

ANDREW POLLARD
A&R Bar-B-Que – Memphis, TN

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Interviewer: Rien Fertel for the Southern Foodways Alliance
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
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[Begin Andrew Pollard-A&R Interview]

00:00:01

Rien Fertel: This is Rien Fertel from the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is just past noon on July 7, 2008, a Monday. I am here at 1802 Elvis Presley Boulevard in Memphis, Tennessee, with Andrew Pollard of A&R Bar-B-Que. Mr. Pollard can you please just introduce yourself by stating your name and your birth date, please?

00:00:25

Andrew Pollard: How ya doing? My name is Andrew Pollard and my birthday is February 22, 1945. [*Laughs*]

00:00:36

RF: Okay; and—and you are the owner of A&R Bar-B-Que?

00:00:39

AP: Yes; I am owner and founder of A&R.

00:00:43

RF: Okay; and as I understand A&R goes back more than two decades. Can you talk about how old the restaurant is and when you founded it?

00:00:53

AP: The—the restaurant is 25 and a half years old and we founded it in 1983. I was—what it was, I had worked for a meat packer for about 20 years and they decided to leave the area and that's when we decided to open up a—a restaurant to try to feed the kids, so—. [*Laughs*]

00:01:20

RF: Were these your own kids?

00:01:23

AP: Yes, yes; they were and we started out in a little bitty room next door really and we mostly did carry-outs and it grew to the point that people—we couldn't get people in that store, so we bought this location here which is next door and—and it's been—we've been going strong ever since.

00:01:46

RF: And it—and it started off as pork barbecue?

00:01:48

AP: Well we would do—yes, pork and beef brisket; we also did beef brisket also.

00:01:57

RF: Okay; and so I'm guessing the A&R stands for—A is you?

00:02:01

AP: That's correct.

00:02:01

RF: And R?

00:02:03

AP: R is my wife, Rose.

00:02:05

RF: Okay; and so let me understand. This is the original location here.

00:02:12

AP: Yes.

00:02:12

RF: And there are more than one location?

00:02:14

AP: Yes, there are; we have—we have another—two more locations. We try to keep them about 20 minutes apart from each other so they won't kill each other. But we've got one on Hickory Hill in Winchester and we also have another out near Wolf Chase Mall on Highway 64. My son is at that location and my daughter is at the location at Hickory Hill in Winchester.

00:02:41

RF: Okay; well let's talk a bit about your history. As I understand, you are from Memphis, Tennessee?

00:02:46

AP: That's correct; I am.

00:02:47

RF: And how—what do you remember perhaps in your childhood about barbecue? Did your parents barbecue at home? Did you go out and eat barbecue?

00:03:02

AP: No; we didn't. We didn't go out to eat barbecue. We were too poor. My dad was a great cook. I mean he could—he could cook anything and he would get an old tub and put a rack out of the stove over it and put coals in it and barbecue there and we kind of picked it up from him. I guess we come from a long line of talented men because—in our—in our family all the men could cook. But my dad you know we picked up things from him the way—the way he would fix barbecue.

00:03:36

RF: What—what was your father's name?

00:03:38

AP: His name was Alonzo Pollard, Jr.

00:03:40

RF: And he was from this area also?

00:03:42

AP: Well no; he was born in Mississippi and he moved to Memphis in 1944, a year before I was born.

00:03:56

RF: So was he from the country and—?

00:03:56

AP: Yes; yes, he was. He was from the country.

00:03:58

RF: And—and do you think being born or living in the country as he was affected the way he cooked barbecue or made him cook barbecue?

00:04:09

AP: Well maybe; I know most people from the country knew how to take different things and add seasoning to it and make it taste—taste good. But I—I think being a good cook it was a gift you know. I can say that much. *[Laughs]*

00:04:28

RF: Would he cook only pork?

00:04:33

AP: Well he—he could really cook anything. I mean he could cook chicken, fish, I mean anything. He could even—I mean bologna; I mean he—he could cook all of it. He could—I mean not only barbecue but in the kitchen you know he—he was a Master Chef and he—and you know, we picked up a lot of things from him.

00:04:56

RF: What was his day job here in Memphis?

00:04:58

AP: Well he also worked for the meat packer. He worked for Wilson Packing Company when he first come to Memphis and later on a company called John Morrell took over and when we finished school we went out to—to work with our dad also.

00:05:16

RF: And just a couple more questions about what he cooked. Did—did he cook on special—when he barbecued, did he barbecue for special occasions, holidays, weekends?

00:05:29

AP: Well quite often but especially holidays you know was a great day for us you know. He would—I mean we'd have all the family over and he'd make his own sauce and I mean it was just great, great food and great fellowship that we would have together as a family.

00:05:52

RF: So did any of his recipes—maybe his sauce or the—the way he—he cooked—. Well let me ask you this first; did he teach you how to cook or did you sit and watch him?

00:06:03

AP: Yeah; we would—we would at—at our home we had to cook anyway. My mom would say you make the cornbread and [*Laughs*] you make the cake or you make the lemonade, so we come up having to cook and do chores, wash—we knew how to wash; we could do everything around the house. But we—we picked it up from them how to cook you know and—and like I say I think it's kind of a gift anyway, even my—my son is a great cook, you know so—. It's just a gift that we have too.

00:06:36

RF: Do you cook at home too?

00:06:39

AP: Yes; my wife loves to cook too but I do get an opportunity to cook at home on occasions, especially holidays. She wants me to barbecue and, you know we have people over and very—we never go out to eat barbecue. We always eat our own.

00:06:57

RF: What do you like to cook at home?

00:06:59

AP: The baby back ribs; that's my wife's favorite—the loin-back ribs, yes.

00:07:07

RF: And so I think what I was going to ask you originally, did the way your dad barbecued did—does it affect this restaurant here? Did it carry over to the sauce or the recipes here?

00:07:19

AP: Yes; it—it really did because the—the—the—before I opened the store up, the same taste and the way we cooked it at home, it was so good to us and our friends. So we used the same recipe when I—when we opened our stores. Now my—my sauce, my wife kind of changed it a little bit. You know we got some pointers from her on—on that, but the same taste that we enjoyed we just said well maybe some more folk will enjoy that also. So that's—that's the way we cook it.

00:07:57

RF: So you—you opened in 1983, A&R Bar-B-Que and you said you wanted to—to feed the kids. What—what made you really want to open a restaurant? It's—it's a tough business right?

00:08:08

AP: Well I didn't know it at the time. I—all I knew is I didn't have a job and I knew it was something that—that I could do and I was—I really was inspired from a—a friend of mine who also worked at the meat packer where we were and he opened up a little old sandwich place and—and he—he—he did—did well there. It was a business that another old lady used to have and she closed and she gave him the recipe to her—to her slaw. It was a kind of a sweet pickle like slaw and I tell you people would come from all around to eat those big hotdogs and the slaw

that she would put them on ‘em. And I went by there and talked with him and it really encouraged me, and inspired me to try to do something for myself.

00:09:05

RF: And what was the name of his restaurant?

00:09:07

AP: Tyler’s Place on Park Avenue.

00:09:12

RF: And—and you’ve outlasted his restaurant?

00:09:13

AP: Well yeah; he got a little bit older and he closed down, so—.

00:09:18

RF: Okay; well let’s talk about what you do here. You cook shoulder, ribs, brisket like you said.

Describe the cooking process if you can; what—what fuel do you use, what kind of cooker?

00:09:30

AP: Okay; we use the old-fashioned method—open pit. We—we use—we got a smokehouse out in back, at this original location and the—it’s lined with—with steel and we’ve got—let me see 10,000 fire bricks around it, so it’s really like a smoke oven like. And the meat is directly over the pit and we cook our shoulders about 14—15 hours and ribs we—you know we cook

them—we don't leave them on overnight but our shoulders we do. We leave them on—overnight at least 14—15 hours our shoulders and our—and our beef briskets.

00:10:15

RF: And—and what kind of fuel do you use? Do you use wood or coal?

00:10:18

AP: We—we use the—a blend of hickory charcoal and we use hardwood also—hardwood coals. The hardwood seems to—to maintain the heat longer and, you know because you need a longer heat for your shoulders and the hickory coals give it the taste—the flavor that we want.

00:10:44

RF: The hardwood is that oak?

00:10:46

AP: One is for heat and one is for seasoning. Yes oak; uh-hm.

00:10:50

RF: And you also do a brisket; how do you cook that?

00:10:52

AP: We do the brisket the same way. We also cook it the same length of time like we do the—the pork shoulder. The only difference—we'll, the beef brisket we'll have it higher away from the fire, probably on the top rack because it can't stand the amount of heat that the shoulder can

stand. And also our pork shoulder we always cook it with the skin down—fat side down. That will protect the—the lean and also it will cause the grease to drip and—and keep—and fuel your fire, so you maintain a—a constant amount of heat on your fire.

00:11:33

RF: Has—has your menu changed over the 25 years? Has it remained the—basically the same?

00:11:40

AP: Well we started out—the basic things that we started with we haven't—I mean we kept that but we've increased our menu. But just the basic things—pork ribs, the barbecue ribs, the pork shoulder, beef brisket, and the smoked sausage, bologna—we always—we maintained that but we've added things over the years like the hickory smoked wings, the catfish, and turkey breast, smoked—smoked turkey breast and—and chicken, turkey legs, and things of that nature.

00:12:16

RF: I see hot tamales on your menu. And the Southern Foodways Alliance has a—a great interest in Mississippi Delta tamales; are they Mississippi Delta style, the ones you serve here?

00:12:28

AP: Well I—I imagine—I say they're mid-South style. It's the kind that most people like in Memphis, you know. Most people, you know these were really made locally here you know, so I—I never tried the—the other but I know that this is the kind that we've been eating all our lives you know, as long as I can remember and I'm 63.

00:12:57

RF: Did—did your father make tamales?

00:13:00

AP: No; he didn't make tamales.

00:13:03

RF: I don't believe I asked you; what town was he born in? You told me what—?

00:13:06

AP: Darling, Mississippi, a little town in Darling down in Quitman County.

00:13:13

RF: Okay; let's talk about the area that we're in now. We're on Elvis Presley Boulevard.

00:13:16

AP: Yes.

00:13:17

RF: This isn't the original name of this road. What—what was the original name?

00:13:22

AP: Before Elvis Presley it was Bellevue.

00:13:26

RF: It was Bellevue and when did they rename it?

00:13:28

AP: I guess once Elvis was famous, a part of it they named Elvis Presley Boulevard. See, Elvis, his mansion is about two miles north of—I mean south of here, so Elvis Presley Boulevard starts about three-quarters of a mile north of where we are, so we're on—.

00:13:50

RF: Bellevue changes into Elvis Presley?

00:13:51

AP: Yeah; Boulevard—yes.

00:13:53

RF: Okay; what else would you like to say about this neighborhood?

00:13:58

AP: Well it's—it's an old neighborhood, got families that have been around here for—for years. They call the area Bunker Hill, B-u-n-k-e-r—Bunker Hill and it's—it's a nice neighborhood, a lot of old families that been here.

00:14:14

RF: Do you know why they call it—excuse me—do you know why they call it Bunker Hill?

00:14:18

AP: I don't have a clue. *[Laughs]*

00:14:22

RF: It would be interesting to find out. So tell me about—there's—there's something very famous on your menu. I've read about it in books; it's in the book, *Smokestack Lightning*, your pies—your fried pies. Can you talk about them?

00:14:34

AP: Well yes; we—very few people have the pies that we have. They're—they're fried pies and we—we have three kinds of pies. We—we sell a fried peach pie, a fried apple pie, and fried sweet potato, and we make out our own crusts, original crusts and it's—when you—the way to tell if our crust is right when you bite it, it should flake in your—*[Laughs]*—flake on your chest, you know.

00:15:12

RF: Is the crust made with—with lard?

00:15:14

AP: Well we use—we use Crisco®, yeah that's—that's one of the ingredients. We use—it's Crisco® and we use the dried peaches. They're very expensive but we use the dried peaches. We—we make the pies the way that our grandparents made them and matter of fact, even the—the idea of cooking them came from a lady that used to make them for me. She was a—the Head Chef at a historic restaurant called Justine's in Memphis for years and she would make those pies

and—and she didn't have the equipment that we've got. She would knead and roll them out with her hand—with a rolling pin and—.

00:15:55

RF: Would—would she make them here or at home?

00:15:59

AP: Well she would make them—she would make them at home and sometime I guess she would make them at work or whatever, but she'd—she—she would make them at home.

00:16:08

RF: Would she fry them at home too or she would make them and fry them here?

00:16:12

AP: Yeah; she would because of being a restaurant she would have to do that here, yeah. But she was—she was a great cook and I picked up some things from her and once she reached the point where she couldn't supply, so I kind of figured the recipe out. She gave us some hints but I—I worked with it until I got it about as close as she had it.

00:16:36

RF: And her name was Maudie Walker Horton correct?

00:16:38

AP: Yes; that's correct.

00:16:39

RF: And where—was she from Memphis? Where did you meet her?

00:16:45

AP: We met her years ago; she was—she was from Memphis as far as we know. I think she might have come from Mississippi when she was a child but she—as long as I been knowing she lived in Memphis.

00:17:01

RF: And she was sort of a famous cook here in—?

00:17:02

AP: Oh—oh yeah; she has—she has recipes—I don't think she got credit for them but she had recipes in cookbooks you know, famous cookbooks.

00:17:13

RF: And when did you add pies to the menu?

00:17:19

AP: Really, it was a year or two after we opened, you know. My wife had met her and she said this—this lady makes these pies, hey are so good. Because my wife would get her pies and take them to work with her. And the people at—at her job would—would buy the pies. So and—so my wife said, she's wondering if you would want to sell some at your store.

00:17:47

RF: Was Miss Walker, was she selling them out of her house at the time when your wife had them?

00:17:52

AP: She—she really was. She was making them at home and—and—and my wife would go by and pick them up, and my wife would take them to work with her and her friends and co-workers there on the job would buy them.

00:18:09

RF: And tell me about the—you were talking before about the sweet potatoes. Can you talk about how you make them?

00:18:15

AP: Yes; we use—we buy sweet potatoes by the bushel. I mean Grade-A sweet potatoes; we bake our sweet potatoes. We don't use canned sweet potatoes. We bake our sweet potatoes and we peel them and add ingredients to them, the butter, and the spices and mix it up and that's—that's how we—that's how we make our sweet potatoes.

00:18:38

RF: So you bake your own sweet potatoes overnight and—?

00:18:41

AP: Well I'll be baking some in a few minutes. I will—yeah; [*Laughs*]—yeah we—.

00:18:46

RF: And so the pies are an everyday process?

00:18:49

AP: Yes, yes; it is an everyday process. We—we try to make enough to last a day so we could start out with fresh pies every day.

00:19:00

RF: And do the other two stores sell the pies also?

00:19:03

AP: Yes; they sell them but the customers know they're at this location and they're used to these, so we sell five times as many as the rest of 'em because I guess it's something about the original location, old building with sauce on the wall and [*Laughs*]—.

00:19:23

RF: Well let's—let's—you mentioned—well I have questions about the sauce but before—

00:19:28

AP: Okay.

00:19:28

RF: —that one more question about the pies. You said they reminded you of your grandparents. Were your grandparents also from Mississippi and do you remember their pies?

00:19:35

AP: Yeah; my grandparents and my mom really because my mom and dad, they picked up things from their—their parents so I—I just said go back to grandparents you know and the way they—the way they cook, yes.

00:19:50

RF: Okay; let's talk about the sauce. Do you have two types of sauce—a hot and a mild?

00:19:57

AP: Yeah; we—we've got a hot and—and a mild. Most people like mild but people that like hot you know, we've—we've got a good hot. Our hot isn't an overpowering hot; you know it's one you could—you know you can deal with but we—we do hot also. And we also do a dry rub you know like—you know most—we—our business started out with our sauce and that's what folk liked so we—we do little—very little dry rub but we do have it when—when people ask for it.

00:20:32

RF: The dry rub goes on the ribs?

00:20:32

AP: Yes; we—yeah you rub the ribs after they come off the pit hot and we don't—we don't put our sauce on our—on our ribs while we cook them because some customers don't want sauce on

their ribs, so that's the point. If I was cooking them—and when I cook them at home I do put sauce on my ribs once they get about done and I baste them with the sauce, but not at the store.

00:21:00

RF: Okay; and how would you describe your sauce? Is it—is it sweet; is it tomato(ey)?

00:21:05

AP: Well, here in Memphis, all the restaurants I know, we use a ketchup base, you know, a ketchup base, and our sauce is a sweet tangy sauce. It got a little tang to it, little lemony taste but you kind of feel it on your tongue. It'll hit your tongue a little bit and you'll feel it, the—a little tangy sweet taste.

00:21:30

RF: Uh-hm; so you have a really great slogan here at the restaurant I think. It's written on all the walls and on—on the backs of shirts. Can you say it and—and tell me how you come up with that or when you came up with that? **[Laughs]**

00:21:44

AP: It really wasn't—wasn't my idea. And we haven't used it long. My son-in-law come up with that a few years ago—*anybody can put the heat to the meat but only a few can barbecue.*

[Laughs] But I'm not even saying it was original but it's just something that he come up with and it sounded good, and we kind of went with it.

00:22:08

RF: Did you like it immediately or was it a fight to get it—?

00:22:12

AP: Yeah; it—it was catchy you know. Yeah; it—it was catchy so we—I said that’s good.

[Laughs]

00:22:18

RF: Okay; all right. **[Laughs]** Let’s talk about—you said you don't eat barbecue elsewhere in Memphis. Do you visit other restaurants?

00:22:27

AP: Yes; I—we—we eat out but very seldom do I eat barbecue anywhere else. I just—I like my taste and people that like my taste come here. **[Laughs]** You know I’m not knocking nobody else’s but—but I like my taste and people that like our taste, they come here. Those that like the other taste go elsewhere. **[Laughs]**

00:22:54

RF: Right; well what do you think it is about Memphis and barbecue that go together? It seems everybody here eats barbecue, right?

00:23:01

AP: I really don't know. I guess it’s like New York and pizza I guess. **[Laughs]** It’s—it’s hard to tell; it’s just something that all of us do. On holidays you’re in the neighborhood, you drive through; it—people are smoking and you smell the smoke and the sauce burning and it—it’s

been that way all of my life, you know. Even when we were growing up, all the neighbors that—
I mean we would do that.

00:23:29

RF: And do you still enjoy barbecuing at home? Do you still get a chance to or—?

00:23:36

AP: I love to barbecue; I mean any holiday, just—I like to get out there and get the smoke going and—and kind of get the neighbors a peeping out you know. Where I live very few people barbecue; they buy, you know, but [*Laughs*] that's you know, part of the fun of it is cooking yourself and you know the smell of the smoke and the meat cooking, you know.

00:24:01

RF: They buy it from restaurants; they—they pick up from restaurants?

00:24:04

AP: Yeah; most of my friends do—neighbors, yeah.

00:24:06

RF: Well why do you think that is? Is it time or do you think there's so many great restaurants to eat barbecue at in Memphis?

00:24:13

AP: Well my particular neighbors probably don't know how to. And but I do have one next door; now he and I—we barbecue a lot together. He—he enjoys it; we pass the slab of ribs over the fence. *[Laughs]* You know—

RF: Really, *[Laughs]* like on two pits?

00:24:30

AP: Yeah; we will. You try mine and see how you like this.

00:24:32

RF: Really? *[Laughs]*

00:24:33

AP: Yeah.

00:24:33

RF: So is it a competition thing or—?

00:24:36

AP: Well not really; he thinks I'm the pro but he's—he's—he's as good as a pro. I have to say that.

00:24:44

RF: Okay; well how—how do you think barbecue has changed in Memphis? Do you think it has in the past 25 years? I mean your restaurant has been around longer than most places.

00:24:55

AP: Yes; that's correct.

00:24:57

RF: How do you think things have changed—not just here but in barbecue restaurants in Memphis?

00:25:03

AP: Most—one thing I will say that most of the barbecue places that been around for years are still here. And there are some that pop up that make it and some don't. You know usually like say that's a hard market, you know—restaurants anyway you know, 90-percent of them close down in a couple years. But if—if you got a—you got a good taste you know usually it's a good business to be in—in this area.

00:25:34

RF: Okay; well would you like to add anything else?

00:25:37

AP: No; I enjoyed the interview with you and I hope it was helpful and I would invite everybody to come and just try out A&R Bar-B-Que and see what you think of it.

00:25:49

RF: Okay; well that's a good note to end on. Thank you very much.

00:25:51

AP: All right; thank you.

00:25:55

[End Andrew Pollard-A&R Interview]