

RICKY & ZACH PARKER
Scott's/Parker's Barbecue- Lexington, TN

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Location: Scott's/Parker's Barbecue– Lexington, TN
Interviewer: Rien Fertel for the Southern Foodways Alliance
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 56 minutes
Project: Southern Barbecue Trail – Tennessee

[Begin Ricky & Zach Parker-Scott's BARBECUE]**00:00:01**

Rien Fertel: This is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. I am on the Barbecue Trail in Lexington, Tennessee. It is July 23, 2008, a—a Wednesday morning, very early in the morning around 7:30. I am at Scott's BARBECUE with Mr. Ricky Parker and his son, Zach. We're first going to talk to Zach a bit; it's going to be a different style of interview today. They can't sit down; they have to work, so I'm going to interview them in action. It's going to mean an action interview and I'm going to ask Zach to introduce himself and then I'm going to shout out on some questions when he—while he lifts the new pigs they're putting on today.

00:00:50

Zach Parker: My name is Zach. I was born May 20, 1991.

00:00:53

RF: Okay; and how long have you been here since this morning?

00:00:56

ZP: Since about 7 o'clock.

00:01:00

RF: Okay; so how many pigs are y'all putting on today?

00:01:08

ZP: Three.

00:01:10

RF: Okay; and how much do these pigs weigh?

00:01:11

ZP: Between 180 and 200 pounds.

00:01:14

RF: Okay; now is this—is this your job? Is this how you start your morning?

00:01:20

ZP: No; I start my morning with flipping hogs first and then I come over here. We get the pits cleaned out and get the hogs on the truck and get ready to put them on.

00:01:32

RF: When did you first start working here? How old were you?

00:01:35

ZP: Since I was about 13.

00:01:38

RF: Thirteen; and when you put these pigs onto—you have a rail system kind of like what I saw yesterday at the slaughterhouse at Hays'. When you put the—when you bring the pigs from the slaughterhouse here are you able to lift them up?

00:01:51

ZP: Yes.

00:01:51

RF: Okay; no pulley system?

00:01:54

ZP: No pulley system.

00:01:55

RF: Can you describe to me what you're about to do?

00:01:59

ZP: Well we're about to pull the hogs onto this rack and we're going to carry them in there and sit them on the pit, cut the feet off, and slice them down the middle, and we're going to flip them onto the cooking pit.

00:02:07

RF: You're going to slice them down the spine?

00:02:10

ZP: Yes; sir.

00:02:10

RF: But you don't split them?

00:02:12

ZP: Well we don't cut them in half, no; uh-uh. We just slice them where they'll lay right on the pit.

00:02:17

Ricky Parker: And then they would replace my hogs with somebody else's.

00:02:23

RF: And you can tell right away?

00:02:25

RP: Oh yeah; I can tell when I cook them.

00:02:27

RF: When you cook them? Can I turn this on; I want to start asking questions—not about them, not about the—but about your hogs?

00:02:35

RP: Yeah.

00:02:35

RF: I'm going to ask you to introduce yourself for the Southern Foodways and tell us your birth date. All right; so I'm going to ask Mr. Parker to introduce himself.

00:02:45

RP: I'm Ricky Parker. I'm 46 years-old, born February 19, 1962.

00:02:51

RF: Okay; so we just put on three hogs.

00:02:52

RP: Yes; sir.

00:02:55

RF: What kind of hogs do you use?

00:02:56

RP: Half Duroc and half Yorkshire.

00:02:58

RF: And where do you get them from?

00:02:58

RP: Roger Gill.

00:03:01

RF: Where—where does he farm them; where does he grow them?

00:03:02

RP: He grows about 10 miles from my place of business; he has a farm house that he raises them from ground up. What I mean—he don't go out here and select hogs. He goes and he raises them from babies up, which I've got a certain type of boar and a certain type of a gilt that he—he raises my hogs from. It ain't one that you go out here to a—what you would call a sale barn and buy. I don't do that.

00:03:41

RF: And you were telling me yesterday that he feeds them a special diet that you pick?

00:03:43

RP: Yeah; uh-hm.

00:03:43

RF: What's he feed them?

00:03:44

RP: Well that I can't say. [*Laughs*] Yeah; it's just—it's a different supplement. It's—it's about more than just corn fed.

00:03:50

RF: Okay; but it is a corn-based diet?

00:03:53

RP: Yes; yes, yes.

00:03:53

RF: And the three that we put on today we established how much they weigh; your son told us that, but how old were they?

00:04:00

RP: These hogs are approximately six months old.

00:04:01

RF: Six months old, and you said that you can tell the difference between these and others after they're butchered?

00:04:06

RP: Yes.

00:04:08

RF: And while they cook? How exactly; can you kind of describe that?

00:04:11

RP: Yeah; the hogs that we cook has got like a three-percent fat, all right. The ones that other people have they either have a 10-percent fat or they ain't got no fat at all. So the marbling of the hog has got everything to do with the cooking of the hog.

00:04:26

RF: So it's a pretty lean hog.

00:04:27

RP: Yeah; basically but still you got marbling like you do in a steak if you ever look at a steak and you see the marbling that's in it.

00:04:34

RF: And how much inch on the back is—is—or how—how much—?

00:04:39

RP: Approximately about anywhere from three-quarters of an inch to an inch.

00:04:42

RF: Okay; of fat on the back of the hog?

00:04:44

RP: Uh-huh; yeah.

00:04:46

RF: Now you just laid a bunch of kind of corrugated cardboard on top of the pits; what does that do?

00:04:52

RP: That will seal in the—the heat and the smoke itself. It—it basically—it's used like the older generation when they had—owned wells and stuff they used to wrap their water pipe in

newspaper to keep them from freezing. All right; if you use that same concept you can do the same thing with the heat. You can insulate the heat and keep the heat in, same—same concept.

00:05:17

RF: And there's no fire hazard even though it's paper on—near fire?

00:05:22

RP: Yes; there is. Now you—you will have fire—fire problems. I can show you—we got to change this cardboard out once a week. Well there's one right there for instance.

00:05:36

RF: Is it because it gets too greasy?

00:05:36

RP: No, no; it just—it gets too hot. And—and I mean it just breaks. [*Claps*]

00:05:42

RF: Oh and it turns this color?

00:05:44

RP: Right, right; so I got a company, Kirby Containers, I have them make my boxes for me.

00:05:53

RF: They cut them to size?

00:05:54

RP: They cut them to size.

00:05:55

RF: Wow.

00:05:56

RP: Now I was getting them from Sears & Roebuck in Jackson but the older gentleman retired that was getting—getting them for me, so I had to go to another—I had to go to a company and actually start buying the cardboard. So of course that's another cost.

00:06:13

RF: Can—can I—can we establish the—the first things? How long have you been here?

00:06:20

RP: Since 1976.

00:06:23

RF: Since 1976 and how long have you owned the place?

00:06:27

RP: Since 1989.

00:06:30

RF: And in '76 you were how old then?

00:06:32

RP: Fourteen.

00:06:33

RF: And do you have a little time to describe how—how you got started here?

00:06:39

RP: Not—not at this particular—we can't.

00:06:43

RF: We'll ask again. So I just watched Zach put some coals under the hogs. Is—is there an art to doing that?

00:06:52

ZP: Yeah; yeah. If you don't do it right you could burn up the hogs. You just got to make it even, make everything flat.

00:07:00

RF: You—you make the coals flat on the ground?

00:07:01

ZP: Yes.

00:07:04

RF: What do you do about the ashes because there's lots of ashes from the coals? How do you keep them from—from kind of billowing up?

00:07:11

ZP: You got to clean the pits out every morning before you put the hogs on.

00:07:17

RF: Now what kind of wood is this?

00:07:20

ZP: Do what now?

00:07:20

RF: What kind of wood is this? Is this hickory wood?

00:07:24

ZP: It's hickory, yeah.

00:07:25

RF: Okay; and—and where do you get it from? Do you know?

00:07:27

ZP: Oh we get it from—I think his name is Jeff Gambrill. He owns a sawmill in Savannah I believe.

00:07:39

RF: Now how long does it take this hickory to burn down the coals? They're about three or four-foot long cut boards; how long does it take?

00:07:49

ZP: Probably 45 minutes to an hour.

00:07:52

RF: Okay. And do you keep this fire—you have a fire about 12-feet from the hogs in between the restaurant and the—the pit building. You keep this going all night long or all day long?

00:08:04

ZP: All night; yeah.

00:08:06

RF: So what is—what are your—what is your earliest memory at this restaurant; can you remember?

00:08:17

ZP: Uh.

00:08:18

RF: Or earlier memories; what do you remember from a kid coming here?

00:08:21

ZP: Probably mopping at night; yeah—mopping.

00:08:26

RF: And what—what age did you start doing that?

00:08:29

ZP: Probably seven or eight.

00:08:31

RF: And at what point do you remember eating barbecue here?

00:08:33

ZP: About—about around the same time.

00:08:37

RF: Okay; did you—I mean did you start off younger than that eating the barbecue?

00:08:42

ZP: Yeah; yeah.

00:08:44

RF: I mean as soon as I guess you could eat food you were eating barbecue here?

00:08:47

ZP: Yeah; yeah pretty much—yeah.

00:08:49

RF: Tell us how you—tell us how you order your barbecue sandwich here.

00:08:52

ZP: Pulled middlin', mild sauce, and slaw.

00:08:56

RF: Uh-hm; what's the—what's the most difficult part of this job?

00:09:01

ZP: It's all pretty difficult.

00:09:07

RF: Right; did—I mean at one point—you said you started working here four years ago full-time. Are you full-time here with your father; you're here all day long with him?

00:09:16

ZP: Yes; until—until I go back to school.

00:09:16

RF: Okay; until you go back to school. It's more of a summer job now?

00:09:20

ZP: Yes.

00:09:22

RF: And when school starts do you come after school?

00:09:22

ZP: Yes; I do.

00:09:25

RF: Okay; what—what grade are you in?

00:09:27

ZP: I'll be a senior this year in high school.

00:09:30

RF: Okay; and what are your plans after school?

00:09:33

ZP: I plan on going to college and getting my Business Degree and coming back and running Scott's BARBECUE.

00:09:38

RF: Okay; can you tell me about that? Do you have—what are your dreams about Scott's BARBECUE?

00:09:45

ZP: I plan on coming back and running this place and maybe trying to make a franchise out of it.

00:09:48

RF: Okay; what do you think makes Scott's BARBECUE special or better? I don't know if you've had other barbecue; you might not have had. *[Laughs]* But you know—you know this place is good and you know your dad has something special. Why do you think it's good?

00:10:02

ZP: Because we do it the old-fashioned way; we don't use ovens and stuff to cook our barbecue in.

00:10:08

RF: And is there anyone else doing it this way in Tennessee?

00:10:11

ZP: Not that I know of.

00:10:14

RF: Okay; and do you think—do you think this—this would take? Do you think you could open another one?

00:10:18

ZP: Oh yeah for sure; really.

00:10:21

RF: And could you—how much longer do you think you have until you—or do you feel comfortable now? Could you run a place like this?

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ZP: Yes; yes.

00:10:30

RF: How long did that take to feel really comfortable?

00:10:32

ZP: This year.

00:10:34

RF: This year?

00:10:34

ZP: Yeah.

00:10:36

RF: What was the moment? Was there a moment?

00:10:38

ZP: No, not really.

00:10:38

RF: It just felt—?

00:10:41

ZP: Yeah.

00:10:45

RF: So Mr. Parker, I have to ask you a few questions about the beginning—how you got started here. Can you tell me how you met Mr. Scott?

00:10:55

RP: Yeah; basically I started pumping gas at a service station and he—I had met—I met him filling his truck up one day and me and my dad had—had problems and that's when he threw me out of the house when I was 13. And then when he done that then Mr. and Mrs. Scott sort of took me in and then that's how me and him met. That's how it got me started in doing this.

00:11:24

RF: And Mr. Early Scott was the owner of Scott's BARBECUE at the time?

00:11:27

RP: Yes; yes.

00:11:30

RF: And so he took you to work here. Where are you originally from?

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RP: Memphis.

00:11:36

RF: Did you have experience in barbecue there? Do you remember eating at old barbecue restaurants in your family with your family?

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RP: Bozo's.

00:11:43

RF: Just in Mason just north of the City?

00:11:44

RP: Uh-huh; yes, sir.

00:11:46

RF: Why did you move to this—to Lexington?

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RP: That was my parents' doing; that wasn't me.

00:11:53

RF: And did they—when—when Mr. Scott had his place were there other whole hog barbecue places in town back then?

00:12:00

RP: There was one more and it was Asball's Barbecue and it was on the other side of town, which is no longer there.

00:12:10

RF: And do you remember why Mr. Scott got into this business?

00:12:14

RP: He traded two school buses for this business.

00:12:17

RF: Really; so—so this—this—this restaurant, this building was already a barbecue place?

00:12:21

RP: Yeah somewhat; it was a little shack.

00:12:26

RF: And why did he have two school buses?

00:12:28

RP: That's what—that's what he done; he drove school buses carrying kids back and forth to school. He got tired of driving; he couldn't make—he said he couldn't make a living at it.

00:12:36

RF: So he traded two school buses. Can you tell me about those early days—how hard it was? Do you remember your—your first day maybe?

00:12:47

RP: Yeah; it was different. It was nothing I wasn't never used to but I've always—my dad and mother has always been like sharecroppers. My dad always got us up. There was five of us kids—always would get us up and we would go—this is when we was living in Florida. We moved back and forth—Florida to Michigan. And we'd have to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and go out and pick oranges or pick apples, whichever place we was at, until it was time to go to school and then we'd go to school. And when we'd get out of school we'd go right back to the field again. So the work wasn't—wasn't a big thing to me; I was—that was—my dad bred that into me. The work wasn't so much as being hard that it was the hours was the biggest thing 'cause when I started helping Mr. Scott I was a sophomore in high school. I would work 80 hours a week and go to school too. And that was tough, but there again, I—you know I had—I had to get immune to doing that. And at the age of 17 and a half, I was three months graduating from high school and Mr. Scott told me, he said why don't you just quit school and you come to work? He said you done learned all you going to learn in school. He said now let me learn you about life. So I just—that's where it all really began right there, and he taught me a lot about living. He taught—he's got morals. He had morals about him—very common, common sense; he's got a lot of common sense, which he didn't have but a third grade education. But he had a lot of common sense.

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RF: Was he from Lexington—born and raised?

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RP: Yes; yes, sir.

00:14:43

RF: What kind of man was he? You—you told me that he—that he kind of raised you as a son at some point.

00:14:52

RP: Yes, sir; yes, sir.

00:14:52

RF: What—what kind of man was he outside of the business?

00:14:56

RP: The same; he was the same person any day that you met him—wherever he was at—it didn't make any difference. He was the same person.

00:15:08

RF: Did he enjoy the—the hard work, the—the long hours?

00:15:13

RP: Uh, no; well I mean he done it because he had to do it but once I come in the picture then he could back off a little bit you know, which I'm not going to say he didn't like the hard work. But he didn't have to do it—do it as much 'cause he seen that my eyes was focused on what I'm doing. And I—I grasp a whole—I didn't—I didn't run around; I didn't get out here and party like a lot of kids do or anything like that. When he was here I was here. When he went home I went home and that was basically how that is, so I mean I'm married to this place more than I am my wife. And the kids will tell—my—my two kids will tell you that—they two boys there.

00:16:14

RF: The process of cooking a whole hog here, did you keep it the same from Mr. Scott's process or did you change it? And if so, how did you change it; did you make it better—?

00:16:27

RP: Yeah; I didn't change a whole lot. I learnt more about it far as—we talked about the genetics of the hog. All right; the—far as the—the insulation of the cardboard, I—I changed that up a little bit. All right; the amount of fire that I put up under the hogs and the timing with the hogs—.

00:16:52

RF: Did he used to do more or less fire?

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RP: He would do a lot more.

00:16:56

RF: So they would cook faster?

00:16:58

RP: No, not so much as faster but he was—how would you say—he thought if a fire—if you didn't have a fire burning then them hogs wasn't going to get done, all right. So that's—all right now I seen what he was talking about in one—in one sense, but there's another sense where I found out you build a big enough fire all right; when you're firing them hogs out there if the pit is too hot and you done fired off them—them coals you can leave them coals right there and cover them up with ashes, all right. Then if you—when the—the pit cools down, you can go back and you can rake the ashes off the top of them coals and the coals are still there. So then you're cutting back on your cost of the wood. You ain't having to burn as much.

00:18:00

RF: So there's a science to keeping the ashes and the coals—?

00:18:03

RP: Yeah; everything that we—everything that we do it's—it—it's all common—common sense but a lot of people don't—a lot of people think that you can learn it out of a book and—and you can't do it. You can't; there's no way. We got—I got a good friend, who—Don and I can't even think of his last name; he tried to get me to go in business with him in South Carolina.

00:18:37

RF: Similar—whole hog?

00:18:40

RP: Right; but he cooked in barrels and he—he stayed in business about a year and a half there and he tried to duplicate what we do here, the flavor, the taste, and he’s a well educated man. I mean he’s got degrees you would not believe, but after he closed, he come back to Lexington and he said there’s no way that you can duplicate what you do. There’s nothing you can build, no kind of electric stoves, no ovens; he said you cannot get the full flavor of what you’re doing.

00:19:14

RF: And what is about the—the construction of the pit ‘cause you—I think if you brought a—someone in here their first time and they looked at the pit they’d think it was pretty simple and they could build that in their backyard. But it—it can’t be ‘cause it gives—it must give a lot of flavor. How does the construction of the pit work? Is it—is it special or is it as simple as it looks?

00:19:37

RP: It’s simple in one—in one aspect and then in another aspect all right, the—the blocks that’s cut out where we fire at, all right that—that’s called—that’s like a draft. You’ll get a wind draft going through. All right; and this goes back to your common sense. If anybody has ever cooked on a charcoal grill at home, you shut your lid; the coals that you got in there it’s going to—you’re going to—what you might say—it’s going to cool the coals down. No air can get to it. All right; you open it up and when you’re cooking a steak or something and it drops on them coals it—the air is getting them coals hotter and you get a fire, so that makes them that much hotter. So all right then there again, this is going to gain you two or three hours of firing time on your hogs.

If you understand what I'm saying; once—once you all right—if you had for instance if you had maybe you can word it anyway you want to; if you—if I had a fire in here—this is on fire. All right; if you open that door, air gets in here—what's going to happen? It's—it's going—that's going to get hotter than a firecracker; it's going to burn up that much quicker. That's—that's the basic idea on—on them air pockets that's in that pit.

00:21:13

RF: How does day-to-day weather affect the cooking of whole hogs?

00:21:16

RP: Humidity—when there's a lot of dampness—**[Interruption]** hey young man—good, good. When humidity is real high it's harder to cook especially with concrete block and on a concrete floor and there's no air stirring, you've got a high humidity; it's—it's—I don't know; it's got—the ground itself it sweats you know and then it's just harder to keep them coals hot with the humidity when it's real high. Is it 9 o'clock hon?

00:22:09

RF: Can I ask a few more questions?

00:22:09

RP: Yeah.

00:22:10

RF: Tell—tell me about the—can—can we talk about the recipes? Does—you said you learned a lot of the process from Mr. Scott. Does the sauce—the barbecue sauce come from him also?

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RP: Yes, sir; yes, sir.

00:22:21

RF: And how—how many sauces do you have?

00:22:23

RP: Well we got a mild, medium, and a hot sauce which now I include a sweet sauce since I've took it over.

00:22:32

RF: Okay; so a fourth.

00:22:33

RP: Yeah; so—and the reason I done that a lot of people don't want nothing real spicy all right. You got people coming in from Memphis that eats Corky's, eats at Rendezvous and they're used to a—a rib or something like that. It's got a—like a hickory type based syrup type sauce or a ketchup based sauce, so I've got that just for people like that.

00:23:07

RF: Right; why do you think—your sauce is vinegar based. Why do you think—why do you think Lexington or this part of Tennessee is vinegar based and over there it's so sweet?

00:23:17

RP: I couldn't answer that question and be honest with you. I couldn't answer that.

00:23:19

RF: Well as—as a—I mean it's strange; as a bus driver how did Mr. Scott know how to cook? Did he make these sauces? Was he a cook at home?

00:23:32

RP: No, no; he got this sauce recipe from his mother.

00:23:33

RF: From his mother; what does his mother do?

00:23:35

RP: Well now his mother just a home—home—just a home-wife, a housewife, and see you're talking about this is back in the—in the '30s—in the 1930s when they didn't have a lot of hot sauce or anything like that so people made their own sauce at home. And that's—that's where that come from.

00:24:02

RF: Do you get a lot of kind of older customers come in and say that they used to cook whole hogs at home or on their farms?

00:24:09

RP: Yeah; we have a—you've got a few that does that, yeah. And they—they—several of them say I wouldn't—I'd like to do it every once in a while but I wouldn't do it every day.

00:24:21

RF: And you said your father was a sharecropper; did he ever cook whole hog?

00:24:25

RP: No.

00:24:25

RF: Did your family?

00:24:26

RP: No; sir.

00:24:28

RF: Does—why do you think—I mean I've been traveling around Tennessee and the more people I talk to they say that they remember their grandfathers or their fathers telling them that they used to cook whole hogs on the farm, if they grew up on the farms. Why—and that's all but

disappeared everywhere but this county and everywhere but your restaurant. Why do you think that is?

00:24:55

RP: Well it used to be a—more of a family get-together thing. And then they got to be—you got people that sits—sits at home. They're cooking a hog and then a half of them will get tired and they'll go and you got one man left there holding the bag and he's got to finish doing everything. Everybody is getting—everybody gets out of that. This day and time, everybody wants what they want when they want it and they—they depend on me to get that. They ain't got to go home and—and build them a block pit and throw a hog on. Hey let's go to Rick's; Rick will have it. And it's—it's more—it's a more convenient thing, which basically they're putting all the work on me is what it boils down to plus they can—when they come get it from me they still have their family outings but everybody—there ain't nobody going to be tired where they don't—being at a family function they can be right there, you know.

00:26:00

Fourth of July we had a gentleman come from Parsons on the 4th of July. He wanted a half a hog and he brought a barrel cooker up here and put it in his barrel cooker and he just pulled it to his house and he told them he cooked it. **[Laughs]** And I told him; I said I don't care. I said you're buying it from me and I said that's all that matters. You know I'm making you happy. So when you leave the parking lot with it I don't care you—who you tell cooked it but I mean I know I'm making y'all happy. And he just laughed at me. And he said no, I'm not going to tell them that, Rick. And I said you can't lie to me. **[Laughs]** I said—I said yeah; you will—you will. He said maybe a little bit. I'll tell them I done some of it.

00:26:48

RF: Oh.

00:26:48

RP: I don't—that don't bother me.

00:26:50

RF: Tell me about the 4th of July; it must be the busiest time of year. How many hogs did you cook this year?

00:26:55

RP: Forty—forty-four.

00:26:59

RF: Forty-four and what is the record?

00:27:01

RP: Sixty-seven.

00:27:01

RF: And you hope to—to beat that?

00:27:05

RP: Two years.

00:27:07

RF: And I think the reason that you can do that is maybe your new building—your new pit?

00:27:11

RP: Yes.

00:27:13

RF: How—how old is that building?

00:27:15

RP: Four—about four year-old, three year-old, something like that. I'm going to say three; yeah.

00:27:29

RF: Well I want to ask—I think the most interesting part of the cooking process—I've never seen it done; I need to stay here later today and see it, but I've seen it on film—is when you flip the hogs. Can you tell me what happens? How do you know when it's ready to be flipped?

00:27:40

RP: I can tell by touching the skin.

00:27:45

RF: Touching the outside, the skin?

00:27:47

RP: Uh-huh; I can tell by touching the skin and looking at the back of your hams and looking at the way the legs are on the—on the hog itself.

00:27:55

RF: And after how many hours is it ready to be flipped around about?

00:27:58

RP: You're talking about 15—16 hours.

00:28:05

RF: So you flip it onto its skin side, onto the backside?

00:28:07

RP: Right.

00:28:09

RF: And at that point as I understand you—you put—?

00:28:14

RP: That's when we—we put our sauce—or salt and stuff like that on it, yeah.

00:28:19

RF: What does that do to the meat? How does that affect the meat?

00:28:20

RP: Oh it soaks—it soaks in; it’s—the sauce gives it the flavor plus the smoke—the smoke itself.

00:28:28

RF: And do you ever do one more flip? Does it ever need a second flip?

00:28:32

RP: Occasionally if I’ve got a hog that’s too big and I have been known to flip one over and it not be like it needs to be and I’ll turn him back over and I’ll cook him a little longer ‘cause I’m not going to serve anything that’s not half—half done. I’m a perfectionist when it comes to that.

00:28:57

RF: How do you control the smoke in a pit? I’ve seen the cardboard.

00:28:59

RP: Yeah; there’s no—there isn’t—no controlling the smoke in the pits, not—not like we got. I know your barrel cookers, your electric cookers; you got dampers on them, you got temperature gauges on them. Mine is just no—no thermometers—nothing. It’s just know-how.

00:29:30

RF: Can—can you take coals out to diminish the fire? Do you ever do that?

00:29:33

RP: No. No; if you got one hog—all right, on one end of the pit if you got one hog that's getting—getting done too quick 'cause that—it's hotter on that end, you'll shift that hog. You pull it all the way to this end and you shove the other two backwards.

00:29:57

RF: Huh; so you kind of rearrange the hogs?

00:29:59

RP: Right; right. It's sort of like cooking a hamburger on a grill again. You got—you got one over here that's not—that's not as done as this one on this side. You're going to pick him up and you're going to swap him around.

00:30:13

RF: You've been known to work all day long. How many hours a day do you work average?

00:30:18

RP: Anywhere from say 16 to 20.

00:30:26

RF: When do you get a chance to eat? [*Laughs*] That's what I want to know; when do you get a chance to take a break? When do you eat?

00:30:33

RP: Well like last night I went home for—I went home about 10:30 and took me a shower, ate supper, and then I come back about two and a half hours later.

00:30:43

RF: Do you eat during the day? Do you have a sandwich or—?

00:30:46

RP: Oh yeah, yeah; I eat on the run. [*Laughs*]

00:30:49

RF: Okay; and what—what do you do on Sundays? What do you do on your day off?

00:30:53

RP: Rest, mow the yard, weed eat—well Sunday morning I come down here and make sure the pits is not too hot and ain't caught nothing on fire and nothing like that. So basically I don't—my day—my week is full.

00:31:10

RF: I know that the—one of the most important things of a whole hog is that it give—it gives customers a choice. They could—they could pick their piece of meat.

00:31:21

RP: This is true.

00:31:25

RF: Do you get customers that will—will only eat one type of meat and that will leave if you're out of say middlin'? Are people that particular?

00:31:37

RP: Yes; well 15-percent of the people are, and there again they—they like the whole idea of the type of person I am. If they come up and they ask for it I don't try to put something else on them and say yeah; this is middlin' where it's not middlin'. I'll tell them and be honest with them; I ain't got it. And a lot of them will say okay, well Rick, give me the next best thing you got to that or they'll say okay, I'll catch you tomorrow. I mean if I'm honest with them, they're going—I mean they're going to be straight with me and I ain't got to worry about them carrying something home that ain't right. And they respect me more for that than they would me trying to put something on them and just trying to make a dollar. See it ain't all about that.

00:32:30

RF: How do you eat your sandwich?

00:32:32

RP: [*Laughs*] Not anyway that—I mean anyway that you fix it.

00:32:40

RF: Oh it's different every time; you don't have a standard?

00:32:41

RP: Oh no, no, no; I'll let—I'll let Zach fix me a sandwich. I'll let Matt [Ricky's eldest son] fix me a sandwich and I do this for a reason. Make sure they stop on top of their game. Now if they make a sandwich and I can eat it I know that anybody else can eat it that comes through the door. And I may get particular; I may tell them I want a middlin' sandwich or a shoulder sandwich or a ham sandwich or tenderloin, you know. I'll tell them what kind of sandwich I want and I—they know that I know. I can bite into it; I can tell where it come from.

00:33:22

RF: Now I was talking to your son, Zach earlier and he says he wants to do his own barbecue. How—how long do you think you know it takes—he's—he's a young man; how long does it take someone to learn this?

00:33:32

RP: He is well on his way. Now Zach is—Zach has been by me ever since he was big enough to walk. He has started cooking a lot more like when he was 12 and 13 he got to helping me more, but right now I wouldn't be—I wouldn't be afraid to put him in any contest with anybody of my stature that's how confident I am of him.

00:34:00

RF: Why do you think both him and you have that—the ability to do this and you know you had told me a story earlier when we weren't recording about all the businesses, all the men you've seen come and go trying to do this.

00:34:18

RP: ‘Cause Zach—Zach looks at it in the same perspective that I do—don't sell anybody something that you wouldn't eat yourself. And then he is—he is one of these—he likes his stuff perfected and that's a good—that's a good thing in him; I like that. Even he'll tell me if—if I have him down there doing something for me, he'll call me up and he'll say daddy I don't know about this hog; you need to come check it, which see, he's not got—he's not that—he second guesses his self a lot of the times. And that goes along with him not being in it—not doing it as long as I have which a lot of time he—he guesses wrong. And I'll tell him; you look at it—don't second guess yourself, just do it. If you mess up that's—that's one you mark up; that's an area that you know not to do the next time.

00:35:14

RF: What kind of questions come up in the process of cooking a hog? What would—what would he question and have to ask your expertise on?

00:35:22

RP: Far as like knowing when the hog needs to be flipped or coming across a ham that's been broke in a hog. See and the only way that you can tell like the hogs we put on this morning—all right; the only way that I can tell if one of them bones are broken, one of them hams is when it's—after it's cooked. All right; and you tear into that ham, blood will run all the way through that meat, so you got to cut it off and you got to throw it away. And he, you know a lot of times he'll question that.

00:36:01

RF: How does the bone in a ham break? Is it during the processing?

00:36:04

RP: Processing—when they kill it they'll put in a de-hairer and the de-hairer throws it around and around getting the hair off of it and it'll hang. And when it hangs it will snap. All right; if that blood hasn't drained out all that—all the way through that hog and it breaks that blood will stay in that ham.

00:36:23

RF: So you've—you've got a lot of attention the past couple of years; why do you think that is?

00:36:28

RP: I don't know. I'm being just as sincere as I can be; I don't know. I don't know if—I think myself, I think that I'm just an ordinary guy trying to make a living and I am good at what I do. And I think John T. seen that when he met me. He met—which I—I had met John T.—I've knowed John T. for eight year. And when he—the first time that he come down here and eat with me and I sit out and talked to him, it was about 9 o'clock at night. [*Interruption*] Something wrong; tell him to call me back after dinner.

00:37:21

RF: You were talking about—.

00:37:27

RP: Oh when John T. come by. John T. seen that—he—I don't talk a game. I can play the game; I can do the game. I don't talk. Just like he was telling you it was hard to catch me still. Now I

don't sit behind a desk; I don't push a pencil and I don't like answering the phone. I'd rather work a 15—16 hour day and work my ass off—than I had to do what I'm doing right now. No disrespecting you. *[Laughs]*

00:38:05

RF: Well we're going to have to let you go in a little while but can I ask you just one or two more questions; do you think it's special what you're doing?

00:38:11

RP: Yes; I do.

00:38:13

RF: And—and why?

00:38:14

RP: 'Cause it's—it's a dying breed; there isn't—if it—now if it wasn't for Zach wanting to take this over when I quit there probably won't be no more of what I do. I know you've been to other barbecue places; if you talk to them and you was to ask them how long they have been in that certain place they'll tell you how many times it's changed hands. This place ain't never changed.

00:38:51

RF: You still kept the original name?

00:38:53

RP: Everything is original. Like I said, Mr. and Mrs. Scott adopted me and I've been with them so you can pretty much say I've been in this all my life. If—if you compare when he started and then when I took it over I have put in more years at this than Mr. Scott actually has, which I've been—he started—he started this business when he was 54 year-old. All right; he retired at 65. So how many years is that? He stayed in it 11 years. I started in '76 helping him and I'm here and this is 2008.

00:39:47

RF: Thirty-two years.

00:39:47

RP: Right; I'm the oldest. I'm the oldest at this kind of business in West Tennessee if you—if you count years to years.

00:40:01

RF: We—we've talked about Zach going into business. I think that's really interesting. If you could give him a—you know some advice for the future what would you say to him?

00:40:12

RP: I want Zach to go get a Business Degree for one thing. I'm trying to get him to pick up a trade, another trade 'cause it's—if he ever quits this he'll have something to fall back on, which there's nothing saying that now he'll go ahead and do this after he gets out of college. He gets in college, he may find out—he may find a different road but if he does that's—that's good; if he

don't that's good. I mean I don't pressure my kids into nothing—but work. I do pressure them into work.

00:40:50

RF: And that's important. What—how long do you want to do this for? How long do you think you can do this for?

00:40:55

RP: That's a good question, Rien; I don't know. As long as my health holds up, I mean I won't never quit until Zach gets out and if he wants to take this over, I told him that I would probably quit age of 55 to 60, which that don't give me about another 10 year—10 or 15 year. But now I can tell a big difference in my work ethics from when I was 40 year old and I'm 46 now; I can tell the difference in myself, which when I first met John T., I was just running, gunning. I mean he just had to run with me, which now I'll walk. **[Laughs]** It's a big difference.

00:41:54

RF: So I've been to—or I've heard of a lot of restaurants in—mostly the Henderson area that stopped doing whole hog. Who—why do you think it's—it's staying here and most—I mean the reason is that you're here, but who are these clients? Who are these people eating the whole hog that—that support you? Can you describe them?

00:42:20

RP: Maybe I don't understand the question.

00:42:21

RF: Or maybe why is whole hog so important to—to Lexington, Tennessee—the people who eat in Lexington, Tennessee?

00:42:27

RP: Well it's real; it's the real deal. It ain't—you know anybody can go out here and get a shoulder and put it on the grill at home and cook it. But now coming here you're like—this goes to your different types of meat. They know that—they know the process that I do; I think they take it for granted a lot of the times and they don't actually see the work that's involved in it, but anybody in this town will tell you straight up, there is nobody else that works any harder than I do. And especially this—this is not no easy—easy job for nobody. It really ain't. But this—going—there again it falls back to different types of meat people wants instead of just shoulders, which shoulders is basically a dark meat. And you get your whole hog, you got dark meat, white meat, you know brown—outside brown meat. You got just a little bit of everything.

00:43:36

RF: Do you serve the ribs too? I heard you do and not a lot of places do.

00:43:39

RP: Yeah; what I do—I sell the ribs out of my hogs.

00:43:44

RF: No one else does that I don't think.

00:43:46

RP: No; uh-uh.

00:43:47

RF: How do they come out; how do they taste and—do they have meat on them still? How does that work?

00:43:51

RP: Yeah; enough for about two people. I mean I think a person is getting robbed when they go out here and buy a slab of ribs. I mean you're paying like \$16—\$17 for a slab of ribs. There's not that much meat on ribs. Well I take a side out of my hogs after they get done and I sell them for \$4 a side. That's enough for two people; that's a good meal for two people—for \$4. Where are you going to eat anywhere for \$4 a good meal? But the supply is—the supply and demand is very slim. You ain't got but two sides of ribs to a hog. Like today I ain't got but six slabs of ribs and they'll be gone probably by 2 o'clock. We'll have people calling from everywhere on them. We sold shoot—every rib I had the 4th of July we sold them; they was sold before I opened the doors.

00:44:44

RF: Is it the most popular cut of meat?

00:44:47

RP: Between the ribs and the middlin' meat and the tenderloin. I think a lot of people thinks the whole hog is a middlin'; you know what I mean? And so you got some people think that the hog should be all tenderloin but it's not.

00:45:06

RF: Why do they call the tenderloin *catfish*?

00:45:10

RP: There's a piece of meat up under the tenderloin. It's—it's about six inches long and about three inches wide. It is the most tender(est) part of the hog. There's enough in the hog for two sandwiches; that's it.

00:45:27

RF: And what is that—that's called the *catfish*?

00:45:28

RP: That's what—that's what I named it 'cause it's shaped like a catfish.

00:45:33

RF: Like a fillet of a catfish?

00:45:33

RP: Uh-huh.

00:45:34

RF: And what color is it?

00:45:35

RP: It's—it's a white—it's an off white color and it just absolutely will melt in your mouth.

00:45:44

RF: Hmm; do people fight over that piece of meat? *[Laughs]*

00:45:47

RP: They ask for it. I mean you know if I got it, I got it; I ain't, I ain't. They'll come in and they look at me Ricky; you got anything today? I ain't got it; oh just fix me a sandwich; yeah.

00:45:56

RF: All right; just—the—you add the option for onions on your sandwich.

00:46:01

RP: Yeah.

00:46:03

RF: I've never seen that. Did you—your son Zach told me that you brought that here.

00:46:06

RP: Yes; yes, onion to me is like a—it enhances the flavor especially a Vidalia onion. A Vidalia onion is—is a sweet onion; it's not a hot onion but it enhances the flavor. It really does. You need to try that before you leave.

00:46:34

RF: I will—I will; my first sandwich I didn't have it but I love onions so I'm going to get one on my next. **[Laughs]** Mr. Parker when was the last time—we know that there's a company in Jackson that sells electric cookers. When was the last time he tried to offer you one to—to purchase and what did you say to him?

00:46:53

RP: I—he calls me quite often. And he tells me I need one of these things where I can go home and get some rest. And I told him I said what am I going to do? I said I'll be bored. I said a man that works a 40-hour a week job, if I had that kind of job I said I'd think I was on vacation every week. And—and he laughs at me most of the time, but he always calls me. He always calls me and asks me how I'm doing, asks me am I ready for a cooker and I don't want that damn cooker, you know. **[Laughs]** I've been doing this so long that if I sleep more than three hours a night I feel bad. I absolutely feel bad. But now I can sleep three hours and I'll sleep hard and I'll sleep sound. You can't bother me; you can't wake me up but my body has done got immune to it and I know when to go to sleep and when to—when to get up. I ain't got to have an alarm clock; I just wake up.

00:48:00

RF: Do you worry about your hogs when you're at home?

00:48:04

RP: Yes.

00:48:05

RF: How much; what does it feel like?

00:48:08

RP: Oh—

00:48:08

RF: What do you worry about? What do you think about?

00:48:10

RP: About the pit catching on fire and the hogs being—catching on fire, you know—stuff like that. The way that we cook you can't get insurance on the building and I try my best when I do leave—I try my best to know—to know that there ain't nothing going to catch fire. Like if I—if I fire hogs I may sit down here for an extra two hours 'cause if it's going to catch fire most time it'll catch within an hour after you fire it. If it don't catch up within an hour then it's not going to catch up.

00:48:54

RF: The first fire or any fire?

00:48:56

RP: No; any firing that you do. See, when Zach fired the meat this morning, I've done been out there five time to make sure there wasn't no fire up under it—while I was back there and you

was out here. I constantly walk back and forth. Now I'm always a looking; that's why I got to buy four or five pair of shoes a year. **[Laughs]** I do a lot of walking, a lot of pacing, but it's—like I said, it ain't—if I hadn't—and I've told—I think I told John T. this. If I hadn't been raised up in this business I would have never done it 'cause it takes away from your family life, it takes away from just life in general, which I didn't grow up like a normal child. I did not get out of here; I could not play ball; I couldn't go to basketball games. I couldn't even date nobody right, you know what I mean; I grow(ed) up too fast. And I'm afraid I'm doing my boys the same way. **[Laughs]**

00:50:05

RF: Well that must be a conflict. Do you—I mean do you want him to do this?

00:50:09

RP: I do; I want Zach to do this but there again, I think I'm—I'm going to deprive him out of his life. But if he has set his goal to do this and wants to do this I couldn't think of anything any better that I'd like for him to do. But he's got to understand you got—you got to give up a lot to do this—vacations, going to ballgames and seeing your girl play softball or watching boys play football or even if you got family that's died and you can't even go to a funeral because you got hogs cooking. I mean there's a lot of things you got to sacrifice.

00:50:58

RF: What makes it—what makes it better? What makes it all right?

00:51:03

RP: I don't understand.

00:51:05

RF: Well what—what makes it all worth it? That's what I should say; what makes it worth it?

00:51:10

RP: When I see a customer coming back and a smile on their face and I see people coming around like you and John T. [Edge], it makes it all worthwhile. It—it makes—it sort of makes a person feel like yeah, I am doing something for the good of the people and I'm getting acknowledge back that I'm doing a good job and I'm not doing it just to be making a—you know I'm not out here to get rich. I'm doing it; my heart is in this.

00:51:37

RF: I want to ask just one more question about when people eat your barbecue. I know you've—you've gotten to travel and—and cook your barbecue and you've had a lot of visitors, a lot of tourists come here I know just—just to the town to eat your barbecue. How—what do you think that they think about you—about your food and what you do?

00:52:00

RP: I think—I'm going—I'm going to say this—.

00:52:10

RF: Because I'm sure most ask to meet you?

00:52:11

RP: Yes; yes.

00:52:12

RF: So they meet you; what—?

00:52:15

RP: I think their first impression is who is this damn nut? And then they can't believe that somebody puts—puts their life on hold to do something like this. I know a good friend of mine, Roger Wilson, he just put in a restaurant in Jackson, a Zaxby's—chicken place. He come by here Monday and he ain't been in business even a year yet and he told me he approximately works 10 hours a week. And I'm thinking to myself, how in the hell can you run a business working 10 hours a week? Now and I can't even leave this place 10 hours a day—I mean 10 hours a week, just leave; I can't do that 'cause I—I'm just—I don't think it's going to work. I'm—I'm sure if Zach was here I'm sure everything is going to be fine, but there's this doubt in my mind. Are my customers are going to be satisfied? Am I going to be satisfied? I got to be the first one to be satisfied—me. Not you, not anybody else; if I'm satisfied I know y'all are going to be satisfied.

[Claps]

00:53:32

RF: When are you satisfied? Is it the food; do you taste the meat from every hog or is it the whole process?

00:53:38

RP: Oh yeah; there ain't a hog that don't go through here that I don't try. And that's why I got a gut on me. **[Laughs]** That's when I'm satisfied. When—when we put that sell-out sign on the door every night that's when I'm satisfied 'cause I know tomorrow I got fresh meat. And as long as you got fresh meat every day and it's cooked right to my expectations I'm going to have satisfied customers and they're going to be back. I piss a lot of people off when I sell out but I—I have to tell a few of them. I said this ain't like flipping a hamburger. You can't throw one on the grill and flip it over and then put it out the window. It ain't like that. I've got to guess and give a good estimation of how much meat every day that I'm going to sell. And it's hard to guess the public. You can't look at somebody and guess what they're going to do today and what they ain't going to do. But it's—it's a prediction. I mean and like I said I try to get as close as I can to selling out every day.

00:54:54

RF: Do—does the meat at the end of the day just go to waste? It goes away?

00:54:58

RP: No; we package it up. Most time I don't have five pound of meat left every day if—if I got that. And I package it and then we got—I've got several people that goes on trips and we'll freeze it and package it for them and we'll ship it to them. We just shipped out the first of June I shipped out a half a hog to Illinois and then I shipped some to New Jersey to Jeff Krobowski, a good friend of mine. He's a lawyer up there. When I was up in New York I got with him and his family. And I—I ship several pounds up there. I've—the furthest I've ever shipped any was Japan. And I've shipped some to Switzerland. Ain't sent none to Hawaii yet.

00:55:54

RF: Maybe you'll get to bring your own to Hawaii. *[Laughs]*

00:55:57

RP: I don't know about that.

00:55:59

RF: All right; well I want to thank you. This was very informative, so I just want to thank you.

00:56:05

RP: Well I appreciate you—I appreciate you coming by and talking with me. And don't be a stranger.

00:56:13

RF: Okay; all right thank you.

00:56:15

RP: You're quite welcome.

00:56:17

[End Ricky & Zach Parker-Scott's BARBECUE Interview]