

ANTHONY BLEDSOE
Woodstock Store 'N Deli – Millington, TN

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Location: Woodstock Store 'N Deli - Millington, TN
Interviewer: Rien Fertel for the Southern Foodways Alliance
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
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Project: Southern Barbecue Trail – Tennessee

[Begin Anthony Bledsoe-Woodstock Interview]

00:00:01

Rien Fertel: Okay; this is Rien Fertel on the Tennessee Barbecue Trail. It is July 18, 2008, a Friday; I'm in Millington, Tennessee with Mr. Anthony Bledsoe. The name of the place is Woodstock Store 'N Deli. It is at 6055 Woodstock Cuba Road, and I'm going to have Mr. Bledsoe introduce himself and give us his birth date.

00:00:30

Anthony Bledsoe: My name is Anthony Bledsoe; I was born on the May 31, 1953.

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RF: And—and tell us what you. How are you involved with this store?

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AB: I am the Manager and the Chef of this store. We started about 10 years ago; we started out with a little grocery store and deli, which consisted of pizzas, barbecue, fried chicken and deli sandwiches.

00:00:56

RF: Okay; let's—let's talk about your barbecue. What—when did you start doing barbecue here?

00:01:01

AB: We started barbecue here 10 years ago but I started barbecue when I was 13 years-old out in Allendale, Tennessee; worked in a restaurant with a guy that sold barbecue and I got hooked on it, and so I wanted to do it myself.

00:01:17

RF: Where is Allendale, Tennessee?

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AB: That's in Bartlett, Tennessee.

00:01:25

RF: Okay; and what—what was the name of this—this barbecue joint? What was the name of the man?

00:01:29

AB: The name of the store was Dave's Barbecue. It's on Highway 70 which is Summer Avenue out in Bartlett.

00:01:38

RF: Okay; and is it still open?

00:01:39

AB: No; it's closed now.

00:01:41

RF: Did they do traditional Memphis barbecue?

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AB: They did—burgers and soft ice-cream.

00:01:47

RF: And can you tell us a bit about the—about the man, the owner, or the—the Pit Master or were you the Pit Master?

00:01:54

AB: Well he was the Pit Master. I was just—just a worker there at 13 years-old. I made sandwiches and did the ice-cream and—and did the cleanup and stuff like that.

00:02:04

RF: Can you tell us a bit about him?

00:02:06

AB: Well I really don't know that much about him. I worked for them about two or three years, and then he died and I really miss the old guy 'cause I didn't get the barbecue sauce recipe.

[Laughs]

00:02:17

RF: Was this—was his store close to where you grew up? Was it down the street?

00:02:21

AB: Right down the street from where I grew up at.

00:02:24

RF: And 13—that's—that's young—working young.

00:02:27

AB: I was working very young.

00:02:29

RF: Okay; were your—were your parents involved in the restaurant business ever?

00:02:32

AB: Never.

00:02:35

RF: Do you—did they cook a lot at home either your mom or father?

00:02:40

AB: Yeah; my mom, she was a great cook. She cooked a lot at home. I learned a lot from her.

00:02:45

RF: What—what did she cook?

00:02:47

AB: Well she did a lot of soul food and we did barbecue at home but it's—it's not what we do today.

00:02:54

RF: Was—was it more traditional on a grill—barbecuing at home?

00:02:58

AB: Oh yes; we had—we had our own pit. We had like a pit built outside with cedar blocks and we—a little rack and stuff like that.

00:03:07

RF: Would you barbecue with your family for special occasions or on weekends or any time?

00:03:12

AB: What we do—almost every week when we was coming up we almost—we barbecued every week. I do every week now here too you know, so it's something that I've been doing a long time and just learning how to do different things different ways.

00:03:29

RF: And at home did you do pork or—or beef also?

00:03:34

AB: It was just only pork and chicken.

00:03:35

RF: So you worked at—at the place in Bartlett for a couple years you said and then the gentleman died, the owner, and then where—where did you go then?

00:03:47

AB: Well the guy closed the store up and you know I just furthered my education, which I graduated from high school and then I started working at a restaurant called Steak & Ale Restaurant which I was fresh out of high school and I started cooking there. And started cooking there—I just worked at home on my own barbecue sauces and how to cook pork a little bit better myself.

00:04:08

RF: So you would barbecue at home often?

00:04:10

AB: Almost every week. [*Laughs*]

00:04:13

RF: And who would you cook for at home?

00:04:14

AB: Well I would cook for the family. I mean we just—every Thursday or Friday we would throw ribs and chicken and stuff on the grill and—and I would just try to do different types of sauces. I just wanted to try to patent the sauce that—that guy was making out you know—. So I think I come pretty close now though.

00:04:31

RF: So and—and was this on the grill or something you built at home?

00:04:34

AB: It was a pit that we built at home out of blocks you know, concrete bricks and blocks and—

00:04:41

RF: Can you describe the construction of one?

00:04:43

AB: [*Laughs*]

00:04:44

RF: Where I come from we—we don't have those; we—we just have grills that you buy at Home Depot.

00:04:48

AB: Well you—pretty much you build like a block. You put—you build a square and you put a rack in between some bricks and then you build it up a little higher and then you put a top on it and then at the back of it you build like a chimney—like a fireplace chimney straight up so the smoke can come out of it.

00:05:03

RF: And this could—this would be in your backyard?

00:05:07

AB: It's in my backyard.

00:05:09

RF: And is it—is it City legal to do this?

00:05:13

AB: Oh yes; it is—yes; it is.

00:05:15

RF: Okay; so you started this place 10 years ago. Was there—were you—?

00:05:19

AB: Well before then you know I was traveling around the country working for Steak & Ale and I opened up restaurants all across—steakhouses for the guy that right now he owns Chile's and On the Border and Macaroni Grill. I worked for him about 25 years, doing you know steaks, but barbecue was in my secondary—what I did myself. And as soon as I got able to get a place myself I wanted to do the barbecue that I had been practicing on for 20 years. **[Laughs]**

00:05:49

RF: Well when—when you were traveling around the country and opening these restaurants were you opening the kitchens of these restaurants or getting them going?

00:05:55

AB: Yeah; I was opening the kitchen and doing all the training. And I implemented all the new items and menu products.

00:06:02

RF: What do you—back then working for, you know, a pretty big corporation, what did you like most and—and least about working for a—a pretty big nationwide restaurant chain?

00:06:12

AB: Well, you know, you got to remember I started back in '72, and as a young guy, you know I had—I was pretty good. I ran good food costs and that's why I got the opportunity to do the traveling and I was very good on the broiler grill and I would—used to travel from state to state because they would be busy and they needed a cook that could handle the business, and I was the one to do it. And then I got into implementing the new items in—on the menu, which I had to go to Texas to learn all these items and then go to these restaurants and show it to other people.

00:06:47

RF: Okay; so we're back. We had to take a small break to fulfill an order. We were talking about when you were on the road; what did you miss about—or did you miss Memphis and regional barbecue when you were away?

00:07:04

AB: I did; I—I missed it because you know I was in different cities and most of my time was training and preparing that restaurant to open within like a two-week base, and you know I was pretty busy. So I didn't get a chance while I was traveling to do barbecue, so every time I'd come home I'd pull out the old grill and stuff and go to work, and you know get back to my business of making my own sauce and doing this and doing that and barbecuing.

00:07:34

RF: Could you—did you ever find good barbecue on the road?

00:07:39

AB: I—I found a couple places. But it's—it just doesn't compare to Memphis. Memphis, I—I feel that has the best barbecue.

00:07:49

RF: Okay; well before I ask you about your own place here in Woodstock, what makes Memphis barbecue special do you think?

00:07:58

AB: Well—

00:08:00

RF: Or what makes it different from other barbecue?

00:08:03

AB: I—I think it's the way—the way it's cooked. I think it's you know we—we use wood; we use coals. We slow cook and we don't do a lot of rub. I mean I don't; I don't rub anything and I don't inject. I don't do anything like that. I do it the old basic country way, just like my grandpa used to dig a hole and put the whole hog in the ground. Well I pretty much do it the same way. All I do is I wash and clean it and I put a little salt towards the bone and—and slow roast it with hickory—hickory wood—green hickory wood.

00:08:41

RF: Okay; I'm glad you brought up your grandpa because I've got to ask questions about that now. Where—where was he from; where did he live?

00:08:46

AB: He was from way up in—in the country. He was—he was born up in like Galloway, Tennessee; it's a small area of Memphis—outside of Memphis here. It was real country.

00:09:01

RF: And—and you remember him doing whole hog?

00:09:02

AB: Very you know rarely; I was very, very young when he passed. You know, I was probably about seven or eight years old and, you know, I remember just about what he did 'cause when we had to help and I remember.

00:09:14

RF: Was he a farmer?

00:09:15

AB: Yes; he was.

00:09:15

RF: And so did he raise his own pigs?

00:09:19

AB: Yes; he did.

00:09:21

RF: And when did he pass away?

00:09:22

AB: Man; I can't—*[Laughs]*—. It was so long ago.

00:09:26

RF: What about—?

00:09:27

AB: It was probably early '60 I believe when he got out of there.

00:09:32

RF: Did—was he your father's father?

00:09:33

AB: My father's father.

00:09:34

RF: And did your father barbecue also?

00:09:36

AB: He didn't; no, he didn't.

00:09:38

RF: Well let's talk about this place. Where are we? Describe where we are in relation to Memphis.

00:09:43

AB: Well believe it or not, one side of the store is in Memphis and the other—front side of the store is in Millington, Tennessee.

00:09:50

RF: Oh really?

00:09:50

AB: Yeah; [*Laughs*] so we're just like the halfway mark here. And we started this store 10 years ago, like I say to be you know a little grocery store and deli, and this give me an opportunity to produce some of the stuff I can do—some of the stuff I do. I can do a whole lot of

stuff. Barbecue is one of the things that we specialize here and people love here. I—I do send barbecue—Fed-Ex barbecue a lot of places. But barbecue is the main thing here. We do pizzas and we do fried chicken; I make my own coleslaw, my own potato salad, my own banana pudding. I—I do everything from scratch.

00:10:34

RF: Right; well let's—let's talk about the barbecue. When—what kind of product do you use—I mean what kind of cut of meat do you use I should say?

00:10:44

AB: I use US—USDS Choice pork shoulders and they're coming from Hormel, the Hormel plant.

00:10:55

RF: And when do you put the shoulders on; for how long do you cook them?

00:10:58

AB: I usually put the shoulders on early in the morning by 8 o'clock, try to keep the fire to around about 350-degrees you know—you know chunking in some big logs of green hickory wood, you know not to overwhelm that smoke flavor but to try to keep it evenly and we usually take it off around like 6:00 in the afternoon.

00:11:18

RF: Okay; and you—you don't season anything before you put it on?

00:11:23

AB: No, no season at all.

00:11:27

RF: And what type of fuel do you use?

00:11:28

AB: Well I use charcoal and wood. That's it.

00:11:32

RF: What kind of wood?

00:11:32

AB: Hickory wood.

00:11:34

RF: And do you think hickory wood imparts a flavor to the meat and—?

00:11:36

AB: Very much so; a lot of people would go out and buy hickory chips. That's not—that won't give you anything. You have to use green hickory wood. You need to cut a tree down. [*Laughs*]

00:11:50

RF: Do—do you cut a tree down?

00:11:51

AB: I do.

00:11:52

RF: You do; you—?

00:11:52

AB: I have a guy to bring me green hickory wood.

00:11:57

RF: Oh you have someone collect hickory wood for you. You don't buy it from a manufacturer?

00:11:58

AB: No; I don't. I go—I go out in the woods and grab a green hickory tree.

00:12:04

RF: And—and why do you do that? Talk about green hickory and kind of cured or older hickory.

00:12:09

AB: Well green hickory has the—the tree is green and it has that sap and that's what gives you that hickory—good hickory smoked flavor. If it's dry then you got a bonfire. It's—it's nothing there; there's no juice or nothing to give you—not the kind of flavor, so you use the green

hickory wood—that’s what gives you that good hickory flavor and smoke. You can smell the difference when you got green hickory.

00:12:34

RF: Right; I mean you could taste the difference in your sandwich too. Where—where does he get his trees, do you know—how far away?

00:12:39

AB: Right around the corner. *[Laughs]* Come—we’ll go—

00:12:43

RF: Right around the corner? So it’s—it’s real local.

00:12:43

AB: Well yeah; we—we get it right around here, yeah.

00:12:47

RF: Okay; well what is Woodstock? Why is this store called Woodstock?

00:12:49

AB: This is the Woodstock community; yeah.

00:12:55

RF: It’s like—it’s a small town?

00:12:56

AB: Small little community; yeah.

00:12:58

RF: Okay; and so we're—we're just south of Millington but north of Memphis?

00:13:00

AB: Right, like I say you're halfway. We standing—we standing on the Memphis side of the street right now. *[Laughs]* When we walk to the front we'll be on the Millington side.

00:13:10

RF: Okay; and well tell me about the pit you use. How would you describe it?

00:13:15

AB: Well it's a big old—I call it a boat. But it's stainless steel and I have one big rack and—and I have a couple ducts on top and what I do is I build a fire in one end and the other and then let it rip for 10—12 hours.

00:13:32

RF: Have you—did you buy it or build it?

00:13:33

AB: I bought it; I bought it—I saw it, and the guy wanted to sell it, so I—you know I just bought it from him.

00:13:40

RF: Do you—when you—when you start your hickory and your coals do you start it outside of the pit and then put them in the pit or do you start the fire in the pit?

00:13:48

AB: I start it inside the pit. I start the fire inside the pit. I load my meat up; the fire is started and I just close it up. That's it; I start everything from the inside and when I get ready to feed it I would slide the top back and you know and just throw in my logs of wood or my charcoal—whatever I want to do and just close it back up and let it rip on.

00:14:10

RF: All right; what's—what's the secret to cooking a shoulder? Is it—what's the secret?

00:14:16

AB: I think it's just slow cooking and keeping it at a right temperature and using it just you know slow cooking. That's the secret.

00:14:25

RF: When—when you have a shoulder on the pit do you ever move it around—flip it or does it stay where it is?

00:14:30

AB: It stays where it is. It cooks complete in the same spot. I do not move it. My pit—it's a big pit, so I don't want to have to be moving it around to try to put these upfront or nothing like that.

It's big enough where I could just leave my shoulders in one spot and just keep the fire at a certain temperature.

00:14:48

RF: How many shoulders do you normally do a—a day or a week?

00:14:52

AB: I do 200-pounds a day; that's probably about 10 shoulders a day.

00:14:56

RF: Okay; and you do ribs also?

00:14:58

AB: I only do ribs on Saturday. That's when it gives me the opportunity to get out there and stay with the ribs on Saturdays. Usually during the week you know I'm here mostly by myself or with—with a little bit of help and I don't have that time to do the ribs, so on Saturday I—I got another person here with me and when I can just know—you know when doing ribs you have to flip them and watch them you know so they won't burn on you and stuff like that.

00:15:24

RF: Okay; well tell me about the—the rest—the process in making a sandwich. What kind of bread do you use?

00:15:32

AB: We get our bread from Wonder Bread. We use the big—I think it's the seven-inch bun. We use—probably—well you just saw me make a cup of jumbo barbecue we call the *sleeper*. You probably had a pound of meat on that thing you know. You get a couple ounces of coleslaw and about four ounces of sauce and it sells.

00:15:54

RF: So the sleeper is a jumbo; it has a pound of meat you think. Why do you call it the *sleeper*?

00:15:57

AB: 'Cause usually you—you go to sleep when you get done. [*Laughs*]

00:16:02

RF: And your—and your sauce, how—you've been making this—perfecting this sauce for a long time you said?

00:16:07

AB: Ever since I was probably 13 or 14 years old.

00:16:12

RF: Has—has it changed a lot over the years or has it—what have you don't to it over the years without giving away you know the—the ingredients to the sauce?

00:16:19

AB: Well it's—it's the same recipe. What I did is I do some different things. The sauce that I've used here has white sugar. I use white sugar. If I do something at home, I—I might go honey and brown sugar for the sweetening. Usually my sauce is a little sweet and a little tangy and a little hot and—and good barbecue you want—you want to taste that in your sauce you know. Every bite you should have a little sweet, a little tangy, and a little hot. I think you had it the other day; I think you thought it was pretty good didn't you?

00:16:52

RF: I did; I thought it was very hot. And I want to talk about your—your slaw too because when I had the sandwich there was a big piece of carrot in there and I said well this much be fresh. It must be homemade.

00:17:00

AB: I make it every day. I just made slaw a few minutes ago. I make it every day. I don't use mayonnaise. I use a little salad dressing; I use a little—little sweetener and a little relish and fresh carrots and cabbage and I try to do it every day. A lot of people make slaw and it's—will be too runny and a lot of mayonnaise and I—I don't do that. My slaw accompaniment is hotdogs, whatever you want to put it on. I even put mine's on burgers—barbecued burgers.

00:17:33

RF: Barbecued burgers?

00:17:34

AB: Yeah.

00:17:35

RF: And tell me—well you just brought me into your—your prep area where you made some sandwiches and I just want to ask one question about your cutting board. I’ve—I’ve never seen one—it’s—it’s well used. It’s a beautiful piece of wood. How long have you had it; where—where did you get it? And what—what might it do for cutting meat—for cutting pork?

00:17:56

AB: Well that board is a chopping block. I had it built when I had this guy—my brother-in-law was having a house built and that was a part of—a piece of his house really and what I did is I seasoned that big block back there and made a chopping block out of it. It’s the same thing that you buy in the store but this is just homemade.

00:18:18

RF: And do you think it affects the—the—the pork having been well worn and used?

00:18:25

AB: Well no; what I do is before using it you have to oil it. You have to season it, so when you use it, it don't splinter, getting that stuff on you because you can see it’s like—it’s just been worn out in the middle but it’s still there you know. And you can see on the sides, the—the shape of it and everything. It just—it’s just the old way we do things. It’s just the old thing there.

00:18:55

RF: What—what do you think distinguishes the old way and the new way?

00:19:00

AB: Well the new way—the new way, people are—right now getting into gas. Gas heat dries out your meat. You know slow—hickory smoked keeps it moist and people going to the gas deal because they want to produce more. And the way you produce more is—is cook faster, and I'd rather stick to the old method and that a slow-roasting is the key.

00:19:35

RF: And do you—do you continue to eat barbecue in the area? Do you eat it other places?

00:19:39

AB: I do; I don't eat barbecue much at—at the other places but I do try other people's products.

00:19:47

RF: And is it more because you like other places or you want to test and see what your competition is?

00:19:51

AB: I just—I just—I just do it just to see what the taste is.

00:19:57

RF: Do you think other people around—or have you found other people besides yourself that is doing it in what—the old way or what you think is the old way?

00:20:05

AB: Most—most of the people that—that I've saw, I've been to their restaurant they're using the gas grill and you can tell the difference in the meat. The meat is—it's dry; it's—I mean it's good but it's dry. My meat is slow-cooked; it's moist and I showed you the method that I use with the steam. Most people have got theirs in a draw—a dry draw and they throw wet towels on it to keep it moist. That don't work.

00:20:33

RF: And describe how you do yours—what you should me earlier.

00:20:37

AB: Well I use the roasting pan with the rack and I have water in the bottom oven and I heat it up in—and I heat it up in my pizza oven so it's steam and that holds in that hot moisture. And the moisture that's going to come out is when I fold it back to make a sandwich out of it. And it—it keeps it good and hot. Most of the time is—is you get a good hot sandwich.

00:21:04

RF: Uh-hm; did—who—who eats barbecue here? Describe your—your customers.

00:21:09

AB: Shew! Everybody that comes through the door. [*Laughs*] Mostly everybody that comes through the door eats barbecue. They do the barbecue and they love it; I mean I had no complaints.

00:21:20

RF: Do people come from Memphis to eat barbecue here?

00:21:22

AB: I have people come from Memphis, Covington, I mean all parts—Bartlett—from everywhere, from I mean, I got people that come from the other side of the town. They say when we want barbecue we come over here, you know because I'm—they get—they get their money worth and they get a good barbecue.

00:21:43

RF: I asked a question about your grandfather and whole hog earlier. Have you ever seen anyone else do whole hog?

00:21:50

AB: I have—I have.

00:21:52

RF: Where have you seen it being done?

00:21:53

AB: Well years ago, I saw another side of my—on my other side of my family. They used to do whole hog and I watched them do it and they—everybody pretty much back in the day did it the same way. And in—you know I just watch, watch, watch, watch and back in the day they didn't have the sweet sauce that we use today. They had more of a vinegar based sauce but it was good.

00:22:18

RF: Do you—do you—do you like the vinegar sauce?

00:22:23

AB: I do; I use the vinegar myself.

00:22:25

RF: Right, right; but do you think—but you like sweet and vinegar?

00:22:32

AB: Honestly I do; I do. Most of the time if—if I'm at home I don't use a lot of sweet sauce; I just want that vinegar base—that—that—just that barbecue taste.

00:22:44

RF: But you think your customers want the sweet and that's why you serve it?

00:22:46

AB: Oh yes; oh yes. They love the sauce. They think you know—that little sweet and tangy and hot, I think they gets it you know. I don't think I'll change. I think that would be the only recipe I have but I can make you know two or three other types of sauces, and you know different flavors and stuff like that.

00:23:10

RF: So we—I mean we were talking about the old—doing it with hickory wood and the new doing it with gas cookers, fancy gas cookers. Where do you think Memphis or local barbecue

where we are now is—is going to go in the next 10 years or so? Do you think it's going to get more towards what you're doing or do you think that—you know or it's going to keep getting to be gas or even something different?

00:23:33

AB: I think that most big restaurants are going to be with the gas versus using just straight wood and—and coals. I mean I just—you know everybody is—right now is looking for—for volume instead of quality. I'm looking for quality. If you do quality good you will get volume and that's just the way I see it. If you stay—stay you know like I am right now and serve a good quality product, the volume of people will show up, so you're going to have start doing a little bit more and more and more and more and that's what happened here.

00:24:21

RF: So do you think it will always—there will always be someone like you kind of doing it—your way?

00:24:26

AB: I—I believe so. Yeah; I believe it—the real barbecue people, they know the way I do it is the right way to do it. If you go to Memphis in May you'll hardly ever see anybody with gas grills down there, but you go to the big-time restaurants and stuff you see the gas grills, you know Memphis in May you see the guy with the big—the big rigs, with the charcoal and—and the wood, you know. I know it's a lot of people even in Memphis in May I see them soaking wood you know in apple juice and stuff like that. It's—it doesn't work. Water evaporates—any kind of liquid when you put fire to it is going to evaporate. It doesn't really just give it—give it

that piece of meat, that flavor; I just don't believe that. I think that the sap of the tree, the green tree does the job.

00:25:20

RF: You don't think wood—wood or wood chips soak up liquid?

00:25:24

AB: I—I don't.

00:25:24

RF: Or liquid flavor I should say?

00:25:26

AB: I throw it in my fireplace at home.

00:25:29

RF: [*Laughs*] Tell me what is—what is the—the hardest part about being in the restaurant business? This was your—your first place right on your own?

00:25:34

AB: Yes; it is. Yes; it is. This is my first place. I don't own this place; this is my brother-in-law's place. I'm just the chef of the family and—and I'm just doing my thing. I—you know we're going to do some different things you know later on you know but right now it's going to be barbecue and pizza and the other stuff that we do here right now.

00:25:56

RF: Uh-hm; what's—what's the toughest part about—about cooking barbecue?

00:26:00

AB: It's easy to me right now. I mean it's—it's nothing tough about it. When I do shoulders I go—I load 200-pounds of shoulder and I check on it every two or three hours. And that's it and let it rip.

00:26:14

RF: Would you encourage you know your children or young people to—to get into the barbecue business?

00:26:18

AB: Believe it or not, my kids eat barbecue; they eat my barbecue. They know I do good barbecue. I have a daughter and I have a son, and neither one of them know how to do nothing.

[Laughs]

00:26:28

RF: **[Laughs]** Have you—have you tried to teach your son?

00:26:30

AB: I—I told him—I told them that they need to learn to make the barbecue sauce. They need to do it; I think that I—it could be on the shelf, I really do. I think that much of it. But neither one

of them know how to make it, but I—I think in the future they will. You know I think they will learn. It's easy.

00:26:59

RF: And—and what about the barbecuing aspect? Do you—do you want them to—would you encourage to—to deal with the smoking of meat for those long hours?

00:27:10

AB: Oh yeah; I mean that's the only way you're going to get a good product. I mean you can't get the—the product unless it's smoked.

00:27:17

RF: Okay; and one last question—do you—do you still love to eat barbecue? Do you get tired of it?

00:27:26

AB: Yeah; I get tired of it but I still eat it though. I still eat it; I mean, you know, I don't eat a lot of barbecue anymore. I—but I do eat it; even when I do ribs at home, or something, I will cook them and everybody eats, and maybe before I go to bed I grab a little bit and eat before I go to bed or something like that because at that time I'm cooking I don't have that taste for it right then.

00:27:49

RF: What—what are your specialties at home when you're not cooking—when you're not barbecuing?

00:27:52

AB: Oh man I do 38 meals. Rachel Ray don't have nothing on me. *[Laughs]*

00:27:56

RF: *[Laughs]* What's—what's like a good Sunday meal at your home, not—not barbecue, not smoked meat?

00:28:01

AB: Oh shoot; homemade macaroni and cheese, green beans, and chicken and dressing and stuff like that—that I do. I—I'm a country boy; I can still do the—the home-cooked stuff.

00:28:17

RF: Do—do you think—I mean some people I've talked to—. Well here's—I'd like to ask a couple more abstract questions. A lot of people I've talked to say that barbecue is born in the country and not in Memphis and not in the city. Do you—can you say something on that?

00:28:32

AB: Most country people did; that's where it started at you know roasting—I think the Stone Age started a long time ago you know. They had over their fire you know and in the woods and stuff you know. You—you start looking way back, people was roasting—I don't know what they

was roasting but they were roasting meats you know and they was turning it on the stick over the fire and stuff. So you know it did start back in the country.

00:28:57

RF: Right; yeah and I was at a place this morning and someone said well you want to understand barbecue, she said there's a difference between white barbecue and black barbecue. What—what do you say about that?

00:29:08

AB: I don't think it's any different. I think it's the way you do it. If you do it—I think I do it the correct way. You can do it a little bit quicker with the gas and stuff but I think it's no different if you do it the good old country way and that's with charcoal and with wood. I mean green wood, now; don't get me wrong. I tell everybody that green wood; do not—no dry wood—green wood because you know like I say that wood takes longer to burn and it gives you that good smoking aroma because the green has sap. That sap—that's what gives you the flavor.

00:29:50

RF: When he brings you the wood, does he bring it to you in logs?

00:29:52

AB: He do and he splits it for me.

00:29:55

RF: Oh he splits it for you, okay.

00:29:59

AB: He takes care of me, you know. He know I need it this long. [*Laughs*]

00:30:02

RF: Right; I mean there's not many people doing it with—with the—the fresh green hickory.

00:30:09

AB: Well I think that's what I got on—I'm on top of them with that taste. Yeah; I think anybody can do a good tender piece of meat but I think the flavor is what people looks for and the sauce.

00:30:21

RF: Okay; well I want to thank you very much and if you have anything you'd like to add I'd like to hear it. But yeah—

00:30:26

AB: Well I appreciate you and I appreciate your interviewing me and I want to know—I want everybody to know out there—people come backs to the restaurant because of the cook and not the owner. And that is just the case. [*Laughs*]

00:30:43

RF: But you—you get along with your owner—with the owner of this store?

00:30:47

AB: Oh yes; but you know, got a lot of people that say well they're going to go so and so and so and so. They don't go to see the person that owns the store; they go to see—to the restaurants 'cause they got food there. I think people oversees—overlooks the cooks; you know cooks need to be praised because those are the ones that are making the people come back. If I—I mean if I didn't serve good food would you come back? No; I don't care who owns the place. So—so I think cooks—cooks, you know we've got some good cooks out there.

00:31:18

RF: Well this just brings up one more question. Was there—was there a Pit Master that trained you or you—you sound like you were self-taught.

00:31:25

AB: I was.

00:31:26

RF: Okay; have you met older Pit Masters who maybe felt that—and I'm not asking for names—I don't need it, but people—men who—who didn't get the attention and the owner of the restaurant did? Have you run across those people?

00:31:39

AB: I ran across a lot of that; it's a lot of that going on. It's I mean you know I—that's why I try to let everybody know. You—you have to give the cooks some praise. I started out when I was younger—very young, and you know you—you want to go to Dave's Place but you really—you're really—you're going to Dave's Place because he got a great cook there, so where is the

cook getting any kind of prop? He gets no prop 'cause he's the one that's making them come back.

00:32:06

RF: Right.

00:32:06

AB: You see what I'm saying? I've been cooking 36 years, you know, and it's time for cooks to gets a little glory, you know, even though, you know—you know, whoever owns the place, you know—you know, gets most of the—you know, the prop. But they never say anything about those guys that are doing the great cooking back there, and most of the people that own the place can't cook. [*Laughs*]

00:32:30

RF: Cooking for 36 years, did you ever think about doing something else or was it always about kitchen?

00:32:35

AB: I have—I have; I tried to do some other things but it—I guess cooking was my calling because I always came back to it. So you know that's what I'm going to do. I worked 10 years for Department of Correction for the prison and I was the Food Service Supervisor [*Phone Rings*]. You know I cooked for you know like 1,500 inmates and stuff like that and I was the Assistant Manager, so, you know, I did get away a little time—when I could do a lot more training and stuff like that. And so that was part of my 36 years of cooking too.

00:33:13

RF: Okay; well thank you very much.

00:33:15

AB: Appreciate you.

00:33:16

[End Anthony Bledsoe-Woodstock Interview]