

**TERESA CRANMORE**  
**Squealer's Barbecue — Meridian, MS**

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Location: Squealer's Barbecue — Meridian, MS  
Interviewer: Meghan Leonard  
Transcription: Meghan Leonard  
Length: 53 minutes  
Project: Southern BBQ Trail

**[Begin Teresa Cranmore Interview]**

**0:00:03**

**Meghan Leonard:** All right. This is Meghan Leonard on Tuesday, June 29<sup>th</sup> at 1:05, sitting in Squealer's Barbecue in Meridian with Ms. Teresa Cranmore. If I could have you state your name, occupation, and birthday.

**0:00:16**

**Teresa Cranmore:** My name is Teresa Cranmore. I'm the owner of Squealer's Hickory-Smoked Barbecue. My birthday is November the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1961.

**0:00:25**

**ML:** Are you from Meridian originally?

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**TC:** Meridian is my hometown.

**0:00:29**

**ML:** Can you give me a little bit of background on Squealer's? When you started, maybe?

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**TC:** We started Squealer's Barbecue back in 1998, and it's pretty much— *[phone rings]*

**0:00:46**

**ML:** We can pause. And we're back.

**0:00:54**

**TC:** I guess to give you the background on Squealer's I have to give you a little bit of background on myself. I'm an accountant by trade. I've worked for independent oil

jobbers, I've helped them open convenience stores, I've worked at night at the community college. I'm a workaholic, basically, so Squealer's came about as—as me being a workaholic and also with the American Dream that everybody has of owning their own business. And men especially—it's so funny, they think that they can cook, and I'm telling you this because of my husband. And my husband had always had a dream of having his own barbecue restaurant. And he just—he's full time in the Guard, so he's unable to be in here all the time like I am, and anyway, we had this idea that since I worked so much for everybody else, why not try to do our own business and I thought we could build—if he would build it, I would get the people to come. He said, “You build it, they will come.”

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So, he built a little smokehouse—if you were at my North Hills store, I've got a little—like a shoothouse, with a smoker sticking out of it. He built it, and I had to figure a way to get the people to come. We thought that I could set up in front of a Wal-Mart or a Winn-Dixie or something like that and people would come and get barbecue there. Well, we found out that Wal-Mart and Winn-Dixie aren't just going to let you set up in front of their place. And by the grace of God, we had somebody that wanted us to do a catering for them for 300 people. This was before I actually started selling barbecue, and it turned out to be such a—such a tremendous event.

**0:02:36**

And some other people that had been at that catering had tried it and they wanted us to set up in front of their convenience stores. And we've got—there called Safeco's now, but they used to be Super Stops, and they asked us to set up in front of their rest—I'm sorry,

in front of their convenience stores, and they set us up in front of one probably about 20 minutes outside of Meridian, and it—it went well to start with but we realized real quick we didn't—we weren't convenience store barbecue. We wanted something a lot better. And I continued my job as an accountant, my husband continued in the Air National Guard and luckily about three months later the North Hills store used to be a sno-cone building. They sold sno-cones out of there. But it had been empty for months, and, you know, you don't realize all the connections that you make with people, and we had a connection with somebody that worked for the man that owned that sno-ball stand, and so they really thought a barbecue place would do great in there.

**0:03:34**

And scared to death, we, you know, took the initial jump, the investment of getting in there, buying more equipment to put in there. My accounting background makes me look at every single little penny and making sure that we're being able to make the bills, and here we are twelve years later in our own location. And we are actually fixing to open up a new location. But when we do that new location, it's going to be a legitimate barbecue joint which is exactly what we wanted to start with, and I don't feel like we've achieved that at this point, but the barbecue joint--when we get it open, then we won't have our other two. We'll just have the one location. So Squealer's—it just came from the idea of me being a workaholic and my husband, his idea of owning his own barbecue restaurant. It—it's kind of funny, but it all worked together. And like I said, twelve years later, Meridian's been great to us. We love it here. We love it.

**0:04:36**

**ML:** You mentioned a true barbecue joint as opposed to the two that you have right now. What do you mean by that?

**0:04:42**

**TC:** Well, you know, people say the best barbecue is where you find it in a hole in the wall. And I truly believe that, and this is not a hole in the wall, but I—I can say that ever since we opened our doors, we have been voted as Meridian's favorite barbecue every year in the Reader's Choice Awards. So, and—and I don't have a big head about it, I'm very humbled by it because we have some phenomenal barbecue here in Meridian. And I am truly humbled by it. The people in Meridian have just been really great to us. But the North Hill store is more along the lines of what you think of as a barbecue joint because it is more of a hole in the wall. But we want a real rustic, you know, very—keep it simple stupid. It's how my husband and I have always said, you know, the more complicated you get with stuff, then the—it's just not as good. So, we—we really are trying to go down to the basics and just keep it as simple as we can. I think we've got a great product, and people keep coming back.

**0:05:43**

**ML:** Can you tell me a little bit about that smoker that you guys have over at the North Hills location?

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**TC:** Okay. We actually have four of those smokers. That's one of our smaller ones. That's a 500-pound Southern Pride smoker. This may sound silly to say. My husband has said a monkey with his brains in his pocket could handle it. It's a very easy machine. My husband's an old engine mechanic in the Air National Guard, and he can take things apart

and put them back together. And he's said it's the simplest oven that you could ever have—so easy, when things go wrong. The smoker—it actually runs on butane, but we put hickory logs. You can put whatever kind of wood you want in there. Some people may want apple or pecan or something like that, but we are hickory-smoked barbecue so we keep hickory to put in it. And you put the hickory in a little shoot and it's got a fan and it blows the hickory. It's a rotisserie type of oven so it blows the hickory smoke on to the meat. It gives it a really good—you've got a really good smoke ring and a really good smoke flavor.

**0:06:50**

**ML:** Was that your first smoker ever, or had you used other ones?

**0:06:53**

**TC:** That was the first smoker that we ever had, and that's all we ever get is the Southern Pride smokers.

**0:06:59**

**ML:** What difference do you think using hickory wood makes, as opposed to other kinds of wood?

**0:07:05**

**TC:** It's really just a—a flavor. Some of your other woods are a lot sweeter. One thing that a lot of people don't realize with smoke is that you can get very, very ill from smoke. If you put too much smoke to your meat, you—as a businessperson, you may not realize it. But it's the customers that go home and they just got a little upset stomach, and it's not from food poisoning or anything like that. It's just too much smoke, especially in elderly

people. So hickory's a little bit easier to control. Hickory is a much harder wood than a lot of these other woods are, so it's—I just like the flavor that the hickory gives.

**0:07:40**

**ML:** I want to talk a little bit about your menu because it's very delicious, as I just experienced. What did you start out with on your menu?

**0:07:50**

**TC:** Our menu was the simplest that it could possibly be, and again, we have to go back to our North Hills store, that was our original location. Just pulled pork, ribs, chicken, baked beans, potato salad, bread, and our homemade banana pudding. Now you didn't get to try the banana pudding, but I have people that would kill for the recipe. It—it's just an awesome banana pudding, and banana pudding kind of goes along with barbecue. But that was our menu originally, and it's just grown from there.

**0:08:20**

**ML:** What seems to be the customer favorite so far?

**0:08:23**

**TC:** As far as the food?

**0:08:25**

**ML:** I guess starting with the meat and then moving to the sides.

**0:08:28**

**TC:** Okay. The pulled pork is our number one. That—that is the most popular. And then of course you can get into the ribs and the chicken. We also have brisket. We've got sausage. We do turkeys. I sell a lot of turkeys over the holiday seasons and hams—hickory smoked hams. And then on our side fixings, at this College Park location because

it is a dine-in and we've got fryers and all, our homemade fries are our number one seller here. Our baked beans are out of this world. I can honestly say I don't make our potato salad. I don't want—I would never try to mislead anybody. I can't make the potato salad that good. I think it's a good, simple potato salad. And then something that I don't know if you care for it or not, but pickles. I have pickles here, and I should have introduced you to our pickles because they are something that brings people in. I have people call from out of town, say "Have you got any of your hot pickles? Because I want to get some to take home with me." We sell them by the jar, and it's a sweet bread and butter pickle but it's hot. And it's really good.

**0:09:37**

**ML:** Now, talking about your desserts because I just had the fried Twinkie and it was delicious, where did the idea for having a fried Twinkie in a barbecue joint come from?

**0:09:45**

**TC:** The fried Twinkies, I—I actually, I think I had seen something on the Food Network or some show or maybe I read it on the internet about them having them up in fairs. And they do them differently because they take the whole Twinkie, and they stick it on a popsicle stick and freeze it. I tried that, but it was really hard to —it 's hard to handle for somebody trying to eat it. So we decided to cut the Twinkie into bite-sized pieces and just deep-fry them in a batter that I made up. As far as—most places just put the powdered sugar, but we started sort of coming up with ideas of caramel and pecans, which is the number one as far as the Twinkies go, and then the raspberry sauce is really good.

**0:10:26**

But something also along the lines of the fried Twinkie, I told you our banana pudding is really our number one seller. We do a fried banana pudding also that is just out of this world.

**0:10:37**

**ML:** How do you fry banana pudding?

**0:10:38**

**TC:** That's really a funny question. *[Laughs]* I got a little story to tell about it because I had been talking about it. My employees that are—that have been with me over the years, even the ones that still aren't with me, I feel like they've had Squealer's in their hearts. Most of them. And when they hear about things they want to try, they get real excited, and we had been talking about coming up with a recipe for some fried banana pudding. And basically what we do is we deep-fry the banana in the same batter that we do the Twinkies in. That's the only thing that's actually fried, but then we take our pudding mix that we make so many times a day because we go through it so much, and we put the banana pudding on top of the banana, then we sprinkle pecans on top of that, and sprinkle cookies on top of the that.

**0:11:20**

And it is really, really good, but when my employees had heard about it, one of them—one of the young men decided he was going to try and do the fried banana pudding, and he took the banana pudding and I guess he rolled it is what they told me. He tried to roll it up in some of the batter, and he fried it but of course it just completely broke apart in the grease. *[Laughs]* I just thought that was really funny. They do—they try. They want to be

part of it, and they want to help and learn so quick. But yeah, he was literally frying the pudding itself.

**0:11:51**

**ML:** Well, the fried Twinkie is delicious. I'll have to try to fried banana pudding before I leave. Now, can you tell me a little bit about your sauce? Because it's delicious, and I noticed it sits on the table—that you guys have the bottles of it. You don't have to give me your recipe or anything, just describe it maybe?

**0:12:06**

**TC:** Okay. Our sauce, I believe, is more like a southwestern style. My—my roots are from Mexico and from up North. My father was a Yankee. He was from Pennsylvania. My mother was from Kingsville, Texas. And of course, my mother being Mexican, a lot of our food was kind of spicy. And I don't care or a real sweet sauce. And it's funny because I've found in Mississippi—or at least in Meridian, people—not as many people care for a real sweet sauce. I mean, there are people that want it, and this sauce that I've got it's—it's got a little bit of vinegar in it, but it's not a strong vinegar base. That's why I say it's more of a southwestern style. The original sauce that we started with twelve years ago is still our number one sauce that people come and buy, and I ship it. People want us to ship it to them and everything.

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But about a year ago, maybe two years ago, I developed a honey barbecue sauce. And the honey barbecue is really, really good. It's—it's not as—it's not a real thick sauce. None of our sauces are real thick because we don't believe that—that barbecue is a sauce that you're buying. As far as when you come into a barbecue restaurant, a lot of these

barbecue restaurants you go into, everything is smothered with sauce. Well, you're not really getting to taste the meat. You're tasting the barbecue sauce. So, we want the sauce to enhance the flavor of our meat. That's why if you saw—I don't know which sauce you might have tried, but if you saw the sauce on our tables, then there are different kinds. We've even got a hot barbecue sauce that a lot of people like it too. But it—it is a thinner sauce, but that honey barbecue, like I said, it's only been about two years. And I guess because it's different, I really like it.

**0:13:57**

**ML:** So, it's safe to say that you believe the meat is more important than the sauce?

**0:14:03**

**TC:** Oh, most definitely. If somebody doesn't—if a barbecue sauce—I'm sorry, if a barbecue restaurant thinks that the sauce is the most important thing, I don't think they're true barbecue connoisseurs. The meat, the smoke that you use on the meat—or these open pit barbecues, it's a totally different way of cooking. And I love open pit barbecue. We don't have that here. But it's all in what you like, what style of barbecue you like. In the South, there's so many different kinds of barbecue, and I see a lot of places that they just—they take cold meat and they throw it on the grill, and that's what their—and then they smother it in the barbecue sauce. I just don't believe that's a good product. The sauce is not the most important thing, but it is important, you know.

**0:14:50**

**ML:** Now you were just saying that the South has so many different kinds of barbecue, and one of the reasons I'm here today is to talk about Mississippi barbecue. Do you

notice a different tradition, as opposed to maybe Alabama or North Carolina or South Carolina?

**0:15:02**

**TC:** It's funny because here we were just talking about sauces. I do notice a real difference, mostly in the sauces, you know. And—and like I said, you do have your open pit barbecue, you've got your smoked barbecue, no matter what kind of wood they may use. And those are really the only two that I'm real familiar with. But the sauces—it seems like the sauces in Alabama and the Carolinas are more of a vinegar base. In fact, to be honest with you, on our sauce when I first started, I worked for an independent oil jobber in Alabama, and they had a barbecue sauce. The owner had a barbecue sauce that everybody in Alabama absolutely loved, and I thought, "Well, maybe I could use his sauce when I come to Meridian and we open up our own place." And when—when I introduced that sauce to the people of Meridian, they said, "You will never make it with a sauce like that." Because it was called a white sauce, and it was a real strong—he used apple cider vinegar and white vinegar and even malt vinegar, I believe if I'm remember correctly. So that's a real strong vinegar and—but that's what the people over there like. So, it's all in what you were raised with.

**0:16:16**

And in Mississippi, they—I have people tell me with my barbecue sauce that they would eat it on a cow patty. They love it so much. And the first time I heard that, I thought, "Wait a minute, are they complimenting me?" But then when I realized what they were saying, I was like, she really likes my barbecue sauce. But then I've got some people that

say, “Oh, I can’t stand your sauce.” It used to hurt my feelings, but it does not anymore because I’ve learned everything is a matter of taste.

**0:16:43**

**ML:** Now going back to talking about your parents, you said your dad was from the North, and your mother was from Texas. Can you kind of explain about how growing up—what foods you guys ate, if you guys ever barbecued maybe?

**0:16:56**

**TC:** Okay. Growing up, a lot of our meals that we had were either Mexican or Yankee-style, so much the southern fried chicken and mashed potatoes and all that. It was—it truly was either the Yankee style or the Mexican style cooking. We’ve also—my father was not military, he was civil service, and we lived all over the world. But Meridian was always home, we always came home to Meridian. And I think that my mother’s cooking, using spices, a lot of spices in her food is where we come up with the—the spice in our sauce. Because it is a little spicy, it’s not—I don’t really think that it’s hot, but it’s just got a lot of flavors to it—a lot of different flavors to it.

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And then the Yankee that I get out of my dad’s side is more the slow cooking, you know. That’s—I can remember my mother getting recipes from his mother and everything was, you take your time, you know. Don’t be in a rush and cooking anything. When we cook our meats, it takes a long time, a long time to cook them.

**0:18:03**

**ML:** How long do you guys usually cook your meat for?

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**TC:** Well, it depends on what meats we're cooking. If we're cooking our Boston butts, we usually cook them overnight. It's going to take 12-15 hours for those to cook. Our ribs and our chicken, generally it takes about two and a half hours to cook them, and they're slow—slow cooked. Now our Boston butts, something I haven't gotten into is our fundraisers. And I don't know if you might have seen that on the back of our menu. We do a tremendous amount of fundraisers. So, we pull a heck of a lot of pork. And we use Boston butts for pulling them.

**0:18:43**

**ML:** Can you tell me a little bit about your fundraisers? I did see it on your menu and on your website as well, and I was hoping you could elaborate on that.

**0:18:50**

**TC:** Oh, sure. I love to talk about the fundraisers. Fundraisers—it's our way of giving back to the people of Meridian and the surrounding communities. They've been so good to us, but the fundraisers came about just from a dear friend who had a child in high school and it was right after we opened. And a lot of the stuff that's happened at Squealer's has come from suggestions; I'm always open to new ideas. She asked if we'd ever thought about doing a fundraiser, and I said, "No, but let's talk about it." So we—we developed a fundraiser, and it truly is a fundraiser for the organization. It's not—it's not a fundraiser for Squealer's. We are basically charging them what it cost for my food and for my labor to be able to make this. I'm not really making any profits off of what we're selling it to them for.

**0:19:40**

I'll just give you an idea. We sell the plates to them for, like, \$3.25. A full pulled pork dinner like you get it at the restaurant. They turn around and sell it to the public for \$6 or \$7; most of them now are selling them for \$7. So, and they don't have anything in—in that cost, so they're making well over \$3 off of every plate that they sell. I have some fundraisers that may sell 200 plates or they may sell 1500 plates, and they make all the profit. So they're basically making the profits off of my plates, but I make the customer off of it. And that helped make our business grow. We've helped to raise well over a million dollars in the Meridian and surrounding communities just with our fundraisers, and we do the same groups over and over and over. So that tells me, you know, that we've got something good going there.

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I couldn't sell anything to anybody. I couldn't sell ice to people in hell, I'm sorry. I'm just not a salesperson. But I think our plates sell themselves. And I have these people that do the fundraisers that say, "All I have to do is sell them Squealer's barbecue." And they're like, "Yes!" They know we're very consistent with the product we put out there.

**0:20:53**

**ML:** Lots of people view barbecue joints as almost a community-gathering place, and it seems like with your fundraisers, it kind of echoes that. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**0:21:05**

**TC:** Yes, I agree with that because with our fundraisers, I don't want to say it's the same people that buy the same plates over and over and over. Now they do when they hear that Squealer's is having a fundraiser, then they know that I'm going to stand behind it. If

they were to get a plate, and in twelve years that I can think of I've had two people that called me that said they got a plate, and they weren't happy with it. Of course I made it good for them whether it was my fault or the fault of—you know, I don't care, to me it's my fault if a plate got out to somebody, and there was something wrong with it.

**0:21:40**

But it is. People come, and they help to build the plates. People come into this restaurant—we're really good about when a customer comes up, you notice they ask you your name. We want to get to know our customers. I mean I've got people in here that I see at least once a week and I know them by name now. My employees are a lot better at it than I am. *[Laughs]* I know faces, and I know voices a lot better than I do names. But I feel like the people in Meridian are the ones that built Squealer's. Not me and my family. I feel like it was more the people in Meridian because they've supported us, they've given me advice. You know, they'll call me, and say, "I was at your restaurant and the young lady that was there wasn't very friendly to me" and I don't mind, I want to know that. I tell them, "Thank you so much for letting me know that." But I also hear—I just, yesterday I was in a meeting and an attorney I was meeting with said, "You know, I don't know how you hire such good employees because they are the nicest people there." So I hear the good and the bad and most of its good, thank goodness.

**0:22:53**

But, you know, another thing I've learned is the bigger you get, the more complaints you're going to get, you know. You can't make everybody happy. We just try. If people will give me a chance, I'll make it right.

**0:23:03**

**ML:** How important is it for you as the business owner to be in your business, to be in your establishment, seeing people? Like you were saying, knowing names, knowing voices, knowing faces—is that something that's really crucial to you as a business owner?

**0:23:15**

**TC:** It's very, very important. And I—I wish that I had more time to get out there and talk to my customers on a regular basis. We're—we're really a very small business, and I'm—the way the economy is, I've gotten my staff just down to the bare minimum. And I'm really having to work—I've always worked really hard anyway, but I'm having to get even dirtier and working a lot more which keeps me from being out, from being able to go out there and talk to the customers all the time. This new location that we're working on, because it will just be one store, I'll have more time to do that.

**0:23:52**

The customers want to know you. They want to know that you care, and that's why it's so important to talk to them. I—I guess because in Meridian, everybody knows everybody around. I know it's a small—it's a small—it's a big small town, but they know me where I may not necessarily know them somewhere, they're going to know me and who I am. And to be honest with you, the way I look right now, they wouldn't know me. I've usually got my baseball cap on, my hair pulled back, no makeup because I get down and dirty. I get real dirty in the restaurant, and I work really hard. But I'll be behind the counter and I'll see a customer and I'll holler at them, "Hey so and so!" especially if there's nobody in here. But, you know, I try to make a point of talking to my customers

and knowing them, you know, and them to know me, that I care enough about them. And I get out there and ask them, “Is everything okay for you?” It is important.

**0:24:46**

**ML:** Going back to speak about your new location, I find it really interesting that you're going from two locations to just one, which seems to be the opposite of what most people do. You know, they grow their business, and I think that's really cool because it keeps it local, keeps it small. Did you intend for that to happen that way?

**0:25:05**

**TC:** You know, I really didn't intend for it to happen. But I also didn't imagine that Squealer's would get as big as it has gotten. I do so much in fundraising and so much in catering. My caterings, I may on the average week do about 2,000 plates in fundraising plates. And that's not necessarily just one fundraiser, that could be four fundraisers or five fundraisers, or it could be two fundraisers. And I want to be there to do the fundraisers. I want—because it gets me out there in the community and the people know me. And I can't be at both locations too at the same time. And it's hard—I've got one other person that works for me that I think is a very good representative of me. And when you're dealing with your fundraisers, you've got—like if you were trying to put on a fundraiser, and you've got 500 plates, you've got 500 people that are eating, and you're responsible. In your mind, you're responsible for these people to get a good product in their lap for lunchtime or for whatever time they've specified. And you know it's all on your shoulders. The last thing you want to worry about is, “Is the food going to be ready? Is the food going to be good?”

**0:26:19**

So I want my customers to know that they can call me at anytime, any questions that they have, and to know that I'm not going to be late. I'm not—if anything's wrong with their fundraiser, it's not going to be my fault. So that's—I'm sorry, I'm losing track of everything I'm saying. *[Laughs]* But the fundraisers, it's just me wanting to be—I wish I could clone myself. This one young lady that I've got working for me, she is just like me. She's very laid back, she doesn't—when we go to this fundraiser, we don't need to be like, “Oh I'm so sorry, I'm so late. Hurry up, hurry up!” When we get there, it's—they're panicking in their mind, even if we're n plenty of time, in their mind, they're panicking, and we're saying, “It's okay.” We'll have 100 plates built in 15 minutes or less. It takes no time, and once everything gets going and they realize it, it's like, “Oh wow, this was the easiest fundraiser in the world.” We didn't realize it was going to be as easy to do and then we even bring stuff that we clean up the tables. We even bring the bags that they can carry them off in, their customers can carry them off in. All they have to do is sell the plates, have people help build them, and they make any deliveries. But we take care of everything else. We really—to them, we're taking care of the hardest part, but because I can't sell anything, they're taking care of the hardest part for me because I couldn't sell anything. *[Laughs]*

**0:27:53**

**ML:** As I told you earlier, I was really excited to know that Squealer's was owned by a female, and you have a really largely female-based staff from what I've seen.

**0:28:01**

**TC:** Isn't that funny the way that worked out?

**0:28:02**

**ML:** I think it's awesome, and they're really sweet girls. I was hoping you could tell me what it feels like to be female in a really male-dominated culinary tradition.

**0:28:12**

**TC:** Well, I'll be honest with you. I didn't—I guess I never really looked at that. Now my husband and I are both—we're partners in this. But he is full-time in the Guard. One thing I will say about him is he's my biggest critic. I have to please him and—and he comes in here on a regular basis, not just this store but the other location. And if there's anything wrong, he's going to let me know. And although he works full-time and he loves his job, he does—he—he does let me know all the time. And if he's not in here because of the Guard, they're all big customers of ours. They'll let me know, all those guys. They're—they're like, I've got a hundred husbands out there. They're all so quick to let me know.

**0:28:57**

But as far as it being a male-dominated culinary experience here, I just—I guess I never thought about it until you say that and I guess it is. I would have never opened up a barbecue restaurant. Like I said I'm an accountant by trade. I taught computers out at the college at night. That's the kind of stuff that I did. I never in my wildest dreams thought that it would be like this. Never. But it's just evolved. And one thing that I guess it kind of surprises me that there aren't more women doing this sort of stuff. Women, we're more to nurture. We want to nurture our families, our friends.

**0:29:34**

So when I do catering, I do a lot for pharmaceutical reps and individuals. And I think of everything. I mean, absolutely everything. And that's a woman. That's the nurturing in me that—where I don't know that a man. Not to knock men, don't get me wrong. But I don't know that a man would think—like, on these—on my fundraisers, I bring a bucket with sanitized water to clean off the tables when all is done. I don't know that a man would think about that, you know. That's just me, thinking of every single thing, and it surprises my customers when I show up whether it's for a catering or a fundraiser. And I've gotten stuff that they've totally forgot about. It's, "Oh wow! I'm so glad, I didn't even think about that." So that's—like I said, that's just the—the nurturing in women. And that's why I'm surprised there aren't more women. I know there's women out there in the restaurant business, but barbecue, maybe it's because barbecue's such a hard—it is a hard job. Very—people don't realize the restaurant business period is extremely physical, extremely long hours, hard work. So you've got to be, you've got to love it, and I absolutely love it.

**0:30:49**

**ML:** Do you feel like being female has ever presented you with any obstacles? It sounds like it hasn't, but can you think of a time where it maybe time?

**0:30:55**

**TC:** You know, if it did, I didn't know it. *[Laughs]* I'll put it that way. I've never let that get in my way in any—anything in my life that I've done. I've never, never looked at being female—that's just like saying, "I'm Mexican so that's going to hinder me being a minority." I may not actually look, you know, the Mexican look, but if you saw all my cousins and everything, you'd realize, "Oh wow." But yea, it's—I guessed I was just

raised that you control your life, and I'm here today, whether it be good or bad, because of the choices that I've made in my life.

**0:31:35**

**ML:** Going back to speak a little bit about your transition from being an accountant and working in the—the community college into barbecue, could you give me kind of a timeline of when that shift occurred?

**0:31:48**

**TC:** Sure. When I—when we first started Squealer's, we actually went under another name. I'm going to tell you the name because it's really funny, and it has backgrounds of my accounting. I worked for a company named Larkin Oil in Livingston, Alabama. Wonderful town, wonderful people. Just felt like Mayberry, RFD. And Larkins was the name of the family, and through a phone call from somebody foreign who couldn't understand me—me saying the name Butch Larkin; he understood it to be Luke Farkin. *[Laughs]* I know. And there is a barbecue place—or was, I know, at one time in Demopolis that was Luke Farkin Barbecue. And that's actually the first name that we—the first flag we flew was Luke Farkin Barbecue. And there's more that I won't say but anyway—because we had a little slogan that went along with the Farkin.

**0:32:49**

Anyway, as an accountant, me working for them full-time as an accountant, we opened up our—our little barbecue place. My father and my mother, who was living at that time, they helped us. They—they would be in there in the mornings. My husband, the way that he worked, he was working night shifts so he was able to be there in the morning. As soon as I would get off of work, it would take me about 45 minutes to get home. I would

beat feet to the restaurant and I would work the night shift and close. It—it's strictly a take out so it was a lot easier. And then it just started to grow as far as our sales go and then our fundraisers and our caterings. And we started thinking, wow, you know, we could do a dine-in restaurant. Let's try and find a location.

**0:33:40**

So, seven years later—or no, let me back up, probably about five or six years later is when this new restaurant came about. And probably six months before we opened it, I knew that it was very unfair to my employers who had been so good to me for me to continue. I didn't need to stay there on their dime trying to do another restaurant and so I, you know, thanked them for what all they did for me and would never forget what they did for me. And then just made the transition at that time. So it took years of the transition. And you know, I read a lot of different article about people trying to start their own businesses and so many of them were saying the best way to do it is if you got a job, keep the job you got and try to work it out so that you're not taking the money out of the new business in order to survive, you know, for your own personal survival. Pour all the money back into the restaurant, which is what we did, and that allowed us to do this. And now we're ready to move on to the next level.

**0:34:41**

And it's funny because, like you said, we're not growing, we're trying to get back in but I—I do want to get back in touch with my customers, and I—I can't be everywhere at one time. And another thing that is—it's important to every restaurant owner out there is the quality of the food and the quality of the service that they get. And it's human nature. If your employees are not supervised, they're not going to take care of your business as well

as they are when they are. I'm not saying that they do a horrible job; they're just not going to do near as good as when you're there. When you're there to—whether you're actually there watching them or not, your presence makes them be on their toes a lot more. If your customer has a complaint, then they can talk to you right there. I'm not the kind of person if a customer comes, and I've seen this happen in a restaurant before, where someone's got a complaint, and the owner shies away. No, I'm going to come right up to you and know what's the problem. Give me a chance and I'll make it right. I'll more than make it right, I always have. You know, if there's been anything wrong, and trust me, in twelve years, you know, we've had some mistakes. But I—I do, I overcompensate because I don't want to lose that customer. They're so important. That customer is gold to me, and I try to stress that to my employees. But to them, it's just a paycheck. Some of them, some of them really do have their heart in it, and I think that I've got a wonderful staff. Very sweet employees, but they, just like everybody else, they've got their good days and their bad days.

**0:36:18**

**ML:** Earlier in our interview you mentioned opening Squealer's as almost a realization of the American Dream. Has that been your realization of the American Dream?

**0:36:28**

**TC:** I think it has because, you know, we may not be millionaires or anything by the business, trust me. It's been a lot of hard, hard work and a lot of sacrifices made from my family. My children may say it was the American nightmare. *[Laughs]* I have an 18 year old and a 20 year old, and they've been, you know, they were six and eight, I guess, when we started the restaurant. And at times, we've hated it, you know, "Why aren't you home,

Mom?” Especially when they were younger, but as they got older into their teen years, people may not realize it but your children need you more when they're in their teen years because there's so much out there that's pulling them. So it's allowed to me to be able to be with them and even to go on field trips, you know, with my—my kids when their classes had to go out of town or whatever.

**0:37:23**

I can remember one field trip I went on with my son to Chattanooga, I believe it was. His fifth grade class and we were sitting in a Shoney's eating breakfast with all the kids. And at that time, one of the radio stations would call me like every other morning and I'd do a radio spot with them. And it was a live radio spot that people—I had people in Meridian saying, “I heard you on the radio this morning!” Really neat, and I loved that, and that's just the hometown feel of Meridian. But anyway, I was up there with all these kids from this class, and I told the radio, the deejays, where I was and what was going on. And I said, “Can the kids say hi to their parents?” And they said, “Let's get them to sing the Pledge of Allegiance.” It was either the Pledge of Allegiance or sing “God Bless America” or something. So I told all the kids—here we are in the middle of Shoney's, and I'm holding up my cell phone and the kids are all singing. It was the neatest thing because the parents then didn't know any of this—nobody knew it was going to happen, but the parents got to hear their kids singing, you know, on the radio. It was just neat, you know.

**0:38:31**

**ML:** Are either of your kids involved in barbecue, or have they gone their separate ways?  
You're laughing.

**0:38:36**

**TC:** I am laughing. No, both of my children actually work for me right now, and both of them can't wait to get away. *[Laughs]* Because they have been in the restaurant since they were little bitty. So, I certainly don't blame them. I've told them it's a lot of hard work, and if anything ever happened to it, sell it because it is a lot of hard work. But no, in all honesty, I love it, and I really wish that they had the desire to be in it. But I think seeing what I've gone through, the sacrifices that I've made, that my daughter wants to be a physical therapist, and my son, he's not 100% sure yet, but he's just going into his first year of college.

**0:39:16**

**ML:** Barbecue is something that a lot of people are really passionate about, and that passion comes from different places. I was hoping you could tell me where your passion for barbecue came from.

**0:39:26**

**TC:** You know, I don't—I guess I've got hesitate on how I'm going to say this because I don't know that I have so much have a passion for barbecue. I love barbecue, I love what we've got going on here, but I think my passion is more the people than anything else. Everybody, especially women, we want to please everybody. And the way to the man's heart is through his stomach. So people see me coming, whether its man or woman, they see me coming, and they love me because I'm fixing to feed them. *[Laughs]* So that's my—my passion is more in feeding—feeding the public. I absolutely love it; I absolutely love making them happy.

**0:40:09**

I come from a big family, you know. There were six kids in my family. So, growing up I was used to feeding the masses. And my mother had a huge family, so whenever we'd have family reunions or whatever, there was, you know, well over a hundred people or more there on my mother's side of the family. So, I really am—I'm used to feeding a lot of people at one time. So, coming into Squealer's and—and although it was—it evolved, you know, and it got bigger and bigger, it still goes to that desire to make people happy. And—and I definitely have a strong desire to make people happy.

**0:40:47**

**ML:** Coming from a large family, do you find that any sort of familial traditions have made their way into traditions, whether it be through the menu, through the atmosphere?

**0:40:56**

**TC:** Yea, I—I guess I have to go—lean towards the sports. We're not—my family is not, well not everybody. Some people in my family are pretty competitive, but my family has always loved sports in every way. If you were to look around the restaurant, you would see—not necessarily so much in this room, but I do have collages of local youth sports. And these, all these pictures, 90% of them came from my customers, from different customers. All these big boards that I've got, they're pictures of either their kids or some of them, I've got some very old pictures of people's parents playing, you know, on a little league time. In fact, somebody's supposed to be getting me a picture of Meridian's very first little league baseball team.

**0:41:46**

I've got a picture, I've got actually a big scrapbook that one—that the family of one gentleman who'd passed away had given me. I'm kind of saving it for when I open up my

new restaurant, but he played at our local city high school. And the—the people that are in this photo, I think this is from the 1940s or the 1950s, and the—the people that are in these pictures are high-ranking officials in Meridian that everybody knows. Some of them have passed away now, but it's so neat for people to see these pictures. And I'll have people come in, and they'll look at the pictures and they'll say, "There's my father!" or "There's my uncle" or "I knew him" or "There I am", you know. They didn't know that their picture was up in the restaurant, and, you know, I've got some—these here are mostly, they're—when I say they're current, they're within the last ten years. But then there's one on that board that is probably—the Lumberjacks is the name of the team and that was probably in the early 1960s, that black and white picture in the middle there.

**0:42:54**

I've got one of a gentleman that in my other dining room that—he's on the baseball team. He came in, his wife brought him in, and he's in a wheelchair. And he, I think in his early thirties maybe, he was on an accident with the railroad and had his leg amputated, and now—but there was a picture of him when he was a kid playing ball, and he didn't know that the picture was up there. And somebody had told him so he had to come by and see. And he was telling me, come to find out that there's some history there with him and my family, that when we moved to Spain they had adopted one of our dogs from us. And so, you know, there's a lot of connections here with everybody, but sports is always been a big thing in my family, and as you can see, I try to bring it into the restaurant too. And youth sports, I mean, we love kids. With kids you've got to teach them good sportsmanship, and Meridian's pretty good about that. Meridian's got a pretty good athletic program for all the kids, and sportsmanship is a pretty big thing around here.

**0:43:55**

**ML:** Speaking of sports and competitive natures, have you ever competed in any sort of barbecue competition?

**0:44:01**

**TC:** No, I haven't. I've been asked to many times, but I don't have time. I don't now how anybody with a barbecue restaurant, you know, would really have time to go and pursue that. But I definitely have been asked many times. We've had people ask to franchise, but it's a lot of hard work.

**0:44:18**

**ML:** Yeah. Who came up with the Squealer's logo and the Squealer's name?

**0:44:23**

**TC:** Well, the Squealer's name actually comes from some of the guys I used to work with in Livingston. When we were trying to separate from the Luke Farkin Barbecue to our own, one of the guys said, "Well why don't you call it Squealer's and Clucks?" Because of the pigs and the chicken. And I said, you know, I really don't think I like that, but I think Squealer's Hickory Smoked Barbecue, and that's just how it came about. As far as the logo, our pigs change from time to time. We're actually working on a new logo with the new pig that I've got a picture of; you might want to see it. I'm sorry, not a picture, I've got a—my brother and his wife found it in, I think, up in the mountains somewhere, and it's a big terracotta pig head and he's got a cigar hanging out of his mouth. He looks like Boss Hog if anything, you know.

**0:45:16**

So our logo kind of has evolved over the years, but it started out with a little boy, made it look just like my son. He was holding—he was pulling a wagon, and our slogan was, “We pull our pork”. He was pulling a wagon and he had a pig in the wagon, so he was pulling the pork. It was really cute, and if you were to see how we pull our butts from our—from our smoker at our North Hill store to the building, it’s on a wagon too.

*[Laughs]* We’re doing just like the little boy in the picture did. That was our first one.

Then we eventually got rid of the little boy and, you know, anyway. My son’s grown up.

*[Laughs]*

**0:45:55**

**ML:** I like all your pictures of the pigs that you have around here, your little baby pigs.

**0:46:05**

**TC:** Yeah. That’s David McHenry, I think, is the famous photographer that takes a lot of pictures of pigs. Somebody had given me calendars over the years, and I just decided those will look really cute in the restaurant. Pigs are cute. *[Laughs]*

**0:46:21**

**ML:** They are cute.

**0:46:21**

**TC:** Now I’ve honestly had people ask me if we had pigs in the back if we had our own pig farm. *[Laughs]* I said, “If I did, we wouldn’t be serving them.” I love animals, and no, I can’t see the pigs. *[Laughs]*

**0:46:34**

**ML:** Where does most of your meat come from?

**0:46: 35**

**TC:** As far as which provider? Mostly from Sysco.

**0:46:43**

**ML:** Now as we come to a close, I wanted to ask about your new location. When will it be open?

**0:46:49**

**TC:** We're hoping that a new location will be open shortly after the first of the year, if not before, but that would be a good time for me because things will be slowing down for us. And it's—it's actually just right around the corner from the store, the North Hills store.

**0:47:06**

**ML:** Will you be using a lot of the same décor? Like the pigs, and at the North Hills store you have the big smoker, will that still be out back? Or out front, rather.

**0:47:13**

**TC:** Yeah, we plan on using everything. It's just going to be a smaller building. We're going to have an indoor/outdoor patio. Inside it will probably only seat about 25-30 people, but on the patio it will seat at least 40 people on the patio. And that's—now we want it to be rustic. We plan on going not—to me, this is a little bit too fancy looking, but maybe it's because it's so big, it doesn't—I don't feel like we have the atmosphere that I'm looking for. And we want to go with definitely a rustic, old looking atmosphere; the tin, the corrugated tin walls, maybe the wood on the top, old wood for the outside of the building.

**0:47:55**

Now I don't know if you saw this at the North Hill store, we have a garden that we've planted. All the fresh tomatoes. That's for our customers; that's not for us. If a customer sees a ripe tomato and they want it, or they want to take a green tomato home and fry it, we plant it strictly for them. Now if I see one hanging on the vine that may be somebody hadn't got, I'll bring it here to be able to, you know, let my customers here have a nice homegrown tomato on their rib-eye steak sandwich or something like that. They really love that treat. But we do bell peppers, habanero peppers. Now I use the habanero peppers in my wing sauces that we make here. We make all our wing sauces from scratch too. We love the garden, and my customers love it. Absolutely.

**0:48:41**

**ML:** And you'll still have it at the new location?

**0:48:43**

**TC:** Most definitely. Most definitely. That's the idea of having an indoor/outdoor patio that we can have stuff like that and give it that homey feel and, you know, you're in the South. You're going to get hot. It's nice to come inside and get in an air conditioned place, but also, you know, you've got to think of the old days when people would be sitting on the porch with the fans. That's what I want. You know, I want people to be sitting on our—in our patio, which is going to be like a huge porch, like we have at North Hills, just bigger, with the fans blowing, and, you know, a way to be able to get people out of the rain. But yet, I love to be out on the porch when it's pouring down rain. I just love the smell of rain.

**0:49:27**

**ML:** In closing, I wanted to ask you to maybe say a few words about what barbecue means to you and what your favorite part about owning a barbecue restaurant is.

**0:49:36**

**TC:** Barbecue, to me, is a style of cooking. If you're—if you can barbecue your meat, whether you're going to do it on an open pit or you're going to do it in a smoker, you have to take your time. Barbecuing has been around for centuries. I guess the cavemen started with their barbecuing. *[Laughs]* And with the right seasoning—and I think that we try really hard to have a good rub for our meats, but again, we do try to keep it as simple as possible, especially with our pulled pork. Our pulled pork—if people knew what we used to season our pork with, they would be totally surprised because it is as simple as it could be. It—it's—I didn't realize that barbecue meant as much as it does to me. I don't want to hide the flavor of my meat with sauce. I think we've got a good sauce, but I don't think it's an award-winning sauce myself. And that's just because the sauce is not near as important as the meat. Now I think our meat is award winning. I think our meat is phenomenal, very tender, very tasty, and the fact that my customers keep coming back tells me that they really like it.

[In a follow-up conversation, Teresa added: *Barbecue is more laid back. Most people are drawn to barbecue restaurants because it takes them back to simpler times. Times when we were young. When we had no worries. Sitting outside cooking on the grill, laughing with family and friends. Taking our turn at turning the crank on the old ice cream freezer. Eating watermelon and trying not to swallow seeds so a watermelon won't grow in your stomach. Young faces smeared with BBQ sauce all over them. T-shirts stained with dirty, little sauce-covered hands. That's what brings people to a barbecue restaurant. When the*

*food is not good, then what they were looking for is usually not there, and they won't come back, because they want to remember the good times. When the food is good, they will continue to come back because it brings back those good old memories of simpler times, great food and great family and friends. Meridian is that kind of town. We are one big family.]*

**0:50:59**

**ML:** Mm-hmm. I did want to ask who came up with the idea for your t-shirts that say “Peace Love and Pork” on the back?

**0:51:09**

**TC:** *[Laughs]* I've got to think about that. Joe's Crab Shack? I'm sorry. You know, it's funny, I come up with a lot of different ideas that I don't realize are out there. Like, we've got redneck nachos that I didn't know anybody had anything like that out there. They've got nachos that are barbecue style but nobody's calling them redneck nachos. But I didn't know. The fried banana pudding, I didn't know anybody had ever done anything like that, and after I do it, then somebody'll say, “Oh so and so had that.” The “Peace Love and Pork,” probably more my kids than anything else. Now we've got another t-shirt that says, “The Ten Most Popular Questions Asked at Squealer's Barbecue,” and one of them is, “Are the fried Twinkies fattening?” Well, no, we fry all the fat out of it, you know. *[Laughs]* Of course not. Some people want chicken pork sandwich or a pulled pork chicken sandwich, or they'll ask the question, “Where does pulled pork come from?” How do you answer that question? I want to say from a Boston butt which is actually where we get it from, but they're really specific in saying, “No, what kind of animal does it come from?” *[Laughs]* You'd have to see the list of top ten

questions. How big are your butts? They're pretty a good size. People in Meridian are real friendly, and they've got a great sense of humor, and they've allowed us to use a lot of the stuff that we do here.

**0:52:42**

**ML:** Do you have any final thoughts, any final statements?

**0:52:46**

**TC:** Really, just to thank everybody in Meridian for—not just Meridian, the surrounding communities. I have people from Jackson come here. I've had people actually from all over the world that come to Squealer's. And really, just to thank everybody for the support that they've given us because we wouldn't be here today if it weren't for our customers. And again, it goes to I want to please everybody, and if I haven't made you happy, let me know. I will do the best I can to make you happy.

**0:53:15**

**ML:** All right, well, thank you for your time today.

**0:53:19**

**TC:** Thank you, I sure do appreciate it.

**[End Teresa Cranmore Interview]**