

Horace Archie

Church of Holy Smoke, New Zion Missionary Baptist Church Barbecue –
Huntsville, Texas

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Interviewers: Melanie Haupt

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Southern Foodways Alliance
&
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Group Members:
Melanie Haupt

[BEGIN INTERVIEW]

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Melanie Haupt: OK, so this is Horace Archie. Mr. Archie, could you state your full name and birth date for the record please.

Horace Archie: Horace Ray Archie, the first month, twenty-seventh day, 1950.

MH: All right, thank you. I always drop this thing. So, you are in charge of the pit here at New Zion Missionary Baptist Church Barbecue. So, tell me a little bit about the pit, the wood you use, and your smoking process.

HA: I usually get here about five o'clock in the morning, load up the pit with oak wood. Basically oak wood, but I use mesquite and hickory, I got a little pecan. I usually put on the hickory, pecan, and mesquite about two hours after I've started the meat cooking. Those three woods give it the flavor. I cook my rib about three-and-a-half hours, briskets five-and-a-half, six hours, chicken's about three hours. After the pit gets good and hot, though, it takes a little less time than that because, you know, the pit is already hot. But in the morning time, at five o'clock, that's what I do first, get my pit hot. Usually the night before I've already sautéed my meats with rub. And they'll be ready to go when I get here in the morning time. And I do that up until—I started cooking up until about two-thirty or three. At the end, by the time I get done, it's time to close down, so. But—and they keep me going all day between that and running to the store, getting bread and sodas, change for the register and everything else.

MH: So in between cooking, you're running errands, basically.

HA: I'm running errands, running the cash register *[Laughs]*. A lot of time I'm over at the church doing the church business because I'm a deacon at the church. I have to go do the church business, take care of the yard. Most of the time, I do that on a Monday or Tuesday, though. I do all that and whatever needs to be done at the church. So, I'm busy seven days a week, really.

MH: Sounds like it. Sounds like it. Now, Ms. Archie told me the company where you get your meat. I guess my question is, how much of it do you go through during the four days you're in business every week?

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HA: Four days here, I will use at least about eight cases of ribs. Each case has about nine slabs in it. So, I use about eight cases of ribs, about two cases of sausage, and each case of sausage has thirty links in them, at least thirty-pounds worth of sausage. And I use two cases of those. I use a whole case of chicken, easy. Sometimes I have to go to the store and buy a few more. And I use two cases of briskets. Usually, there are six briskets in each case. So, I usually run through that. Matter of fact, sometimes I have to buy a little extra brisket, especially when people come buy any by the pound.

MH: So, you would say that brisket and, what, ribs are your biggest seller, then?

HA: Everything goes, everything goes, really.

MH: How often do you sell out?

HA: Usually on a Saturday because I don't have time after two o'clock, three o'clock. I can't put anything else on. I'm usually sold out on a Saturday, unless I really get here. But there's really not enough time in the day to cook that much more. My pit—I use one pit basically out front, it has a box on the front that I use. I just can't get enough meat on it, you know, to save. We have a motorcycle club come down and there's sixty people in it, plus my regular customers. I'm might well run out on a Saturday.

MH: They'll wipe you out.

HA: They wipe me out. And I have had as many as ninety that came in at one time. So, I had to use the barbecue place and the church cafeteria to seat everybody. So, on those days, I usually run out. Either that or they just sit and wait a little while.

MH: So, you use the church cafeteria as your runoff seating?

HA: Yes. I do. Most people, though, that are nice, they will give me a call ahead of time and say, "Well, I've got ninety people coming." So I'm prepared for them. I'll stay up later that night cooking. But lot of times, they just come. Yesterday was Fourth of July; people came by and just bought by the pound. So, I ended up cooking an extra brisket last night in order to try to accommodate for today. It takes a while for the brisket to cook.

MH: And where do you get your wood?

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HA: I get it from a—it's a gentleman that sells me wood out of Oakhurst—I mean, not Oakhurst—Point Blank, Texas. Mr. Willie Bookham. Plus I've got a little farmland myself. I go out and cut me a oak tree down every now and then and bring it myself and use it.

MH: And so do you vary the blend of the woods? You mentioned a bunch of different wood.

HA: That's right, I do—all the time. I've got post oak wood I use, red oak, white oak, and, like I said, I've got the mesquite, hickory, and pecan. But I use the hickory, mesquite, and pecan, like I say, for flavor, it goes on last. The oak actually does the heating and the really cooking. Mm-hmm.

MH: So, you never really vary the ratio of the hickory, mesquite, and pecan? It's the oak that you kind of play with. Is that about right?

HA: That's right. Too much hickory, too much pecan, or too much mesquite will make your meat taste bitter or, you know, it'll be too strong. So, I know about when to throw that other piece in or how big a piece of wood already—

MH: And did that some—did that take you a while to figure that out or did you, kind of, do barbecue before you came into this?

HA: It took me a while in the beginning. At first I was using too much hickory, and my meat started tasting bitter or it was just overwhelming, you know. People liked it, but, you know, it was too much at one time. So, I broke it down and I know how many sticks to use. Most of the time I use one stick for a load of meat of hickory wood, you know. So, that usually works out one small piece of mesquite, one piece of pecan. Or you just—mostly pecan—mesquite and hickory. I use the pecan every now and then.

MH: And do you have any major competitors here in Huntsville, barbecue-wise?

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HA: *[Laughs]* I don't really—I don't really like to talk about my competition. They're there, but I've had people say that this is better. So, I don't really like to talk about, you know. But I've had people come from there over here and say this is better.

MH: *[Laughs]* And that's good enough, right?

HA: Matter of fact, I tell everybody I've got the good Lord on my side, so that helps. That helps a lot.

MH: Now what did you do before—you took over here in 2004, correct?

HA: Yes, 2004.

MH: And so what did you do before you took over the barbecue shop here?

HA: I had my own business, construction and home repair. Worked for myself. And before that I used to work for a guy, building metal buildings. I worked at the hospital. But basically for myself, most of the time. Mm-hmm.

MH: And so what made you decide to take over for Ms. Brown?

HA: Ms. Ward?

MH: Ms. Ward, excuse me, when she—

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HA: Mr. Ward and Mrs. Ward, we all went to church together here at New Zion. And as they was getting older, getting a little slower, one summer they asked me to come in and help them out. So, I helped out. And they was beginning to get older and older and weaker and weaker. So they kind of told me the secret. And I took up and since this building belonged to the church, everybody agreed, I took over and been going ever since.

MH: Now, do you have a predecessor? Do you have someone you're kind of grooming to take over when you decide you're—you're done with the barbecue shop?

HA: Not really. I have my son here working with me, but that'll be left up to the church. The building belongs to the church and like I said, myself and Brother Ward were both deacons in the

church. So, he had confidence in me to do things right and told me the secret. And it's been going on from there. And with the good Lord being on my side, that's what kept me going.

MH: And is Mr. Ward still living?

HA: Mr. Ward and Mrs. Ward are still living. They're living in Houston now with sister-in-law or niece or someone down there. Matter of fact, I went to go see them about two weeks ago. Mr. Ward is in the hospital, but Mrs. Ward is doing fine.

MH: That's good. Do they ever make it down here and eat the barbecue?

HA: No, not really. Mr. Ward can't move around that well, he's on a walker and a wheelchair. Mrs. Ward, she's moving around, you know, I think she's feeling a little *[indiscernible]* now *[Laughs]*.

MH: So, you're not too sure who's going to take over for you when you're—when your retired.

HA: No, I'm not sure. Maybe the pastor, he might take over. He's familiar with it, but I can't say. It'll be left up to the church or if they decide to rent it out to someone else. Then I don't know. Really it's up to them after that. I've taught my son things about it, but I don't know if he'd take over. He would have to make an offer with the church in order to. Mm-hmm.

MH: And, so, you make your own rub and your own sauce here on premises. Is that correct?

00:10:29

HA: Do I make my own what?

MH: The rub and the sauce.

HA: I buy it. I put it on ahead of time. And I do a little extra something to it, but I don't make it myself. I put it on. My own sauce, we, I buy a base sauce, and then I do other things myself. That's the little secret that the Wards gave me.

MH: I see, I see. And you'll take that with you.

HA: And I'll take that with me because they entrust me with it. So, I'm going to have to keep that to myself.

MH: Well, I'm going to go ahead and pause this.

[END]

00:11:00