

**Debbie Holt**  
**Clyde Cooper's Barbecue - Raleigh, NC**

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**[Begin Debbie Holt-Clyde Cooper's Barbecue]**

**00:00:00**

**Rien Fertel:** All right; this is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. I am continuing on the North Carolina Southern BBQ Trail. It is Tuesday afternoon, November the 22nd, 2011. And I'm sitting in downtown Raleigh, North Carolina at Clyde Cooper's Barbecue and I'm going to be talking to Debbie Holt, the owner and possibly her husband, too. He might step in; his name is Randy Holt. I'm going to have her introduce herself first, please.

**00:00:34**

**Debbie Holt:** Hi; I'm Debbie Holt, co-owner with my husband Randy at Clyde Cooper's Barbecue, Raleigh, North Carolina, 109 East Davie Street.

**00:00:45**

**RF:** And your birth date for the record?

**00:00:46**

**DH:** Nine, twelve [September 12], 1958.

**00:00:49**

**RF:** All right; and you said you were a co-owner. How long have you been owner or co-owner here at Clyde Cooper's?

**00:00:56**

**DH:** Since August 25<sup>th</sup> of this year was three years, so it's a little over three years.

**00:01:01**

**RF:** A little over three years. Let's talk about how old Clyde Cooper's is. It's extremely old.

How—when was it founded?

**00:01:10**

**DH:** Clyde Cooper—the building was built in 1884. Clyde Cooper started Clyde Cooper's Barbecue on January the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1938 with fifty dollars in his pocket.

**00:01:23**

**RF:** And who was Clyde Cooper himself?

**00:01:26**

**DH:** Clyde Cooper was a man who decided he wanted to start a venture in barbecue and he knew something about barbecue and he took a—as I understood, he tried to get several loans and nobody would give him a loan. And I think a brother-in-law loaned him the fifty dollars to start this business. And he started it and he kept it for fifty years and the—something that I think is fascinating is that he was the only key-holder of this business for fifty years. So he never laid out for fifty years.

**00:01:58**

**RF:** So he was—that means he—no one else had a key to the business?

**00:02:01**

**DH:** No one else had a key to the business.

**00:02:03**

**RF:** Wow. You said and I know you knew Mr. Cooper at the end of his life and we'll talk about that but I want to ask, have you heard any stories about his life before he went into the barbecue business?

**00:02:17**

**DH:** I know very little about him. What I know about him is whenever he would come in here with me, I ran Clyde Cooper's Restaurant from 1989 to '95. And I really don't know him that much prior to that. I just know him during the five and a half years that I ran it.

**00:02:35**

**RF:** And so you came in as manager when who was—who took it over for him?

**00:02:42**

**DH:** After his fifty years of owning Clyde Cooper's he decided to sell it to a very close friend of mine that used to come every Saturday and worry Clyde to death about selling him the business. And Clyde really I don't think even thought that a twenty-something year old was serious. My friend was a builder, so why did he want to be a builder—go from a builder to a restaurant owner? But he really sincerely wanted the business. And after many years of him worrying Clyde, Clyde sold it.

**00:03:10**

**RF:** And you still continued to see Clyde, although he sold the business in—in '88, '89. How often did you see him?

**00:03:21**

**DH:** Gosh; he would probably come to Cooper's sometimes at least two times a week, sometimes three times a week, and he would sit at the same booth over there [*Gestures*] to the right or at the chair right there at the cash register and sit there and tell me all his stories. I would ask him about his recipes and what made the Brunswick stew special, and he told me. And a lot of times, Tony [Moore], the—the owner who bought it from Clyde, never even would conceal—would let anybody know what the secret recipe to the Brunswick stew was. But Clyde let me write down the recipes. And so that's the pretty cool thing about this restaurant is it's extremely simple.

**00:04:00**

**RF:** And what are some of the stories Clyde would tell you?

**00:04:06**

**DH:** Well, I thought he was a ladies' man. He was a super sweet man, very kind; he loved to joke. He was a big jokester, pranks all the time, jokes all the time, but some of my little funny stories that I remember him telling me was about all his women that he had—that he had a room up there at the Sir Walter Hotel which is a very old, historical place in downtown Raleigh. And

there was a liquor store right around the corner. And on the weekends when he was winding down his weekend, the bell man, he would call the bell man and tell him to get his room ready and his women ready and the bell man would call him back and say “Clyde, I got your bottle, I got your women, I got everybody on standby.” So when he closed he went up there and he threw down. And that was pretty much it. And everybody knew Clyde for being the—the kind, fun-loving soul that he was. And that’s what I remember about him. I never saw him be rude, hateful, ill, edgy, anything; he was always a jokester.

00:05:02

**RF:** Was his wife still around when he was—?

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**DH:** I only know him from his I think—his second wife, which her name was Lorraine, which I thought was so—she was a good match for him because she knew his personality and knew that he was a flirt and she—I think she was a good wife for him. She drove him after he couldn’t drive, and he wasn’t driving for a long time. During those days she was the driver, so we’re talking about twenty years ago, she was doing the driving for him.

00:05:35

And she would drop him off and he would hang out with me for a couple hours [*Laughs*] and then she would come back and they would eat and then they would trot on. And that’s it.

00:05:44

**RF:** Did he ever tell stories about the first fifty years in business or those fifty years?

00:05:49

**DH:** Yeah; he told me that he was one of the first business owners that ever let colored people come in the front door. He said he wasn't going to have them going to the back. At that time in restaurants whites were on one side; the blacks were on the other side. And he wasn't going to have that. And that—he actually broke all I guess records for that in the early 1960s. And he didn't care; he was a good soul. He didn't see people of—of color.

00:06:14

**RF:** And do any other stories come to mind?

00:06:17

**DH:** No; not really. I just know he was a partier; he always had something to say. I always felt like he talked more junk than a two-dollar radio. And that's what I remember about him. But the cool thing was—was that he had such pride about this restaurant and he was always so proud of it. And I think he was really proud whenever I had—I think he referred to Tony many times as a youngster. And he was proud that he wanted it but yet, it's funny; the parallel of Clyde and Tony were very similar, into personality. So Tony, the reason I was brought in was because he was way too confined. And so I came in and ran it for him for five and a half years. And then I got married and a couple of years later got pregnant and I hadn't worked in thirteen years and my husband and I—I nagged Tony again, just like probably he nagged Clyde but probably not as persistent. I just made, you know, little hints every now and then and said, you know, when you get tired of it let me know. You don't love it like you should love it. And so all in all it's funny how things come back to—to—for you and we bought it.

00:07:31

**RF:** And that's when you took it over, August three years ago?

00:07:33

**DH:** Uh-hm; yeah. And he had changed some of the things. And the cool thing was—was that I still had my old menu and my—I mean I'm sorry—my recipes. And so there were some variations like in the vinegar and the hushpuppy mix and certain things and we put them back to the way that Clyde had them. So it's exactly the way Clyde had it, food-wise. The thing about the food here and Clyde used to tell me, it was funny to him how people always did so much to barbecue when we do so little and it's so good. He said that's the key—it's true Eastern Carolina style barbecue—is barbecue that just has a kiss, "A kiss of vinegar," and that's what Clyde used to always say.

00:08:18

He said sometimes people would try to come up and make his recipes, couldn't match it, and they put everything in it. It's only got a few little items and that's it.

00:08:29

**RF:** You—what did—I'm assuming Clyde came in here to eat.

00:08:35

**DH:** Uh-hm.

00:08:36

**RF:** What would he eat?



00:08:37

**DH:** Always barbecue, slaw, and hushpuppies and skins. That was it; Brunswick stew sometimes—loved it.

00:08:46

**RF:** How did he order his barbecue—chopped, sliced, coarse?

00:08:49

**DH:** He liked the chopped and he always would do it in trays, the old-fashioned way. So every time he ate his—he would order a tray. And it didn't matter if he had a dinner. If he wanted to add something else in it, like the stew or whatever, everything came individually in its little trays, because that's the true old way that he did it. So we still have that.

00:09:08

One thing I never understood, and his daughter comes in here every now and then, and I want to ask her, “Why does he call the sliced—sliced?” Because the sliced is really pulled pork. It's not sliced barbecue.

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**RF:** So here the sliced is pulled pork?

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**DH:** Uh-hm; but on the menu for years, and it started out life as sliced barbecue, but it's not sliced. It's the tenderloin of the barbecue. So it's not sliced; it's just like pulled pork. If you look at it it's just like pulled pork—never understood that.

**00:09:38**

**RF:** Hmm; besides the recipes that you wrote down that he recited to you, did he leave behind any records or anything?

**00:09:48**

**DH:** I found in some old paperwork an old check where he paid for this insurance which was \$2.50, which I have now on the wall. **[Laughs]** No, not really; you know he—he ran it—he was a one-man show. I mean you know he had his staff. We have pictures over here with him and his staff, but that was pretty much it.

**00:10:14**

**RF:** And you described him as a ladies' man. What—what did he look like when you knew him; what was his voice like?

**00:10:21**

**DH:** He was tall, thin, and lanky and had a raspy voice, like a heavy smoker would but I don't know if he even smoked. He never smoked around me. But pretty much that; I remember when he—as he aged, he aged just like a well-defined old man, you know, tall. I think Clyde was probably about six-four. He was about six-four but he was lean. That's pretty much what I remember. I remember him to this day because I took a picture of him and this is him right before he—he was in this position, tall, lanky, walking with a cane for I bet five years and then he ended up going to a skilled living facility. And that's where he passed away at.

00:11:16

**RF:** And—and the—the picture you're talking about is on the front of the menu, the picture you took. What year was this taken?

00:11:21

**DH:** That was probably taken back in 1990, maybe. Across the street from Cooper's there used to be a vacant car lot, a car—McLaurin Parking Lot and it was all gravel. They had like a hill of gravel in the corner of it and I remember climbing that hill to try to get the best picture because I wanted Clyde and the top of the building too because if you ever look at the menu, there's a copper pig on top of it, and that copper pig I bought at the flea market for like sixty bucks because it was a pig. And then I went and spent like thirty dollars for a drill back then that would drill down twenty feet, I mean I'm sorry, twenty inches down in the brick so I could put it on top of Cooper's.

00:12:02

And so I was trying to incorporate all of it and there happened to be a policeman coming by on a horse and I thought that was really cool. So he hopped off because he was going to tie his horse up to the—to the metal piece that was surrounding the tree and I asked him if he would kind of stand there and let me get a picture of him and him kind of keep an eye on Clyde. And I asked Clyde to wave at me and he waved, so that's my picture. And then on the inside of the menu the *Welcome to Clyde Cooper's Barbecue*, I remember writing that. So that was pretty instrumental in this picture right here. That picture of Clyde's face is the face that I remember at the end of my time here when he sat in the chair and talked to me.

00:12:44

**RF:** Did he always—he's wearing a hat in the picture; did he always wear a hat?

00:12:46

**DH:** Always, always had that cap. I don't know what you call it. It almost looks like—

00:12:51

**RF:** A news boy cap maybe.

00:12:54

**DH:** It almost looks like a golfer's cap.

00:12:54

**RF:** Right.

00:12:56

**DH:** Yeah; I'm sure there's a term for it but don't know.

00:12:59

**RF:** And you mentioned he had a daughter that's come by. Does he—have you ever met any of his other children or grandchildren?

00:13:04

**DH:** Um, before Tony bought this business, he had a son-in-law that he let run Cooper's for a few years. And I knew him; he didn't really mesh with the barbecue world that well. His personality was real abrasive. So then I think that's what made Clyde go—cave into Tony to sell the business to Tony, but no; I just met his daughter. And her—his daughter to this day—I've met his grandchildren and they come in here, but every time they're around town they come into Cooper's and they're really proud of the way—. Their—his daughter just told me about a couple of months ago, and she's eighty years old driving the same kind of Lincoln that he drove; she looks dog-gone good. She came in here and got two pounds all the way. And she told me that she was so glad that my husband and I had Cooper's; that it was back to the way her daddy had done it. So that made me feel good. Plus we get a lot of publicity because we fed U2 on the jet and she read about that and things like that, so she's just really proud. She said that her—she knew that her Daddy was really proud in heaven.

00:14:12

**RF:** And on the menu, you have his—he was—you have his birth—?

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**DH:** February 16<sup>th</sup>.

00:14:23

**RF:** Right; 1899.

00:14:24

**DH:** Uh-huh.

00:14:24

**RF:** And when did he die?

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**DH:** He died February 12, 1998.

00:14:29

**RF:** So he almost—he was—?

00:14:31

**DH:** Almost lived to be 100, yeah; and he ate barbecue as much as he could. They used to come by Cooper's and pick up barbecue. After I left I understand he ate barbecue. And at the end of his time I think he wasn't maybe able to eat barbecue but as long as I knew Clyde could eat, he was eating barbecue. And he was always so proud of this place.

00:14:52

**RF:** Did you attend his funeral?

00:14:54

**DH:** No; I didn't. I think I actually came in here to fill in for Tony to go to his funeral.

**00:15:03**

**RF:** I'm just wondering how big it was, how—what sort of showing there was for—.

**00:15:06**

**DH:** It was a good—it was a good showing. Clyde was like a legend. You—you meet the older people here, twenty years ago when I ran it, some of my most fascinating people were the really older—older people. They would tell me and they had the utmost respect for Clyde—blacks and whites had the utmost respect for Clyde Cooper. They knew that he was a jokester, but if you needed—if you needed something he gave it to you. Sometimes if they didn't have the money to buy something he'd feed them. He didn't really like the liquor store being around the corner at—sometimes because it would bring in all the drunks and then they would worry the mess out of him but, you know, he tolerated things well and he would kind of give somebody something to send them on their way.

**00:15:47**

But, you know, he was a fun-loving soul.

**00:15:53**

**RF:** And have you heard any stories from customers who knew him?

**00:15:57**

**DH:** Oh yeah; a lot of colored people say that they really thought a lot of him because he opened both doors to them. And those are some of the older people that I met twenty years ago and it's what's really cool now—is a lot of people that I saw twenty-some years ago I still see today. And it is fascinating because I've grown up more; they've grown older and it's—it's really cool the

way that you see those people that you saw twenty-some years ago come still in here. And those are the ones who actually told me a lot about Clyde.

**00:16:29**

**RF:** And today we met Mr. James Bolton who has worked here for nineteen years he told us.

**00:16:37**

**DH:** James has been here longer than nineteen years.

**00:16:38**

**RF:** Oh really? How long—?

**00:16:40**

**DH:** Twenty-nine.

**00:16:40**

**RF:** Okay; maybe he said twenty-nine. I'm mistaken. Okay; pardon me, pardon me, so twenty-nine years. So has there been anyone else who has been over since Clyde's time?

**00:16:52**

**DH:** No; no. He had a guy named Frank Smith that ran the block room for years. And as soon as Frank retired he passed away shortly thereafter. But James is the one who actually has probably worked with Clyde and then James also worked with Tony. All—everybody has worked with



Tony except for there's some newer people here. But some people here, when I ran it back twenty-some years ago—I have an employee, two employees that I hired that are still here.

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**RF:** Can you tell me about them? Or, or maybe tell me what's the importance of having long-standing employees? Does it matter to an establishment? What does it bring to the place?

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**DH:** The thing about Cooper's is if you think about downtown Raleigh and whenever it closed up there was nothing downtown. It was businesses down here, so after six o'clock everybody packed up and went home. So I think—I don't know; I can't speak for Clyde but I know when Tony acquired it he wanted to pay everybody at least minimum wage, whereas if you know, waitresses sometimes will make two dollars an hour and then they have to make up the rest in tips in order to equate out what minimum wage is.

**00:18:02**

Well he didn't really want that and he wanted people to want to stay here. So, I don't know whether he inherited that part from Clyde but I know that during the time that I ran it we paid everybody at least minimum wage and then they got their tips over. And one of the reasons was it was important to try to hold onto good help. So you got to pay good help.

**00:18:28**

The other thing was—was maybe they weren't able to make the tips that some establishments did if they were open at night or in the evening. And since everything closed down because we were downtown and a prominent business downtown, everything closed at

6:00, it was better to go ahead and pay a decent wage. So, we have people here today that—I got—I got a few that I know are bringing home some good money each week. And I think that's—that was important.

**00:18:56**

**RF:** And you just mentioned downtown Raleigh a few times. Can you tell me about where the restaurant is?

**00:19:03**

**DH:** Uh-hm.

**00:19:04**

**RF:** The neighborhood?

**00:19:05**

**DH:** Right; downtown Raleigh is almost on the corner of Wilmington and Davie, but it's 109 East Davie Street. And if you think back—back when Clyde had this business there was only businesses downtown and downtown was the town.

**00:19:18**

When Raleigh grew—started growing it grew out and there wasn't a whole lot of anything going on downtown, so a lot of the businesses went outside of downtown Raleigh to prosper and Raleigh didn't really see a really good growth until, say, maybe twenty years ago. And then they started developing downtown to bring more people to downtown Raleigh to make

it to the capital that it is. And, but that's one reason the business hours had always been 10:00 until 6:00 because after six o'clock downtown was dead.

**00:19:53**

**RF:** And let's talk about the building that we're in. You told me a bit about the history yesterday. Can you tell me again?

**00:20:00**

**DH:** The building was built in 1884; it was up for auction, and I believe that's when Clyde bought this building. It's just an old building. It's two stories; it's about—I think it would be 3,000-square feet on each level or 2,700 roughly on each level. The upstairs houses our two pits that are custom-built by Nunnery-Freeman. A lot of times people say, “Wow! I've never seen anything like it.” And—but they're cool. They work awesomely. You always keep your parts on hand for it. This business has grown an awful lot. When Clyde had it, Clyde did caterings and that's phenomenal for back in that era. And for the small kitchen that it had because if you look at those pictures over there on the wall [*Gestures*] those are all caterings that Clyde did and that's mass quantities of food, if you think that they got barbecue and they might have got chicken. I don't know. But that's a lot of food.

**00:20:59**

So this business has grown with Tony and with us because we've incorporated better equipment, bigger equipment, bigger ice machines; we're just rolling out the food. But we wanted to keep it going with the caterings because Clyde was doing something like on a smaller scale. He was doing mass quantities of people though and he had his trucks and he was

dominating in the barbecue business. That to me, back in that time, was really extremely exceptional if you think about a small business back then when your—your basic meal was like—or your sandwich was thirty cents and you'd go out there and you'd feed like hundreds of people and I'm not talking like 100 or 200. I'm talking about 500, to 600, to 700, to 800 people.

**00:21:46**

Clyde Cooper was whipping out some barbecue. So the really cool thing is—is that I think he functioned greatly in this restaurant, and then since then, it was during his time that he came up with these cookers from Nunnery-Freeman. Tony has kept them going; we've kept them going. And that's just how important it is, so he came up with a good solution on cooking some barbecue overnight, mass quantities of it, and producing for the demand. And I think that's phenomenal back in his time because he had that projection in his brain on how to do it. And then we've just kept it going and grew the business.

**00:22:22**

**RF:** How much—let's talk about mass quantities of barbecue [*Laughs*]. How much—how much barbecue do you go through on an average week or month or season?

**00:22:30**

**DH:** Oh my gracious; that's—you know our slow time will start January the 1<sup>st</sup> into the middle of March maybe. Then it picks up with graduations and it—I've seen the time when we've served 6,700 in a weekend. That's a lot of barbecue, if you look at a third of a pound of barbecue goes to feed a person so you take your 6,700 divide that by three. What do you get: 3,400 pounds it's pretty much it. So that's a lot of barbecue.

**00:23:05**

On a regular day, on a regular 300 pounds, 400 pounds but we don't have anything that's regular. You know, just like we have our eat-in people. Our—back in the time that Tony bought it I think 500 people ate here a day. Sometimes we have 900 people plus that eat here a day but that doesn't include the buffet pickups that we have. We have a heck of a business for buffet pickups and we have a heck of a business for caterings. So that doesn't include those people. It's nothing for us to go through eight—900 pounds a day if it's based on your number of people and then not to think about the barbecue, you've got to think about the chicken. So it's mass—mass consumption. *[Laughs]*

**00:23:52**

**RF:** And all the stuff that goes along with the barbecue here?

**00:23:53**

**DH:** Oh yeah; we make our homemade coleslaw. We don't make the potato salad because we can't make it that good. Don't want to mess with eggs. It's not even a mayonnaise base. That's the cool thing about our coleslaw and our potato salad. Lots of people try to create the coleslaw. If you go on Google, "Clyde Cooper's Barbecue Coleslaw," you'll see that somebody comes up there and says, "Oh I finally conquered the recipe for Clyde Cooper's!" And it's so funny because it's not even close. I mean there's only like four ingredients, but they think they've got Dijon mustard and this, that and the other. No; it doesn't. It has mayonnaise; no, it doesn't. So it's just kind of funny.

00:24:32

**RF:** How would you describe the coleslaw without telling us the secrets?

00:24:36

**DH:** Just like Clyde says, “It’s simplicity.” It’s the true old-fashioned simple coleslaw, nothing fancy. People add too much to things. I remember Clyde telling me all the time, you—people think they can cook barbecue. They’ll splash this on; they’ll do that, they’ll do this. They put too much mess on it—simple. Coleslaw is simple. Everything is simple. There’s not one thing in this restaurant that’s complicated. The most complicated thing would be the Brunswick stew and it is really good.

00:25:07

In fact, I’ll tell you something about our Brunswick stew. We were in a Brunswick stew cook-off about two years ago and we have a base that has a secret recipe in it. And I had it out there. The man next to me scorched his stew. Ours—we did not have shoepeg corn in it, or I think we would have won. But he had scorched his stew but he had everything just like they wanted: shoepeg corn, whole potatoes, chunks of tomatoes, string beans, carrots, everything just like we did, but we didn't have the shoepeg corn. The bad thing was—was he came to me and he said, “I’ve scorched my stuff. I want you to taste it.” I went over there and I took half of his stew with my base and I fixed his concoction up perfectly, and who do you think won first place? He did with my stuff. *[Laughs]*

00:25:58

**RF:** But he had that corn?

00:26:01

**DH:** Well he had the corn and he had everything but I fixed his flavor.

00:26:04

**RF:** And you fixed his flavor, right.

00:26:05

**DH:** Fixed his flavor and he won it. That was unbelievable. But the stew is probably the most complicated thing here.

00:26:11

**RF:** And is the barbecue as simple? How is the—well, first tell me what you do barbecue here and what—.

00:26:19

**DH:** Okay; we only cook shoulders and the reason you want shoulders and—and Clyde used to do hams at times, and we've done it too. But the thing about a shoulder it's much more leaner and the important part about it was it's all hand-done and it runs through—you—you pick out everything gross in it and you only chop up the meat.

00:26:40

The one reason Clyde didn't never do whole hog was because number one, he could have; it was cheaper. You—and you can get a lot more yield off of the whole hog, but the problem is—is that you're eating a lot of junk in it. And nobody wants—you don't want to be noted for serving junk in your barbecue because then that runs your business out. So he always did the

shoulders and the hams and because it was really lean and all hand-done and he prided his self on that. And to this day it's done the very same way that Clyde did it, only Clyde started cooking—he cooked behind his house and would bring it here, before the Health Inspector stopped him. So then he had to start cooking upstairs.

**00:27:17**

**RF:** When was that? When did that happen?

**00:27:18**

**DH:** Back when he started in 1938; he had a guy named “Boss” Faison that was his cook. And they used to cook in a shed behind his house, and his house was on Chapel Hill Road, outside past the Fair Grounds on the left. And he had a barn back there and that's where he cooked all his meat and transported his meat up here. But the Health Department changed that because you can't cook off premises like that. You got to cook in your restaurant, so that's how the pits and everything came about upstairs.

**00:27:47**

**RF:** Do you know when that change was made, when they—the Health Department forced him —?

**00:27:52**

**DH:** No; I would almost think it was probably—I think he probably did it for at least ten or fifteen years because I heard it because I've had Boss Faison kin people come in here and say he



cooked with them for fifteen years, out there. And then when he came here I know that Frank did it and I think Boss got really old and died.

**00:28:09**

**RF:** Do you know anything else about Boss? Or do you know how to spell his last name just so we have it?

**00:28:15**

**DH:** Faison—F-a-i-s-o-n—and his first name was Boss—B-o-s-s.

**00:28:18**

**RF:** And was he white, African American?

**00:28:21**

**DH:** He was a colored guy, colored guy, tall lanky colored guy. And, but he was Clyde's right-hand man.

**00:28:29**

**RF:** Has his family members told you any stories about Boss?

**00:28:33**

**DH:** Just that Boss cooked and worked with Clyde out there and cooked at his house and that they would cook all night long to have the food—the barbecue ready and bring it and transport it in for the next day. And then I'm pretty sure Boss worked with him some here until he passed

away. But the thing about Clyde was—Clyde started with people that were older than him and he was actually younger. If you do the math, you know he passed away right before he was 100; so Tony had it for twenty years, so that would put him at eighty and then he ran it for fifty, so that put him at thirty when he started. So, you know, he was a young guy with older folks helping him because Frank passed away before Clyde did and Boss passed away before Clyde did.

00:29:17

**RF:** And that's Frank Smith; did you know him?

00:29:19

**DH:** Yeah; I did. I sure did.

00:29:21

**RF:** Can you tell me about him?

00:29:23

**DH:** I know his hands were shaped weird because of all the sandwiches he made all through the years. This is no story. He had such a technique for flipping his paper and rolling—well he would hold the bun, put the barbecue on there, and it was a perfect cup of the way he cupped his hand and he would wear gloves [*Gestures*] and pat it. And it was a perfect way he did it—even the way—the technique of him holding the spoon, he did it for so many years, over fifty years I'm—I think he did, he had such a way. But from the point of putting the barbecue on the bun then they

came and put the other—the lid on the bun and whenever he went to go fold his papers, his hands were shaped in that direction, his left hand in particular. Never forget that.

**00:30:08**

**RF:** And that's one of the most interesting things I've ever heard.

**00:30:10**

**DH:** It was weird, and I asked him one day, I said, "Do you have arthritis?" He said, "No." He said, "It's from making these here sandwiches all these years." That's exactly what he said.

**00:30:19**

**RF:** And what did—was Frank white or—?

**00:30:20**

**DH:** White. Frank was a white guy.

**00:30:23**

**RF:** And did he work here until he passed away?

**00:30:25**

**DH:** He retired and then he—Frank was a quiet man. I think he was probably having some health issues but didn't say anything to anybody, retired, and then he went to the hospital, and I remember going to visit him in the hospital and then he passed away about two weeks later. There's a picture on the end of the counter right here of Frank. And also back then there was a

lady named Edna Brock who I have a wonderful picture of her at home, and Edna worked with Clyde and knew Clyde and she could probably tell you a whole lot of stories if she was alive because she liked to run with him. But I heard a lot from him—her but she passed away probably about twenty years ago.

**00:31:03**

**RF:** And who was she?

**00:31:07**

**DH:** Edna was a waitress. And then he also had Florence Wright—Walters actually, Florence Walters, who worked with Clyde and she transitioned into working with Tony, and but if you think about Florence and Edna, they were both probably here over twenty-five years. So he—he kept good people and I think it was because he was a good boss. He was a good owner. You think about owning a business for fifty years and you're the only that had a key.

**00:31:39**

**RF:** Do you call Clyde Cooper's Barbecue Eastern style, North Carolina style; do you define it?

**00:31:48**

**DH:** Right here it's true Carolina style and that's what he always said. Technically it would be considered an Eastern style but I incorporate both of them and say it's an Eastern Carolina style because that's it. And the recipe is extremely simple. I'd have to kill you if I gave it to you but you would laugh at how simple it is. And what's so cool about it is Clyde is so right because we

did a barbecue cook-off about a month and a half ago and we did it with fourteen of the major chefs in all over the Triangle and I—you know, we—we do so many caterings. We had pulled off three caterings that day and probably served 1,200 people in that particular short amount of time from the afternoon up until about eight o'clock—nine o'clock and we had to be there from 6:00 to 9:00 at this barbecue cook-off. And what was so funny was, when we walked in, we might be an old business but we've got out style down. We have our chef jackets that are black with red piping. Everything is very, very nice.

**00:32:52**

So when we did the barbecue cook-off we'd go in there and we got all these big chefs, I mean big guys with these professional white hats and these white coats and they all walk around like they're stiff as a board and we're so bad and, you know, we're going to whip you or whatever. And I was standing there thinking, "Oh my gracious; Lord have mercy. What have we done?" So we're busy. We get to select what we're going to take. We knew that we had to take barbecue. So we took barbecue, some of our awesome slaw; we took baked beans, which we kind of got a little kick on baked beans—that we don't have in the restaurant but we do on caterings. We did hushpuppies and skins. We went out there with our perfect little table, set it up, fancy as you've ever seen barbecue be served; the cool thing is—is that I had the skins in a galvanized wash bucket and we could only put the food on like a little six-inch pie plate. And people pay I think twenty dollars to do this. What was so interesting was we worked our behinds off because we had so many people. It was a fund-raiser for InterAct of Raleigh—or North Carolina and so we were—people were—I mean it was tons of people. I don't know how many people were there—400 to 500 people. And you had a short length of time, but we had Bob Garner who is a food critic.

**00:34:03**

And I remember when Tony bought this place he came in to see Tony and eat his food and told him he didn't know what he was doing. That was because he had changed a recipe, a vital key ingredient in the barbecue. So what was cool was we were sitting there working ourselves to death and the judges were getting ready to come in and my husband tells me, "Oh your buddy Bob Gardener was in the elevator with me." I'm like, "Oh my gosh; oh my Lord. Oh no; he's the one that kind of chewed Tony's tail out." And so I was thinking, "Oh my gracious; we're going to get creamed." Here we are; how's it going to look for a 1938 year, I mean a seventy-three year-old business get creamed by you know these kind of—I shouldn't say prissy but uppity chefs?

**00:34:41**

So all I know is that we were working our tails off. We had our little plates. We had a lot—people after people after people after people. I could hardly look up. We were talking as much as I was trying to serve and roll on with the food and people coming back for seconds, loving our food. I looked over there at Bob Garner's plate and he cleaned it. I said, "Oh, good sign; good sign, he has cleaned that plate." There wasn't nothing left on that plate. It was almost like he had just licked the plate. I was like, "Oh my gosh; we stand a chance" *[Laughs]* Because you just never know what you're up against. You know, all I know is it's a barbecue cook-off. They could come up with some swanky idea for barbecue and cream us.

**00:35:13**

And I thought again: "How is that going to look with a seventy-three year-old business?" So what was so cool is whenever they started to announce the winner, he said, "I don't know if y'all noticed but this group has worked—has hardly been able to hold their head up. They've had

the longest line. They have been continuous. They have never had any breaks, never stalled, no —no stopping the line. The line has been wrapped around trying to get to these people to sample their food.” And all in all what it boiled down to is he said, “Clyde Cooper's Barbecue” and these big tears came to my eyes and I said oh, “We’ve whooped them!” **[Laughs]**

**00:35:42**

And I jumped up and down **[Laughs]** and my husband was outside smoking a cigarette and I wanted to wring his neck for that because he missed it, because the pressure was on. And so whenever he finally got to—when he came in and I said to him, I said, “Ah, where you been?” And he said, “You know where I’ve been.” I said well, “Look what I got,” and I showed him our plaque and he was so proud. But what made me so proud was all those people couldn’t wait to get our food. They raved about our food and we whipped fourteen of the top chefs and then a lot of the chefs said, “Oh, we knew we couldn’t beat Clyde’s. Clyde’s has been around forever.” And I thought, “Oh, okay; well maybe they did know we were good.” You know—you know trying to not kill us. Well at the end of the night I walked around to everyone of them’s table to see what they had and some of those places like Capital City Club and the Cardinal Club which is uppity, it’s expensive, they have really top chefs. They had sometimes three and four entries. They were trying to kill us. So they needn’t say that they weren't trying to do anything. They knew we’d take it. No; uh-uh, they really tried to get us, but we whipped them.

**00:36:48**

**RF:** Were they making fancified barbecue—the other places?

00:36:51

**DH:** Oh my gracious. I've never—I had barbecue—I saw barbecue that looked like sushi. It was wild. It was wild. And but, you know, it was a barbecue cook-off so you never know what to expect. **[Laughs]** So I thought, “Okay, how's one of these chefs going to do if you know a seventy-three year-old business and we're supposed to—we're just doing the true authentic barbecue?” And bam! One of these little uppity chefs comes up with this swanky little idea on barbecue and everybody goes crazy. Bob Garner falls over and loves it; you know what am I going to do? What are we going to do? How are we going to do that? How are we going to handle it? And I begged them. I said, “Please don't make me do it; please don't make me do this cook-off.” But we did it and we prevailed and I was so proud because I know Clyde would have been proud. So and—and that was—that was really interesting.

00:37:35

**RF:** Would you do—would you do another cook-off again?

00:37:37

**DH:** I'm a real competitive person. Yeah; I probably would. But, you know, there's something about these chef coats and these hats that intimidate you especially whenever you're slinging in a pig shirt that has a big pig on the front and a pig butt on the back of it. You know, but however, that day we had our polos on and he had his chef jacket on so we can clean up our act if we need to. **[Laughs]**



**00:37:59**

**RF:** And so seventy-three years in business, how—how has, you know at its simplest, how has Clyde Cooper's survived that long? What does it take or what has both Clyde and—Clyde and yourself done?

**00:38:13**

**DH:** You know, the thing—good, clean food; that's it. We don't run specials. We do the same thing that Clyde did. The menu has not deviated a whole lot. We did improve the ribs. I don't think Clyde had ribs back then, but yet he had beer and we don't have beer. And there was a reason he quit selling beer was because he just got tired of people aggravating him.

**00:38:36**

But the thing about the food is that it's good clean food at a good price. We do not take charge cards and the reason we don't take charge cards is because you've got to pay too many people to—to have that. And then our prices would have to go up and that's not fair either. So we try to keep everything down and as close and reasonable as possible. Even out catering prices, our catering prices beat anybody's prices around here and our buffet pick-ups start at \$5.95 for ten or more people. Who can do that? But we do it. And the food is just clean, simple food—clean food. The fried chicken is awesome. The important thing about the fried chicken is that you got to make sure that you've got your grease just right because what happens is it cooks—if you have it too hot then you've cooked the outside hard and left it raw in the middle. But if you have the grease just right then it's almost like steaming the inside, cooking it out, and it's making it a moist and juicy, so we have really good fried chicken.

**00:39:32**

We have awesome ribs. We won an award with it. It took us about two years to tweak those. We just now went to go to NC State Food Science Department to get our barbecue sauce ready for market, because we have so many people that want our rib sauce. And I make that. And so that's different than Clyde but I think Clyde would have liked it. He grew the business a lot and it's kind of rolled over from Tony to us. But it's really the same thing.

**00:40:04**

**RF:** Did—did Clyde also have fried chicken?

**00:40:05**

**DH:** Yes; he did, he did. Clyde had a very simple menu though and—and this is really it. This is his menu except for the corn and butterbeans I don't think he had. He always had boiled potatoes and French fries and coleslaw and Brunswick stew. The collards were added, but he always had steamed cabbage. He did not have banana pudding. He had lemon pie and carrot cake. We brought in the banana pudding because that's a good old Southern thing. Pretty much that's it.

**00:40:36**

**RF:** So one thing that is on the menu and I've spent about twenty-four hours here at the restaurant [*Laughs*] and you—a bag of skins is on the menu and you see a lot of skins in the kitchen; near the cash register there's bags and bags. Tell me about that.

**00:40:52**

**DH:** Skins are a staple. People get an attitude if you don't have skins. It is a phenomenal thing. We go through skins like people would not believe and we have people that drive here from you would not believe. I had one man come from Lumberton, one man from Sanford; one guy bought forty-five bags. He made his wife buy her own four bags because he wasn't going to share. Those were for his poker buddies. I mean you would not believe it. And the cool thing is—is that Clyde only had two types of skins. He had the regular skins, the pork rinds, and he had the shoulder skins. The shoulder skins are like heavens of gold. They are the skin off the shoulders that we cook. We take—the meat is so tender the skin will just slide right off of it. After it's done you take and clean the fat and mess out of the skin and then re-fry it. So you have like a thicker, harder skin and it is like to die for. People love those.

**00:41:45**

But since my husband and I have bought it we've incorporated—well no, actually I'm wrong. Tony brought in the mild barbecue and spicy so there was Clyde had the regular and the shoulder. Tony brought in the mild and the hot and spicy. We brought in the salt and vinegar and people have gone crazy over this stuff. But we have to have skins. People get an attitude if you don't have skins. And they expect skins with their sandwich. They get skins—it's with everything. It's just a perk.

**00:42:18**

**RF:** Does anyone ever order skin on a sandwich?

00:42:19

**DH:** No. No, because they know they're going to get basket of skins; you know a few skins come with your sandwich. Yeah; and they all get excited like we have people that come—. The cool thing about Clyde Cooper's, and I'll have to get into this part with it because we're struggling here wanting to buy the building. When we bought Cooper's Tony was doing a deal with a developer. And we knew that there may come a time when we have to move but we figured downtown was over-built. There was so much vacancy that we really weren't worried about it. Well right now we're kind of stressing over it a little bit.

00:42:55

The point that I'm making is that I've learned something about Clyde Cooper's. It's not always about the money. Clyde made a lot of money. Tony made a lot of money. Inflation has gone up; Cooper's Barbecue has always prevailed and stayed here. We've never closed. This business never closed down because of economy. The economy didn't ever affect us. But now we're—the only part that worries us is that we end up may have—may have to move. And the reason I—we've changed on that area because at first we thought, “Well, you know, if we have to go, we have to go.” But since we've been here I got back to where I was twenty years ago which was this place means something to way too many people. So when people come to get the skins and the sandwich they know what they're expecting. They expect the old building with the old booths with the old everything and they don't want it to change. And now we don't want it to change because I realized that now it's not a money thing. It's a noble thing. So we have people that come from Jacksonville, Florida that will spend the night overnight to come and eat our food, go back, and we have people that go to the hockey games from all over everywhere and come in here to eat with us. We fed Georgia Tech Band. We did U2 on their jet. We did Creed,

the band. We—we have so many—it's not only celebrities; it's just people. People love Cooper's but they love it because it's an old established, privately owned business. And they don't want us to go anywhere. So the skins, the building, everything needs to stay exactly like it was and that's what we're fighting for.

**00:44:28**

**RF:** Can you tell me more about that what the fight is over exactly with the building? And you made the news recently, you made the newspaper and it's Googleable; that's how I read it recently.

**00:44:41**

**DH:** There is a developer that would like to tear down Cooper's and put an apartment building here. Back four or five years ago I think he approached Tony and the deal was—was it was supposed to be the Edison which was going to be a really big high-rise building. Well if you look at the economy the way the economy has done, downtown has got a lot of vacancies. There's a lot of buildings down here that are for sale, a lot of apartments that are not leased, a lot of condos that are not sold.

**00:45:05**

So they kind of came back and recanted all that and now they want to do a six-story apartment building right here. And so, what we're hoping is that it will make the contract null and void in some way with the owner of this building. And the owner of this building is actually a very close friend of mine. That's how I came about this business and I think now he realizes the importance in selling me this building and—and we will end up having to pay a lot to do it, but

it's like the noble, right thing to do because once you're here and you're at that cash register and when you meet people that came from Seattle, Washington and when you meet people that came from Hungary, that came from Finland, that came from all over everywhere and they've heard about Cooper's and they want to come and eat or they've got a child going to NC State and they've got to come to Cooper's because they're way out of state somewhere this is where they all come. And when you see those faces and you hear those people and they didn't know Clyde; they just know that it's an old privately owned business that's been here for seventy-three years, it means something. And then all of the sudden you realize, "Hey, you know what? It's not about a new building. It's not about this." It's about keeping it and preserving it, so now that's our fight. And I'm hoping that my good friend will sell me this business, this building. And I've talked to him today and I said to him, I said, you know, "Please sell me this business. It means a lot to me." And he said to me, "I know it does." So that means something to me that he acknowledged that he knows it means something to me. So I'm hoping that it'll prevail.

**00:46:45**

**RF:** Why does Clyde Cooper's mean so much to you?

**00:46:49**

**DH:** Because I knew Clyde and I knew what he stood for. And when you're—twenty-years ago when you talk to the people that come to Cooper's and they brought their—their grandfather brought them, they're bringing their son, they're bringing their grandchildren, you'll have four generations sitting at a table, it's really cool. And that what it's about. And before you know it, I thought my husband would really be the money guy because he was in it for the money. He knew

that this was—he knew it back whenever I ran it and he knew what I felt about it. But he also knew it was a lot of hard work. The cool thing is—is that now he's swayed over and he's onboard with me without even a fight because I figured it was going to have to be a fight to save this place. But—but he sat there more than I have and he hears what people say. And so now he's got it. And I didn't even have to fight for him to get it. He got what it means to preserve this place. So if it all works out then I hope we buy this building, we own this; if they want to do anything over us, go around us, I made that proposal to the developer and I told—also told him, I said, you know, “I'm not being ugly. I'm telling you like it is; I want this building. I want it to stay. And if it doesn't you can come out one of two ways. You can look like the biggest heel or you can look like a hero.” And that's pretty much what I told the owner of this building. I said he knows me and I'm going to do whatever I can to do the right thing, which is save it. It ain't all about the money no more. It's about saving it for people and generations to come.

**00:48:29**

**RF:** And you've used the word *preserve* and yesterday you used the word *preservation* and that was really powerful. Can you talk about that?

**00:48:37**

**DH:** Well you got to preserve this building. You got to think about it. All that glitters is not gold; all that's new is not great. Old is history. This is—what else you got to look forward to? I mean you know anybody can eat at a franchise. This is an old privately owned business that needs to stay in its location in its entirety until somebody of a greater power like God takes it away from

us. That's it; I don't want these bricks to fall down off these walls until a storm comes and it makes them fall down. Other than that I don't want nobody else to touch it.

**00:49:21**

I used to power wash this building twenty years ago. Since we bought it I was power washing it. And I stopped power washing it because mortar was coming out of the bricks [Laughs] and that's no lie. So I'm not doing it anymore. And that's the truth. I mean I'm just—I'm—I'm almost possessed and people will look at me and—and Tony who is my close friend, he knows me. Tony is a very wise, smart businessman, very wise and smart. A lot of times he doesn't get the credit that he deserves because his father tried to steal his glory. In the paper, whenever this business was sold to Tony, I knew Tony better than most people know Tony. Tony bought this business from Clyde, not his daddy. His daddy is a businessman that a lot of times people refer to him as Alvin the Alligator. He never stops. But he never could let Tony have all his glory. He always had to be like Tony's maker or I bought this for my son or I did this—but he did not. Tony Moore, if you go back to the Register of Deeds, anything, Tony Moore owns it, never was it Alvin Moore at all.

**00:50:25**

But he always tried to take it. And in fact, one day I won't ever forget; Tony was working here and we were just friends. He called me up and he couldn't even talk. And he was so upset because his father came and stole the deed through the night out of the safe. And he was hyperventilating. He said, "Come pick me up; come pick me up. You got to take me to the attorney's office. Alvin stole my deed." And he was so upset. So I took him straight to the lawyer's office and he filed whatever paperwork he had to do with—through the court system to get his deed back from Alvin.



**00:50:57**

Tony didn't borrow the money from Alvin but Alvin was just the guy who—man who always wanted to take the glory. I hear it today. Well didn't Alvin Moore own this business? I say, “No, sir; he did not. Tony Moore owned this business.” Tony Moore has always owned this business before we bought it and that's the truth. That's an absolute truth. Many times even in the paper, just like that article that's over there on the wall, Alvin always tried to steal Tony's glory. And you know who would call the post office and say, “Oops; you got it wrong. You need to go do your paperwork.” Me. And they would have to do a recant on the side. And many times Tony would call me and say, “I know it was you; you don't have to tell me but I know it was you.” And I said, “I'm not saying anything.” Because it just wasn't fair. But Tony is a very smart, wise businessman. He loves a dollar a lot of times better than Peter loved the Lord. I'm just hoping that he'll do the right thing and sell us this building.

**00:51:46**

**RF:** And so if the worst-case scenario happens, if the wrong thing happens and Clyde Cooper's is forced to move somewhere else downtown what does that mean to the community?

**00:51:56**

**DH:** Well we were trying to stay downtown. I'm not going to pay Tony Moore six—or six or \$8,000 for rent. I'll go buy my own building. If this is—and this is what I told him; first of all, I was young when Tony and I were friends. We dated off and on for eight to ten years. And I told him, I said, “You didn't raise a fool. And I'd rather play nice than ugly because I would go the media and everywhere and try to get everybody all over this world that would help me rally to

save this business if I have to.” If worst-case scenario comes and I have to give up this building and can't then we would go buy another building because why would I pay somebody that much money in rent when I can own my own? But that's only in a forced case scenario. But we're not looking at small change here. We're looking at \$1,000,000-bucks for this building and this building is not worth \$1,000,000 but you have to do what you have to do.

**00:52:48**

**RF:** What has the reception been since this made the news recently?

**00:52:53**

**DH:** A lot of people come in and they're concerned. And I told them, I said, “Now I have somebody working with me on Facebook” and a lot of people follow us from Facebook, like a lot of people from out of state. I said, “So, if I post and I send it to you I'm going to need your help because if it goes that way I will have to do it. I'll do whatever I can. I'll raise as much hell and cain as I can.” But like I said, in the worst-case scenario if I'm forced and I don't have a choice then we'll relocate and we'll try to do as much as old as we can, take whatever is old. We're not about the new; it's not about that. You got to preserve this place. And if it takes taking the tables, the booths and everything else in doing it, trying to do it—duplicate it we're going to do it.

**00:53:34**

The kitchen, a nice new kitchen would be nice but [*Laughs*] you know other than that that's it. [*Laughs*]

**00:53:43**

**RF:** So you have a real fight on your hands.

**00:53:45**

**DH:** Oh yeah, oh yeah, we got a big fight—big fight but I want to play nice if I can. And I got one thing that's a little secret that I know that the owner would love to have, that I have, and I'm willing to do that and that might give me my little ace over the developer. I think it does because the developer can't give him what I can give him.

**00:54:14**

**RF:** And so tell me, I mean barbecue is obviously important to this community and to this State; why do you think barbecue in North Carolina or this part of North Carolina are so intertwined?

**00:54:26**

**DH:** I don't know. We have a lot of people that come from Lexington and they like the red sauce and they use our rib sauce on the barbecue. But they love our barbecue; they love our texture of barbecue. And everywhere I've ever eaten, gosh twenty years ago in owning and running this business everywhere you went you had to eat barbecue. I mean you'd be off the beaten path going to find a barbecue place to compare their barbecue to your barbecue or just tasting it or finding out about the kitchen. That's how I found out about eating whole hog. I will not go to a restaurant and eat whole hog—ever, ever, ever. I have been to too many kitchens and saw that whole hog chopped up and it almost looks as pretty as much chopped barbecue, but I ain't eating

that mess. I'll eat whole hog if I can pull it off of a grill but I'm not going to eat it if you chop it up. There's just no way.

**00:55:09**

But ours is just true clean barbecue. The cool thing about it is I had a chef in here about a month ago and he told me, he said, "Do you know why we like your barbecue so much in South Carolina?" He said, "Because we have the yellow sauce." And I said, "Yellow?" He said, "Yeah, it's like a honey mustard sauce." And he said, "But I buy so much and take it back because this is awesome barbecue." He said, "Can't you tell me the recipe?" I'm like, "No, I can't." But we have people from the Four Seasons at Washington, DC, the chefs that come down there get—get a day off. They'll come down here and buy a bunch of barbecue and take it back there and serve it. I'm serious. And they'll eat and they'll take a pile of it back to serve. So I mean it's—it's interesting but it's just like Clyde, it always goes back. People do too much to their food. It's so simple you'd be blown away. But it's good.

**00:55:59**

**RF:** Where—where were you born and raised?

**00:56:02**

**DH:** I was born in Warsaw, North Carolina, a very small little country town, raised there, graduated, went to college, and ended up working at a bank and thought that was the noble thing to do. Bad thing was—was I worked for a bank now which is known as Bank of America but it was a male chauvinistic bank back then. I got promoted four times in three years, got no more money. If you wanted a dentist appointment you had to make it three weeks ahead of time and

hope like the dickens you got to go. And then from there I said that ain't no money in that because I saw girls making deposits that were—I'm like, "What in the world are you doing?" They were waitresses. But then I realized that I needed to get in sales because then I could make a commission so then I went to work for another prominent company in Raleigh, which was Alfred Williams & Company, complete office outfitters. And I started out selling office supplies and ended up doing furniture and design work. And the commission was it. I was told I could sell an icebox to an Eskimo and I tried it. And I liked it.

**00:57:00**

**RF:** And what made you come here?

**00:57:03**

**DH:** Tony. We had dated, and he bought this from Clyde and I tell everybody it's a true story but he was confined. He couldn't chase women like he wanted to. So he asked me to do it and I did it for a few times and then I liked it and gave up my job at Alfred Williams, came and did it for five and a half years. That freed him up to go back to building and doing whatever he wanted to. I would work Monday through Friday. He would take Saturdays and that was it.

**00:57:31**

**RF:** And we know you love Clyde Cooper's—you love being here; do you love working in the restaurant, the day in, day out?

**00:57:41**

**DH:** It's a good thing I have my husband because he's got a much kinder personality. I'm more of a no-shit taking person and don't try to sell me some crap. And I—you know, back in those days, back twenty-years ago we used to have homeless people come in here. Although I don't think they were all that homeless but I won't ever forget; the same scenario happens today and I go back to that little trigger back twenty-years ago.

**00:58:03**

There was a man that walked in the restaurant twenty-years ago. He said, "Are you going to give me some food free today?" I'm like, "What are you—what do you need free food for?" He said, "Well, I'm homeless." I'm like, "Honey, if you got two healthy arms and two legs and you're walking pretty good, I think you can get a job and you can pay for this food." Well he went and sat down at the counter and he ate. When he came up there to the cashier he said no problem. I got plenty of money. Pulled out a wad of money; I bet the man had \$600 and he said—and he laughed at me. And he said yeah; he said, "You can get a begging permit for a dollar and go stand on the streets of downtown Raleigh and whatever and beg." He said, "I make anywhere from \$300 to \$600 in a day." And boy my horns went up. I said, "Oh my god; we got to make a change."

**00:58:43**

Well then that was Mayor Fetzner was the Mayor, and I called. And I couldn't get him on the phone I was so ill. I'm like, "Are you kidding me? This man is conning people; he's healthy as he can be and he's over here conning people wanting free food and everything else like that." So finally I got the Mayor on the phone and I told him, I called G105, which is a big old radio station, big mouthed people over there, got them on it and got everybody on it. And I want you to

know dog-gone if Tom Fetzer didn't go and change the ordinance to raise the begging fee to five dollars and said you can't be within so many feet of a business and you got to be on the outskirts of city limits of Raleigh. So that was important to me.

**00:59:19**

And it's funny because today you know you kind of still have some of the same people, and so back then you know I call a spade, a spade real quick and now I look at them like, "Oh please." You know, so he's much kinder in that area. He probably would give them something. I'm like, "Get!" I put my foot in their back and help them out the door and say, "Come on honey, let me help you out the door." *[Laughs]*

**00:59:39**

**RF:** And it looks like—I mean just from being here the last day y'all have run this place together. Does that work as a married couple running a restaurant together?

**00:59:47**

**DH:** Oh god; yeah, yeah. He's like I said, he's—he's a lot—I'm either black or white. It's either right or wrong. And he's got the patience of a snail and I'm too fast. I'm really fast-paced. So we work I think good together. One can take the mornings, one takes the afternoon, one closes or one takes the whole day. Yeah; but sometimes you get a little aggravated because I'm a creature of habit. Don't you get better with habit? If you had to do the same thing over and over and over every day wouldn't you get better? Some people don't; some people have a bounce of Alzheimer's and sometimes they just forget it and I had to come up with a recipe book to write down. I threatened their lives: "If you ever print this thing I'll kill you," because sometimes they

just forget it and they get to thinking, “Okay, well I think I’m going to put a splash of this in there.” You know, so that’s whenever your horns go up again and you want to straighten it out.

**01:00:46**

Him on the other hand, I’m ready to get you right then and he’ll wait for the end of the day because he don’t want to upset you during the day where you’re not productive. *[Laughs]* So I’ve learned that from him actually. I wait to kill at the end of the day. *[Laughs]*

**01:01:00**

**RF:** Where did y'all meet?

**01:01:02**

**DH:** *[Laughs]*

**01:01:04**

**RF:** Or how did y'all meet?

**01:01:05**

**DH:** Well I knew him. I knew him but out at a bar and I always thought that he was not that nice of a guy. I didn't really like his personality. And the cool thing is—is I think he kissed me—well if you want to know the whole truth this is the truth.

**01:01:27**

Tony was a—was a great guy. But Tony was not good at a lot of things. So after you go through that relationship with Tony and his daddy, who was just ruthless, I made a list of criteria that a guy had to meet in order for me to think, well could you not be the father of my children or



could you be the father of my children, before I would waste time with you? So I was single for like four years after that. And pretty much did what I wanted to do, how I wanted to; I drove a BMW, my shoes and my pocketbook matched. I was in sales. Don't touch me. Owned a house; it was paid for, had money in the bank. It wasn't who I needed, it was who I wanted. And that's who—how I felt and that's how all us sales reps at Alfred Williams worked. We were independent.

**01:02:11**

So when he kissed me I was like, "Oh my god!" because I really—I told my uncle, I said well, my eyeballs rolled back in my head and my toes curled and I knew something was up then. So I said—I said I figured if he's a good guy then—then I got something here. And the more I got to know him he wasn't the guy I actually dated; he was married prior to me and I knew his wife. Didn't really care for her; dated her brother and they were divorced. And she had always made me think that he was like this kind of asshole person. And to be honest with you he was actually an extremely nice guy, super nice guy. So I guess it's who you're married to. And we've been married—this January 1<sup>st</sup> will be nineteen years.

**01:02:52**

**RF:** So you got married January 1<sup>st</sup> and Clyde Cooper's was—?

**01:02:56**

**DH:** I know. Isn't it cool? It's—it's funny because see, Tony nagged Clyde. I kind of nagged Tony. And Clyde started January 1<sup>st</sup>; we got married January 1<sup>st</sup>, so it kind of all works together. It's kind of like it's meant—and too it's interesting because people that saw me here or read the

article about us buying it and me being here before, it was cool because they said, “You’re back home.” And that made me feel good because it did feel like home.

**01:03:23**

**RF:** And y'all have raised a daughter. Would you ever encourage her to go into the restaurant business or does she work at Clyde's?

**01:03:32**

**DH:** Uh-hm; she does. Ashley is sixteen years old, going to be seventeen January 19<sup>th</sup>. The cool thing about that is you never know if you've raised a sorry child or a one that wants to work. So when you own a restaurant you're a little nervous because you got twelve people working here that's going to watch and see well, “Is your daughter spoiled and she's not going to do anything?” And I've told everybody my whole life that if I had life to do over again I'd always get my education but I don't know as I wouldn't become a waitress because if you can pocket your tips you can make a ton of money because those girls that I worked at the bank with that made their deposits did it.

**01:04:09**

So I've always told everybody outside of my commission job that are young kids going to school, “Go find you a waitress job.” So I told my daughter the same thing. I said, you know, “You'll either feel it when you get that tip or you won't feel it when you get that tip.” Either she's going to be sorry or she's going to go get it. And the cool thing was—was I was very nervous and I was really worried, but as soon as I put that child on this floor and she got that first tip it was like *game on*. She told these people, she said, “You going to get them or I'm going to get

them.” I mean because we don’t have territories because we found out once you have territories then you’ll have one that gets really slow because they know they’re going to get it. And people end up waiting. So we got rid of the territory part, which I didn't have any way. But Ashley came in here like a dynamo. And the cool thing is—is that during the summer, my husband I went to the beach on two occasions and let her and her best friend run our restaurant for two days. And Megan has done ServSafe. My daughter helped me learn—practice, study for ServSafe where out of ninety-nine questions I only missed four. And she knew food like the back of her hand, so we instilled our business to two sixteen year-olds [*Laughs*], went to the beach, and came back and had rave reviews. I said, “Oh my gosh.” I was almost scared to walk in the business because I thought either our help is going to want to kill us or want to quit. And they came in and they said, “Y'all have got to be proud. They did a bang-up job; they did a great job.” Even Sheriff Johnny Harrison who comes in here quite often, he said, “We loved the new management. We liked their choice of music too. They’re a lot more fun than y'all.” So it was a hoot. So we figured she had G105 blaring out and this place was a dance hall. Who knew? But it—you know, yes; she likes it.

**01:05:46**

**RF:** You got to be extremely proud of that.

**01:05:49**

**DH:** I’m very proud of that, very proud and almost scared because it was funny; in our catering book, I turned to a book of catering and she wrote on—in magic marker in the front of the catering book, *I got this*. [*Laughs*] So it was—it was interesting; it was interesting but she did a

great job and we went two times to the beach and left it to them for two days. Of course they were the slow days which will be Monday and Tuesday but—but it was interesting. But the feedback we got was phenomenal.

**01:06:21**

Not one problem with anything. She checked off—we have a checklist that you go behind everybody. You don't take for granted that somebody turned the pit on the right temperature. You don't take for granted that the cooler is working upstairs. You have to go physically see the stuff before you walk out the door and she did every bit of it. In fact, she has a note pad over there where she walked around him for a week and wrote everything down—what she had to do. So that's a hoot.

**01:06:44**

**RF:** Do you think she'll run this place one day?

**01:06:47**

**DH:** Well, she told me one time, in fact she just walked in here a minute ago; she told me that she was going to go to college, get her education, do what she wanted to for a while, and then she was going to come back to take over Cooper's. So that would be good. And her little friend Megan is her best friend and those were the two little managers and that's what they plan.

**01:07:12**

**RF:** So maybe to wrap this up, what do you think Clyde Cooper would say with the business reaching almost a seventy-fifth anniversary, with y'all in charge, and with this looming kind of battle with a changing downtown Raleigh landscape?

**01:07:30**

**DH:** I think he would get tears in his eyes if he thought that something was going to happen to it. And I think that he's—you know, it's funny; when my grandmother died, I asked the preacher one day, you know, "I know I hear about heaven but nobody ever comes back and says, 'Oh yeah. I went up here to the gates of heaven. It was beautiful and everything was pearly white and all this stuff.'" I said, "So you know you got to believe."

**01:07:52**

So I've got to believe that he would be up there happy and proud of us and ecstatic that his name is living on and his name is as popular and as famous as it is but I think he would have tears in his eyes the day that something happens and I think he knows me well enough that not to underestimate me because I'm going to do everything I can legally to hold onto this business, this building, and this—this business in this building and just hope and pray that that's in the plan. So I think he would be hoping with me.

**01:08:31**

**RF:** And so January 1<sup>st</sup> of next year, 2012 you'll be seventy-four years, the business. So January 1, 2013, 75 years what—

01:08:38

**DH:** We're going to raise hell.

01:08:40

**RF:** —will you be open and what's the party?

01:08:41

**DH:** Oh we're going to be wild as you can be and I want it to be—I'll tell you what; if we make it here, in the same location for seventy-five years, this is going to be a blow-out party. We're going to go back and sell sandwiches as cheap as Clyde did. we're going to bring—I don't care what we have to do, but we're going to put it on the map more than it's on the map, in honor of that man who started this business seventy-five years ago. So that's our intentions. We're not—I'm not into this radio stuff where people have this radio and they give free sandwiches and stuff like that. No; we're going to go back for that time, but we're also going to have a—maybe an old brass band. I don't know what Clyde listened to but I'm going to find it and I'm going to try to get somebody to recreate it. We're going to have it and I'm going to ask them if they'll close the street down and let's have a party. That's the truth.

01:09:24

If the Lincoln Theater can do it and close the street over there, we can do it.

01:09:30

**RF:** Seventy-five years and I will be here [*Laughs*].

01:09:32

**DH:** I hope so; I hope so. [*Laughs*] I hope so; just keeping—you know I just hope for seventy-five years we can stay right here. That would make me really happy. And then if I was forced to go then I might cut that developer a little slack. But I'm not going to.

**01:09:50**

**RF:** Okay; well I want to thank you. This was a wonderful interview. If you have any closing words I'll let you have them.

**01:09:54**

**DH:** No; I don't really have any. I appreciate you wanting to do this. I think it's really noble that you want to come around and see these old established barbecue restaurants. It's history and I'm not—to try to sound like a real religious person, but I just absolutely started reading the Bible not too long ago, not because I wanted to be a preacher, but I wanted the history. And that's the most fascinating start I've ever had about history and basically ethics and morals and rights and wrongs. And so Clyde is history. And we all started somewhere, so I got to keep it going. I got to do the—the noble thing.

**01:10:39**

**RF:** All right; well thank you. I congratulate you on almost seventy-five years. And I look forward to that party.

**01:10:45**

**DH:** Thank you; thank you. Yeah; you got to come because I—I hope and everybody say a prayer for us because we want to stay right here.

**01:10:54**

**RF:** We will; thank you.

**01:10:55**

**DH:** Thanks.

**01:11:00**

**[End Debbie Holt-Clyde Cooper's Barbecue]**