

VERNA REAVES
Westside Barbecue – New Albany, MS

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Interviewer: Meghan Leonard, Southern Foodways Alliance
Transcription: Meghan Leonard
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[Begin Verna Reaves Interview]

0:00:02

ML: Alright. This is Monday, July 5th at 10:02. I'm sitting here with Mrs. Verna--
Reaves, is it? In Westside Barbecue in New Albany, Mississippi. If I could have you state
your name, your occupation, and your birthday?

0:00:15

VR: My name is Verna Reaves. October 8th, 1940, and I--my husband and I are the
owners of Westside Barbecue.

0:00:24

ML: Are you a native to Mississippi?

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VR: Yes.

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ML: How long have you been in New Albany?

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VR: All except twenty years of my life.

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ML: Where did you live in those twenty years?

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VR: We lived in Memphis.

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ML: So you're a Southern girl, born and raised. How did Westside come into your possession?

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VR: Actually, we built the business from scratch. My husband built the building. I'd always wanted a--a restaurant, or something of my own, and he told me to find some land, he'd build it for me.

0:01:02

ML: How long has Westside been open?

0:01:04

VR: Since 1989.

0:01:06

ML: You guys have been here for a while. What made you decide to choose barbecue?

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VR: Because there wasn't barbecue in New Albany, and we had a relative that owned a barbecue business in McKenzie, Tennessee. And we loved going up there and the smell, the taste, the foods, so we thought that would be good for New Albany.

0:01:33

ML: Have you noticed barbecue growing in the area since you guys have opened?

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VR: Yes. There is--since we've opened, there's been a place in Tupelo that's opened, maybe a couple of places. One in Pontotoc, another one in New Albany.

0:01:48

ML: One of the reasons I'm here is because we've noticed that there isn't a barbecue tradition in Mississippi, and we were given your name for having delicious barbecue. Do you have any thoughts on why maybe there isn't a strong barbecue tradition in Mississippi?

0:02:02

VR: Why there isn't? No. I don't know.

0:02:08

ML: It's interesting because places like South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama have such a strong tradition, whereas you come to Mississippi and there kind of few and far between, and the sauces are all across the board in terms of the flavor. I didn't know if maybe you had any input as to why you think that is.

0:02:26

VR: I don't know unless it's just Mississippi's noted for their southern cooking. *[Laughs]*

0:02:32

ML: That's true. We still haven't found a real reason why. Talking a little bit about your barbecue, how do you cook your barbecue here?

0:02:41

VR: We started out with pits, with--with hickory wood. And either my husband or my son would cook all night long. They would bundle that fire into that pit all night long. The coals, I'm sorry, the coals. They build a fire in the fireplace and then take the coals and cook that meat all night long. It was a 12-hour process. We did that for about five or six or seven years. We couldn't do it anymore. They couldn't do it anymore. So, we went from that to electric cookers.

0:03:16

ML: What was the--what kind of cooker did you use originally? Can you describe it for me?

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VR: It's probably the same one we have. We've had it all this time. It holds probably 30 hams at one time, and it cooks all night, slow.

0:03:35

ML: What wood did you use originally before you went to electric?

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VR: Hickory.

0:03:39

ML: Is there a reason why you chose hickory?

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VR: I don't know, my husband could probably tell you that, but probably it was long-lasting, long-burning, and maybe the smell or the taste that you got from the meat.

0:03:55

ML: What difference in the taste did you notice?

0:03:58

VR: Well, you can tell the difference in hickory and anything else cooked any other way.

It just has a unique taste.

0:04:07

ML: Do you notice a difference with the electric cookers in the taste, or is it still fairly the same?

0:04:13

VR: There's probably a difference; there probably is. But you just get adjusted.

0:04:19

ML: And what's your husband's name?

0:04:22

VR: James.

0:04:24

ML: How has it been working with him in this business?

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VR: Oh, good and bad. *[Laughs]*

0:04:29

ML: Why bad?

0:04:31

VR: Well, if you live with somebody 24 hours a day and then work with them, like, 12 hours of that day, sometimes there's friction. But most of the time we've gotten along. And he usually stays in his department, and I stay in mine. But not only that, we have a daughter, a son, a daughter-in-law, son-in-law, and all the grandkids work here, have always worked here.

0:04:54

ML: What do they do here?

0:04:56

VR: Any and everything. Just whatever has to be done.

0:05:00

ML: Do you want to keep Westside in the family?

0:05:02

VR: Yes, most definitely.

0:05:05

ML: Did either of your parents or your husband's parents barbecue?

0:05:08

VR: No.

0:05:10

ML: Who taught you guys how to barbecue?

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VR: The relative in McKenzie, Tennessee.

0:05:15

ML: And who was that?

0:05:17

VR: His name was Leon Wood, and he passed away several years ago, but he had some great barbecue.

0:05:23

ML: What kind of barbecue did he have mainly in Tennessee?

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VR: Basically, what we have here, and he shared his hot and mild sauce recipe with us.

And then I developed the rib sauce that everybody likes in this area.

0:05:40

ML: Can you describe your rib sauce to me?

0:05:43

VR: It's sweet. I think that's the reason people like it. It's sweet. It's not too hot but it's got a little kick to it. But it's--it's a tomato base.

0:05:59

ML: Is that the same one that you have on the tables of the restaurant?

0:06:03

VR: Yes.

0:06:04

ML: Tell me a little bit about your menu, how you guys came up with what you decided to serve.

0:0:6:08

VR: We started out we wanted to keep it as simple as we could, so we just had regular and jumbo sandwiches, regular and jumbo plates. And of course we started out with ribs, so we had a rib plate. Then we added the chicken plate, and then for a while, we had a grill out back that we did grilled hamburgers, but it was getting into too much work. So, we deleted that. But basically when we were, we kept it just as simple as we could. And then we of course added our desserts. Well, we had the desserts in the beginning but that grew into another little operation.

0:06:47

ML: Did most of your recipes come from your relative in McKenzie?

0:06:51

VR: Nothing except the two sauces. The dessert recipes – do you want to know about the desserts?

0:07:01

ML: Oh yes, we want to know about the desserts.

0:07:02

VR: *[laughs]* The dessert recipes are all mine.

0:07:05

ML: Is that something that was passed down to you, or your original recipes?

0:07:09

VR: Some passed down and some original from me.

0:07:12

ML: Can you tell me a little bit about your cakes? Maybe list the flavors that you guys have and your most popular?

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VR: The most popular probably is the caramel and strawberry. They're pretty close. We have chocolate, a pineapple, red velvet, banana, and carrot. Did I say pineapple?

0:07:33

ML: And you have pies as well, correct?

0:07:35

VR: Yes, we have pies, and they have been a big seller. We have chocolate, coconut, caramel, and pecan that's made fresh daily.

0:07:45

ML: What do you think makes your cake so yummy? They are very delicious.

0:07:50

VR: We don't skimp on ingredients. They're consistent. The girls really do a good job. They put everything they've got into making cakes. When they're here, they--they're working at making those cakes, and they--they do a good job.

0:08:07

ML: They are good. Now your side items, also, could you tell me a little bit about those?

0:08:12

VR: We started out--we started out with the Big Buffalo Chopper, it's called, from Hobart, making our own slaw, and when we got up to about 650 pound sacks a week--for the three days that we're open, we said, "Something's got to give." So we started buying shredded cabbage, which is not as good. *[Laughs]* And then we do our own mayonnaise in with that. And then our potato salad, we've never made homemade potato salad. It was just too much. But we've shopped around and found one that we thought was as close to homemade. And then our beans, we have a special recipe for our beans, of course.

0:09:00

ML: Is that your recipe?

0:09:02

VR: Yes.

0:09:03

ML: What do you think sets those beans apart?

0:09:08

VR: I don't know. We put the--chop up the outside of the shoulders in the hams and add to our beans so that gives them the flavor of that crusty outside part of the barbecue.

0:09:22

ML: Now what seems to be the most popular barb--barbecue item that you have on your menu?

0:09:29

VR: Probably the regular sandwich.

0:09:31

ML: The pulled pork?

0:09:33

VR: Mm-hmm.

0:09:34

ML: Now how much meat are you guys cooking each week?

0:09:37

VR: I wish I knew to tell you. Can I call my husband?

0:09:43

ML: Sure thing, I can pause if you want to call him. Now we're back.

0:09:59

VR: 450-550 pounds of pulled meat a week. I mean, that's raw meat. The hams and the shoulders. And then...what's 14 times 30?

0:10:11

ML: *[Laughs]* We're trying to figure out 14 times 30.

0:10:14

VR: 450 pounds? Right at 450 pounds of ribs a week. And then we usually sell probably a case of chickens a week. And that's probably 30 pounds.

0:10:25

ML: Who provides most of your meat?

0:10:27

VR: We buy it through Sysco.

0:10:30

ML: When you guys first started, when you first opened, were you strictly doing barbecue, or were you doing the sides and the cakes as well?

0:10:38

VR: Oh, yes. We did it all. We did--we started out with just a caramel cake and a fresh coconut cake and the caramel and the chocolate pie. And then we added everything else.

0:10:53

ML: When you first got into the business, did you realize how labor-intensive barbecue is, or did you know what you had in store for you?

0:11:00

VR: No. *[laughs]* We did not.

0:11:05

ML: But it seems like you both have really come to love being here at Westside.

0:11:08

VR: Oh yes. We wouldn't think about doing anything else.

0:11:14

ML: Did--when you first opened, did you tell a lot of people about Westside, or was it more of a word-of-mouth kind of advertisement?

0:11:21

VR: Probably word of mouth, New Albany being a small town, and we were right out 30 Highway, right outside of New Albany. We started building this little building out in the bean field, and people wanted to know what we were doing. So it just went from that.

0:11:35

ML: Do you advertise around here at all, or is it still word of mouth?

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VR: We have advertised in the past, but we don't--*[phone rings]*

0:11:43

ML: We'll pause again. So we have 1,500-2,000 pounds--

0:11:50

VR: 1,500 to 2,000 pounds of meat--raw meat, that we cook every week.

0:11:56

ML: Do you just sell the barbecue, or do you guys cater?

0:12:00

VR: No. Well, actually, we do a little catering, but not very much. We have in the past but mostly it's just from here.

0:12:10

ML: Now we were talking about advertising around here. You were saying that people just saw you guys building the restaurant, and they came.

0:12:22

VR: No, just-- other than they just watched us build it and they started asking what we were going to do. And they were excited because we hadn't had barbecue places in New

Albany years ago, like when I was in high school. But they just weren't here anymore, so they were interested in barbecue.

0:12:43

ML: Was there good barbecue when you were growing up? Did you eat lots of barbecue?

0:12:47

VR: Yes, we had two real good places of barbecue here in New Albany.

0:12:52

ML: What were their names?

0:12:53

VR: One was, I believe, Tackett's Barbecue on Highway 78 going into town. And the other one was, I'm not sure, it could have been called Hill Top. I'm not exactly sure, but it was on the other side of town.

0:13:10

ML: When you first opened, was there a standard of barbecue that you tried to meet?

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VR: Well, we wanted it to be very good and actually wanted it to be like the barbecue in McKenzie, Tennessee that we had had help with.

0:13:26

ML: Is this building the original location?

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VR: Yes.

0:13:30

ML: So it's been twenty years, almost?

0:13:33

VR: Twenty-two. Opened in '88 so yeah--*[inaudible]*.

0:13:39

ML: I noticed you do dine-in and carry-out.

0:13:41

VR: We do.

0:13:42

ML: What seems to be more popular? Because it was pretty crowded when I came in here the other day.

0:13:47

VR: At certain times, the carry out is busier but it's a real--it's eat in. *[phone rings]*

0:13:57

ML: We can pause. Now--oh no, I lost my train of thought. *[Laughs]* I noticed you guys are open on Thursdays and Fridays--

0:14:06

VR: Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays.

0:14:07

ML: And Saturdays. What's the reasoning behind the shorter schedule?

0:14:12

VR: Probably because the small town. You can't eat barbecue maybe luckily once a week. If we could get everybody to eat it once a week, we'd be doing good. If it was in a larger town, we could probably stay open more days. And two, this is family. Three days, three 12-hour days is about it for the workweek.

0:14:36

ML: Is that what your schedule was like in the beginning as well?

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VR: No. We thought we could do seven days. *[Laughs]* We found out we couldn't real quick, so we started whittling our days down.

0:14: 49

ML: When did you go to the shorter work schedule?

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VR: Probably about ten years ago.

0:14:55

ML: And that's been worth it, I'm sure.

0:14:58

VR: Yes, mm-hmm.

0:15:00

ML: Switching gears a little bit to actually talk about the barbecue, we talked about your rib sauce very briefly, but could you tell me a little bit about your meat maybe?

0:15:11

VR: Well, it's pulled, and all the outside is taken off before they pull it and get it ready for us. I think people--some people still like the brown, the chopped up brown but our customers have gotten used to this, and they tell us they like it without the outside in it. It's just all white pulled meat. We use hams rather than shoulders, so it is the white meat.

0:15:44

ML: Some of the--some arguments that people have in barbecue is the sauce is more important while other people think the meat is more important. I was wondering if you had any thoughts on that.

0:15:54

VR: Well, I think the meat is the most important. Yes. If you don't have good meat, you can't cover it up with sauce.

0:16:01

ML: Have you always thought that?

0:16:04

VR: Yes.

0:16:08

ML: We talked about your rib sauce. I was about to ask you about that again. Is that the same sauce people eat on their barbecue sandwiches here?

0:16:17

VR: Mm-hmm. I don't know why we call it rib sauce because we--we first started putting it on our ribs and chicken. We didn't think people would like it on pulled pork, but we set some on the table and--and it's the favorite now. We just--everybody knows it's called rib sauce. *[Laughs]*

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ML: Do you season your meat before you guys smoke it?

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VR: No.

0:16:37

ML: You just take the meat and put it on your smoker?

0:16:41

VR: Mm-hmm.

0:16:44

ML: Are you planning on expanding your menu anytime soon or keeping it the way it is?

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VR: Probably keeping it like the way it is.

0:16:51

ML: Have people ever wanted more, or they seem to be pretty satisfied with the barbecue here--?

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VR: As a rule, the people are--we have people that travel through and they want Brunswick stew or something like that, that they have at other barbecue places. Or maybe corn on the cob. But usually people know exactly what we have.

0:17:15

ML: Sometimes people are wary of the electric cookers as opposed to the smokers.

Personally, I find it to be not too big of a deal. But do you have any thoughts on that?

0:17:28

VR: Not really. If you can't cook with real hickory fire, then probably one is as good as the other. It's all going to taste about the same. I think it's all in knowing how to cook it, what temperature, how long, when to take it off, when to know when it's done, not to overcook it. I think we've perfected that here in all these years. They know exactly how the meat is supposed to be just by the feeling of it.

0:18:01

ML: Who take the photos in the dine-in section of the restaurant, of all the children with the barbecue?

0:18:09

VR: Oh, that's the five grandchildren. They're grown now, with children of their own.

0:18:16

ML: Are they in here, eating your barbecue a lot?

0:18:19

VR: Yes. *[Laughs]* They are. Sometimes too much.

0:18:26

ML: Now, looking at your barbecue restaurant and then looking at your parents, or even your relative in Tennessee, have you noticed any familial culinary traditions, aside from barbecue, that have worked their way into your restaurant?

0:18:43

VR: Not really.

0:18:45

ML: How important is it for you and your husband for you to be in your restaurant and seeing your customers?

0:18:53

VR: I think that's very important, and also being here for the employees too. We--we--we've been the whole 22 years. Very seldom do we take a day off. And then the children have grown into so they're dependable now. We could go now and leave it with them.

0:19:30

ML: Are the majority of your employees family?

0:19:34

VR: Yes, yes they are.

0:19:35

ML: Is there a reason behind that?

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VR: They just started work here when they was old enough to work, and they just stuck with us.

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ML: Do they enjoy barbecue like you and your husband do?

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VR: Working here or eating barbecue?

0:19:52

ML: Both.

0:19:53

VR: I think they eating here. I mean, working here. And they eat here occasionally.

[Laughs] [Phone rings]

0:20:01

ML: We can pause again. Really? What do you think inspires your employees to stay here for great lengths of time? The atmosphere--?

0:20:18

VR: I like to think that we're easy to work with. And everybody knows their job and they do it and there's really not a big boss. We just--we just all work together. And I will say

that we have one employee that's been here as long as we've had the barbecue, and I-- she's sort of become family.

0:20:39

ML: Earlier we were talking about how you would like to keep Westside in the family. I was hoping you could tell me the reason behind that.

0:20:47

VR: I think it's--it's--you don't make a lot of money, but you can make a living here. So, I don't know, I just--I would just hate to see it, all this hard work, not be carried on. And we've got enough grandchildren to see that it's--I think they will.

0:21:11

ML: Do your grandchildren have a real passion for barbecue like you and your husband?

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VR: Either that, or they just want a job. *[Laughs]*

0:21:20

ML: *[Laughs]* Who can blame them in this economy? Do you think that they would-- when you guys opened, you obviously persevered. As you were saying earlier, it's a tough business to be in, it's very labor-intensive. Do you feel like your family would pass it on like you and your husband would?

0:21:42

VR: I think so.

0:21:45

ML: Do they have a real passion for cooking?

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VR: Maybe just seeing that the job was done well.

0:21:58

ML: One thing about barbecue is that lots of people kind of view barbecue as community gathering places. Do you look at Westside as that?

0:22:09

VR: What do you mean by that?

0:22:10

ML: Somewhere the community can get together and socialize, at the same time being in a place that they feel comfortable eating a food that's maybe comfort food to them.

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VR: I think that's--that's true. We have people that come and they'll sit and they'll visit after they eat. But a lot of people just come to eat and then they either go back to work or go back wherever.

0:22:37

ML: Do you have customers that have been coming in since you guys have been open?

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VR: We do.

0:22:41

ML: Do they order the same thing every time, or do they like to switch it up?

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VR: *[Laughs]* Usually, they'll order the same thing every time.

0:22:48

ML: Consistency in barbecue is something we hear a lot about--how it's very important to be consistent. Do you have any thoughts on that?

0:22:54

VR: Oh, I think that's true. You have to be consistent.

0:23:00

ML: Do you think Westside has been consistent since it opened?

0:23:02

VR: I do.

0:23:03

ML: What's your favorite thing about owning a barbecue restaurant?

0:23:08

VR: That I don't have to work for somebody else. *[Laughs]* And that, in our case, that I'm with my family. I've enjoyed that. And meeting people. You meet so many different people. We have friends from this couple from St. Louis came--just happened by when we first opened, and they--now they've gotten older and can't come. But they come like two or three times a year when they would travel through, and they'd stop and bring us a little happy or send us a Christmas card and visit when they came. They'd stay at least an hour, you know, visiting, and we've gotten real close to them and just, you know, people like that.

0:23:54

ML: Have you had people come in from all over the United States?

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VR: We have.

0:23:59

ML: Where's the farthest that somebody has come from?

0:24:01

VR: Probably California.

0:24:06

ML: Now talking about people that have been coming in for a very long time and looking at that as--looking at Westside as a community gathering place, is that something that you hope continues once the barbecue restaurant is passed on?

0:24:19

VR: Yes, I do. I want that to be like that.

0:24:23

ML: Would you say that's one of your primary goals in owning a restaurant?

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VR: I don't know.

0:24:35

ML: Maybe a benefit of owning a restaurant and seeing it--

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VR: Well, yeah, that's a benefit of it. Yeah.

0:24:45

ML: Have you ever competed in a barbecue competition?

0:24:47

VR: No.

0:24:50

ML: Have you ever considered it?

0:24:50

VR: No.

0:24:52

ML: Have you ever been asked?

0:24:55

VR: No. Usually when there's competition, it's our days to work. So we--nobody can leave. I won't see that--that probably is the main reason. I think for sure our barbecue and our sauce might qualify, but--

0:25:15

ML: The cakes, I would think--not for a barbecue competition, but for maybe a baking competition, definitely. What inspired you to do cakes because, you know, sometimes you'll go to barbecue restaurants and you'll see cobbler, but you have such a wide variety of cakes. What kind of inspired that?

0:25:33

VR: Well, from when I was a little bitty girl, I liked to bake. That's my passion, baking. Not barbecue, but baking. When we opened the barbecue, that's what I wanted to do was to do the desserts. So, it--it grew from that. I started it out, like I said, with two cakes and a couple pies in just a little cubby hole. And then my husband built this part of the building for me for my desserts. The part back there. This was just a little porch, but that back there--and then I outgrew that, and we had to build the big bakery. And then I couldn't do it all so I started hiring girls to bake, and I've taught them. And it just--now I don't bake at all, except maybe at home.

0:26:26

ML: Do you see yourself adding any more flavors of cake to the menu?

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VR: Probably not, no.

0:26:32

ML: You already have a very large selection, so I can't blame you. Do you want your recipes to be passed down with Westside?

0:26:39

VR: Yes, I do.

0:26:42

ML: Preserve the tradition. Now, one thing that, and this might not be totally applicable to you since you and your husband own the restaurant, but it's rare that we come across female barbecue owners in Mississippi. Have you ever noticed different--has there ever been a negative reaction with a female barbecue, for you? Or, to a female barbecue owner?

0:27:05

VR: Not really, no.

0:27:07

ML: And Roy's been here with you the entire time, right?

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VR: The entire time, right. This has been a joint venture.

0:27:16

ML: Do you know if he came from any familial barbecue traditions?

0:27:18

VR: No. He worked in Memphis and installed glass in high-rise buildings until the barbecue. He never grilled outside before. *[Laughs]*

0:27:31

ML: What made you guys chose barbecue? The relative in Tennessee or something different?

0:27:37

VR: Just the something different that we thought New Albany needed. And we thought it would be easier, but little did we know. *[Laughs]*

0:27:47

ML: Last week I spoke with somebody who mentioned that she opened her restaurant kind of as a realization of the American Dream of being your own boss and having your own place. Is that something that you guys have felt has succeeded with Westside?

0:27:59

VR: I think so, yes.

0:28:02

ML: Would you say that that was the main reason why you opened Westside?

0:28:09

VR: At the time, no. Just--I just wanted a little restaurant that I could do myself.

0:28:26

ML: What is your opinion of convenience store barbecue? That's something that's kind of cropped up. You see lots of, you know, foil-wrapped sandwiches in Chevrons or what you have you. Do you think that takes away from good old-fashioned barbecue, or no?

0:28:43

VR: I think most people know that that's what that is and just, you know, if that's what they want. But it's not like a real barbecue place.

0:28:55

ML: What would be your definition of a real barbecue place?

0:28:58

VR: Westside. *[Laughs]*

0:29:02

ML: A store where people can come and eat--

0:29:06

VR: Right. Comfortably, very casual. Bring the children; let them run. Let them watch the train, blow the horn. And just--we clean up the mess when they leave, you know.

0:29:19

ML: And that's something that speaks to Westside's--your familial feel that you have going on here with your family working in the restaurant and something like that. Was that intentional?

0:29:30

VR: Was that intentional?

0:29:32

ML: To have it be a place where people can come and bring their kids--

0:20:34

VR: Oh yes, definitely. My husband built the tables and the benches. If they got scratched or--nothing--you couldn't hurt anything here. Just come and eat and have a good time.

0:29:49

ML: Did your husband design the lay out of the restaurant as well?

0:29:53

VR: He did.

0:29:54

ML: Did you build it by hand? Or--it was your own design--

0:20:58

VR: Actually, he built it. He built the main building and then, of course, had some added on that he didn't build. But the original building, he built.

0:30:10

ML: When did you have the addition put on?

0:30:16

VR: The cake building is probably six, maybe five, six years old. We just kept adding on to the barbecue. We had a--a little front porch we took in, and then we had a screen porch around it. We took that in for a dining room, just a little bit at a time I guess.

0:30:42

ML: When did you start expanding?

0:30:45

VR: We had probably had been here five years when we had to expand.

0:30:49

ML: Was that a result of the popularity of the restaurant?

0:30:52

VR: Right. We had to also go buy a little bit more land and make our parking lot larger because we couldn't take care of the cars.

0:31:02

ML: Can you tell me about your cake building?

0:31:05

VR: My cake building? Well, it's in two separate buildings. We have a baking room and then we have an icing room. The girls bake in one end, and then they--well, actually we have girls that do bake in layers and then we have girls that ice cakes. They can do both, but when we're at our peak, there's girls that do one or the other.

0:31:34

ML: What would be your peak season?

0:31:39

VR: Christmas, Thanksgiving, Christmas.

0:31:42

ML: Do you take a lot of orders for the cakes for the holidays--for family gatherings?

0:31:47

VR: Oh yes. We take a lot of orders. Then we sell our cakes on PFG truck, and they're fixing to be on the Sysco truck, so anybody can--any restaurant or food chain anywhere can, in the state of Mississippi, and probably Tennessee and Arkansas, can buy our cakes and resell.

0:32:10

ML: And that's just the cakes, right?

0:32:13

VR: Right, just the cakes. No barbecue or pies. Just cakes.

0:32:15

ML: What made you want to expand your cake business?

0:32:20

VR: Well, the potential for a bigger income, maybe. It's just fun to know that my cakes are out there.

0:32:30

ML: Where do you want them to be sold, if you--do you want them to be in family restaurants or do you think restaurants are going to purchase them--?

0:32:39

VR: I'm hoping, yeah. Just maybe family restaurants, delis. We have Bogey's Deli in Memphis that have been selling our cakes for about twelve, fifteen years. All three Bogey's. The High Point Coffees--the one in Oxford sells our cakes, places in Corinth, Tupelo.

0:33:11

ML: Now can you tell me a little bit about the area where your husband barbecues, since you were saying he has his own area where he does the meat? Can you just describe it for me?

0:33:20

VR: What is that?

0:33:21

ML: The area where your husband barbecues.

0:33:22

VR: Oh, okay. It's out back. It's just in a room--well, he has--actually has a couple of rooms. He has a room where the cookers are, and then he has--and that's not cooled. And then he has an air conditioned place where he pulls the meat.

0:33:41

ML: And what brand of cookers do you guys use?

0:33:45

VR: Do you know--I don't know. *[Swats at flies]*

0:33:47

ML: *[Laughs]* We've got a fly problem.

0:33:52

VR: They're going to drive us crazy in here!

0:33:55

ML: Now what--and he pulls the meat himself, you said, correct?

0:34:00

VR: Yes. My husband did until he retired, and now my son does.

0:34:04

ML: Who makes all the sides?

0:34:09

VR: Just whoever is available. Just different ones.

0:34:14

ML: Now looking at your menu right now, it says no hamburgers with an asterisk. Do people come in here and ask for hamburgers a lot?

0:34:20

VR: They do because we had them at one time, and then we--and then we decided that we could no longer do them, so we just put that up there because people was always asking.

0:34:35

ML: Your French fries are really, really good. I was wondering if there was any--if you made them any different way.

0:34:32

VR: No. They're just plain fries, but we do really pay attention to our oil in the cookers and keep our cookers clean.

0:34:55

ML: What difference do you think that makes?

0:35:58

VR: Oh, it makes all the difference in fried foods if you're keeping everything clean and that grease filtered.

0:35:06

ML: Now with the--in the past couple of years, there's been a real turn away from, you know, hydrogenated oil or anything that's processed. Have you noticed any sort of change in people's desires, in terms of what they want to order when they come here because of that?

0:35:22

VR: No. Our customers, if they come in and they want French fries, they're going to eat them.

0:35:29

ML: What do you think the future holds for Westside?

0:35:30

VR: Ooh. Well, I would like to think that my children are going to carry it on. Hopefully, they are. They're--they're certainly going to give it a try.

0:35:40

ML: Would you ever consider expanding to have more than one restaurant, or would you like to just keep it this one?

0:35:46

VR: No. We thought about that many, many times, but we want to just keep it in the family. And I just feel like if it's family, you--you know what's going on, as far as the quality of the food, the cleanliness of the food, you know. You just can't be everywhere, so we decided just on the front end we'd just have one place and try to do it right.

0:36:11

ML: And have you ever--you said you thought about multiple times. What was kind of the catalyst to thinking you might expand at one time?

0:36:18

VR: Because people were always coming in and saying, "Come to our town, come to our town. We need a place like yours!"

0:36:26

ML: Do you foresee barbecue growing in Mississippi?

0:36:33

VR: I don't know. I don't know why it wouldn't because we've been here 22 years and that sorts of speaks for itself, you know. Somebody else could do the same thing.

0:36:50

ML: Have you noticed a rise in barbecue restaurants in this area, or in Mississippi in general?

0:36:54

VR: Around here, yes.

0:37:00

ML: What is your--if you had to choose your absolute favorite thing about being in New Albany, being in Westside, what would that one thing be?

0:37:15

VR: Well, in my case, like I said, working with my family. Is that a good answer?

0:37:24

ML: *[Laughs]* Yeah, that's a great answer! What--what benefit do you think that has for you, aside from obvious ones about working with your family, what maybe less obvious benefits would that have?

0:37:37

VR: What benefits would it be working with--

0:37:42

ML: To the restaurant, to you?

0:37:43

VR: Well, I know, if it's my family, I know at 9 o'clock on Thursday morning, they're going to be here. And I know they're going to work and give it their very best until we close that night. Now I'm not saying that employees wouldn't do the same thing, but I know that they are going to be here.

0:38:03

ML: Do you have anything to add, any final thoughts on barbecue, on Westside, on barbecue in Mississippi?

0:38:13

VR: I don't. No.

0:38:14

ML: Alright, well, I think that will conclude our interview. Thank you very much for sitting here and talking with me about Westside.

0:38:19

VR: Well, you're welcome. I enjoyed it.

[End Verna Reaves Interview]