

Randy Russell
Bunn's Barbecue - Windsor, NC

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Interviewer: Rien T. Fertel
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[Begin Randy Russell — Bunn's Barbecue]

00:00:01

Rien Fertel: All right; this is Rien Fertel, with the Southern Foodways Alliance, continuing on the North Carolina BBQ Trail. It is the 1st of December 2011 just after—well, it is three o'clock exactly. And I'm at Bunn's Barbecue in Windsor, North Carolina. I'm sitting here with one of the owners. I'm going to have him introduce himself.

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Randy Russell: Randy Russell, born May 20, 1964; co-owner of Bunn's Barbecue.

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RF: All right, Mr. Russell how long has Bunn's Barbecue existed?

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RR: Bunn's Barbecue has been here serving barbecue since 1938. I'm not exactly sure which month it started, but it was in 1938 they started serving barbecue.

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RF: And—and what do you know about the origins of—of Bunn's Barbecue back in '38?

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RR: Well, I know the man that started it was from Bunn, North Carolina, so therefore you—the locals nicknamed him Bunn and he started doing barbecue and the name stuck, so there goes—

there was Bunn's Barbecue. That's where it came from is—because, you know, that was just a nickname he, you know, acquired from the locals when he moved here. And it's been Bunn's Barbecue ever since.

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RF: And what was his name? Do you know his exact name?

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RR: Oh, his name was B—I don't know his whole name; it was BB Weathers. I don't know what the Bs stand for, but Weathers was his last name. And like I say, he—he—they ran it until 1969, and he was ready to retire, I assume, and he sold it to my family. My father bought it in 1969 and he just started—kept up the tradition and everything is basically the same as it was—the recipes from the barbecue sauce to the slaw to the cornbread, the whole—whole ordeal is the same. Try to keep everything the same.

00:02:00

RF: And let's talk about your father. He bought it in 1969, your family, and what was your father's name?

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RR: My father was—his name was Wilbur Russell, actually it was James Wilbur Russell. But everybody called him Wilbur, and like I said he bought it in 1969 and just kept up the—the business as, you know—as it was running. He just didn't do a whole lot of changing because it

had been a successful business and he didn't want to change the name or the—any of the recipes or—because, you know, why—why change when it's working so good, you know?

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RF: And what did your father do before he purchased Bunn's Barbecue?

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RR: He had several businesses. I remember at one time he was doing like a lime business like fertilizer and had his I think the first lime truck in the county you know. And this is a big farming area, so he did that for a while. I remember going out with him at a very early age, you know, getting lime trucks stuck in the field and having to get somebody to pull us out but that was years ago. And I barely remember it because I was like a little—little toddler then. But he did that mostly, and before that I don't remember too much about as far as—because I wasn't—I didn't exist. But that's mainly the business I know and I'm not really sure. I never heard too much other talk about what they did before that.

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RF: Where was your father born?

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RR: He was born, I believe, in Virginia. I think in the mountains of Virginia, if I'm not mistaken, but he grew up most of his life in Windsor, right here in town. But I think actually he

was born in the western part of Virginia, I think up there in the mountains, somewhere, a town called Marion if I'm not mistaken.

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RF: And did he move to Windsor with his family or parents?

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RR: Yes, yes, he moved—he moved to Windsor with his family at—you know, at an early age and resided here all his life.

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RF: So how old was he in 1969 when he took over the barbecue business?

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RR: He would have been about—he was born in '36, so I reckon about thirty-three years old. He started serving barbecue when he was thirty-three.

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RF: So he was a young man.

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RR: Right. Still very young; still very young, like I say, because the only other occupation I knew was the lime business and like I say that was—I don't know what was before that but, like I say, he was still very young at the time.

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RF: And what do you remember—what are your earliest memories about Bunn's Barbecue? Did —did you grow up here at first?

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RR: Yeah; yes, I remember it from the time before we owned it. I remember little—little wooden forks, you know, they were actually wooden forks. They weren't plastic. You know, back then they had these little wooden forks that were like a little devil's pitchfork. **[Laughs]** I mean a little fork—that's a—that's something that you—the weirdest things you remember but I remember those little wooden forks that they made and—.

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RF: Were those for the customers to eat?

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RR: Oh yeah; it was just like, you know, instead of plastic forks they put them in a—on a plate, you know, but I just remembered those little wooden forks because you never see those—I'm sure they're non-existent now with—with plastic and everything. But I mean they were pretty neat back then. You can—you know, you remember they were—everywhere didn't have them but I don't know, just—they just had them here, you know, just kind of like a paper plate. I mean you don't see our type paper plates many places but they work really good. They're a whole lot better than Styrofoam because if there *is* any excess grease which there's not much in our barbecue at all but—because we go to lengths to try to reduce the amount of you know grease in it, but if

there's any, the paper plates we have absorb it, you know. So that's another way of just reducing the—the—the bad stuff so to speak.

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RF: Has anyone ever told you stories about Mr. Bunn?

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RR: Yes, I've heard a few stories. I heard he loved to fish. That's the main—the main common denominator you hear with most people that knew Bunn. You know, because I—like I say, when —when they sold it to my family I was only like five years old, and I think he died within the next two or three years after selling Bunn's and but I always heard that he was an avid fisherman and he loved his fishing. He would—we—you know, back in the day most of our town used to close up on Wednesday afternoon. It was just a tradition in this area; everything on Wednesday closed half a day and, you know, you—he would always be fishing or doing something. I mean most of time it was something fishing related—time off.

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RF: And your dad, did he have hobbies also?

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RR: Oh yeah, yeah. He loved to play golf. He was a—he was a big-time golfer and he loved watching any sports on TV but outdoor activities mainly. He enjoyed playing golf. He started playing golf probably in the—I'd say in the mid-'60s maybe, the best I can recollect or some—

well best I've heard, and from the time I was old enough to remember I remember him hitting golf balls and playing golf, you know. That was one of his main activities.

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RF: Was he good? Did he have a good handicap?

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RR: Oh yeah, he was pretty good. I mean like I say, he played in little local tournaments and stuff and he won a few tournaments. He was a pretty good golfer.

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RF: And so did your dad ever tell you about the early days? I know you were young, but did he tell you about those early years in the—'69 and early '70s?

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RR: Well—well, I can remember a lot—some of those but like I say, the first memory—big memory I reckon I remember in—when we first—not long after we bought it was Hurricane Ginger when we had our first episode with water around the building, which this area is so-called *subject to flooding* but not hardly—I mean you—I say it now because I've seen a lot but in those days and up until 1999 it only happened very rarely because it was such a big event when people said they—they remembered taking little john boats or Carolina boats, which they called them around here, down—down Main Street because the water, you know—it flooded down—down

in Windsor you know and that was in '71. But prior to that and after that you never saw any flood up until 1999.

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But I remember him, the picture we have of him standing at the doorway and just looking out; you know, you can only imagine what he was wondering. He had just bought the business only two years and—and it was surrounded—it was like an island. It was surrounded by water. It never got in the front but, you know, you can just imagine the thought that would go through your mind if just bought something that, you know, like I say had flooded any at all, you know.

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RF: Where was the family home then, how far from the business?

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RR: We lived within a mile. We lived right down Granville Street, which is the next street over, and it was only like a short drive, not even—not even a mile, maybe a half a mile.

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RF: And how long was the city or the restaurant closed by Ginger in '71?

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RR: I really don't know. I'm sure comparatively speaking, now I know since '99 and the floods even we've had this year I would think they could have gotten opened within a few days because the fact that it did not come inside and the back—most of the floors in the back are concrete,

cement or whatever and I wouldn't think they had hardly any down time and it probably only stayed up maybe a day or two. But I wouldn't think they had hardly any down time.

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RF: I want to ask some more questions about storms because I'm from New Orleans and they're on my mind and I used to run a—a food business in New Orleans that was lost because of the storm, Katrina. So you mentioned '99, what storm was that and what happened?

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RR: Ninety-nine was Hurricane Floyd and it happened around September 16th or the 19th or something, one of those two dates in '99. But prior to Floyd we had a storm come through called Dennis, which Dennis was extremely unusual because it passed us. It went out in the ocean; it did a reverse track. It came back by us on the reverse track and then it—it did the trifecta. It went back by us the same path it did the first time so it passed us three times, which wasn't that significant of wind situation, but we don't get the storm surge much here, but we did get about ten or twelve inches of rain from Dennis, so that set us up for when Floyd came. Well Floyd came about ten days later and Floyd dumped about twenty-two inches of rain, twenty-one—twenty-two, so that compounded the problem because everything was already saturated, the ground was saturated. The water had nowhere to go. So we basically had twenty-two inches of water and twenty-two inches of rain—when you get to an area that's got low spots all that water is going—it's going to one spot and that's the lowest spot. And we're—we're a low—we're at low ground right here. And, like I said, we had seven and a half foot of water in the building. And it took us twenty-nine days of a lot of work and a lot of volunteers to get it going again.

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And then to add insult to injury we were—we—we opened for three days and the another storm, Hurricane Irene hit us on the 16th I believe of October of '99 and then we—it—it shut us down for about three days. But we—it—it came and went pretty suddenly but, like I say, it still—it still had water in the building and, like I say, we still had to shut down for three days to redo some of the things we had just got through redoing for like twenty-nine days. So we've had our share and since then we've had four or five other ones. So we know all about flooding.

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RF: And I know you had one recently or one earlier this year. What sort of preparations, food preparations do you do or not do when you know a storm is eminent?

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RR: Well, this one here ironically enough, this—the name of this storm that we had this year was called—was named Irene. And we basically you know like I say, I'll talk about this year, but last year not even eleven months prior we had Tropical Storm Nicole that—that was our second worst one ever and it dumped about twenty-two—twenty-three inches of rain. And we—we were about six and a half foot under water from Nicole.

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Well, like I say, eleven months later this Irene, which was a couple months ago hit us, and we took everything out. I mean I didn't take no chances. I didn't know how much—how high it was going to get. We had about thirteen inches of rain from this Irene of 2011 and I took everything out, even stuff—some of the stuff that was bolted and hooked up. I mean I just

unhooked it and took it out and anything that I couldn't get out I elevated as high as I could. And it worked out really good as far as not losing as much stuff because, you know, equipment is very expensive—restaurant equipment and anything you can move or elevate you better do it because you—like I say, you don't know when it starts raining if it's going to rain ten inches or twelve inches or fifteen, and all those inches of rain make a big difference. I mean twelve is a lot different than twenty. I mean, it's—it makes a difference between flooding maybe a foot or flooding six foot. I mean, it doesn't—you wouldn't think it but that's just how—that's how it goes, because water has got to, like I say, eventually come to one spot to drain out and, like I say, once it gets to a point where it can't get out it—it starts backing up. And that's where it—it affects it so much.

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RF: And how long were you closed if at all this year for the storm that dropped—or where the waters came six and a half feet?

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RR: Well, the last year the six and a half foot we were closed about twenty-four days and I had some kind of formula of how many inches, how many days you're closed per inch but I can't remember what it was right now. But I know this year for Irene it—it only—it was about twelve or thirteen inches of rain but we were closed about—about a week. It was either seven or eight days; we could have opened sooner but I think it fell just where Labor Day was on a Monday and we're normally closed on Labor Day. So we could have opened on Monday but we decided to open on Tuesday as usual. So I think we were closed about—about seven or eight days.

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RF: But the building kept a lot of its character; the building looks—looks great. Tell me about the building and how old it is and what this building was historically.

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RR: Well, the building has maintained its—its probably because it was built—part of the building was built over 100 years ago. And it was probably made out of, you know, pine that was your know the heart pine or whatever they call it that was—I mean just, you know, it was probably built like things should be built. It's not, you know, pre-fabbed or, you know, just nothing that would—that would, you know—a little water won't hurt, you know. It's—it's not like things today, you know; with production like it is they try to, you know, get things out as quick as they can and quality is not always there. But like I say, it's part of this building that were built over 100 years ago and—and most of the building is probably seventy-five or eighty years old. But it's withstood it pretty good, like I say.

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And when we go back after floods and have to redo, you know, now I—I go back with salt-treated timber, so that makes a difference. And we don't insulate a whole lot because it's not very advisable. When you insulate walls if they ever do get wet then they just act like a sponge and you're better off not insulating them than dealing with the—the, you know, the other issues as far as cost of heating and cooling versus the cost of tearing it out when it floods, when it's no good because if you had isolation it would be—it would be no good. I mean it—just it ruins everything.

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RF: And please tell me—tell me about Windsor. Were you born here? Did you grow up here?

And tell me a bit about the town.

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RR: Windsor is a small town. It's probably got about 2,500 people and it's just like every other small town across the country. I mean, a lot of jobs have been lost overseas, and we used to have lumber mills and little furniture companies and textile. We used to have a Wrangler—Wrangler store out there that, you know, they made jeans or whatever, and a lot of the jobs have been lost overseas, which I don't know; I don't know—I won't say much about that because it—it's kind of—I don't know. Our government doesn't do a good job of making trade agreements.

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But anyway—

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RF: Well what does that do to the—to the—your business?

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RR: Oh, it definitely affects; I mean everybody—I mean you're talking about 300 or 400 jobs here, 200 or 300 jobs there and when you're talking about a town the size of 2,500 people you can imagine that you know once the jobs go then the people are going to go or—and if they are here they're going to unemployment or a limited income and just like the economy is now, you got to—you got to cut every corner you can. You know, our business isn't like it used to be. It—it definitely isn't—the—the food or the food or the quality because we've kept everything the same

and the service I hope—I can say is the same. But I can only attribute it to the economy and the lack of robust economy, people getting out. You know, if people have jobs they don't mind spending money, but when you're unemployed for extended periods of time, you know, you get to a point where you feel like you—you don't want to do a whole lot of spending because you don't know where your next little bit of money is coming from.

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RF: But do you get a lot of out-of-towners coming in, a lot of travelers?

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RR: We do. We've had—we've been in several magazines that I don't go out and do a lot of advertising because for the very fact, I tell people we've been here so long, you know, that most people know about us. But there are people that have read us—about us in several magazines that are, you know, distributed across you know most of the country. I mean, we've been in magazines; people tell me they saw us in magazines I didn't even know existed. I mean, like there was one out West they were talking about barbecue places and I didn't—I was clueless. And they said, “Oh, you—they ranked y'all in the top ten.” And I was like, “Well that's nice.”

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Just, but yeah; we do get a lot of—every once in a while when we're put up and, you know, like the internet. We've—we've been—we've been listed on some of these websites like roadfood.com where you go to that site and you get some—they critique your—your restaurant, the—everything from the service to the food—everything, the whole nine yards. They critique it and just tell you how—you know, how many miles you should go out of your way to try it and

we've been real fortunate to have good reviews on that too, so—. So we try—that's what we try to do; I mean, we—we've kept everything basically the same. Like I say, we—the food is the same, the service we try to be good, and, you know, then it's up to whoever comes here and tries it, you know.

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RF: Let's talk about the food. What do you cook here?

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RR: Basically we're still a barbecue restaurant, pretty strictly barbecue but we do, you know, through the years we've added a couple little items just like, you know, we added hotdogs years ago because sometimes, you know, we get a family come in. You know young kids, you know—you know, how you are when you're young, you didn't want to try something different and—and hotdogs are pretty international. I mean everybody can eat a hotdog. And we added that and then I think in the '80s, when my brother came back to help out, he had been out—off school and he got his Business Degree but he came back to Bunn's to work, and he added a couple little items, like on Tuesdays and Thursdays, a barbecue chicken on Tuesdays and a chicken in pastry on Thursdays. And just very simple; we've not expanded too much because, I don't know. The more you expand the more—most time you might lose a little bit of your quality on what you do fix, you know. And that's basically why we've kept it pretty simple. And like I say, it's—it's done reasonably well so we felt like it's no need to go out an venture out when you—you got a good product and you—you can get by—you can do okay with that.

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RF: And what parts of the hog do you barbecue?

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RR: We use the—the Boston butt. We found out—years ago we did cook the whole hog and through time we figured out that, you know, there's a lot of waste when you use the whole hog. And a lot of waste, I mean, you know, and we just figured it's better to—the Boston butt had less—less fat and no gristle and you could take it off the bone relatively easy and chop it up and you had just as good quality as you could get. And like I say, not a whole lot of—not a whole lot of stuff you don't want in your—in your barbecue. And, you know, that's basically how we done it, you know, since we quit cooking the whole hog back in the early '70s.

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RF: And you're—you're famous for a certain sandwich, the way you do a sandwich. Can you tell me about that?

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RR: Oh yeah, yeah. Years ago there was a lady that came in here and she—she was—she didn't want to eat a whole lot or she didn't—at that time she would always say, “Well I just want a little bit. I want a little cornbread and if you would put a little barbecue up there and little slaw.” And—and then we started—took it from that and come up with a cornbread sandwich. And a cornbread sandwich is basically just a—our cornbread is about I don't know a quarter to a half-inch thick baked cornbread, very simple but very good, but you take it and you just cut the

cornbread very—very—very precisely. You take a knife and you slice the cornbread in half hoping you don't slice your hand. But now most of the time it works pretty easy, if you do it right, and take that cornbread and slice it in half and you separate it and you throw a little barbecue up there and if you like throw a little slaw and put a little barbecue sauce, and there you got a cornbread sandwich. And it's—it goes over pretty good.

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RF: Do you know the name of the woman who is credited—who you're crediting?

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RR: I believe my brother would say it's a lady, her name was—her name is—she's still living; her name is Nancy Rascoe. She's a local and she's—she was the one that I believe my brother could remember saying that was—that was where the cornbread sandwich came from, Miss Nancy Rascoe requested a little bit—little bit of barbecue between a little bit of cornbread and—and it went from there. And now since it's been in a couple—couple magazines it seems like everybody comes in and wants a cornbread sandwich.

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RF: Does she still come in and eat?

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RR: She still does. She doesn't live here anymore. She lives—she runs a bed and breakfast about an hour away. Her family—a lot of her family is still here and her son actually—his name

is Fen Rascoe and he helped out a lot during the—a couple of the floods we had volunteering.

And like I say, he—he helped out a whole lot and it was his mother Nancy Rascoe, like I say that started—helped with the cornbread sandwich.

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RF: And was the cornbread always here? Did it come from Mr. Bunn's time?

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RR: Oh yeah, yeah. Actually his wife used to cook the cornbread at home and bring it down here. She'd—she'd prepare the cornbread at home and then she'd make a couple of trips and bring it by the sheet, you know, sheets of cornbread and it's been—. And actually we started doing that years ago. My mother did it—cooked the cornbread and brought it here, but since then we've used these big commercial ovens that you can cook a lot of cornbread at a time, you know, like eight or ten sheets at a time. So that's the only—the only difference in the cornbread, but the—the recipe was the same or is the same. It's—you know, just that's how it is. It's a simple recipe—cornmeal and water and a couple other little ingredients and that's basically it.

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RF: And how do you eat your barbecue and how often?

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RR: Hmm, I really—everybody says, “Well you got to get tired of barbecue,” but I really don't because I'll eat it more like where somebody might eat two or three sandwiches or a large plate

or something like that I'll just eat like a little—a little tray of—with enough to just fill you up at the time like a little appetizer more—you might say, an appetizer. I don't really just eat a big meal of it, but I could eat it three or four times a week. I mean it's just—it's—it's good flavor and like I say, I just don't get tired of it. I just—I get tired—sometimes when I'm not around you know like, you know, I—I think about it and say, “Dog-gone I haven't had any barbecue in three or four days!” So, I'll have a little craving for it so I have to get me a little bit. But like I say, it's—it's just a taste that I—I hadn't never gotten really tired of.

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RF: And—and what can you tell me about the cooking process whether time or—of the—of the barbecue?

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RR: Basically, you know, years ago just like a lot of places, they—we used to pit cook wood and all that stuff and we had a couple of fires that—one or two of them. And then the last one it burnt the pit down, you know, because it's a lot of—a lot goes on cooking it with, you know, wood cooking in the pit, open pit. And—and it was—there was that one time there was some talk about, you know, sanitation issues with wood cooked barbecue, you know, all the—all the issues; they'll come up with regulations. But we switched over after the last fire that we had in the early '70s and switched over to—we use the big cookers now and they're electric cookers but like I say, people have been eating it for years and years. I mean once we switched over I still contend that it's the sauce that makes the barbecue. It's not—it's not the—it's not necessarily how you cook it. I mean because you're going to get the meat cooked. I mean that's—that's a given and

you know, if you want to have wood flavor, you know, you could always add wood chips or whatever smoke flavor but, you know, the—the flavor is from the sauce because that is really what gives you—the barbecue sauce, I mean the sauce is what gives you the barbecue flavor. You know, that's just my opinion you know. I'm sure that can be argued from—from now until eternity but, you know, I—if you want Eastern North Carolina barbecue I mean I'll put ours up with anybody's.

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RF: What do you think about the arguments in the State about barbecue?

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RR: Well, you know, like I say I don't—I don't keep up with it too much. I don't get caught up in it too much but I do know and—and for lack of travel, you know, I don't—I don't venture out a whole lot because I'm here six days a week, but I've heard people a lot of people talk about the different varieties. I know the Western North—Western North Carolina barbecue is a little thicker and a little tomatoey-type sauce and I've never heard too many people crave it or talk about it as much as ours. I mean, I know that they will be hear so they wouldn't but, you know, I always tell people I said, you know, “Just tell me; tell me what you like. And if you like that better just let me know.” I mean because there's a ton of people that come in here and talk about ours—how much they like ours, which we're not a big chain. We're just a small—small town restaurant, you know, but we—we've done—we've been doing it so long so that's—that's why—and the flavor. I mean everything is—but I don't know; like I say, like I can't really say much about Western North Carolina-style barbecue because I hadn't eaten any lately and I wouldn't

know who—whose to say was better and whose wasn't. So I don't know; but I'm sure—I'm sure they have good barbecue, too, just a different style.

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RF: And you mentioned the importance of sauce. How would you describe your sauce?

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RR: Uh, I would say it's a little on the—little bit on the spicy side, not terribly spicy. If you put it on something else, another type meat, I know I've put it on chicken before and just—just the type of meat it makes it taste a little hotter, you know. Some sauces you put on different meats it—it—and it enhances the—the flavor, you know. And I do know that our sauce on other foods makes it even, you know—gives it a more of a little tang than it does on our barbecue. I don't know what in barbecue kind of neutralizes the—the heat or the spices so—but it's something that does because, you know, like I say ours is—I don't consider it real, real hot but like I say, if you put it on something else you can—you can taste it a little bit—little kick to it.

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RF: And, I want to ask just a couple more questions about your dad. What kind of—what—what kind of man was he when he was working here? Was he a—what kind of boss was he?

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RR: Oh, he was—easy going type guy; that's just his—his nature. He was real easy going and, like I say, he just tried to—tried to accommodate the customer because he always said, you

know, "The customer is always right." And that's—that's the rule of—rule of business you learn. The customer is always right and he always tried to make sure the customer left as happy or happier than when they walked through the door. So he—he was, you know, just an easy going type guy. He just I don't know; he—I reckon he just liked the type of work he was doing.

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RF: And when did he pass away?

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RR: In 1987.

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RF: Eighty-seven and earlier today about an hour ago I met your mom. Did she always work here too or at—at times?

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RR: Actually, you know, she is by trade a registered nurse. But she did that early on in my childhood but once we bought the—the restaurant it—you know, it—a restaurant requires a lot of maintenance. I mean, it's like once you're in the restaurant business or if you have been and you know that it's like a fool—it's almost constant. It's always something. I mean anything and everything and she actually didn't do a whole lot. She didn't—she got out of the medical profession shortly after buying—we bought Bunn's in the late '60s and she helped my father out here, you know. And she wasn't always right here but like I say, initially she helped cooked

cornbread just like—like Mr. Bunn's wife, Miss Helen, she used to cook cornbread at her house. Well, my mama cooked cornbread at—at her house initially until it—it just became too much. And then we, like I say, we—we got these big cookers that we could cook cornbread all on location. And but yeah, she's been here ever since. I can't remember her not being here and she's still here. She's seventy-eight years old and still going strong. She comes down early in the morning before I get here and she gets it going, and I come in at eight o'clock and she's already done a half a day's work. And—and she'll come back at lunchtime or not lunchtime, right after lunch and get a little break. [Interruption]

00:33:06

RF: So when did you start working here?

00:33:10

RR: I started working here when I came home from the hospital—no; I'm just joking. *[Laughs]* It seems like it's been that long. I started though when—actually I was old enough to work, probably I'd say thirteen I started probably loading the drink boxes and doing stuff like that just something I could do to say I was working and doing something, so probably around thirteen. And then in the summers, when I was fourteen, fifteen, sixteen—well fourteen and fifteen I do know I probably worked here and then I did venture out. And I think my father wanted me to try something different, you know, and I worked somewhere else for a summer. And I did—did a little lifeguarding but other than that I went to school and when I was not in school—at college, I was coming back and I would work here. And when I had time off I'd come back and work here.

00:34:01

And then I did, you know, in the late '80s I started another little barbecue, another Bunn's Barbecue in a little town in the same county but, you know, about twenty miles away. I did that for about four years but then my mother decided she wanted to so-call retire—and if I would come back and help my brother. So I came back in '94, and me and my brother took over so to speak but like I say, my mother still works here. So she didn't really retire; she just—she just wasn't as, you know, full-time so to speak.

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RF: And can we have your mother's and brother's name for the record?

00:34:40

RR: My mother's name is Grace Russell and my brother's name is—they call him Russ, Russ Russell but his—he's a junior. His name is James Wilbur Russell, Jr. but everybody calls him Russ, so it's Grace and Russ.

00:34:56

RF: And does he still work here or does—is he associated with the business?

00:34:58

RR: Yes, he's—he's still my partner in the business and he works, you know, periodically. He's kind of semi-retired but he'll come—he still comes in and works when needed and—and like I say, he still—he works whenever he's called upon.

00:35:18

RF: And tell me; why do you think barbecue is so important in North Carolina? Why are there so many barbecue places? Why does everyone seem to eat barbecue?

00:35:30

RR: I just think it was something that it was like a tradition, you know. Years ago people, you know, it's something about sitting around and getting a group of folks together and sitting around, you know, cooking a hog and it was more about probably the social aspects of it than just cooking and eating itself. It was—you know, just sitting around and getting ready to do it and cooking it and all that goes into it and a bunch of people getting together and doing it, it was just like a social event. But still, of course, it had a—had a good meaning. I mean it had some good food that came out of it but you know I think it passed on through the years. And then just like now—even now today, you always see these pig—these contests, these barbecue contests. You know, you see twenty-five, fifty, 100 people somewhere where they're having a contest, who can cook the best pig. And, you know, it's like, you know, it's just an event. It's like a social event but yet still you have the—the outcome of, you know, a lot of good food. And I think it was the combination of both that kind of kept it going, you know, just like I say who could do the best? I mean it was a competitive thing, you know, and I don't know. I think that's got a lot to do with it.

00:36:50

RF: Have you—has there been other barbecue restaurants in this county?

00:36:56

RR: Yeah, well there's actually another restaurant that serves barbecue and it's—but they don't prepare that. They don't do their own, you know, it—it's really—it's really not as many places that cook their own barbecue now. They might be a barbecue restaurant, they might advertise barbecue but they don't, you know—a lot of places that do—it's still barbecue that's prepared somewhere else and it's not the same. I mean I don't think it is. I mean but like I say it's—it's, you know, whatever people like. But it—it's—it's not like, you know—like I say we hadn't gotten any really by—nobody in the county that I know that cooks their own that sells it—retails it, you know.

00:37:40

RF: Were there some in the past?

00:37:41

RR: Yeah, there has been in the past. There was a place out across the bridge that—that sold it. Well, they're now the Heritage House but they weren't called that then. Different name, I can't remember what their name was back then but—it's been so many years ago, but several places that, you know, like I say I have cooked in the past.

00:38:06

RF: I guess what I want to know is there—is there less barbecue in this area of North Carolina than there has been in—in the past or less places doing solely barbecue?

00:38:17

RR: I kind of—I don't think it's any less. I don't think it's any more. I think it's, you know, it's about the same. I'm trying to think in the surrounding counties, you know, I just don't right here around us I don't know of too terribly many places. I know this—the next county over now, Williamston, Martin County they have several different barbecue places, but, you know, I just take pride in the fact that I know people that come—they'll drive twelve or fifteen miles on their lunch break to come eat our barbecue and they have two or three barbecue places—excuse me, in their own county which, you know, like I say, it's only twelve miles but still the fact that they'll—they'll drive—they'll make that drive to—to eat ours when—when they got two or three other ones within five miles that they could try. But, you know, they come here, so—that's a testament to the fact that I think ours is—is better quality, you know—not saying that theirs isn't good. Just—it's just—I just, you know—of course I'm—I prefer ours and but, you know, other people do too, obviously for them to make that ride.

00:39:30

RF: And so your family has owned Bunn's Barbecue for over forty years. How do you think it's lasted as long as it has? What—what makes it special?

00:39:39

RR: I think the fact that we haven't changed anymore than we have, I think the fact that we've kept all the recipes the same, I think the fact that, you know, we have a—just a basic simple concept of what it takes to make a good restaurant—it's not all about how much china or how much silverware you have or how much nice dishes or whatever, you know—the show of it, you

know; it's not what you know—you know, what you—how you serve it or what you serve it on or who serves it. It's—it's the—it's the quality of what you serve and—and just the fact that if—you know, if they serve it to you in a good way as far as, you know, the way they—you know, they bring it—you know, the way they—or the way they, you know, treat you and you know it's not so much what you—what you got to wear to go somewhere or, you know, to—I don't know.

00:40:35

I think some of the best places you'll ever eat are the most simple places, you know, that don't worry about all the extras. That's just my opinion.

00:40:45

RF: Yeah; I hear that a lot. What makes simple good? Why do you think that is?

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RR: Well it's just you don't spend—you don't spend time on the non-essential parts of making something good. You know, you spend less time on—on the less essential things and more time on the essential things which obviously when you go to eat somewhere the number one thing is what you're going to eat and how it tastes. See that's the—that's the primary goal of when—you know, of what should in my opinion—what you should look for when you go out to eat is how good is the food, you know? It's not the extras that go with it; it's the food itself, you know. That's basically what you're going to a restaurant for is to eat, you know.

00:41:32

RF: A few questions back I asked you how long you've been working here and you said, "Since you left the hospital." Is—is barbecue in your blood?

00:41:41

RR: Well, I don't know. I don't know if it's in my blood but I don't know. It's—it's definitely—it's part of me now. I mean I've been around it for a long time. I don't know. Like I say, I just—I don't know if it's the barbecue or the fact that it's the restaurant here is just something we've always done and it just seems like it's—like, yeah, it is part of me. I just—I feel like that it's something, you know, I've been doing for a long time and I don't know. I don't know how much I miss it because I've have done it so long, but I—I—you know, it's just something I've always done and I don't know how long I'll always do it, but it's just like I say, yeah, I reckon it is—that would—that would—that would say it's part of me then.

00:42:30

RF: And how far do you see Bunn's going into the future? You're coming up on your 75th anniversary or the 75th founding of the restaurant.

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RR: Well, I don't know how far it's going to go because I have—I've got no children. My brother has got—he hasn't any children. My sister does have—I have one niece, so I don't know what she wants to do or what her plans are. We would like to keep it in the family but I don't want to tie her down to it by no means because that's what it does. It ties you down. But I don't

know. I—I—I would hope after I'm long gone and whoever—my brother or whoever, I would hope somebody continues it because I definitely wouldn't have spent the energy or the time or the money through the floods that we've had in the last twelve years, the five—four—about five or six floods we've had, I wouldn't have spent the time to try to keep this building here and going if—you know, if I didn't hope that it would continue, you know not just the fact for economic stance—you know, from economic issues to the fact that, you know, it's just something that the people are used to in Windsor.

00:43:43

I mean we haven't got a whole lot to offer but I mean, it's like I say, people that—they're seventy-five years coming here right now and say well, "I remember when my granddaddy or my daddy brought me here when I was ten years old." You know, and you just can't—you don't find that anymore. It's like I say, everything is changing at—at warped speed and—but, you know, some things need to change, but some things need to stay simple and, you know, basically the same.

00:44:11

RF: So is it for tradition's sake, for the sake of history?

00:44:14

RR: Oh, definitely tradition; I—I think that's one thing that keeps us going here is just—just basically the tradition of it because like I say, it's not—I mean it's nothing that you're going to—you know, just something that, you know, you want to keep going for the tradition and the people

to experience and the next generation to experience what, you know, we've—we've done through the years here.

00:44:41

RF: Well I think that's a good place to close. I want—I want to thank you very much for this.

This was—this was great.

00:44:46

RR: All right; thank you.

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RF: Thank you.

00:44:51

[End Randy Russell — Bunn's Barbecue]