

WILLIAM FRIDAY
President of The University of North Carolina (1956-1986)
Customer, Carrboro Farmers' Market – Chapel Hill, NC

Date: August 25, 2011
Location: Graham Memorial Hall – Chapel Hill, NC
Interviewer: Ashley Rose Young
Length: 31 minutes
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Project: Carrboro Farmers' Market

[Begin William Friday Interview]

00:00:01

Ashley Young: This is Ashley Young with the Southern Foodways Alliance. Today is Thursday, August 25, 2011. And I am interviewing William Friday for the Carrboro Farmers' Market Oral History Project. We are currently sitting in the Graham Memorial Building at UNC Chapel Hill. Mr. Friday, would you please introduce yourself?

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William Friday: Well my name is William Friday. I was an administrator at the University of North Carolina for forty years, one job or another, but I'm a long-time customer and client of the Carrboro Market and I look forward to this discussion [Interviewer's Note: William Friday was president of the University of North Carolina from 1956-1986].

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AY: And would you please state your date of birth?

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WF: July 13, 1920.

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AY: So to build a context for this interview I wanted to ask some general questions about your life. Where were you born? Where did you grow up?

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WF: Well I was born in the Valley of Virginia, the Shenandoah Valley in a little town called Raphine. I was my mother's first baby and I used to go back there in the summertime when I was a little boy because my grandfather had a country store and he let me work in it with him. And I had three wonderful brothers that came along and it was--growing up in the Valley of Virginia amongst the Associate Reformed Presbyterians was quite an experience to say the least.

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AY: And what do you remember about that--the store that your grandfather owned?

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WF: Oh I remember that he stocked everything from high-button shoes to broad-rim hats and we used to get things of cheese that were as big as a tire wheel and you'd cut it with a great big blade. And then you bought chewing tobacco in the foot-long sections and cut it up for the farmers who came in. But most of all, I remember sheering the sheep and picking the apples and shucking the wheat. Those were summertime jobs that were really hot and hard.

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AY: So you definitely had a relationship to food when you were growing up. Can you describe that a little bit more?

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WF: Well it certainly was true and an unusual relationship because in the ARP Church nobody works on the Sabbath. So grandmother would cook our Sunday lunch on Saturday and that's

where you learned that food is durable and food needs to be preserved and food can be tasty-- even then.

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But no, when you were born and raised in the Depression cycle I remember people in my little hometown over in Gaston County all were cotton mill workers and the cotton mills closed. And because people ate a certain diet and ate it consistently you began to hear of a disease called Pellagra, which you never hear it now. And so you go through all of these experiences and pretty soon what you start doing is growing a garden in your backyard. So we raised corn in the summer and radishes and beans and those things--. In the wintertime is when you resorted to the canned good. [*Laughs*]

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AY: What brought you to Chapel Hill eventually?

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WF: Well Mrs. Friday and I came here after World War II because I wanted to go to Law School and she wanted to get a degree in Public Health. She had a degree from Meredith and I had a degree from NC State. But we both knew from the experience we had--had in World War II that we were not educated the way we wanted to be and that's the way it happened. We came in here in February of 1946.

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AY: Now you've had a long relationship with the University after you originally arrived here and I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about the Friday Center and the goals of the Friday Center here at UNC Chapel Hill.

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WF: Well what that building represents is a--the structural identification of a great tradition of the University and that is it's extending itself into the life of the people all over the state. And I like to call it the Citizens Classroom. They--they do a lot of short-course instruction. They do a lot of instruction for groups like teaching profession, businesspeople, oh well you can look at the roster; the one-millionth visitor to that facility occurred not too long ago. And I went out to meet the lady and had a nice visit with her. But it--it's one of those experiences at Chapel Hill where you wonder what you were doing beforehand. But it's a terribly essential aspect now, the extension of the life of the institution.

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AY: I thought now at this point we could start turning our interview a little bit over to the Carrboro Farmers' Market and I wanted to start off with a question. How would you describe your relationship to food now versus while you were growing up? How have things changed for you?

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WF: Well there's much, much greater variety now. You--you--in those days you had certain staples and that was it. You--you had milk and you had cornbread and you had green beans and corn on the cob. And that was--and then you had chicken. And then if you had anything else that

was extra. But the--the Carrboro Market itself is a reflection of the sophistication of what's happened. You can get vegetables out there that you've never heard of before. But my association there has been interesting.

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It--it started more than a half-century ago, one time when Dr. Ed Hedgpeth who was head of the University Infirmary asked me to go with him one Saturday morning and go out there. Well we were in an older cinderblock building over the baseball field then and from then until now I've--I've gone out and really enjoyed the thing. Going to the Farmers' Market at Carrboro on Saturday is a--is like a town's meeting. It's not just buying food. You go out there to see all your friends and it's like you see large numbers of faculty members from Duke and Carolina and the neighboring schools, and you visit. You just--and, you know, one of the leading merchants out there is a lady from Youngsville. Well that's way over on the other side of Wake Forest, but she found out that Chapel Hillians want to buy what she's growing. And it's very--the reason you go is because it's fresh, you know it's reliable, and it has a marvelous taste and you can get everything from baked goods to cut flowers, and so that--that's been my association with it.

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In fact that new facility back when they were talking about it they asked me to speak to Commissioner Graham because I had--had Commissioner Graham as a student when he was at NC State. So I called Jim one day and I said, "I want you to help finance this place because it's terribly important that the state get behind this center." Well it became the example for others to follow. So that was--that was the continuity of the work that led me to where it is today, and I still go out there. It's so crowded now and for somebody my age and mobility I have to wait until about eleven o'clock until they sort of clear out. **[Laughs]** But I whisper to my old friends save me this or save me that and some of the older farmers out there, we've been friends so long that

he'll tuck--tuck some arugula in the back and he'll get me some--some black-eyed peas and things like that--that they know. But you really enjoy it. I'd go out there right now and get fresh corn just to--because it's so tasty. **[Laughs]**

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AY: Are there particular stalls and/or vendors or farmers that you like to visit every week and can you speak about them please?

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WF: Oh yes, there are a half-dozen out there that I have known for years. And when I--they see me coming--there's one out there for example that grows lettuce, the best lettuce I ever saw and he'll grow five different varieties. Well he--I don't even say a word. He--he just reaches over and gets one head of the radicchio and another--radish--and the water lettuce that they have. Oh it's just wonderful. And I get a head of each and take them home and put them in my spare icebox. So we have fresh lettuce all week. And then Farmer John is over there on the other corner. He's--he grows the best arugula that there is. And I buy my seed from him and I plant arugula in my backyard every summer when he's doing it. And then the--then the other people are just sort of family, the flower lady and the--the lady who does all the baking. She has those pound cakes that are just absolutely dangerous to get a hold of they're so good. **[Laughs]** So that's the way it is. It's a family visit [Interviewer's note: Louise Parrish sells the pound cakes].

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AY: I talked to the pound lady--the pound cake lady, Louise Parrish last week and that caramel cake looked really delicious.

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WF: Well she takes a pound cake and she covers it in so many different things, you know. You can get a lemon version. You can get the almond version or just plain pound cake; that's what I like. I don't like for them to color it up too much. I want my real McCoy. But, you know, you have--the potters are there, Rita--what's her--I've forgotten her last name from--she's from down in Pittsboro. She brings her pottery up every week. And then the--the people who build the cedar chests, you know, they're wonderful people. Then those two women who are the best plant people that I ever saw. They have the first stall as you turn in there and I've been buying tomato plants from them for twenty years, so that's the way it's been.

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AY: You mentioned that you have a garden of sorts in your yard. Can you describe that a little bit? How long have you been gardening?

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WF: Well I learned from dealing with these people that there are certain things you do and other crops you leave alone because you don't pay attention, but I've got a mint bed. I've got a rosemary vine and I've got my arugula bed. And then when I have any room left I'll tuck things in like parsley or--the so-called evergreen crops which we use for dressing for salads and things. We're great salad eaters at our house. And this is--this is what you learn associating with these people.

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But there was a gentleman there who came from a farm north of Hillsborough. He's since died but a wonderful grower of all kinds of fresh vegetables and some of these people just instinctively are that good. And there are lots of people who bring their produce there who don't live anywhere near here. And oh, you learn--there's even a fellow there who sells orchids, you know, and so I got one as a gift one day and I asked him how to care for it. So he takes me in and tells me how to prune it and all this. So this is what I mean--family because it to me--Saturday morning at the Carrboro Market is a sort of mini town's meeting. You see everybody in the world there. They all want to stop and talk and you just have a good time. It's worth it and it doesn't cost you a nickel. *[Laughs]*

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AY: And how do you think the Carrboro Farmers' Market has changed over the past years? Have you noticed any large changes?

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WF: Well number one there are more farmers there. Number two, they grow a greater variety of commodities. Number three, it's so much larger in area and volume. And number four, they're even specialty farmers. There's one man there who brings nothing but tomatoes. And he grows them--some hydroponically, just--you know, the water system. And then there's another fellow who brings nothing but azaleas and you have two there who are just potters. And then you got this wonderful woman there who has the braided hair. I never will forget her, but she grows the prettiest sunflowers you ever saw. And she doesn't know all about botany. She just grows things and so you go from all that to the--to the baker and to the fruit producer and there's even two

people out there that make rugs. And so you see it's just everybody but that's why you enjoy it so much.

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AY: Do you often ask the farmers for advice as to how to prepare the foods or do you normally just buy foods from them?

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WF: I buy the raw materials. Mrs. Friday was a home economist and I wouldn't dare get in her way of preparing foods. **[Laughs]** But she knows what to tell me to get and I go get it. And when I've taken--she goes with me quite often because she likes to know these people too and they'll--the great thing about going out to that market is that these are such wonderful human beings. You enjoy visiting with them. They are very open and honest with you. They--and don't make the mistake, they're watching what the University is doing too. And they want to know about why you did this and why you did that. And you better have a good answer. **[Laughs]**

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AY: Got that. The microphone just fell a little bit but we got it. So would you describe the relationship between the Carrboro Farmers' Market and the University of Chapel Hill?

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WF: Well I think it's--I think everybody in the University that goes there goes for the same reasons I go. For example, I see Bill Leuchtenburg out there. Well here's one--an internationally famous political scientist and historian. And I--I go out to Bill's house and I see evidence of the

fact that he's done a little thumb work himself. You know, well that's the humanity of it. It's a piece of America cut out for itself and there are all shades of opinion, all shades of professions, and you just--you revel in that because it's always so open and so honest and so fair. You--I've never gone out there and left disappointed.

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AY: Have you seen other faculty members there--there that you could mention?

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WF: Oh yes, in fact they--I would guess that for the first two--three hours out there that's mostly what's there because everybody wants to get the fresh food. And oh yeah, there's just dozens of us out there and I hope that never stops. **[Laughs]**

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AY: How would you describe students' relationship to the Carrboro Farmers' Market?

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WF: Well I don't know--I think now that more students live at home, so to speak, and do their own cooking and do things like this that they buy bread from out--buy breads that are there that are very good, they're very identified breads--Italian, French, and things like--. And you get fresh fruit there that you don't see anywhere else. But you can buy blueberries there in season for example that are just wonderful and strawberries in turn. Now it's the melon season--cantaloupes and English melons and watermelons and you just know that was in the field yesterday so you--

you don't have to worry about it being fresh. But I'm sure students--I don't know them anymore like I used to but I'm sure that they are very much clients there.

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AY: Did you know students during your tenure here at Chapel Hill--did you know students who frequented the Market fifteen, twenty, thirty years ago?

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WF: No, if I did it was because we were in Law School together when I was a student in '46 to '48 going through Law School. But it was more of the community and that's what it really is. It's a community center and it's a very good one because people really do mingle and you get--you get ideas from just listening. And--and people out there who just have grown old with me, together out there, and you know, you--you sort of look forward to that; you really do. It's--it's a different world. And it's different because it's very refreshing. You like to hear this and like to see this happen. And oh, every once in a while one of them will--will stop or pass away and it's like you've lost an old friend.

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AY: When you go to the Farmers' Market do you ever visit for some of the special events that they have there, such as cooking classes or festivals like their Tomato Festival?

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WF: I get in on the fringes of it but no, that's a little more than I can handle right now being over ninety. But I--whose energy dissipates quickly and I have my plan of action. I know exactly who's got what I'm looking for after all these years and so that's what I do most of the time.

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AY: Do you go to the Market every Saturday now or is it more occasionally?

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WF: It has to be occasionally because it's just--as you grow older, you know, you change. And I used to be out there at seven o'clock sometimes but now I wait until about 11:00 when the crowd has sort of faded away and--. But the old-timers are still there and I get in to visit and I buy my greens and few tomatoes and now I'm buying a few melons and that's it.

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AY: What is your favorite thing about fresh foods?

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WF: Just that; that I know that when I get it, it was taken off the stalk yesterday. But it--it brings a different taste. You know, when you get food that's been taken from a--farms in Florida or California and marketed and processed and sprayed and all this--I took an apple the other day and I took a kitchen knife and I just screened the paraffin off of it to see how much I'd get. And I--when I go out to the Market that isn't true; I know I'm getting what I see. And that's why you enjoy it so much.

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AY: So there's been a lot of talk about organic and locally sourced produce recently. Do you have a preference for organic versus local or do you like to have the combination of the two when possible?

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WF: Clearly the latter. Not too many farmers are organic farmers and it's very good. My lettuce person is one who does that and you're down then to the really natural taste of the product. But it's unfair to expect all of them to do it because they--what you find is that the--the farmers at Carrboro, some of them supply the big stores like Whole Foods and others and--because they got their pictures up on the wall. And you know, the volume goes there and they have to do certain things to meet the schedule.

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But I'll take both any time. *[Laughs]*

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AY: There's also been a movement especially in the Triangle area of having restaurants source directly from farmers. Do you know any farmers who participate in that or have you been to restaurants where they say, "Hey, we're sourcing this locally."

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WF: Yes. I've eaten that in restaurants that are very proud of the fact identifying this came from the Farmers' Market. And I've been over to the Raleigh Farmers' Market where they have their own restaurant right there. And you--they use products right out of the--the farmers' shed right

over there in the restaurant. But yes, and--and that's another source of income you see to the farmer. And they've learned how to merchandise very well and how to market. And having all of us around them like this where we all want to get this material they've got a ready market most of the time. **[Laughs]**

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AY: Do you prefer any restaurants in the Chapel Hill area that have these locally sourced products?

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WF: I look for it to see if I can find it but most of the--the restaurants that you go to around here do use products. And they're the people that are out at the Carrboro Market at 7:00 a.m. I used to see Ben Barker out there--he ran his restaurant in Durham, you know, and he'd be right out there buying up all the green stuff before we got to it. **[Laughs]** But that just shows how smart he is. **[Laughs]**

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AY: As they always say, "Early bird gets the worm."

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WF: He got the lettuce in that case. **[Laughs]**

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AY: Yeah. Now in the next coming weeks are there any particular fruits or vegetables that you're looking forward to finding at the Carrboro Farmers' Market?

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WF: Well we're sort of at the end of the season now and--and we will go down to more staple fall products, you know, that come along this time of the year but we're working our way out of the melon season now and you begin now to begin to think of fall and winter and so the Market will begin to slack off. You can see it now already and we used--they went to the Wednesday Market because of the volume and demand, but now I would guess in time they'll go back to the regular Saturday schedule. But you'll see the fall crops of collards and greens and things like this begin to move, but the fresh fruit and all that is over now. And we'll have to wait and look forward to springtime. *[Laughs]*

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AY: And I wanted to ask you, in relation to the Farmers' Market, where are you actually living in this area? How far away from the Market are you?

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WF: Well I'm--I consider myself a next door neighbor. I'm in the center of town here. Mrs. Friday and I live on Hooper Lane which is one block off the campus and it's about--I'd guess really just a couple of miles from--out at the--the Market and, you know, it--I'm so proud of that building. They--it's a very nice facility. It's open and it fits the--the farmer. They can come into the center section, park, and put their material right there in front of you. And it's been interesting to me to watch them how they move around and get--swap places and do all this

because my wife is a part-time potter and she's gotten involved with the young lady from--from Pittsboro and she works with her every week and it's a lot of fun.

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But everybody looks out for everybody else. You know, when somebody is sick or, you know, when somebody has had an accident. They all communicate with you and that lets you make notes and you go call them and you see how everybody is doing, so--. It's a family affair; it really is.

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AY: And in the last section of this interview I'd like to ask you about how the--the Farmers' Market looked at its old location. Can you describe what the earlier years of the Market were like?

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WF: Oh well there were not nearly as many farmers there. And farmers in those days didn't prepare everything the way they do now. They--there's so much competition that you'll see corn will be shucked down a certain level--not bare but the rough stuff is cut off. And there's just more of it, huge--huge volumes of things now. Where it used to be the space I would guess was no more than fifty yards by twenty yards, just one room. But now they've got this whole outdoor arena so to speak and it shows growth. And it shows interest in foods and interest in commodities and they're all there. And I'm amazed at the--the extent of the flowers that are available--beautiful flowers there on Saturday. And we all--I'm growing some of my own but very sophisticated poppy development and things like this that add quite a bit of beauty to your home.

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AY: And in the past fifteen, twenty years ago who--what kind of person was shopping at the Market? Was it generally UNC staff and faculty or was it a market for a different kind of economic level?

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WF: Oh it was clearly the latter. It had not grown to the dimension that it is to attract faculty--both in volume of produce and in volume of producer. And this made a big difference. And it has grown and become a lot more sophisticated. You know, you can buy melons that people talk about seeing in Paris, this kind of thing and well that didn't happen in the old days--not at all.

[Laughs]

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AY: And where were the people coming from in these earlier years? Were they just local persons who were shopping at the Market?

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WF: They were mostly Carrboro residents and Dr. Hedgpeth took me out there because he lived out in the edge and he wanted me to see what was there. And then of course, I became hooked because I had grew up in a small town where everybody had a little vegetable garden and I realized how tasty and what a difference it made to get fresh commodities. So I stuck with it and I've gone out of there some Saturdays with the things that I bought for Kay and Georgia Kyser. I got so interested I'd feed my neighbors with stuff and because it was all so fresh and clean.

That's the good part about it; you knew you were getting something you could eat tomorrow morning.

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AY: And so you believe that growing up with food, fresh food as a child really affected your desire to have fresh food as an adult?

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WF: Oh there's no question about that. And what you learn now--all of us, if you're not, you're not doing what you should do, but we're so much more aware now of problems of obesity and problems of nutrition and problems of effects on cholesterol and heart disease. And so now farmers aren't going to sit around studying that and all about--talk to you about it; that's your job. So you can become very selective. But I have yet to see a food out there that didn't fit every pattern that I've ever seen about healthcare because it's all fresh, it's green, it's yellow. You know, they say the colors can help you if you don't know anymore. But that's all true out there.

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But, there's one lady that has that very first stall. She's been going--she's been there as long as I've been going out there and I've watched her son grow from a little kid--he's now graduating from the University. And I've watched, you know, as the seasons goes on; first it's the lettuce and then it's radishes and then it's turnips and then it's corn. This is the cycle that you go through. So it's a great place.

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Every community ought to have a farmers' market because it does something where you all sit down together, so to speak, but you're not sitting anywhere but you--you're mingling and you're talking and you're listening and you're understanding as well as getting something you really enjoy. So for me it's a win/win proposition under every circumstance and I'll never give it up as long as I'm mobile.

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AY: And as a last question, I like to ask this; is there anything else that you would like to talk about or something that I didn't ask you that you think would be important for this project?

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WF: There's one attraction that most--I'm sure most farmers' markets never even contemplate. But right in the curve of the Carrboro Market there's a very creative person that takes junk and makes animals and figures out of them, radiators and swings and things and it's an animated added attraction to the Carrboro Market that he even sells the stuff. And it--he's so much a figure of the Market culture out there that he starts talking to you before you ever get there almost. And so it--that's what makes this place unique. It's--it's now its own personality. It has its own character and if you--if you're a homebody at all you wouldn't miss it for anything in the world.

[Laughs]

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AY: Mr. Friday thank you so much. This concludes our interview for the Carrboro Farmers' Market Oral History Project.

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WF: Thank you.

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[End William Friday Interview]