

Natalie Ramsey & Chase Webb
Red Bridges Barbecue Lodge - Shelby, NC

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[Begin Natalie Ramsey & Chase Webb — Red Bridges Barbecue Lodge]

00:00:01

Rien Fertel: All right; this is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. I am continuing on the North Carolina BBQ Trail. I'm at Red Bridges Barbecue Lodge at 2000 East Dixon Boulevard; that's right off Highway 74 East in Shelby, North Carolina. And I'm sitting here with Natalie Ramsey, granddaughter of the founder, and we're going to be joined in a second, in a moment or two by her brother. But we're going to start off now, so I'm going to have Natalie introduce herself please.

00:00:36

Natalie Ramsey: My name is Natalie Ramsey. I'm the Vice President. I was born June 25th, 1981 and I'm thirty years old.

00:00:45

RF: All right; so you're thirty years old. How long—tell me how long you've been working here at the Barbecue Lodge.

00:00:54

NR: Well, I've been working here since I was a little girl, but actually when I first started getting on the paycheck was when I was sixteen years old. I started out as a waitress. And then I've worked in every department in here since. I can cook meat to whatever you need; I can do it.

00:01:06

RF: Okay; and—and tell me, you—you said you started working when you were sixteen. What did you do before then? Would you—would you be brought to work by your mom or by your—by the family?

00:01:18

NR: Well, we would just hang out here; you know of course we would come with mom to work on Saturdays and stuff like that. And you know help—fill up the ketchups or the napkins or, you know, just anything like that. We just thought we were a big part of that.

00:01:29

RF: Okay; and so we're talking about mom right now. Tell me your mom's name?

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NR: Debbie Webb.

00:01:34

RF: And tell me about her; what's her position here?

00:01:36

NR: Well she's the owner now. My grandmother passed away about four years ago and she took over the business—well before that but she's definitely the owner now.

00:01:44

RF: And does she come—your mom, does she come in every day?

00:01:47

NR: Every single day, five days a week; uh-hm.

00:01:49

RF: And—and let's go back another generation. Let's talk about—well we're going to be joined by your brother. All right, please give me your name, your position here at Bridges and your birth date and how old you are.

00:02:05

Chase Webb: Chase Webb; I'm twenty-five—twenty-six, excuse me—born May 29, 1985.

00:02:14

RF: Okay; and your position here?

00:02:15

CW: Co-owner.

00:02:17

RF: Okay; so we were—I was just asking about your—about your grandmother. Tell me her name again and—and a bit about her, where she was from.

00:02:25

NR: Her name is Lyttle Cabaness and—

00:02:29

RF: How do you spell her last name, I'm sorry?

00:02:31

NR: Cabaness—C-a-b-i-n-e-s-s [Interviewer's note: Cabaness is the correct spelling]—
Cabaness. And where she was from—yeah, you're going to get me on that one; hold on.

00:02:38

CW: South Carolina.

00:02:39

NR: That's what I thought. I wasn't 100-percent sure.

00:02:41

CW: She was from Kershaw, South Carolina.

00:02:42

RF: Where is Kershaw, South Carolina?

00:02:43

CW: It's about an hour and a half west, right?

00:02:47

NR: Uh-hm.

00:02:47

CW: West of here, so yeah; it's right about twenty—thirty minutes from Rock Hill, South Carolina, so right there close.

00:02:55

RF: And her husband was whom?

00:02:57

NR: Red; his actual name was Elmer Leroy but everybody called him Red, so—.

00:03:01

RF: Why did they call him Red?

00:03:03

NR: I have no clue. Nobody really knows. They just called him Red, so—I don't—do you know? Have you ever heard?

00:03:10

CW: That's one thing my mom doesn't even know, so—.

00:03:12

NR: We've asked people. Yeah.

00:03:14

RF: And where was he born?

00:03:15

NR: Yeah; good question here. Where was he born? This is terrible to say, but I'm—I'm sure he was born in Shelby.

00:03:27

RF: Tell me how many—how many children did they have besides your mother?

00:03:29

NR: Just one, just my mom.

00:03:33

RF: Just your mom. And—and—

00:03:35

NR: And my mom was actually adopted, so—. She come to my grandmother when she was two days old, a couple of days old, so—yeah. So she's a little blessing.

00:03:45

RF: So, let's get into the—to your grandparents' history. First, before we go into them opening the restaurant, did you know both of them or—?

00:03:58

NR: My grandfather passed away when my mom was a teenager and my grandmother passed away four years ago and we were very, very close to her.

00:04:04

CW: Grandpa died in '66.

00:04:07

RF: So your grandfather died in 1966. Let's—tell me some stories about your grandmother. What kind of—first what kind of person outside the restaurant was she?

00:04:16

NR: She—her whole personality was the restaurant. She was here from sunrise to sunset. She was here every day all day. She had red hair. They called her the—the redhead, you know, that meant she had a little hot temper but she was a wonderful person and she lived for this barbecue place. And she called her everybody out here her family.

00:04:36

RF: And is that people who worked here were her family or—and her customers or one or the other?

00:04:41

NR: Both of them. Yeah; most of our employees have been here for over twenty—thirty years, so—. We're a real close family out here and then the customers, they keep coming back. You know, their family, their grandchildren and so we're really close to our customers, too.

00:04:57

RF: And tell me, your grandmother had a nickname?

00:04:59

NR: Mama B.

00:05:01

RF: And who called her that and why?

00:05:02

NR: Everybody, customers, employees, everybody; they didn't call her Lyttle. They called her Mama B, almost everybody that I've ever heard call her anything.

00:05:10

RF: And what did y'all call your grandmother?

00:05:12

NR: Well I called her Ma-Maw and Chase called her Maw-Maw.

00:05:16

CW: I just called her Maw-Maw, so; yeah.

00:05:17

NR: But I called her Ma-Maw. *[Laughs]*

00:05:20

RF: Did she cook at home? Was she a cook outside of the restaurant?

00:05:24

NR: Not really, not really because this is what she did day in and day out. She loved to fish though, so if she got—if she caught some fish she'd cook fish, but that's about it.

00:05:33

CW: Uh-hm.

00:05:34

RF: Tell me about that because I had a grandmother who also loved to fish.

00:05:36

NR: Oh really?

00:05:36

RF: Yeah; tell me where did she go fishing and what did she fish for?

00:05:39

NR: Lake Norman, she had a little house up there that we would go stay at. Sunday night, she'd drive down Sunday night and she'd stay until Tuesday. And she would go fishing, her and her sister, Mary Bain, and another employee, John Henry, which has been here and still is here to this day, and they would go down and they would fish all day long, on Mondays and Tuesdays. And then they'd cook it up and enjoy their fish.

00:06:00

RF: Is that part of the reason you're closed on Mondays and Tuesdays?

00:06:03

NR: No; actually back in—long time ago there was a lot of mills around here, and I guess that's when they were closed is on Mondays and Tuesdays, and that's just how it's always been and we've kept it like that.

00:06:15

RF: All right; and—and I have one more question about—so this restaurant is very much family and you—and everyone called each other “my family.” And we're coming up on the holidays. So Thanksgiving is less than a week away. What did—what did y'all do or what do y'all still do for the family holidays, Thanksgiving and Christmas? Or, what I want to know is do you have like a company-wide Christmas or Thanksgiving party?

00:06:38

NR: No; we don't but my mother does something very special for everyone out here at Christmastime. She does—each individual person.

00:06:46

RF: And who cooks Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners at your house?

00:06:48

NR: Actually it's going to be me this year. Once my grandmother passed away we took—kind of changed our traditions because it's been really hard because she was the only family that we had left. So it was just her coming over, so we just switched it up and now we're doing things at my house now, instead of at home. So I'm the one cooking.

00:07:03

RF: So your grandfather Red and your grandmother Miss B, right, Mrs. B, they ran this place together?

00:07:12

NR: Uh-hm; they did. They—we opened in 1946 and my grandmother and grandfather were both in here—mainly my grandmother. She was the—you know, the root of the business, but my grandfather, you know, he just liked to talk to everybody is what I heard [*Laughs*], while she did everything.

00:07:28

RF: How did they—how did they split up the work?

00:07:33

NR: Good question. This is when we need John Henry here. He'll actually be here tomorrow.

00:07:38

CW: I think my grandfather done more of the caterings and then my grandmother stayed in the business all the time, so if he wasn't doing caterings or helping out working on something then he was just kicked back and not doing too much, so—. But, he'd cut the meat sometimes and stuff like that but most of the time he would handle the caterings and outside the business stuff.

00:07:56

NR: And, yeah back then we did feeds with thousands and thousands of people because of all the mills.

00:08:01

CW: We fed over 10,000 people in a day and a half, so—.

00:08:04

RF: When was that?

00:08:05

CW: Sixty—I think it was '61, '61 or '62 back when the mills were going. We fed all three shifts and it ended up being almost right at 10,000 people, yeah. It was then—right at thirty-six hours, thirty-seven hours, yeah.

00:08:21

RF: You just said you've heard stories about your grandparents back in the day from customers or from workers. What—are there any other really interesting or funny stories you've heard about your grandparents that come to mind?

00:08:32

NR: There are just so many. I couldn't tell you one specific right off. What about you?

00:08:37

CW: Uh-um.

00:08:40

NR: I keep hearing what amazing people they were which of course I know my Ma-Maw was, because you know we—we loved her up until—we still love her but lost her four years ago. But my grandfather, I heard he was just a hoot and hilarious and I would love to have met him, because they said he was just a character. And I think I would be honored to meet him.

00:08:57

RF: Did your grandmother keep working until she passed?

00:08:59

NR: Well—

00:09:02

CW: She worked until she was eighty years old. She got sick and then she died when she was ninety-one or ninety-two?

00:09:08

NR: Ninety-one.

00:09:09

CW: Ninety-one; yeah.

00:09:10

NR: Yeah; and she had—when she was eighty she got really, really sick and then from then on she had to have twenty-four hour care, so we hired twenty-four hour care and she would still come out here. She'd sit right at that counter and she would watch you and she would know if you weren't doing your job. She had eyes around her head. She would—she would know. She was amazing.

00:09:29

RF: Was she a tough boss or was she easy?

00:09:33

NR: Tough is the words. She was definitely a tough boss. But she had that love in her heart and they all—I mean she could look at you and you would be straight as an arrow because they knew—everybody knew how she was. But she loved you in the same day, you know, so—.

00:09:47

CW: She walked in and you wasn't doing something she said, "You got time to lean, you got time to clean." [*Laughs*] She didn't play.

00:09:53

RF: Now would she do that to the two of y'all also?

00:09:56

NR: Oh, yes.

00:09:57

CW: Oh, yeah.

00:09:57

NR: Oh, definitely. She'd give us our hugs and then she'd say, "All right, get back to work." [*Laughs*]

00:10:02

RF: So you knew—you were treated no different because you were real family?

00:10:05

NR: Yeah; exactly.

00:10:06

RF: Although you were real family.

00:10:06

CW: Probably worse actually. [*Laughs*]

00:10:09

NR: Yeah.

00:10:09

CW: She stayed on us hard, definitely hard.

00:10:10

NR: She definitely did but I mean she made this business what it—her and my grandfather made it what it is today and she just wanted to see it—see it succeed.

00:10:19

RF: And when your grandmother was here both she and your mom worked together?

00:10:23

NR: Uh-hm; they did for many years. They did.

00:10:26

RF: And did they get along well? Did—how did that work?

00:10:29

NR: They were very, very, very close just as me and my mom and my brother are. We're all—we were all just very close. Now they had their times. Don't get us wrong. But, you know—for the most part it was wonderful.

00:10:40

RF: All right; now let's talk about the beginning. You said the restaurant was founded in 1946, correct?

00:10:44

NR: Uh-hm.

00:10:45

RF: How did your grandfather get into the barbecue business?

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NR: You want to answer this one, Chase?

00:10:52

CW: Warner Stamey, a guy come down from—he come down from actually—what was it?

00:11:00

NR: Go ahead; he's been over there all week.

00:11:03

CW: Yeah; Warner Stamey come down from—from anyway—

00:11:07

RF: From Lexington?

00:11:08

CW: Yeah; he come down from Lexington and taught my grandfather and another guy named Alston Bridges how to cook barbecue which is across town actually and they've been opened since—

00:11:17

NR: A couple years—

00:11:17

CW: —no, they opened about ten years later, about '64 or '65—. Long story short that got him into the business of learning how to cook and he ended up buying the business at an old livestock place. And started it there, it was Dedmond's Livestock, and that's where he started selling barbecue and when he bought it, John Henry, a gentleman that still works on Sundays with us, worked there, so he's been working with us for over sixty-five years.

00:11:43

RF: Is John Henry his full name?

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CW: John Henry Williams.

00:11:46

RF: And he'll be here tomorrow?

00:11:46

NR: He will.

00:11:47

RF: Okay; well I'm going to talk to him, or I hope to.

00:11:50

NR: He's awesome; he is. And he still works on Sundays for—or when—actually whenever we need him. So all you got to do is call him, and he'll be here in a heartbeat.

00:11:57

RF: Well what does John Henry do here?

00:11:59

NR: Well, right now he's behind the counter. And he just helps us ring out people, makes teas and does all that stuff. But there were several people that told my grandfather; they said, "A barbecue business will never make it." And he says, "Well, I'm going to try it anyway," you know. That's just what he wanted to do and he did it, and we're still here sixty-five years later.

00:12:18

CW: It was the first restaurant with air-conditioning and the first restaurant to ever serve Sun Drop or Cheerwine.

00:12:24

RF: In Shelby?

00:12:26

CW: Yeah; we was the first restaurant period to ever serve Sun Drop.

00:12:29

RF: Oh really. What is Sun Drop for those who don't know because this is going to be heard by a bunch of people who don't know.

00:12:34

CW: It's just a citrus soda kind of like Mellow Yellow or Mountain Dew and got a little bit more kick though, a lot more caffeine. **[Laughs]**

00:12:39

RF: And is it local?

00:12:43

CW: It's local—local brew, so yes, sir; it was invented in Shelby.

00:12:47

RF: And do you prefer—I've had my share of Cheerwine recently—do you prefer Sun Drop or Cheerwine?

00:12:53

CW: I'd rather have Sun Drop.

00:12:56

NR: I'd rather have Cheerwine. *[Laughs]*

00:12:58

RF: All right; did your—do you know if your grandfather had a job before he went into the barbecue business?

00:13:04

NR: He actually was in the military right?

00:13:08

CW: He was a cook for the military.

00:13:10

RF: He was?

00:13:09

CW: Uh-hm; so he loved to cook. That's what got him started and then Warner come and he offered to teach him how to cook. And that's what got him started.

00:13:17

RF: Do you know if he fought in one of the Wars or did he—where was he stationed?

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CW: He never fought. He was just a cook, so—.

00:13:23

RF: Oh, and so he opens a restaurant and it was called Dedmond's, right?

00:13:27

NR: Uh-hm.

00:13:29

RF: And when did you move to this present location?

00:13:32

NR: Actually—

00:13:32

CW: In 1953. We moved to this one in 1953; he bought the one at Dedmond's in '46 so they stayed there until '53. They actually had old saw—sawdust floors. I mean it was—it was old school back in the day. But we moved here in '53. That's when we got the air-conditioning and everything, that was a big deal for a restaurant back then. And it actually burned down in '60—when did it burn down, '61?

00:14:00

NR: Hmm; I'm not sure what year it burned down.

00:14:03

CW: Oh, I'm sorry; '64 it burned down and it just burnt the ceiling though so they just rebuilt the ceiling and come in and redone everything, so it's actually the same building and they just put a new roof and a new top and all on it, so—.

00:14:14

RF: And was it a pit fire that burned it down or—?

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NR: Cigarettes.

00:14:18

CW: Cigarette started that one.

00:14:19

NR: Cigarette started that fire; uh-hm, yeah.

00:14:20

RF: And on the subject of fires have you ever had a pit fire in the history of the Lodge?

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NR: He can answer that. He cooks the meat.

00:14:26

CW: We had one about three weeks ago, which was just a small one. I mean we put it out and got it under control but that happens quite often because—and that can happen—that can come up real quick before you know it.

00:14:39

RF: And tell me how it happens.

00:14:40

CW: Well you'll put it in there and if you don't chop your coals up fine enough, you got big coals in there, they'll get to going and that's what will get your fire started, a big piece of a

bigger coal and be like a little miniature fire starting up, so—. It'll get on top of those hot coals down there—coals down there and get it going.

00:14:57

RF: And what do you do? What's the—the policy when a fire starts?

00:15:01

CW: I—I usually try to put it out with a shovel so you don't ruin the coals but if we have to we'll take a little bit of water and put on it or the least—at the last thing, you have to spray it down with a fire extinguisher, but you know if you do that you contaminate the meat and everything, so—. We couldn't—wouldn't be able to use the meat so we usually use water. But it works out good.

00:15:22

RF: And how many fires have you seen in your time cooking here?

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CW: I've probably seen about five or six, which I've only been cooking here lately, so I mean it doesn't happen that often, probably once every four or five months we have one, maybe two every six months if it's a lot, but that's the most ever, so—. But they—we always get the under control and they never get out of hand, so—.

00:15:46

NR: And what's so funny is probably once every two weeks people call and think there's a fire here because you know we still pit-cook our barbecue and there's flames and there's huge smoke everywhere and people are like, "There's a fire at the barbecue." And we're like, "No, it's okay," because we have somebody out here cooking the meat every night. And it's funny to hear that because we get calls a lot about that.

00:16:07

RF: So does the Fire Department show up sometimes?

00:16:08

CW: Oh yeah.

00:16:10

NR: Oh yeah.

00:16:10

CW: See but what—it looks—it really does look like a flame. We have the big glass window out here and when they heat it up, like if it's raining outside or something, they'll heat it up a little bit too much, and the flames would come out of the top and I mean you'll see it and you'll look straight through the window and you'll see flames and say hey, the building is on fire. But it's not; we're just warming the pits up getting them ready to cook.

00:16:29

RF: And tell me is the—the pits, let's talk about the pits—are they connected to the building or not?

00:16:35

NR: Yes.

00:16:35

CW: Yes.

00:16:36

NR: They're—right, you were right there near them a minute ago. [*Laughs*] Yeah; it's on the other side of the building.

00:16:41

RF: Okay; and are they the original pits?

00:16:41

NR: They are.

00:16:45

CW: Actually the original pits are in the back right here. These are the—we added these on back in '69 or '70 I think it was. But back when we used to do all the caterings we'd use the big pits and see, we could cook plenty enough on them.

00:16:57

NR: And that—that's that whole building going on one side.

00:17:00

RF: Right; I saw where—yeah next to where I parked. Are those pits ever in operation?

00:17:04

CW: They're actually not right now but the way it is now you have to be grandfathered in to pit-cook barbecue now, so we're going to leave them there, and if we ever do expand the business or get a bigger building and expand the building a little bit. We'll be able to cook more because right now all we can cook is for what we can handle in the restaurant right now. We can cook about sixty shoulders and that will be enough for one day on the weekend and that's pushing it. If we had a little bit bigger building we'd have to cook a lot more barbecue, so—.

00:17:31

RF: So you do sixty shoulders a day on the weekend. How many during the week?

00:17:36

NR: It just depends on what day it is on how busy we are, you know, probably —forty-five just depending. We also deliver barbecue to Billy Graham once a week, probably about fifty pounds at the Library in Charlotte. Actually Billy Graham and my grandmother and grandfather were good friends. So it says up there his favorite barbecue sandwich is from here, so we're selling it up.

00:17:54

RF: And this is Billy Graham, the—?

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NR: Uh-huh; it is.

00:17:58

RF: And tell me is sixty the max shoulders you can do—that you can fit on the pits?

00:18:04

CW: Probably—probably if you crammed them, sixty-four or something like that maybe, at the most. But we only have those four small pits, but that's—that's about the max you'd get at—maybe sixty-five, but I don't—I don't know if you could do it. **[Laughs]**

00:18:19

RF: Right; and how many pits are there exactly?

00:18:21

CW: Four.

00:18:23

RF: All right; so you mentioned that the—the shoulders are cooked at night. Can you give me kind of a day in the life of a pit worker here or if that's your—you know, whether you do it or someone else?

00:18:36

CW: They come in about 7:45 and start stacking the box and getting it filled up with wood and get you a little cardboard and all that in there to get it started. And long story short, we'll put cardboard under the pits and get the coals on the bottom and try and get them a little bit of heat in them. And about eight o'clock as soon as all the customers are out we'll fire it up and takes about thirty minutes to get your coals and once you get your coals we'll go ahead and put the meat on. And go ahead and we fire them every fifteen minutes, so—.

00:19:06

RF: So there's someone here all night long?

00:19:07

CW: Yeah; we start about eight o'clock and they usually leave out about 4:30, something in there. They'll take the barbecue off the pits about 3:45, right at four o'clock and we'll put them on the cooker and stay warm until the next day. And that's it; you just got to feed the fire and keep the coals going.

00:19:24

RF: So who does the watching at night? Does that happen in shifts? Is it one man, two?

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NR: One man.

00:19:28

CW: One man.

00:19:29

NR: And actually Chase comes once a week and he just—where he can always remember what to do just to where he has that in the back of his head.

00:19:36

CW: We have two employees cooking at night and we took it down to one person. And that way if he gets sick or something I come once every other week and cook once, and if he gets sick or he needs to step out for any reason then I can come in and cook them, so—.

00:19:50

RF: And what's his name?

00:19:51

CW: His name is Lester—Lester.

00:19:55

NR: Vincent.

00:19:56

CW: Lester Vincent; excuse me.

00:19:56

RF: And how long has he been here?

00:19:58

CW: He's been here—he's been off and on here about fifteen years.

00:20:00

NR: Yeah; and the guy before that his name was Phil and he was here for—

00:20:06

CW: He was here for twenty-six years.

00:20:08

NR: —twenty-six years. Yeah; I was about to say as long as I can remember. I can remember being a little girl and—

00:20:12

CW: He come the year I was born.

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NR: Yeah; okay, so twenty-six.

00:20:15

RF: Wow; is he—is he still around?

00:20:18

NR: Phil? Yeah; he's still around. He still comes by and sees us and all that stuff. He actually just did something for the North Carolina Barbecue Society. I'm not even sure; he went up there and taught them how to—?

00:20:27

CW: Went down there and taught them how to cook.

00:20:29

NR: Taught them how to cook; yeah.

00:20:29

CW: Showed them how he done it his ways.

00:20:31

NR: How he does it yeah.

00:20:31

CW: Which he was—he's actually—he's the best. He's very, very good. He knows what he's doing. He don't want nobody messing with him. That was a one-man team and he worked it for twenty-six years by his self, so he's—he's really good.

00:20:45

RF: And Chase who taught you how to cook?

00:20:47

CW: Phil originally did. I come out here when I was about fourteen and I done it about two or three weeks in the summer I cooked and then the next year I done it for about two or three weeks, too, realized—never knew how much—how hard of work it was and how hot it was in there, especially in the summertime. But I respected him a lot more after that. But he originally taught me how to cook and then Lester showed me his way, so I actually know two different ways, so—.

00:21:13

RF: How do the two ways differ?

00:21:15

CW: See, Phil fires his. Phil flips his more. He'll flip—see, our guy only flips ours about two or three times and Phil flips them about four or five times. And see, the difference is it cooks—it cooks through the meat a lot better and gets a lot more smoked flavor in there. I don't know how it does it. I don't understand why but the more you flip them it does; it gets more smoked flavor in them.

00:21:36

RF: So what do you do?

00:21:39

CW: I—when I’m with Lester we cook them his way. That way if they’re messed up it’s on him; it’s not on me. And then if I’m—if I’m ever by myself I’ll cook it the way Phil did. That’s just—that’s just me.

00:21:51

NR: Which he should cook it the way that Phil does it.

00:21:54

CW: He should but his—his way is still good too. It’s very good too.

00:21:58

NR: It needs the smoked flavor you can get.

00:22:00

RF: Did he train Lester also?

00:22:02

CW: Uh-hm; he trained Lester also which everybody has got their own little way of cooking and changing stuff, which I do too. But see, he—he would fire them—that’s who taught him; he’d fire every fifteen minutes. He’s got the basic stuff down. He just don’t flip it quite as much Phil did, so—.

00:22:19

RF: So, a few more questions about the pit-cooking. Do you—so the shoulders are on the pit.

Do you cover the shoulders with cardboard or foil?

00:22:27

CW: We do. We cover them with cardboard and we just put it up there and fire them out and shut the door and let them go. And we usually try and flip them probably about every two hours. That's when I like to flip them. He likes to flip them about every three hours, so—he as in Lester.

00:22:48

RF: And so you know if you're here alone every night what do you do? If you're here for you know eight, nine—what, eight hours right?

00:22:55

CW: Uh-hm.

00:22:55

RF: So what do you do? Does it get boring? What—put on the TV?

00:22:58

CW: You turn the radio on and you lock the gate because people will walk up on you all times of the night. It's kind of—kind of a little bit of a scary job. I—I keep a gun on me when I'm here of course, but it's—you just got to stay awake. You got to be used to it which I can stay awake

until about two o'clock and then I start falling asleep. I can't help it. But all he does is sit there and watch the fire. That's all he does.

00:23:25

RF: And let's talk about the wood that you use. What kind of wood is it?

00:23:31

NR: You go right ahead honey; you're doing—

00:23:33

CW: It's hickory. It's all hickory and oak.

00:23:36

NR: Yeah; mostly hickory.

00:23:37

CW: Yeah.

00:23:38

NR: And then they—I'm sure you've seen that really, really long woodpile back there.

00:23:40

CW: I did see that woodpile. I think it's the most wood I've ever seen. What is that? Well why; why is there so much wood there?

00:23:48

NR: because we go—we use a ton of it, so there you go. That you know—we just have it out.

We have it ready to use.

00:23:55

CW: We like it to be real dried out before we use it. That way it's—we don't want it—we don't want it fresh at all, so—. It's a lot better—a lot easier to burn and puts more flavor in it if you ask me.

00:24:06

RF: How often do you get deliveries of wood?

00:24:09

CW: Every—we still get it every week.

00:24:10

NR: Every week; uh-hm.

00:24:12

CW: Yeah.

00:24:14

RF: And where do you get it from?

00:24:16

CW: We got one man doing it. His name is Buster Mullinax. He's been doing it with us for what about—?

00:24:20

NR: Long time, as long as I can remember.

00:24:22

CW: At least fifteen years, fifteen to twenty years, so he's been doing it since then.

00:24:27

RF: And where—is he close by? Does he cut the wood himself?

00:24:30

CW: He lives in Gaffney, South Carolina. He actually owns a—he cuts trees for a living, so it's a plus-plus for him and a plus for us also.

00:24:38

RF: How far does he drive? How far is that?

00:24:39

CW: Probably about twenty miles.

00:24:41

NR: Twenty minutes, not far.

00:24:43

CW: Not bad.

00:24:45

RF: All right; and we're talking about location and you're close to the South Carolina border, right?

00:24:48

NR: Uh-hm.

00:24:51

RF: Let's talk about Shelby for a second. What—tell me about—y'all grew up here, right? So tell me about this—this town.

00:24:56

NR: It's wonderful. Everybody around here is just—excuse me—just everybody is family and friends around here you know. We—everybody has been here for so long. I actually went off to college and I said I'd never come back.

00:25:10

RF: Where did you go to college?

00:25:12

NR: Well, I went to Appalachia and I went to UNC Charlotte and I came home within six months both times because I missed my mama.

00:25:17

RF: Wow.

00:25:19

CW: So I love Shelby and I always said I was going to get out of here and then there's no way I'd leave now.

00:25:25

NR: It's a small-town, gossip town. That's all it is. I mean it's a great town. I love it. I've got all my connections. I couldn't move just because I got so many connections with people as far as motorcycles and stuff like that and—. But that's—that's it; it's a great little town.

00:25:43

RF: Where did y'all go to high school here?

00:25:44

NR: Crest—graduated in 1999.

00:25:48

CW: I went to Crest, Shelby, and private school. **[Laughs]**

00:25:52

RF: How do you spell Crest?

00:25:53

NR: C-r-e-s-t.

00:25:54

RF: Okay; and tell me what y'all do in town when you're not here working? Well first, tell me how many days a week you are here?

00:26:02

NR: We're here Wednesday through Sunday. We're open from eleven to eight o'clock.

00:26:05

CW: I'm here six days a week one week, seven days a week the next week, so—.

00:26:11

RF: And what do y'all do when you're not—when you have free time when you have those couple days off?

00:26:15

NR: Spend it with my little boy. [*Laughs*] I just love to stay at home with my mom and spend time with my family.

00:26:22

CW: I got a race car. I love racing. That's—that's my life besides in here, so—.

00:26:26

RF: Yeah; what kind of racing?

00:26:27

CW: Dirt-track racing.

00:26:28

RF: Okay; so that's—that's local too? They have a dirt-track here?

00:26:31

CW: Yeah; they got about three tracks within about twenty miles of us, so—.

00:26:34

NR: Which we go watch it too. But it tears my nerves up.

00:26:38

RF: Does your mom like that?

00:26:39

CW: No. She doesn't like it at all.

00:26:42

NR: That's her baby. That's her baby out there. She—it tears her nerves up a little bit. But my daddy does it too, so it's in the blood. *[Laughs]*

00:26:50

RF: And let's talk about your mom. Does she—is she front of the house, back of the house, everywhere? What does she do here?

00:26:55

NR: She is everywhere. She—she's like my Ma-Maw. She's got eyes looking everywhere. It doesn't matter where you're at. She's got, you know—so but she's not here today. She's sick but don't think she doesn't have her laptop at home opened up watching the cameras right now. See those little cameras—

00:27:09

CW: I guarantee it. She's—she's amazing. She can do anything in this place. I've seen her come home at night, get off at eight o'clock, and come in and cook meat that night and then come in the next day with about two hours of sleep, and that's working three shifts solid, about two hours of sleep and she's—I'm telling you that woman is just like my grandma. She can do anything.

00:27:29

NR: She sure can. She's amazing.

00:27:33

RF: So this is a place where two women and now yourself, right, have—have, you know, helped run this place and run this place. Tell me what you think that’s about. Does it mean anything that—that women have run this restaurant because it is sort of rare, I think, in barbecue?

00:27:50

NR: Oh it’s definitely, definitely rare. I think my mom is one of the only ones in North Carolina to own a restaurant—a woman, barbecue restaurant by a woman. And it just shows you that a woman’s power is just as good as a man’s power, you know. She can do it, honey, and she’s just amazing at what she can do.

00:28:06

RF: Does she ever speak on that—that this is a place, you know, run by women?

00:28:12

CW: Uh-um; she doesn’t at all. She—she’s the type that likes to be quiet and just likes to do her work and get on with it.

00:28:20

NR: Yeah. She’s—

00:28:21

CW: She hates confrontation and anything else and she don't—she don't brag on herself at any time, just the quiet type if you know what I mean, but at the same time if you ain't doing your job she'll get you. *[Laughs]*

00:28:32

NR: Exactly; you better be doing your job. She's funny because I'm sitting here looking at those cameras wondering if she's watching us right now.

00:28:39

RF: And you think she's watching? *[Laughs]*

00:28:40

CW: She probably is.

00:28:41

RF: And I asked you about your grandmother and if any stories come to mind. Do any stories about your mom come to mind? You described her as tough; any stories about her toughness?

00:28:49

NR: Really good story that I've heard so many customers—customers of mine say that my mom, when she was a little girl, she used to dance on the tables. And she would just you know she would just dance on the tables. And I just think that is so funny, you know that—because I can just see her right now dancing on those tables in her little frilly dress. I think that would be

sweet, because back then we had the—what do you call it like the little radio on the table, something like that.

00:29:09

CW: Had their own personal radio on each table.

00:29:13

NR: Yeah; and I can just see her cutting her radio wide open and dancing on the tables. I can see that.

00:29:16

RF: Have you ever asked about that?

00:29:16

NR: Oh yeah; she'll tell you she remembers doing it. So I think that's neat.

00:29:21

RF: Did your mom encourage you or did your grandmother encourage you to work here? Or did you ask when you were the right age?

00:29:30

NR: She told us to do whatever we felt was right in our heart. You know because my mom had to choose years and years and years ago. She was a big model and she could either go off and model or run the barbecue. Well she learned right quick modeling is not forever and so she took

care of the barbecue business, and that's what she wanted to do. And I always said that I'd change things in here and I would do this and that different. But I don't; no, you can't do that. If something is broke don't fix it. No; that don't—

00:29:56

CW: If it's not broke.

00:29:56

NR: —yeah that didn't make sense. If something is not broke don't fix it. There you go. But I—I have no desire to do anything else but be here.

00:30:06

RF: Has—has your—did your mom make any changes from the generation before?

00:30:10

NR: Nope; nothing has changed at all.

00:30:11

CW: Yeah; we have. We've added—my grandmother—

00:30:14

NR: Well we've added stuff. We've gotten really—

00:30:14

CW: —don't let—she hated change. So we never could have barbecue chicken. We couldn't have turkey or anything like that and we've actually got my mom to add green beans, turkey, barbecue chicken and chicken tenders. There goes the wood guy right there delivering now.

00:30:32

NR: —but nothing—. Yeah; see he's fixing to deliver some wood.

00:30:35

RF: Tell me about the—the chicken and the turkey. Are those for healthier conscious people or why was that change made?

00:30:42

NR: Exactly, because a lot of times people come in here and say, "I want to eat healthy." Well you know barbecue; it ain't the best thing for you but it's so good. So we decided to start doing a half a chicken and we—we sell a lot of that and also the turkey also, so it's the healthier part.

00:30:55

RF: And do you do those on the pits?

00:30:57

NR: Well we've got a cooker that we use, uh-hm.

00:31:01

CW: It's a gas cooker but it—we actually put wood in it and it puts a smoked flavor in it, so it does really good.

00:31:05

RF: And you were talking about changes. Did—have you seen people's tastes change? Do they eat differently besides trying to eat healthier?

00:31:16

NR: No, not really; not at all. [*Laughs*] Most people still come in here for good old barbecue, so —. That's still ninety-percent of what we sell is barbecue.

00:31:26

RF: All right; and tell me the different ways you can order a barbecue here.

00:31:28

NR: Oh goodness, chopped, sliced, minced, chopped brown, coarse chopped brown, you—I mean there's hundreds, chopped fine white to anything. You name it we'll do it.

00:31:39

RF: Are there any nicknames for any of the—any different names—nicknames besides white and brown, chopped and sliced?

00:31:46

NR: Well every customer has their own, you know, nickname, so if they say it you're going to know what it is, like I've waitressed before and they'll say, "I want my so and so, so and so," and you know what they're talking about. So everybody has their kind of nickname for everything.

00:32:00

CW: Like we got one guy that comes in. He always wants a tray. But he says, "I don't want it on a tray; he said I want it on my food just like it comes in a tray. Put it on a plate." And he calls it a "Big Daddy." That's what he calls it.

00:32:11

NR: Yeah.

00:32:11

CW: That's just—just an example of one of our customers, and he is crazy.

00:32:13

NR: And everybody knows what a "Big Daddy" is so that's just one person that calls it something different: "Big Daddy."

00:32:19

RF: Do any other customer requests come to mind like that?

00:32:23

NR: Oh gosh, I can't even think right now. There's so many crazy things that we get.

00:32:30

CW: I don't know.

00:32:32

NR: I mean we get tons and tons.

00:32:36

RF: Well, tell me how y'all order your barbecue.

00:32:39

NR: I go through stages. Right now I'm into sliced white meat. Now tomorrow it might be chopped brown. It just really depends, but I'm into the white meat this week.

00:32:49

CW: I try a little bit of it every day just to make sure it's back there fresh and ain't dry or nothing, so I can eat any of it, but minced is my favorite, so—. It's got a little bit of—minced is real, real fine and they beat up sauce in it. And they'll put a little bit of fat in there too, so it gives it a good flavor. So it's—that's—that's my favorite. But most people don't eat minced, so—.

00:33:11

RF: What is the most popular order here?

00:33:15

NR: Definitely chopped.

00:33:15

CW: Chopped.

00:33:15

NR: Just regular old chopped meat.

00:33:17

RF: And that would be a mix of white and brown?

00:33:19

NR: Well, it has a little bit of brown but mainly white meat, uh-hm.

00:33:23

CW: Yeah; we usually don't put brown unless you ask for it, so—.

00:33:24

NR: Yeah; we have a little bit chopped up in the pan, you know, but not a lot. But now if you have your barbecue connoisseurs coming in, Honey, we going to slap that brown meat on you because that's what they love. They love that smoke flavor and that's where the flavor comes from is the brown meat.

00:33:38

RF: How else is brown different from white?

00:33:41

NR: Well the brown meat is just the skin basically and that's the crunchy part and then the white meat—

00:33:45

CW: Outside crunchy.

00:33:47

NR: Yeah; outside crunchy, see that's one. Somebody will come and say, "I want my brown crunchy" and we know what that brown crunchy is, you know. And then the white meat is just the tender meat on the inside.

00:33:56

RF: Growing up here what—did you order barbecue different? Did you like it differently?

00:34:01

NR: I didn't like barbecue growing up.

00:34:03

RF: Okay; we got to talk about that. [*Laughs*] When did you—why did you not like barbecue?

00:34:06

NR: I don't know. I have no idea, but I guess I just never wanted to try anything different. And my little boy is the same way. He's like, "Mom, I don't like barbecue." But, "Honey," I said "You're going to have to learn to love that." Because he came in here one day and said, "I don't like barbecue, Mama." I said, "You do not say that in these—in this business—place of business, Honey." And he started laughing. But it just grows on you. And now I love it. And I love to go different places and sample their barbecue.

00:34:31

RF: And when did you start eating barbecue?

00:34:35

NR: Hmm; probably ten—age ten, so I was younger. But now I love it.

00:34:43

RF: And tell me; there's a few other things on the menu that I think are—are rarities in North Carolina. One is the barbecue salad.

00:34:52

NR: Yeah; that—we just put that on the menu actually what—two years ago?

00:34:56

CW: Uh-hm.

00:34:56

NR: We had people ask for it and it—what it is—is lettuce, tomato, pickles with barbecue on the outside rim. And most of the time it’s homemade Thousand Island dressing and people love it, and so we’ve been selling so many we finally put it on the menu. And we sell a ton of those.

00:35:11

CW: You can get that in barbecue chicken or turkey too, so—. Yeah; and then we also have the pimento cheese is homemade, the deviled eggs—homemade. Both of those are really good. Potato salad is homemade. And the green beans are really good, so—. We actually—all that’s kind of—besides the deviled egg and pimento cheese everything else is kind of fresh on the menu, so—. But it’s really good stuff. We’ve got them perfected, so they’re ready.

00:35:39

RF: Does anyone get pimento cheese and barbecue together?

00:35:43

NR: Oh yeah; oh yeah.

00:35:45

RF: On a sandwich?

00:35:46

NR: Some of the crazy things, a lot of—

00:35:49

CW: A lot of people put pimento cheese on their hamburgers. Good—good—

00:35:52

NR: Yeah; and I've got pimento cheese barbecue and slaw together. Matt's ordered that before; yeah.

00:36:00

RF: You say no to that? [*Laughs*]

00:36:01

CW: No; that's when I—just—just not my type there.

00:36:05

NR: But you never know. People—everybody likes different stuff.

00:36:09

RF: All right; let's—you mentioned the slaw. Let's talk about the slaw. What—

00:36:13

NR: Well, he's the slaw. He makes it.

00:36:12

RF: All right; you make the slaw. How much do you go through a day? How—what does it take?

00:36:18

CW: We sell basically about 140 gallons a week. We—I don't know by the day because we'll sell a whole lot more Saturday than we will any other day of the week. And long story short though it's just ketchup, vinegar-based. I don't eat it so I don't make it. I mean excuse me; I make it but I don't eat it, so it's made exactly the same every week.

00:36:40

NR: And a lot of times if somebody else makes it they'll, you know, taste it and tweak it a little bit, but him, he doesn't like it. He does—he just does the exact same thing every—every week.

00:36:49

RF: Why don't you like slaw?

00:36:50

CW: I'm just—I'm very, very picky. I'm not a vegetable or a fruit kind of person. And that's just—that's just the way I am. The only way it's going to change is if the—the core gets real tight in the cabbage, it'll be more spicier and if it's loose it won't be as near as spicy so—. That's the only way the slaw is going to change.

00:37:10

RF: I've never heard that. So you can actually—the cabbage will change the taste of the slaw?

00:37:14

CW: If the core is real tight, if it's real, real tight and you got good cabbage, it'll make a whole lot better cabbage but it will be spicier. It just gets hotter. It gives it a kick like you had added more pepper just say.

00:37:25

NR: Yeah; and it just depends on what time of year it is.

00:37:28

RF: When does that happen more often?

00:37:30

CW: The wintertime it'll be a lot more spicy because you'll get a whole lot better. I don't know why but we get a whole lot better cabbage in the wintertime. And in the summertime it falls off and we have a lot more; it's a lot dense and you throw a whole lot of more away so—.

00:37:44

RF: Do the customers prefer it spicier?

00:37:45

CW: Most of them do. Most of the like it like that but every once in a while we get the older—older people, some of them in their eighties and nineties that don't like it too hot, so—it tears their stomach up with all that medicine, so—.

00:37:57

NR: [*Laughs*]

00:37:58

RF: And let's talk about the sauce, or do you call it dip?

00:38:01

NR: Sauce, barbecue sauce.

00:38:03

RF: Why don't you call it dip?

00:38:04

NR: I don't know. We just never have; I don't know. That's weird. That sounds weird to me. I guess because it's always been barbecue sauce. Uh-hm; I don't know. I've never—I don't know; I don't—I've never heard it as dip, ever.

00:38:14

RF: Maybe it's a more Lexington thing. It's a little farther east, yeah.

00:38:15

NR: Maybe—maybe it is but we've always called it barbecue sauce and we make it fresh here four days a week, five days a week, Chase says, but we didn't make any today, so that's four.

[Laughs]

00:38:25

CW: Okay.

00:38:27

RF: Can you describe the sauce without you know giving away secrets, but describe it?

00:38:30

NR: Vinegar based sauce; it is so good. We—I probably sold ten gallons today, ten gallons of just the sauce today. It's very, very, very popular because you can put it on anything. And it stays on the shelves for a year, two years—.

00:38:45

CW: Two years. Two years and you can open—

00:38:46

NR: Yeah; forever.

00:38:47

CW: —it and not have to refrigerate it. So and then the slaw is about three weeks, refrigerated of course but—.

00:38:54

NR: Yeah; but the sauce is very, very popular. Yeah; I think because Thanksgiving everybody keeps coming and getting more and more and more of it. **[Laughs]** So I've sold a lot today.

00:39:00

CW: A lot of people use it on chicken and ribs and it's really, really good on chicken and ribs. You get them out there and you get that stuff thick and put it on them ribs and that chicken, it's good I'm telling you.

00:39:12

RF: Tell me—oh, what is the—what is the best part about running a restaurant? What's your favorite part?

00:39:20

NR: **[Laughs]** I love everything about it. I just love—I guess it's the friends that I've made out here. They're pretty much like family to me. I just—I love that about it. I really do.

00:39:32

CW: I never have to cook. Even when I'm off work I come out here and eat my lunch.

00:39:35

NR: Yeah; that's true. Yeah; you come in here any time you want and—.

00:39:38

CW: Everybody will say, “Well, why are you—why are you eating out here on your day off?” I'm like, “Let's see: I'm saving five dollars. I get to walk in and about fix whatever I want to.” I said, “How do you beat it?” You can't beat it and you can have it just click of a finger because you can fix it yourself. You don't have to wait on it.

00:39:53

NR: That's true. That's true; that's true.

00:39:57

RF: And what's the toughest part?

00:39:59

NR: Oh—

00:39:59

CW: Weekend hours.

00:40:00

NR: My brother says weekend hours, but for me it's dealing with unhappy customers to the employees that are not doing their job; that's the hard part for me if you know that comes about. That's really hard on me.

00:40:14

CW: Go ahead; go ahead.

00:40:16

RF: How do you deal with unhappy customers?

00:40:18

NR: My grandmother always said the customer—well not actually always but my mother has always said the customer is always right. So you do whatever you can do to make the customer happy. And the employees' deal; if they're not doing their job they can just get another job and that's hard for me because you know like I said we're all so close out here. And which we don't have that happen very much but—sometimes it does happen.

00:40:38

CW: The ladies are way too kind-hearted.

00:40:41

NR: Yeah; and me and my mom—

00:40:41

CW: Way too kind-hearted.

00:40:43

NR: —have a soft spot in our hearts for all these people out here.

00:40:46

RF: And so tell me about some of the employees. You said some—most have been working for over twenty years. Tell me about some who—who have been here for a while and—and I mean you've grown up with them.

00:40:56

NR: The red-haired waitress right there, she's been here—

00:40:58

CW: Twenty-five years.

00:40:59

NR: —Twenty-five years.

00:40:59

RF: And what's her name again?

00:41:00

NR: Wanda Montgomery and then Namon Carlton, he is our meat cutter, he's been here for twenty-five years, plus.

00:41:08

CW: No; eighteen years.

00:41:09

NR: No? Eighteen years; see, he can tell you better than I can.

00:41:12

CW: Doug has been here about sixteen years. That's our manager, Doug Bridges and—

00:41:16

RF: Is he related?

00:41:17

CW: No, no relation at all.

00:41:19

NR: No; he—a lot of people think that he's my daddy because he's a Bridges, but he's not at all.

00:41:23

RF: So and—and I meant to ask this earlier; there’s another restaurant called Bridges that you mentioned.

00:41:27

NR: Right; it’s called Alston Bridges.

00:41:29

RF: And is there a relation there?

00:41:29

NR: None at all. None at all, just Warner Stamey is the one that taught my grandfather Red and then Alston to cook barbecue together—taught them both.

00:41:37

CW: We hear so many stories about how we’re cousins and distant related.

00:41:40

NR: Oh yes, people will sit there and argue: “I know they’re cousins.” I’m like, “No you’re not, because I’m the granddaughter and I know I’m not related,” you know. And it’s hilarious to hear that. But we just smile; the customer is always right. **[Laughs]**

00:41:54

RF: So there’s two Bridges families here and—?

00:41:54

NR: Right.

00:41:56

RF: And two Bridges Restaurants?

00:41:57

NR: Exactly.

00:41:59

CW: Which they—they have good barbecue and they do good also. They—they—

00:42:02

NR: It's just cooked two totally different style of cooking, two completely totally different styles.

00:42:06

CW: We cook ours on wood and then keep it warm on gas until the next day and they'll cook on gas and then go to wood right before they take it out, so—. It's two different—it's two different styles and plus they have different sauce but their—their food is still very good, so—. You can't take anything from them.

00:42:23

NR: Gas—our cooker is not gas.

00:42:26

CW: Yes; it is Natalie.

00:42:28

NR: Oh, okay.

00:42:30

RF: So but you cook on wood. You're just warming it on gas right through the—?

00:42:32

NR: Keep it the temperature.

00:42:33

CW: About 160 degrees.

00:42:34

RF: For health reasons right? Have you ever been approached by a gas cooker company, a representative?

00:42:41

NR: Oh, many times, many times, but there's no way we'd ever change anything. This is what —pit cooked barbecue is what this business is about and that's what we're always going to keep it.

00:42:49

CW: Uh-hm.

00:42:51

NR: We'll never change it.

00:42:56

CW: Never go to gas for sure.

00:42:58

NR: Never; it just changes the taste completely. And people come out here for pit-cooked barbecue and that's what you're going to get.

00:43:03

CW: It changes the taste and the texture.

00:43:05

NR: Exactly.

00:43:07

RF: And tell me about the—the clientele that you get. Who comes in here?

00:43:11

NR: We have—wow, so many different types of people but some of the ones that are real big honors are Billy Graham has been in here several times, Mickey Rooney, Patty Loveless, the country singer, actually used to work here.

00:43:22

RF: Really?

00:43:24

NR: Yeah; she worked here—god, I don't know when it was but she worked here.

00:43:26

CW: Seventies.

00:43:28

NR: Seventies? She worked with my mom as a waitress back in the '70s. And we just had several—

00:43:35

CW: We've had a couple famous NASCAR drivers come in. I can't remember—they were actually a lot of older drivers back before NASCAR got big, but we got some pictures over here somewhere. And we've had a lot of people come in.

00:43:49

NR: We've had a lot of celebrities come in, a lot. And we—Andie MacDowell, she's a big model. She comes in here about once every two months and sits up at the counter and just, you know, sits there and hangs out and talks to us and I just think that's cool that people can do that. But Billy Graham is by far the most amazing person that I ever thought of being in here.

00:44:10

RF: And tell me; do you have—how frequent do your best customers come in?

00:44:15

NR: At least once a week, at least. Sometimes—we have customers that come every single day, every single day.

00:44:21

RF: And they eat here every day?

00:44:22

NR: Uh-hm; they do. They have their certain table they like. They have their certain waitress they like.

00:44:27

CW: We had one woman, she actually come every morning about ten or eleven. Every morning she would come in here.

00:44:33

NR: She'd knock on the window. It's time for you to let me in.

00:44:37

CW: It's time to let us in. And she actually just died—this week.

00:44:37

NR: She passed away this week actually. Yeah; it was—

00:44:40

RF: What was her name?

00:44:42

NR: Mary Frye, uh-hm.

00:44:45

RF: And what would she order?

00:44:46

NR: Oh gosh; she ordered a small tray and she had to have it her specific way and we knew— they know exactly how to do it, and she'd have her tea. Oh she was—she was a hoot. And you had to have it that way. Or she'd take it back there and make you fix it, but we always had it right, so—.

00:45:02

CW: Every time, very, very picky but we always had one person that was there every morning and they always fixed her food so they always done it right.

00:45:09

NR: And if somebody was ever in her seat she would tell you to get up.

00:45:13

RF: Where did she sit?

00:45:13

NR: Table six, the sixth table, uh-hm and she had to sit on the left-side of the seat, not the right, but the left.

00:45:22

RF: And did she always eat alone?

00:45:23

NR: No; she had her mother. Before her mother passed away and when her mom passed away it was a little different.

00:45:27

RF: And did you remember her when you were kids, too?

00:45:30

NR: Uh-hm; oh yeah.

00:45:32

CW: Uh-hm; that's what I remembered. We'd come in here and eat breakfast meals with my mom or something. I remember I had just got a new four-wheeler and I'd come out here and ride it because we didn't have anywhere to ride it at home. And I'd come out here with my mom every day to work and ride, and she'd be in here and I'd be up here eating and she'd always talk to me and be nice.

00:45:48

NR: That's another thing I remember growing up. We've always had somebody cook breakfast every morning. And we cook liver-mush sausage, homemade biscuits, gravy, you name it—every single morning. And then on Sunday, oh that's a good spread on Sunday, because you get it all.

00:46:03

RF: And this is for sale or for the workers?

00:46:06

NR: No; just the employees. It's just a little family time before we open.

00:46:07

CW: For the employees.

00:46:09

RF: Oh well tell me about the Sunday meal.

00:46:10

NR: Oh gosh, it's so good. You name it and we've got it from country ham, fat-back, liver-mush, bacon, grits—

00:46:18

CW: Eggs.

00:46:18

NR: —eggs. You name it and we got it.

00:46:20

CW: They do hash browns.

00:46:20

NR: Hash browns; we got it all out here.

00:46:24

RF: And who does the cooking?

00:46:24

NR: Her name is Martha. And she's been out here.

00:46:26

CW: She's been here about twenty-one or twenty-two years.

00:46:30

NR: No; she was—Chase Webb, you know she's been here longer.

00:46:32

CW: Yeah; but we fired her for a little bit.

00:46:34

NR: She was here—well, she did leave but when my mom was pregnant with me she had been here for a while, so she's been here over thirty years. And she's come and she's gone, but we love her.

00:46:44

RF: And what's her full name?

00:46:45

NR: Martha Gaston.

00:46:47

RF: And so she doesn't work her anymore?

00:46:48

NR: Yeah; she's back there. I'm sure you'll see her peeking around the corner any minute. She normally comes up here and wants to know what we're talking about.

00:46:54

RF: Maybe I'll talk to her for a couple minutes. I just want to ask a few more questions. What—y'all are young and third generation doing this. Would you encourage other people your age to go into the restaurant business or the barbecue business?

00:47:09

NR: Oh yeah; definitely. It's a wonderful journey. It's been a—it's wonderful and amazing all the people you meet, the good barbecue you eat. **[Laughs]**

00:47:19

CW: As long as you'll put the time into it that's the main thing. As long as they're willing to put the time into it but if they're not willing to be there while it's run, that's—that's the—

00:47:29

NR: Because if you're not here while the business is—when the doors are open it'll never make it. We've learned that for ourselves.

00:47:33

CW: My grandmother got sick back in 2000 and my mom was out of work about six months. And just those six months the business off major. And I mean we—we could tell majorly on the

bank account and everything else. I mean it was—it was going down and a lot of our regular customers wasn't coming in like they should. And it took—I bet it took my mom a year—year and a half to get that business built back where everybody was coming back and there—everybody knew it was back to good food.

00:48:02

NR: Right.

00:48:03

RF: And so it was the quality of food that dropped?

00:48:05

NR: It was just because if you're not on top of everybody all of the time then to make sure that they're doing their job the right way that—

00:48:14

CW: See, the hushpuppies are really hard to keep constant and steady.

00:48:17

NR: Because they're homemade.

00:48:18

CW: You have to stay on them all the time or maybe the fries was cold this time or that and you got—that's why I go back there and I try that barbecue all the time. If it's dry I'll say, "Hey, y'all need to throw that away and y'all need to get some fresh up here."

00:48:29

NR: And we were young when that happened with my grandmother. We were young and we didn't—we cared but we didn't realize what it was to run a business, you know, and so my—

00:48:36

CW: I wasn't but like fourteen.

00:48:39

NR: I was right out of high school so I was pretty much off at college. I was, you know—but my mama got back in here and we're good to go.

00:48:47

RF: Is it tough running a business as young people with—I mean all your employees are older than you?

00:48:52

NR: Uh-hm; [*Laughs*] sometimes it's really, really hard for the employees to respect me because I'm—you know they seen me, you know, since I was a little girl. But it's been wonderful because they all respect me and they're all, you know—. Now I have to get onto them sometimes, but, you know—.

00:49:08

CW: You just got to put your foot down and earn your respect, which is common sense but it's a little rougher in the private business—a whole lot rougher in a private business than in a corporation or something like that because they have to respect you if they want their job. But in a place like this they come and go and I mean we can't afford to pay everybody good money but we take care of them the best we can. And I mean that's like our employees come to us if they want to borrow money. We—we let them borrow money if they're in a situation; we try to help them if we can. I've helped—I've helped customers get—or not customers—employees buy cars. I mean it's—it's really close like a family like we said and we all work together though, so —.

00:49:51

NR: Uh-hm; and if we ever need anything from anybody they're always there with us, you know, whatever we need.

00:49:55

RF: How do you see the barbecue industry or maybe this—this establishment changing over the next ten—twenty years?

00:50:03

NR: Nothing is going to change if I have anything to say with it. Me and Chase are going to keep it exactly the way it is now because that's what—you don't find pit-cooked barbecue hardly

anymore. You just don't do it. And that's one thing that we're going to stand by and we're always going to do that is have pit-cooked barbecue.

00:50:18

CW: I think if we get to where we can handle this business—me and her together which we can't right now; it's very hard, don't get me wrong—without Mom we couldn't do it, but I think next ten—fifteen years when we can handle this business we may just trying—throwing it out there—may try and branch off and get another one, in maybe Charlotte.

00:50:38

NR: We actually looked at that—

00:50:40

CW: About five years ago.

00:50:41

NR: —a couple years ago. But it's just you know you have to be in your restaurant the whole time. And I have a little boy and he's five now, so you know I was pregnant at the time and you know how that goes, so—. And he's fourth generation and he says he's going to take over the barbecue one day. He said mom, "I'm going to be just like you." But he comes in here and he says, "I'm the boss today because my Ya-Ya is not here."

00:51:01

RF: What's his name?

00:51:03

NR: Parker Ramsey.

00:51:05

CW: We're actually working on getting our barbecue sauce in the grocery stores right now, so that should be happening within the next year, so—. We're trying to get that accomplished and that will help us out a lot too so—.

00:51:18

RF: And—and mom supports these changes?

00:51:20

NR: Of course.

00:51:21

CW: It was her idea. It was her idea, so—because we seen R.O.'s had their slaw and all that stuff and we sell a lot of sauce we really do, so—. We—I think if we can get that in the grocery stores and we've actually let a lot of the grocery stores—head corporations or the head guys in, taste it, and they love it and they want it in there so that's what we're going to focus on getting done the next year, so—.

00:51:43

RF: And as siblings running a restaurant, from an outsider looking in, that looks really tough, because I have brothers and I don't know if I could ever run a place with my brother. How—how does it work for y'all? How is it successful?

00:51:58

NR: He drives me up the wall but I love him with all my heart, and we know what's best for the restaurant. We've got to get along and we've got to do what's best for out here, so—now don't think he drives me crazy sometimes. He drives me crazy but—

00:52:10

CW: She knows she's got the easy work. She's got the—well, not the easy work, excuse me. She's got the clean work. She does a lot of the paperwork, most of that.

00:52:18

NR: That is far from clean. That is hard.

00:52:21

CW: And see—see, I know; I know. Well I do—I change the grease and I'm—I do the slaw and stuff and all that and get out here and cook at night and then I'll come—

00:52:29

NR: And I talk to the customers and yada, yada, yada. He does the kind of behind the scenes and I do in front of the scenes, you know. I'm kind of—I'm more of a talkative person to

everybody and I let him do the other stuff. But we do have to work together all the time which is hard sometimes but I love him. You're supposed to say you love me too—and he pats me. I know he loves me.

00:52:54

RF: Let me ask; what do you think your grandmother would say if, you know, she saw you running this, you know?

00:53:01

NR: Oh, she would be so proud. She would be so proud. [*Emphasis Added*] She would tell us if we were not in—if we weren't here we were not making her happy. So [*Laughs*] it was like we had to be here. And she would be so happy to see us sitting here right now.

00:53:15

CW: She'd say, "Y'all need to get y'all's asses up and get to work even if—even if—"

00:53:17

NR: Yeah; she would be. Even though we're talking about the barbecue—

00:53:20

CW: —even though there ain't nothing in here. Even though there's no anybody in here, she'd say that. She'd say, "Y'all got time to lean y'all got time to clean." She didn't—she was old-school.

00:53:28

NR: Exactly.

00:53:29

CW: She didn't play at all. She was serious.

00:53:30

NR: She was a hoot, red-head Mama B.

00:53:34

RF: All right; well maybe we should end on that note, [*Laughs*] so I can let y'all get back to work unless you want to add anything else?

00:53:40

NR: I think we're good.

00:53:40

CW: I'm good.

00:53:42

NR: I'm interested. What are you going to do with all this?

00:53:44

RF: Oh, I'll tell you. I'll tell you but I want to thank y'all for sitting down with me and I want to congratulate y'all on running this successfully.

00:53:50

NR: We thank you very much.

00:53:51

CW: Thank you very much.

00:53:52

NR: We feel honored for you to do it for us.

00:53:54

[End Natalie Ramsey & Chase Webb-Bridges Barbecue Lodge]