. He never had boundaries as far as, you know, this person has money or this person doesn't. Everybody—it didn't matter. Their— a dollar sign didn't mean anything to him. He either liked you, you know, or he didn't, but he usually liked everybody. And he had a lot of friends. But, I can remember him, being good friends with Mr. Lucas, and I can remember going in there with him as child and sitting there, and Mr. Lucas giving me, a chicken wing or a chicken drumstick that he had just barbecued for me to nibble on as a little girl, while they'd sit there and have coffee. And they'd be talking. And I always thought that he was—half and half. Because he just looked it to me. No—I never asked any questions and, my granddaddy never offered *[laughs]* any ex—, you know, reason, you know. He is—I guess my granddaddy thought he was white. But I thought he was half and half. So I'm not sure that he was completely a hundred percent white.

AE: Do you remember when they closed over there?

KP: I think—see I didn't know he was married, but I remember the black lady that was in there. She died first, I believe. And then he was by himself. And he really started having some health issues, and he got to where he couldn't cook as much stuff as—as before. He got real ill and, I don't know if he left and went off somewhere to die or if he died here. I would say I was probably [pauses to think] in high school when that happened. Because I remember going there when I was in j—as—in elementary school, and I remember goin' there when I was in junior high. But I have no memory or recollection of going there in high school. And I—and—and my granddaddy, I mean, that was always a treat. That was kinda our thing that we did t—together. we would have still done that had he been around. So I don't—I think I was in high school.

AE: Did you ever have the tamales over there?

KP: I never had the tamales.

AE: Because you know, Pearl Johnson, who worked over there—

KP: Is she the one that does the tamales?

AE: She makes the tamales, and she's—has 'em at Giardina's and at the Flatland [Grill].

KP: Uh-huh.

AE: I talked to her last week. She's a real neat woman.

KP: Is she?

AE: -hmm.

KP: I never had the—I never had the, the tamales. The—the ribs were so good. And the chicken. It was good. 'Cause he'd give me the chicken right after he'd taken it off the grill and give me a piece. And he was a really nice man. He was kind of short. Wore dark-rimmed glasses. He was real, real pale skinned. A—of course, his hair was white. I remember his hair being white. kind of a round face. A—always had on a black shirt. And I don't remember what kind of pants, but I just remember a white button-down short-sleeve shirt and a white apron. Always had that on.

AE: Well, I'm glad that came up 'cause you have a clear memory of, all that. And I've been asking around so—

KP: I—I remember him very well. Yeah. [pause] I just don't remember when he closed. But I could show you the building. I mean it's just right down the street.

AE: Oh—

KP: In fact, I ride by there often, and I think about it, you know. I'm thinking—wh—my maid lives over here. Well, she doesn't anymore, but my old maid used to live over here, and I'd have to go pick her up. And I would be riding by there to pick her up and come back by. And I'd always see those doors, and, they—I don't know if they changed the doors to where there's just one door or how they've done it, but I always look at it and think—and it had a sign just like—well we don't have it anymore. Lusco's used to have a sign like that where it was long and had a Co-Cola at the end of it.

AE: Yeah.

KP: And had Lucas Bar-B-Q across the front of it.

AE: Well, I'll have to go snap a picture of that.

KP: [Coughs] Oh, the sign's not there anymore.

AE: Well, of the building at least.

KP: Okay.

AE: Yeah, for sure.

KP: All right. Anything else you want to know, Miss Ma'am?

AE: No, ma'am. That's it.

KP: All right. God, I really feel old.

AE: *[Laughs]*

KP: You asking me about stuff like that, *[laughing]* and I remember it.

[Recording stops but then begins again, when Mrs. Pinkston has something to add]

AE: Okay.

KP: We were discussing the homebrew, and I told you that I thought it was beer. Because I didn't know what else it would be. But it was not. It was wine. Papa made his own wine. But they called it homebrew because he brewed it at home.

AE: -hmm.

KP: And there really wadn't any other word for it back then, I don't guess. People called it wine. I'm not sure why. But, BeBe was telling me that he always kept it out back in a jug. I mean, in some big barrels or whatever. And that when people would order it, they would always go out and have to cipher [sic] it out. And she can remember as a child goin' back and siphonin' it out and puttin' it in a—in a big jug, you know, and bringing it in for people to drink. And she said she always had a cork to put in it. And I asked her, I said, "Was it beer?" And she said, "No, it was like wine." So.

AE: Any idea where he got the grapes for it? Did he grow 'em?

KP: I don't. Uh-huh.

AE: Okay, well—

KP: I didn't ask that question. I should have. Not that she would have remembered But, I guess they bought 'em because, you know, they bought—they had so much fruit that used to come in on the train, like I showed you the picture back there of the Italian banana men. And I guess they brought grapes in. Because there were a good many Italians around here. And, you know, I'm sure a lot of 'em made their own wine back then.

AE: Yeah.

KP: 'cause I—I've heard BeBe tell stories about it. And there are some that—that made wine themselves just to—say, several years ago, when they got so old they couldn't remember or didn't have the time or what to do—And I don't know where they got their grapes from.

AE: Hmm. Well, that is most interesting. Thank you for—

KP: So.

AE: —following up on that.

KP: Yes, I asked her.

[Counter: 805]

[End]