

David Wilson & John David Wilson
Short Sugar's Pit Bar-B-Q - Reidsville, NC

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[Begin David Wilson & John David Wilson — Short Sugar's Pit Bar-B-Q]

00:00:02

Rien Fertel: All right, this is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. I am on the North Carolina BBQ Trail at Short Sugar's Bar-B-Q in Reidsville, North Carolina. It's—it's a Monday morning, November 21, 2011 and I'm sitting here with Mr. David Wilson and his son, also named David Wilson. And I'm going to have them introduce themselves, please.

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David Wilson: My name is David Wilson. I'm the owner. I've been involved with Short Sugar's since 1980 and my wife's parent—father and mother started the business in November of 1949. And my father-in-law passed away in 1978 and I became involved with the business as a co-owner in 1980. And since 1996 I've been the sole owner. My age is **[Laughs]** sixty-eight and my birthdate is December 11, 1942.

00:01:12

RF: All right; thank you.

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John David Wilson: And I'm John David Wilson. I'm the manager here or one of the managers. I was born March 7, 1973 and I'm thirty-eight years old. I've been with the business—the family business now for about a year.

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RF: Okay; let's start with the name of the business. We just established when it was founded; you have a very unique name that I like saying: Short Sugar's [*Laughs*]. Where did the establishment get that name?

00:01:42

DW: It's quite interesting. People guess all over the—the gamut about the—how we came about the name. The name actually has nothing to do with food even though it's called Short Sugar's. In 1949, I mentioned there were two brothers that started the business. In the beginning there would have been three. But in 1949 during the summertime one of the brothers named Eldridge Overby was killed in a car wreck. And he got his nickname when he worked in a—probably a grill convenience store-type business with a jukebox. And one day his girlfriend came in and said she wanted to dance with her Short Sugar. And of course Eldridge was short in stature but just very vibrant. He was just—never had—was at a loss for words. But the nickname Short Sugar just stuck with him, and the two brothers named the business in his memory. And that's how the name Short Sugar's was applied to the business was in memory of Eldridge Overby.

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RF: What were the names of the other two brothers?

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DW: My father-in-law's name was Johnny and his brother was Clyde, and Clyde was deceased in 1974 and Johnny in 1978.

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RF: And how did you spell Johnny? I've seen it spelled two different ways in articles?

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DW: J-o-h-n-n-y.

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RF: Okay; and tell me a bit about your father-in-law. What—do you know where he was from?

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DW: He's from the Bethany area which is in Rockingham County, the same county that Reidsville is in. And he grew up rather poor, on a farm, and he worked around food as a—they worked in some food businesses, you know, up until they got the idea about doing barbecue. But they grew up just very normal people.

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RF: What kind of food businesses did he do?

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DW: Just pretty much hotdogs, hamburgers, and that type of thing.

00:04:01

JDW: There's a story that in '47 or '48 they bought a pizza oven and of course nobody had ever heard of a pizza. And they couldn't sell a pizza to save their lives, so they—they went from pizza to barbecue and—and it worked a little better.

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RF: And tell me about how many children did he have?

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DW: Three; Johnny had three children and it was Lee, Carolyn, and Diane, and Clyde had two sons, Wesley and Randy. And they—Randy and Wesley operated a Short—another Short Sugar's which was up town in Reidsville that closed two or three years ago. But the two businesses operated independently of each other since 1980. We operated as a corporation. They operated as a partnership.

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When we bought the business and when I say *we*, there were two brothers—two more sons-in-law. And we bought Short Sugar's and then sold the partnership to the two sons uptown. But we've—at this point in time, as I said, since 1996 I've been the sole owner here.

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RF: And so there remains only one Short Sugar's today?

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DW: There's one in Danville [Virginia] and it's also unaffiliated with the one in Reidsville. But one of my brother-in-laws, Terry Gentry, operated the one in Danville until about fifteen years ago and he sold it. He had the right to the name just like we do, so the name was passed on in— in Danville and it's operating as Short Sugar's today.

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RF: And I want to ask a few more questions about the family. What—what was your wife's name or what is your wife's name?

00:05:42

DW: Lee.

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RF: And did she work here as a young woman?

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DW: No, she worked at the store uptown as a cashier at times, but she's had very little—. She says that she is, "the Vice President in charge of nothing." [*Laughs*] That's—that's her title. But no; she—she—when we—when we remodeled and reopened when we added the dining room, several members of the family came in to just kind of give us a little extra boost there in the beginning. But no; she didn't—she has not worked as a rule.

00:06:21

RF: And where did you meet your wife?

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DW: I met her when I finished—graduated from UNC she was working in Yanceyville which is in Caswell County, the next county over and I worked there one summer after college and I met her there.

00:06:41

RF: Okay; so you went to the University of North Carolina and what did you graduate in?

00:06:45

DW: I graduated in Business.

00:06:49

RF: And did you—what year was that?

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DW: Nineteen sixty-five.

00:06:54

RF: Okay; so what did you do between '65 and 1980?

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DW: I worked with Fieldcrest Mills in Eden, North Carolina for around ten years and then when I went on the road selling industrial fasteners until I got involved with Short Sugar's, which was about four years on the road.

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RF: And did you have any restaurant or barbecue experience before 1980?

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DW: Just being around it for about I guess you'd say fourteen—fifteen years and being in and out of the business helping my father-in-law on weekends some, but no, actually very little actual experience.

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RF: Did you get along with your father-in-law?

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DW: I did. He was very, very neat. And the philosophy that I had when I got involved with the business was we had—he had some good employees and very loyal employees. And I felt like the first year we were just sort of in a glass bubble. And I—you know, just tried to ride the ship and make sure everything—just learned what I could that first year before we did any—any changes. And we did double the size of the restaurant, more than doubled the size of the restaurant, within two years by adding the dining room. And that's—that was really a wise business decision because it—the business had a good reputation and with just a counter and

curb there were a lot of customers, particularly ladies and families that just couldn't come in and trade except on the curb. So it just opened up a whole new—whole new avenue of business.

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RF: And what year did your father-in-law pass away?

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DW: Nineteen seventy-eight.

00:08:32

RF: Okay; so he—he didn't get to see the expansion of the business?

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DW: No, no; no, he did not.

00:08:36

RF: What role did your father-in-law play in the business? Did he do a bit of everything here?

00:08:41

DW: He did. He was the—well he was co-owner of Short Sugar's at that point in time but he was very much a hands-on person. He—he did the ordering and his—his wife was very involved, too. In fact, she's sitting right up here. I'll introduce you to her, but that—that's my mother-in-law. But he—he chopped barbecue and prepared barbecue up until the week he died.

00:09:07

RF: And what is her name?

00:09:07

DW: Her name is—her name is Ida but she goes by Biddy—B-i-d-d-y. She goes by Biddy.

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RF: So when you were working here before you owned Short Sugar's, did you work side-by-side with your father-in-law? How did he help you along?

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DW: I didn't. I really just on weekends when I came in I may come over and help him start the meat cooking and that type thing, but I did not really get into the nuts and bolts of the business per se.

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RF: And before you—you took it over in 1980, did you ever—before then did you ever have aspirations of taking over Short Sugar's? Did you ever discuss it with your wife?

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DW: Yes, well frequently, yeah. That's something that had always been in the back of my mind. It never was something that was a—a burning passion that I knew would happen. But eventually it unfolded such that it offered the opportunity and that's—that's really the way it evolved is that when my father-in-law died and my mother-in-law was in her sixties at that time, and it's a lot of

stress and strain and they—she and her—her sister-in-law operated the two stores for about two years, but it was just too much. They wanted to retire. So they were planning to either close it or they would sell it to us. It was those two options. They weren't planning to sell it outside the family.

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So we—with that option we—we jumped on it.

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RF: Tell me where you were born and grew up.

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DW: I was born in Durham but I grew up in Yanceyville in Caswell County and went to school in Caswell County and then went to—to college at Chapel Hill.

00:11:01

RF: What—what do you remember about barbecue growing up; any certain places come to mind when you were a teenager and—?

00:11:09

DW: Well this may be kind of strange but I had never been to Reidsville until after I got out of college. And so I had never been in Short Sugar's until I met my wife, and that would have been in 1961—'62. No, I'm sorry, in '65—but no, I don't know that I had ever eaten barbecue per se.

00:11:39

RF: Even in Durham, there was—?

00:11:43

DW: Well, Bullock's is in Durham but I—you know, I was just—they had me home when I was still on milk [*Laughs*] so no, I haven't—you know, when I was traveling with selling industrial fasteners I probably ate at a few barbecue places but they didn't have any real special meaning until after I, you know, got involved with Short Sugar's.

00:12:07

RF: And I want to ask a question about the original drive-in because it's not something you see anymore and is that still the original structure you have?

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DW: Yes, yes, it is. And we tried to keep the same look. The dining room blends in very well with that and—and for the first thirty years the business thrived, no catering; it thrived strictly on counter service and—and curb service. It was like a '50s drive-in, looked real—Fonzi-type thing.

00:12:39

RF: What were those drive-in days like? And I should tell the people listening that—I mean you're wearing a shirt with like old drive-in cars on it, too, so—. What were those days like?

00:12:49

DW: Well, I can only go by what people have told me. There have been so many stories about couples that met here and eventually married. It was a teen hangout and it sounds very much like, you know, Fonzi and his—his crowd but I just heard it by word of mouth, but it was a very popular teen hangout back in the '50s. And the—Mr. Overby, my father-in-law, was very much in tune with the high school students. He sponsored ball teams and softball and that type thing and then some of the sport teams would come in here and eat before they would go play ball. And they're—it's a lot of—a lot of interesting stories.

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There were professional wrestlers that would be going between Greensboro and Danville in this area and they would stop in all buddy-buddy eating together and then they'd go wrestle and want to kill each other, you know that type of thing. But it—it's—it has a real history. I think that's one thing that has attracted my son is just the—the history of it and carrying on that tradition.

00:14:04

RF: I want to ask your son a few questions. What—where were you born?

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JDW: I was born here in Reidsville.

00:14:09

RF: And so you—were you—do you—were you—did you grow up in this restaurant?

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JDW: I—I did; it was my first job was you know busing tables. I washed dishes, done a little bit of everything around here, so yeah, that was my first job all the way up until I left for college.

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RF: How old were you when you started working here?

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JDW: Thirteen.

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RF: Thirteen; and where did you go to college?

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JDW: I went to Vintage Bible College in Winston-Salem.

00:14:35

RF: Tell me about how it was—what it was like growing up in a—in a restaurant.

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JDW: Well [*Laughs*], it was really a lot of fun. You know I had—I went to school in the county. But most of the kids that worked here were from the city so I had to—lots of friends, you know, friends from school, friends from here, two different friend bases. And we—I just—there's some

friendships that came out of my—my days working here that I still carry on you know and just it's really a family atmosphere. So, I had a blast working here.

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RF: And did you eat barbecue growing up?

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JDW: I was probably more of a hotdog and hamburger guy growing up. Now I prefer the barbecue, so—.

00:15:14

RF: Yeah; I hear that a lot from—from people who grew up in—in barbecue restaurants. When did you start eating barbecue? When—when did you appreciate it?

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JDW: Oh, I think it's just been within the last—I've always known it was a great product but I think it's probably within—in my adult years, in the twenties maybe that I've really come to appreciate the uniqueness of—of the barbecue that is—comes out of Short Sugar's. As I've gone around the country and tasted different barbecues, all of which I love, this is just—this is a really unique product and we've got a gold mine—I mean we've got a gem here.

00:15:49

RF: All right; I want to—yeah I want to of course talk about the food in a minute. One more question; you—your father said that a lot of employees remained when the—when the business changed hands in 1980. Did those people—those women especially have a hand in raising you?

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JDW: Sure. We've got an evening manager, Tab Walker, and she's been here since I was a little kid. And yeah, she's definitely part of the family, kind of a mother figure, not that I needed another mother figure but you know she's—she's looked after me like—. And then there was a— a family, the Whaley family, Bill and Louise both that worked here for decades and were kind of another founding family along with the Overbys and Wilsons and they were certainly like kind of grandparents to me, so—.

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RF: Tell me about the Whaleys. I did read about them.

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DW: Right. Bill Whaley who passed away this past May was one of the original employees and he worked up until the late '90s when he had a stroke, but he started here in 1949. He left for about two years to go back out East, where he grew up, and he married and brought his wife back. And he worked until—from I'd say mid-'50s until he retired in the late '90s. He had a stroke and just wasn't able to work. But his wife came to work in 1958, and Miss—and Johnny Overby—when she came in one—at the time she started work he handed her an order pad and

just told her to go to the curb and start waiting on people. That's her application. And she stayed and became our breakfast cook and was our breakfast cook for probably twenty-five years. And she just passed away November 14th this year. So both of those individuals passed away in 2011, but they were loyal. They were conscientious. They were just outstanding employees.

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But we've had employees—we had a manager that retired last October, not this—in 2010 that had been here over thirty years. Tab Walker has been here since 1982. And then we have waitresses that have been here for twenty years. In this type business you have both; you have your core employees that are long-time and then you have younger employees that turn over like high school kids and that type thing. But overall we've been blessed with having probably a good core of—of ten to fifteen people that—that are with us for a long time.

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RF: Is it important in running the business and having employees that have been here that long?

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DW: It definitely is; it definitely is. Any time—we try to make them feel like they're—you know, it's their business also; that they're a part of it and it's particularly like with the wait—waitstaff, it—it's sort of a business within a business. They create their own customer base just like Short Sugar's does. So if—if individuals come in the door expecting to have a certain waitress or a certain person waiting them—and the same applies with the cook. It's just important to have a personal relationship with your customers as much as possible, not just to have a number but to have names associated with them and that type thing.

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RF: And let's—let's talk about the customers. How would you describe your customer base?

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DW: From A to Z, from A to Z. We have—and this is not putting any above the other or anything but we have ones that are very blue collar up to professional people. And they're all important to us.

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RF: Do you—how often do you see kind of the people who stop by the most?

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DW: We have certain individuals that are here three times a day.

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RF: Three times a day? [*Laughs*]

00:20:03

DW: Actually three times a day.

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RF: I thought you were going to say week.

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DW: No; three times a day and it's not unusual to see the same people each day. But there are a group—I say a group—they're different people, different individuals but—that eat with us once or twice and sometimes three times a day.

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RF: That's incredible. And they've been doing this for years?

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DW: Yes; uh-hm.

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RF: And tell me about Reidsville itself. How would you—maybe I'll ask your son this since you grew up here, but how—how would you describe the town and living here?

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JDW: You know, Reidsville is a great place to live. It's one of those small towns that growing up I couldn't wait to get out of, and I left and I was never coming back. And my wife and I both have moved around a lot and most recently we lived—spent about five years in Wisconsin and Milwaukee and when the opportunity came to get back involved in the business and come back home we couldn't wait. You know, it's—it's a great place to raise our kids. I'm sure they'll feel the same way that they can't wait to get out of Reidsville but they'll get to that point in life where they realize what—you know how wonderful it is to have a family here, so—.

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RF: And can you describe the location of Short Sugar's where we are in Reidsville?

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JDW: We're in the old part of town. This is—Scales Street used to be the main drag. Businesses have kind of developed over on the other side of town for the last twenty years and so that's kind of where everything is happening. But we fit in the old part of town. You know I mean we—we would stick out like a sore thumb over on Freeway Drive where all the new shiny things are. You know this is—this is where we belong, so—.

00:21:48

RF: And tell me about the downtown area. It's really beautiful just driving through it.

00:21:53

JDW: It is. That—that was something I was really happy to see when I got home last year. It was not much to look at when I left just five years—six years ago. There's been a big revitalization program. We're still in the middle of it. And they're really bringing that back to life, and I'm excited to see that.

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RF: How and why is that happening?

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JDW: I think—I think people are just ready to—to bring Reidsville back to maybe the—the glory days of the—the '50s, you know, when it was really a happening town, you know. And—and I'm tickled; it's great to drive through there, so—.

00:22:26

RF: Do you—?

00:22:26

DW: I would just add to that—that I think that a lot of the smaller towns have tried to do some downtown revitalization to draw businesses back into that area. And they—they—that's probably been the emphasis—to try to create some more business in the downtown area.

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Reidsville, like so many other small towns, that was—up through the '50s probably—at least the '50s, all the happenings were, you know, in the downtown area, your shops, your stores, your restaurants and it's—I think it's just been an effort to get business—businesses back into that area. And it's been somewhat successful.

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American Tobacco Company was one of the huge employers for Reidsville over the years and there's still a tobacco cigarette manufacturing here but it's Commonwealth. American Tobacco has since left, but that was a huge employer and tax base for the—for the city and when that was lost then a lot of the revenue to maintain the city was—was kind of lost. But they've—there's been a real effort to try to revitalize that area and they've been successful.

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RF: All right; and let's talk about the food. Now one more question before we get to the food; is —is barbecue the word—is it—do you use it as a noun or a verb or both?

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JDW: It's a noun. *[Laughs]*

00:24:00

DW: It's a noun, but you can use it any way you'd like just as long as you eat it. *[Laughs]*

00:24:06

JDW: One thing I learned in Wisconsin is if they say barbecue that's an event and it only involves a grill and probably beef. You know, and—and when I talked about making barbecue they had no idea what—so they know it as a verb but it's a noun around here, I'd say. *[Laughs]*

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RF: Did you make North Carolina style or Short Sugar style barbecue when you were away?

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JDW: You know, I didn't have a lot of access to hickory wood but I did my best to emulate it. You know, so yeah.

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RF: And what did people say, your friends up there?

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JDW: It always went over very well. Sweet tea also, you know, they had never had that and I couldn't make enough of that so—.

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RF: Okay; so what kind of barbecue do you do here?

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DW: We use pork shoulders. We have tried—we have used hams from time to time but we always go back to the shoulder. We—we do—west of Raleigh, most of the barbecue joints as they're referred to use either shoulders, hams, or butts and east of Raleigh they use the whole pig in a lot of cases. But we use mainly I'd say ninety—we use about 100-percent shoulders right now. We have used butts, and they're fine. They're just comparable to shoulders and usually the difference—the reason we buy one or the other is just when the price is better on shoulders or butts, we'll use which is most economical.

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But pork shoulders and butts are not as lean as the ham but they have a much better flavor and I think the consistency of the meat product once it's chopped or sliced makes a better product than the ham does.

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RF: And you talked about increase in price. When have you seen that and—and during what times?

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DW: Well, pork prices traditionally—just kind of historically will ebb and flow. It seems like over the years if there's—the prices are low people will—producers will get out of the business to some degree and then when the demand picks up and the—you can't get enough then the prices go up and people get back into it, the producers.

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But there have been several things. Shipping overseas has affected the price of pork a lot. There's such a demand from it from the European countries and Asian countries where they do eat some—or they do eat pork and our pork prices in the last two years have probably gone up about an average of thirty-percent. And that's a real huge cost because that's such a big part of our, you know—as far as our business is concerned that's a big—big impact on ours—us.

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But pork will traditionally or historically rise and fall depending—it just kind of depends on the market. Right now it's stabilized but it's still probably fifteen-percent higher than what we paid say a year and a half ago.

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RF: Have your purveyors told you that it's going to stay this way or is it going to drop back down?

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DW: I don't think they really know at this point. I watched a—a program on UNC-TV last night. It's Wendell—I can't recall his last name [Murphy]—last name right offhand but he's a big hog producer in the eastern part of the State and he was talking about all the environmental

problems that pig producers have had with the lagoons and that type thing. And their costs has escalated because what they've had to do for EPA and that type of thing, so those costs are passed onto—to us. And I don't really see pork going back to—the prices going back down to where they were two—three years ago. I mean we were buying pork probably in the eighty-cent per pound range and now it's up in the \$1.20 or higher per pound range. And that's on—you know that's uncooked; that's just the—what we call the green shoulder.

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RF: And let's talk about how you—you cook your shoulders. What's—what's the process there? What—what time does it start and—and how long; what goes on?

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DW: Right; we—we use—we have a supplier that has strictly hickory now. We will stay with either hickory or white oak but for the last several years we've been able to—we found a supplier that has hickory. And we've got two pits, and it takes about probably eight to ten hours to cook the barbecue—the shoulders, and we try to keep enough cooked that we can reheat while we continue to—to cook fresh.

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RF: And what time do you—do you put the shoulders on?

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DW: Usually early in the morning. And then they'll be—they'll be cooking or reheating during the day.

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RF: And do they—is there any prep to the shoulders? Are they spiced or salted?

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DW: No. We cook them strictly as we get them from the—from the producers. And they—as I mentioned they're called green shoulders, that's just a term. But they have no seasoning, no sauce and during the cooking process we add no sauce or any type of seasoning to it; only when we put it on the prep table to slice or chop do we add our sauce.

00:29:51

RF: And how many shoulders can you do at one time?

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DW: We can cook about twenty—we have two pits. If we cook both pits we can cook about thirty at a time, but we generally cook about twenty. Well, we cook twenty or so a day, depending on the time of year.

00:30:09

RF: When are the busiest times of the year?

00:30:11

DW: Weekends are busier than the first part of the week, but this time of year with Thanksgiving and Christmas, Christmas we sell the whole shoulder. People will buy it by the pound but they also buy the shoulder. So we—we cook extra on Christmastime. We probably sell about sixty to eighty whole shoulders during—during the week of Christmas.

00:30:37

RF: And you brought up the sauce. Do you use the word sauce or dip? I'll ask your son.

00:30:45

DW: Sauce. [*Laughs*]

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RF: And it's always been that way?

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DW: Yeah; it's always been that way.

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RF: All right; and how would you describe the sauce? It's—it's certainly unique, and without giving away anything, how would you describe it?

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DW: It's a sweet sauce. It does have vinegar, so there's—but compared to Eastern style which is more prevalent with vinegar, ours is more of a sweeter sauce. And it's a dark sauce but it's a thin sauce, but—

00:31:12

JDW: It marinades good; it's a very good marinade, yeah.

00:31:16

RF: What do you marinade in it?

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JDW: Most anything. I grill a lot of chicken and—and pork with it. It doesn't burn on the grill, you know, so it's good for that.

00:31:25

RF: I've heard it described as—in—in books on North Carolina barbecue as a black sauce, black colored. Do you describe it as that?

00:31:36

DW: I just would describe it as dark color. It's more of a—it's more of a—well it could be black, but I would describe it more as a brown—browner sauce. But it's just—it's just a—it's a sweet sauce and we—we don't—at this point we're going through the process of possibly wholesaling the sauce, but at this point we haven't done it. It's something David—John David

has been real interested in too. But we will, just—day-to-day, we will sell twenty-five to thirty bottles a day of just people coming in. And we ship across the country to people—we have a website and we have a pretty—pretty decent—it kind of shows our products and stuff. And we get—we ship to California, Texas, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Florida; it's not an everyday thing but we have frequent orders from places throughout the country.

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RF: And this is the barbecue or the sauce?

00:32:40

DW: Basically the sauce. The barbecue creates a little bit more of a difficulty as far as shipping because it being a perishable item, but we do—we do ship some, but it's expensive to ship it—ship the barbecue. The sauce is not too bad, but the barbecue itself is pretty expensive to ship.

00:32:58

RF: And whose recipe was the—is the sauce and where did it come from?

00:33:03

DW: One of—my father-in-law, Johnny Overby, the original owner, he created the sauce, and it's been the same since day one.

00:33:13

RF: And did he ever say anything about the sauce, why he—you know, where it comes from or why he made it like it is?

00:33:20

DW: I've never heard his reasoning behind his—his percentages or his mixture, but it's stayed —it's stayed the same.

00:33:30

I guess it was somewhat trial and error with him in the beginning until he got what tasted good. But I have not heard a story on his—as to how he developed it.

00:33:40

RF: All right; and how much sauce do you go through in a year?

00:33:45

DW: Well we do—we will—again it depends on—as far as the course of a year, probably around 20,000 gallons.

00:33:57

RF: And I want to ask a question about a bit of lore, some history that Short Sugar's was involved in some time ago and that was the Barbecue Bowl. Can you—can you say what happened?

00:34:10

DW: That was in 1980 was the first—the first year they had a Barbecue Bowl. And there were—was a Representative, [John Light] Napier from South Carolina that represented their Sixth District and Gene Johnston represented the Sixth District in North Carolina. And they had sort of

a—a friendly, I don't know whether you would call it a bet or not, just an arrangement I guess, but they asked barbecue joints in their Districts if they would furnish about thirty pounds of barbecue each to send to DC. And they were going to have a big party is what it amounted to at—at the Capitol.

00:34:56

And the first year that the barbecue was sent up being a—being good politicians they rode the fence. They didn't choose a winner. They did it the next year and the—the Short Sugar's was chosen out of those two Districts, North and South Carolina, as having the—they were chosen the best barbecue. And it was really a—a pretty neat thing for us. It was in the Armed Forces Newspaper; it got published there. The news media, the national news media picked it up and Associated Press, and the local TV station in Greensboro brought their crew over here. And all of this happened around the time we expanded and opened our dining room. So they were here for our grand opening along with all the publicity. So it couldn't have been orchestrated to happen at a better time and better way. Everything just fell together. But it—that contest did give us a lot of good publicity.

00:36:10

RF: Have you—so you've been here for, at least under your ownership, you've been here for thirty years, little over thirty years. Have—have you seen people's tastes change in the way they eat barbecue?

00:36:24

DW: No, [*Laughs*] you know, it's—this might be kind of trite but you don't really—if the wheel isn't squeaking you don't need to grease it, you know. It's kind of that situation and we've had—it's kind of a tongue and cheek, but customers would come in, people like yourself would come in to interview customers and they would—they talk about the sauce. And I do think the sauce is equally as important as how you cook the meat, maybe not quite as much, but you can cook good meat, cook it well, and have a bad sauce and you ruin it. So the sauce is equally as important as—as having the good—good meat product.

00:37:09

But there was—one gentleman was—he was kidding around with the reporter and he said that he has to get his daily fix of barbecue sauce. So I think a lot of people just they—it goes out of here, you know, so people use it for all sorts of things. But during the week of Christmas we make extra sauce and for us it's a lot. We will sell, just out of the store the—the week of Christmas, 500 to 600 bottles of sauce. So it's very popular.

00:37:41

RF: And do people use the sauce on other menu items here? You have a full breakfast menu I should say.

00:37:47

DW: We have had people say they use sauce even on breakfast items like eggs. Now I don't know that I would go so far as—as that. But it is good on chicken. It's good on steaks. It's good on pork. You can—you know—

00:38:06

JDW: You can smoke fish with it; it's pretty good too, yeah.

00:38:08

DW: So it—it has a wide range. It has a wide range of possibilities anyway. You can I'm sure flavor different dishes with it whether it be—well, we do use it in our baked beans, you know, to flavor baked beans, so it has—it has multiple uses.

00:38:28

RF: So Short Sugar's has been around for sixty-two years, correct?

00:38:32

DW: Sixty-two, we're going on sixty-three next year.

00:38:35

RF: So sixty-three and what do you think the secret to the success is?

00:38:39

DW: Well, I'm doing all the talking and my son probably has his ideas, too which he can add. But I have—this came from being in sales, too: if you've got a good product at a good price and I think the—that along with the fact that we try—this is trite too, you know, to treat people like—with respect and let them know that we're glad they came in to eat with us and not—just they're not just a number. We try to have that relationship with our customers when possible to let them know that they're appreciated, greet them, I mean ask them back and that type of thing.

00:39:20

It's just a combination of just goodwill. You've got—every day you've got PR work to do. You know you don't stop. because you had a good day yesterday, you start the day off doing the same thing you did yesterday and that's trying to treat people with respect.

00:39:37

RF: And would you like to add anything?

00:39:39

JDW: He hit the nail on the head. It is a—it's good food and it's fairly priced, but everybody that comes in the door whether it's their third time of the day or their first time ever, you know, they are family and we—we appreciate everybody that—that joins us. And I think that comes through. That comes through with the wait staff. You know, Dad has put together a great team here and people feel welcome. It's just a—it's a good combination, so—.

00:40:09

RF: And y'all have both traveled a bit around the South and around the nation. What—how—have you eaten barbecue in other places and what do you think about it?

00:40:20

DW: I'm going to give you my feeling about that. I like barbecue—I probably am more—have more preference for North Carolina barbecue than further south because we—our—our sauce and Eastern style barbecue sauce doesn't overpower the meat, the pork. And I think you get into some areas, where if you've got mustard or ketchup or tomato based or heavier sauces, you

actually overpower the meat. You know the sauce can be good but you lose the—in my opinion the flavor of the meat, the barbecue. So, I like Eastern style; I like—I love vinegar so I like Eastern style barbecue. But barbecue is such a regional product. People that grow up on a certain type they're going to defend it come you know tooth and nail, so people in—in this area or this part of North Carolina prefer this type barbecue. If you go out to Greenville or where—you'll be going to Rocky Mount and out in that area they're going to prefer their style sauce. But that's kind of my take on that. *[Laughs]*

00:41:39

JDW: Right; I think I said this before but I love it all. I mean, wherever I am if barbecue is on the menu I get it. And—and it's rare that I don't enjoy it. I just appreciate—I just appreciate the food and the tradition that goes—you know, because most—most people's barbecue they take very seriously. But I just—I don't say this for any other reason than—than it's the truth. This—this is my favorite. I love this stuff. I think my grandfather nailed the recipe and the way dad has preserved that all these years—a pet peeve of mine is to drive by a barbecue place that says something about pit barbecue and there's no pit anywhere in sight, you know. I mean it's just—I think it's an insult to those families who still do it the way it's supposed to be done, you know.

00:42:23

RF: So you do—you still do pit barbecue; what is the importance of pit barbecue?

00:42:30

JDW: Well, you just can't buy smoke in a bottle. You can't emulate the taste of—of hickory smoked pork. There's no way around it. There's no shortcut, so—.

00:42:41

RF: What do you think about electric cookers?

00:42:44

JDW: They have their place; you know, but it—it's got to be—if you use an electric cooker it's got to be finished with the smoke. You know, the cooking process has to end with—with that hickory coal, so—.

00:43:01

RF: So I want to ask—yeah just a few more questions. On your—to change subjects a little bit; on your website you—there's a link to a documentary that was made about you. Can you talk about that? It was called *Meeting David Wilson*.

00:43:22

DW: Yes; that is—is—and there's some parts of that documentary that were filmed here at Short Sugar's too, but in 2005 I had a—a telephone call from a person that lived in Newark, New Jersey. His name was David Wilson. And I was here, and he asked to speak to me. And he said his name was David Wilson. He said he thought his—my family may have owned his at one time. And this developed into a documentary where he went all the way back to Ghana doing this

—doing the filming of this documentary to where his—through DNA testing he found out that's where he was from, was from Ghana, his—his ancestors.

00:44:09

But his great, great grandfather—his third—great, great, great grandfather was a slave on my great, great, grandfather's plantation in Caswell County. And we formed a pretty strong—pretty strong bond. He was twenty-eight when he started this documentary, but it—it didn't have a lot to do with Short Sugar's per se, but he loves our hushpuppies. And when we did our filming and it was close-by too; a lot of it was done in Caswell County—but they would come over and—and eat frequently.

00:44:47

And then I've been to the world premier for the documentary was at Howard University in Washington and that was on April 8, 2011—I'm sorry April 11, 2008, and it was a lot involved with it. We went—my wife and I went to New York for the—before the premier and were on the *Today Show* and then we went back to Washington for the premier. But it was just a really interesting story and well done and it did involve Short Sugar's in that they came here to eat some during the filming of it. But it was a neat—neat—neat project.

00:45:30

RF: And on what channel did it air?

00:45:33

DW: It was on MSNBC.

00:45:36

RF: And how was it—whether you knew about that history or not, finding out about roots and history and connections with other—with other people?

00:45:44

DW: It was very meaningful to me and I think it was to him, too and I think David, the—I went by “David B” and he goes by “David A” during the course of our conversations. But he—he made a—it was a part of the documentary right at the very end when he was talking to a group of school students. And he made such a powerful statement at that point, when he told these children that they were not—they should not look—look at themselves as victims but look at themselves as victors for what their ancestors had gone through and where—what they had done and where they had—had come to. But he’s a very neat individual.

00:46:32

RF: And speaking on—on generations and history and roots, do you also see that in your customer base here?

00:46:40

JDW: I’m sorry?

00:46:42

RF: I mean do you see multiple generations of people growing up here?

00:46:45

JDW: Yes; when I was younger my fear was—we had a very senior citizen customer base and I thought boy, well what's going to happen when they move on? [*Laughs*] But no; it's always been that way. We have young families that come in. We still have kind of an older clientele. But I guess we have for decades now and that's okay. You know we—as long as we're bringing in new older clientele we'll be all right. Would you say that?

00:47:13

DW: I would, and I kind of think of myself as a school teacher sometimes. I used to think that I had teachers that taught my parents, taught me, and then your children too and we have waitresses or waitstaff or employees that their children and their children [*Laughs*], so you know, it's kind of—it—it carries on from generation to generation. We've expanded I think some of our—we do a lot—fair amount of corporate business too and we're getting into catering more, which is expanding our business more. But the—we—we have—not only the clientele from A to Z, from blue collar to professional but we have from babies to grandparents, so it's—it's a wide range of—which is not unusual for restaurants. You're going to have that—that age—those age groups coming to trade with you. But we don't try to compete with McDonald's or Hardee's or those people. We have a niche and we just try to fulfill that with a full service.

00:48:24

RF: And what do you think Short Sugar's and barbecue means to this community?

00:48:28

DW: Tradition, pretty much plain and simple tradition. And I think so many people in the community, they don't necessarily feel an ownership but they feel a pride in Short Sugar's.

00:48:46

JDW: When we were talking earlier about downtown, I think, you know, Reidsville has always been the type community that's taken care of its local small business owners and I kind of—I feel like they do think of Short Sugar's as theirs. You know this is—this is my hometown; this is—we kind of are the embodiment of their hometown. And especially when people are traveling to see relatives in other parts of the country they want to take Short Sugar's with them, because this represents Reidsville, you know.

00:49:10

RF: Have you seen that in other places, similarities or do you think this is unique?

00:49:16

DW: I'm sure there are situations like that with other businesses, too. But Short Sugar's is—is unique in that sixty-two—sixty-three years old it's come in touch with a lot of people, had a lot of publicity over the years, and it's unique in that—that respect.

00:49:41

RF: What do you think your—your father-in-law would say to you today—with success over the past thirty years of you running it and—?

00:49:49

DW: I would hope—hope that he would be proud.

00:49:54

RF: And what—your son is sitting here; what words and I—it sounds like you, you know, he—you're going to take over I'm guessing—that's what it sounds like. What words would you impart to him in running Short Sugar's?

00:50:06

DW: Well, I think you—you've got to have a passion for this type business, which I think that he is—is developing. It's not something that comes overnight. In fact, we had a conversation recently, a week or two ago, and he said when he first came back he didn't really feel that much a part of it. And in the last year he's developed that to where he does have that feeling. I think the longer you're in it the more relationships you build. I think that grows on you. Well, I've been here you know thirty-two years; I would—when I retire I'll miss the people. And I think that's where he'll—he'll be working towards.

00:50:52

RF: Do you plan on retiring or—?

00:50:55

JDW: [*Gestures*]

00:50:55

RF: Your son is shaking his head.

00:50:57

DW: Well you know I probably will stay involved as long as my health will—but it'll probably be less, you know, day-to-day or less hands-on. But I'm sure I'll be in touch with it as long as I'm—my health allows.

00:51:11

JDW: When I moved back down here I had this idea that I was going to take this huge load off his shoulders, you know, and he's going to be able to enjoy the good life now and after about six months of being here and he's still coming in every day I said you know, "Dad, am I doing something wrong?" And he said, "No, I just love being here." You know, it's not that he had—felt like he had to come in. He just wants to be here. And he—he wants to—to be here to—to greet the customers and to—. And that's great, you know, and I'm okay with that. *[Laughs]*

00:51:35

RF: So you love being here but what's the most difficult part about running a barbecue restaurant?

00:51:39

DW: Well, the most difficult part would be maintaining—the personnel end of it is the toughest part. And you have, you know, the work ethic of particularly the younger generation is not as strong. Of course every generation says that. But it's—it's—it's a little tougher to get people that

are dedicated to—to work. They're just interested in the paycheck. But we—you know, we've—as David mentioned earlier, we do—we have—we're going to have a core group and then we're going to have a turnover group. And I—I feel like that we've been able to maintain a good balance of that.

00:52:20

RF: Will you encourage, you mentioned that you have children; will you encourage them to work here in their teenage years and perhaps pursue a restaurant career in the future?

00:52:32

JDW: [*Laughs*] I have a sixteen year old son, and he has worked here some this summer. This was his first job. That's entirely up to them. Like Dad mentioned, you can't just do this because it's a job. It's got to be something that you're willing and—and want to put forth all that needs to be put into it and that's a decision they'll have to make on their own, so—.

00:52:54

RF: And how much—how much—you mentioned passion; how much of that passion is—is history and keeping this going and how much is it—of it is kind of a day-to-day operation?

00:53:05

DW: Well the history of it's been—been a real big part of my passion. Just, you know, the—excuse me, I'm sorry, I keep getting—to carry on, you know, what was started and successful

and not you know—that's—that has been a big part of the passion is the tradition of the place for me.

00:53:24

JDW: I feel a tremendous weight or responsibility, if you will. The way I look at that and I tell people that you know my grandfather had a great idea and my father turned it into a great business and now—or soon all that is going to rest on my shoulders. You know, how am I going to continue or—or build on—on what they've done and—and do that in a way that honors both of their accomplishments, you know?

00:53:47

RF: And is that a tough responsibility? Is it releasing? How does that feel?

00:53:52

JDW: Oh it's very tough, but, you know, it—I look forward to the challenge. That's all right; so —.

00:53:56

RF: Excellent. Just one question I skipped and then we'll wrap up. What—who cooks—who mans the pits?

00:54:05

DW: Well, we have the two of us and then we have usually someone that is around the prep table. We're fortunate not—if we had to build a new building we would have—we—because of

codes, we'd have to put the pits in another building more than likely. But the way we have it here we're able to just—different individuals can maintain the coals and keep it going and that type thing.

00:54:32

Otherwise you have to have what's called a pitmaster, somebody to stay with it the whole time, but we're able to manage that with the person—the people that we have here cooking.

00:54:43

JDW: Which works really well because the person that's preparing the barbecue is also the one that's, you know, smoking the meat and—and nobody knows better what it needs and when it needs it than the person that's actually working with it, so it's a good system.

00:54:55

RF: And have you ever used that word *pitmaster* or had a pitmaster?

00:54:58

DW: No; we really haven't it. We—we've just—it's usually been the owners [*Laughs*] that have been—been responsible for that.

00:55:07

RF: And how often do you eat your barbecue and how—how do you eat it? How do you order it?

00:55:13

DW: We—we serve it on a plate and we have a tray which is slaw and the barbecue in a tray and then we have a variety of sandwiches: sliced, chopped, minced—and minced is barbecue that we grind and that's the only—the type that we do mechanical. Sliced and chopped is done by hand at the time it's ordered. But I'll eat barbecue two or three times a week, not every day. I like hotdogs too. *[Laughs]*

00:55:49

RF: How do you eat your barbecue? Is there one way or any way?

00:55:51

DW: Usually either the chopped sandwich or a chopped tray. The plate is a little—well a little more food than I would want during most meals.

00:56:00

RF: And yourself?

00:56:01

JDW: Um, it—and I try to maintain a relatively healthy diet so I have lean chopped barbecue just about every day for lunch here. That's—that's, you know, a good lean chopped barbecue is—I'm okay with that, so that's a good—good healthy diet right?

00:56:18

RF: And speaking on health, I mean I think Americans are taught that nowadays that pork might be not healthy. But being in North Carolina for the past week I'm—you know, I'm hearing different. What are your thoughts on that?

00:56:34

DW: Well, you're probably hearing that it's the other white meat and that's true. If—if you cook the barbecue coals the grease is going to drip away from the meat and you will lose about forty-five-percent of the weight of the shoulder when you cook it, because the grease drips out of it. Now that doesn't mean it doesn't have any fat left in it because that's one thing that flavors the—the meat so well. But the—the meat itself if—when you add the sauce you may be adding some sugar back into it or some product like that, but as far as the—the meat itself is concerned it is very lean and has very little—little fat in it.

00:57:19

RF: Your thoughts on that?

00:57:21

JDW: I agree. I have read—I don't—I can't remember where I read this but: a well-done shoulder cooked over the pit is—is low-fat as a chicken breast. I find that hard to believe but I have heard that, you know.

00:57:35

DW: That's why it's called the other white meat. You know it's—it's relative to the—to the chicken comparison. But our sauce is sweet, so it's got sugar in it. So if someone is diabetic then they may have a problem with that. [*Laughs*]

00:57:51

JDW: Stick with vinegar and hot sauce, you know.

00:57:54

RF: Okay; well unless y'all have any concluding thoughts, I want to thank y'all.

00:58:00

DW: Thank you; we appreciate you coming by.

00:58:02

RF: All right; I enjoyed this very much.

00:58:03

JDW: It's been a pleasure. Thanks so much.

00:58:05

RF: Thank you.

00:58:09

[End David Wilson & John David Wilson — Short Sugar's Pit Bar-B-Q]