

THE SMOKE HOUSE

348 Finley Ave. West
Birmingham, AL 35204
(205) 323-6427

"They believed in family back then, you know, more than we do right now, really. And [my father] got to go back [to Greece], and then he never come back. He always want[ed] to come back. He loved this country. That's why me and my brother came right here because...he push us."

--Theo Hontzas

Theo Hontzas arrived in Birmingham from Greece in 1958, when he was twenty-five years old. His brother, Gus Hontzas, was already here running Niki's West, and so Theo spent his first year in Birmingham working with his brother, hoping to make some money and then head back home to Greece. Soon, though, Theo found a restaurant to call his own, and the Hontzas family dug its heels even deeper into Birmingham's restaurant history. The Smoke House had been open for a while as a short-order place, but Theo saw the opportunity to make it a family business, serving fresh vegetables and a few traditional Greek items that rivaled the menu down the street. And with fresh produce available right next door at the Farmer's Market, it was a match made in Heaven. Theo is retired now, and his son Pete (first cousin to Pete C. Hontzas down the street at Niki's West) has taken the reins. Stop in for the Greek-style fish or chicken and as many vegetables you can fit on your plate.

Full Interview Transcription:

Theo Hontzas, Owner
SMOKE HOUSE RESTAURANT
348 Finley Ave. West
Birmingham, AL 35204
(205) 323-6427

INTERVIEWER: Amy Evans
DATE: March 12, 2004 @ 10:30 a.m.
LOCATION: Restaurant's dining room
LENGTH: Approx. 20 minutes

NOTE: This interview was conducted in the restaurant's dining room, and the staff can be heard working and chatting in the background throughout.

* * *

Amy Evans: This is Friday, March twelfth, two thousand and four, and this is Amy Evans at the Smoke House Restaurant with Theo Hontzas. Mr. Hontzas, would you mind stating your full name and your birthdate for the record, please?

Theo Hontzas: Uh, Theo Pete Hontzas. Uh, twelve, twenty-eight, nineteen thirty-three.

AE: Okay. And your family came from Greece when?

TH: From Greece? Well, my father came, uh, [short pause] nineteen fifteen, I'd say. Yeah, you know. Right—

AE: And your father—

TH: --earlier than me.

AE: What was your father's name?

TH: And he went back. P--Pete Hontzas. And he went back and, uh, brought his brother here—which is, uh, John Hontzas. He's in Jackson, Mississippi.

AE: With John's Restaurant?

TH: With Joh—yeah.

AE: Yes. Okay.

TH: John's Restaurant in Jackson, Mississippi. Of course, he's dead now, you know, it's been quite a while, you know. Yeah. And then he has, uh, three kids in Jackson. Yeah, of course they're not in the restaurant business no more.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Anymore. Yeah, he was, uh—he had last some kind of hotel on the highway there, but I don't know which one it was—in Jackson.

AE: Yeah, I've heard a lot about John's in Jackson.

TH: Yeah. Yeah.

AE: So you—

TH: And then, uh, my brother came and he worked with him [John], you know, in Jackson.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: Of course, he's down the street, you know, [is] Niki's West.

AE: Your brother, Gus.

TH: Yes.

AE: Is that right?

TH: Yes. And he died many years ago, you know. Three years ago, yeah.

AE: Yes. Yes.

TH: The hard work killed him.

AE: Yeah?

TH: The restaurant business.

AE: The restaurant business is a very hard business to be in.

TH: [Laughs] Yeah. And, uh, I been right here since nineteen sixty, which is, uh, forty-four years. And, uh, four years ago I retired, and I turned it [the business] over to my son.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: Yeah.

AE: And where in Greece is your family from?

TH: Uh, Leunithian, they call them. It's about a hundred miles out of Athens.

AE: Okay.

TH: But I lived in Athens, though. Because I have, uh, I went there to college, and I went through military school and everything. When I came right here [to Birmingham] I was twenty-five years old. You come, you know—

AE: Okay.

TH: --when you're young.

AE: So what was life in Greece like when you lived there?

TH: Uh, with me it was good because I had a good time. Of course, I wasn't married then and everything. That was different, you know.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: And I came right here to, uh, make, uh, a little money--ten thousand dollars, back then—and go back. But I [am] still here.

AE: Um-hmm. [Laughs]

TH: [Laughs]

AE: Did you meet your wife here?

TH: Yeah, Yeah, my wife was—she is also Greek.

AE: Um-hmm. And what is her—

TH: It's better to marry your own kind, you know. Your nationality and everything, you know.

AE: [Short laugh] What is your—

TH: It works better.

AE: What is your wife's family's name? Her maiden name?

TH: Uh, Serandos. Angelo Serandos. He was in the restaurant business too. He had a barbecue, you know. A barbecue downtown. Of course, he's dead now, you know. He's all--

AE: What was the name of the barbecue restaurant?

TH: Uh, Eli's Bar-B-Q.

AE: Okay.

TH: Eli's Bar-B-Q. And, uh, I married her, we have three kids. I got a son, you know, want to tend to the business, I give to him. You know, Pete.

AE: Pete. Yeah.

TH: And then I have two daughters. One m—one of my daughters is a doctor. And she married a doctor. Met a Greek boy from, uh, an island in Greece, of course, he born right here too. And he's in North Carolina. He's practicing there--

AE: Oh, okay.

TH: --in North Carolina. They got two kids, so I have two grandkids.

AE: Wonderful.

TH: The other two, they are not married. Yeah.

AE: Well, can I ask you—

TH: They need to get married! But they don't know about it.

AE: [Laughs]

TH: [Laughs]

AE: Well, can I ask you to go back to, um, the Hontzas family starting Niki's Downtown and then the two restaurants that were opened on this side of town.

TH: Yeah. Well, uh, when was—you know, Niki's Downtown, it wasn't a—a—yeah, that was here then. Just down, you know, from, uh,—I have another u—uncle. He started Niki's Downtown [Johnny Hontzas], and then he came right here and opened this, uh, place right here, and then he got sick and then, uh, he sold the place to, uh, uh—my brother [Gus Hontzas] and, uh, his cousin. Our cousin.

AE: Okay.

TH: Another cousin, Jimmy. And they're all dead now.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Yeah. And now their kids--that's where they start[ed], right here in Birmingham, yeah.

AE: Okay. And—

TH: But I don't have no connection with them, though [George Sissa who now owns and operates Niki's Downtown].

AE: At the Niki's Downtown, right?

TH: No. I have no—

AE: The Sar—The Sissa's.

TH: We have no connection with them, yeah.

AE: Right.

TH: I just came right here, you know.

AE: Right.

TH: And bought the place right here.

AE: And the Smoke—

TH: Nineteen sixty.

AE: Nineteen sixty was when the Smoke House opened?

TH: Yeah. That's when I came. Yeah. No! They had opened, uh, a few years earlier. Bou—I bought the place already open.

AE: Okay.

TH: You know, yes.

AE: Okay.

TH: Of course, that was when—you know, they had drinking place, but then I make—I make a restaurant. I make the food—uh, you know—eating place out of this.

AE: Uh-huh.

TH: As you see, you know. Even back then—

AE: Sure.

TH: Yeah.

AE: So you came from Greece and—

TH: From Greece and I, uh—

AE: And you opened this—

TH: Yeah.

AE: --immediately.

TH: Yes, ma'am. Yeah.

AE: Okay. And then, Niki's West was already been open about three years, right?

TH: That was a couple of years earlier, yeah. Three years—about two-and-a-half years earlier than, uh—then I came right here. But this place right here was [here] before Niki's opened.

AE: Okay, and who owned this before you took it?

TH: But--that was, uh—really, the farmer's market. Because the famer's market—the farmner's market, yeah. They built [it] for a—another, uh, guy.

AE: Okay, but was he Greek?

TH: His name Jesse –No. He wasn't Greek.

AE: Okay. Okay. And so—

TH: And, uh—

AE: --how did you decide to—

TH: That—that didn't do any good. I was familiar with the place and everything, you know. Yeah.

AE: Uh-huh. And was it named the Smoke House then also?

TH: Yeah. Back then? Yeah.

AE: And did you—was the same menu here then?

TH: No. No. That was, uh, they didn't have no cafeteria line—

AE: Okay.

TH: And they didn't have no—you know. That was more, uh, they'd have [short pause] short orders.

AE: Okay.

TH: Short orders food. And then, uh, you know, a drinking place and everything, you know. But now I don't—I don't have nothing like that.

AE: Yeah.

TH: I just, uh—I don't have no drinking at all. No whiskey, no beer, not nothing, you know.

AE: Okay.

TH: Just—

AE: So how did you—

TH: --straight food.

AE: How did you--did you decide to change it to the steam table—

TH: Well, I, uh, I don't like the, uh, [short pause] I'm trying to get the families. Yeah, somebody, you know, comes down here with his family, you know, just like you--bring—you know, your kids and everything. [phone rings] You know.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: Don't want, uh—really, that don't mix together [drinking and a family business]. You know. Yeah.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Yeah.

AE: And so did you learn some of the business from what was going on at Niki's West?

TH: Yeah. I—I worked down there, you know, with my brother, you know.

AE: Okay.

TH: For a year.

AE: Okay.

TH: Yeah. But he and I, uh, you know—And then, work about sixteen, eighteen hours a day and that's how you learn.

AE: Yeah.

TH: You know, and don't have to go [to] no school or nothing like that, you know. I have good education from back home [in Greece] and not here.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Not here. I didn't go to school [in the United State] or nothing like that. I just learn, you know, by work.

AE: Yeah.

TH: All by myself.

AE: And so you initially just wanted to come here so you could earn some money and go back to Greece.

TH: Yeah, that was my dream. You know, that's everybody's dream, really.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Yeah.

AE: Are you glad you stayed?

TH: Everybody—well, now—it's too late now. [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

TH: This is my home now.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Been right here forty-four years and my kids—my grandkids right here and--this is the best country in the world.

AE: Yeah.

TH: I been--go back [to Greece], I go all over Europe. You know, I go all around the world, you know, and this is the best country in the world.

AE: Do you know how your father initially made it to Birmingham, specifically?

TH: No, he wasn't in Birmingham, he was in, uh, Louisiana.

AE: Okay.

TH: And he had a couple of small places—sandwich shops, you know, back then. You know, with the hot dog stands, whatever. And, uh, he made some money and, uh, but his daddy died. His daddy was a preacher. And he was the first [oldest] in the family, and his daddy died so he, uh, had to go back [to Greece] to take care of the family.

AE: Okay.

TH: They believed in family back then, you know, more than we do right now, really. And he got to go back, and then he never come back. He always want to come back. He loved this country. That's why me and my brother came right here [to Birmingham] because he—

AE: Okay.

TH: --you know, he push us, you know, here.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Yeah, he says go on, go to the United States. It's the best country in the world and everything. He was right! This is the best country in the world.

AE: And what was Birmingham like when you first got here?

TH: Well, that was, uh—that—lot—lot of smaller, you know thing--just like Jackson is a lot bigger now, you know, than--it probably was four, five hundred—now it's a million people, you know, with all the outside[rs], you know, yeah.

AE: Um-hmm. And what was business like here at the Smoke House when you first started?

TH: Well, when I came right here, the, uh, lunch was fifty cents. [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

TH: Yeah, that difference, you know.

AE: Yeah. A lot changes.

TH: Yeah.

AE: And—

TH: Things change.

AE: --your children were born here [in Birmingham].

TH: Yeah, they [were] born right here, yeah. And they—

AE: And then you raised them in the Greek Orthodox Church?

TH: Yeah.

AE: And they went to Greek school—

TH: Right.

AE: --and everything?

TH: Right. Well, they learned Greek from us at home, really, you know. And then went to school too.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Whatever they have—they don't have no organized schools right here, you know. Just—

AE: Yeah.

TH: --little bit, you know.

AE: Have they been back to Greece?

TH: Yeah. When they were little I was taking them there, you know. Yeah. So they're familiar with all the Greek, uh—

AE: Uh-huh.

TH: --you know.

AE: And does your son, Pete, like being in the restaurant business?

TH: Yeah!

AE: Yeah?

TH: Yeah. Yeah, well—and that's the reason when [that] I'm still here, you know, I come down and help him. You know, we own all the property and everything, of course, you know.

AE: Yeah?

TH: Yeah.

AE: And—

TH: And I come down and help him and [it] give[s] me something to do too, you know.

AE: Sure.

TH: Because I can stay home.

AE: Sure. And your son Pete and Pete Hontzas over at Niki's West—

TH: First cousins.

AE: Yes, they're cousins—

TH: First cousins.

AE: --and they're named after your father?

TH: First cousin. Right.

AE: Okay. What's his--

TH: That's how they name the, uh—the Greeks [unintelligible phrase]—they name the, uh, the grandkids, they take after the, uh, grandfather.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Yeah.

AE: Okay. And so you're open here at five a.m.—

TH: Right now—right now—

AE: --I see.

TH: Yeah. Right now—when I was, uh, owning the place, I was, uh—I was working, you know, different --really, back then we never close[d]. It was twenty-four hours a day, you know.

AE: Wow.

TH: Yeah. But then I start[ed] closing [at] two o'clock, then twelve and then come down, you know. And I was closed--you know, like they do now, you know, ten o'clock but—He [Pete] took over. He's by himself and, uh, open--you know, he comes early in the morning. We open [for] breakfast and lunch now. We don't open at night. And he [is] also closed on Saturdays too, you know.

AE: Okay.

TH: This is a big place and, uh, in order to do that [stay open late] he has to get a partner. He has to get somebody else and everything. And I told him [he's] better off to go, you know, to do it by himself and cut down on the hours and everything.

AE: Yeah.

TH: That's what he's doing.

AE: Well, to be open at five a.m. you must have a really big breakfast crowd.

TH: Yeah, we have breakfast, you know. We do good at breakfast because [there are] a lot of working people around here, you know.

AE: Yeah.

TH: And we have the Farmer's Market right behind us, you know. From –and it's real busy in the summer. You know, a lot of people go in, you know, produce and all that.

AE: Yeah.

TH: You know, yeah.

AE: And you get all your produce and everything from the Farmer's Market?

TH: Yeah. All fresh, you know. We get them all fresh, you know. Yeah. We'll have people from all over Birmingham just--come to eat just the vegetables, you know.

AE: Yeah.

TH: You know, yeah, fresh vegetables.

AE: Um, what about Kontos Produce? Do you work with them at all?

TH: Well, they—they—they Greeks—they Greeks too, you know, those boys. But those boys, they're born right here.

AE: Yeah?

TH: And everything—they, uh, yeah.

AE: But I know that produce company is really old—going on one hundred years old, I think.

TH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, they real old. And they, uh, they were—[many] families there [in the business] too.

AE: Uh-huh.

TH: But now the—last year, uh, one of the family left, so there's only one family there now, you know. Two brothers in there now, uh—yeah. There were about five, I think . At one time.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: Bu they, uh—now they only, uh, one family there. Two brothers that—owning the place. Yeah.

AE: Okay.

TH: But their [family] come[s] from way back too.

AE: Yeah.

TH: They—longer than us.

AE: Yeah.

TH: You know, we came from the old country, but see they [were] born here. The older people born right here, yeah.

AE: Well, and the food that you serve here—is there anything—do you have Greek items on the menu?

TH: Yeah, we cook Greek.

AE: Uh-huh.

TH: We eat a lot of, you know, garlic, olive oil, oregano and, uh, things like that. Which is Greek, and we use them on, uh, most our foods, you know. We do that. We do Greek chicken, Greek fish and all that, you know.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: But, uh—and some of the vegetables. Tomatoes and onions, you know, the Greek-style. You know, with garlic and—but all the rest [is] American because we--our customers is, you know—American people, you know. Yeah.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Yeah

AE: I looked at the steam table a minute ago and saw all the yams and the—

TH: Yeah.

AE: --the snap peas.

TH: Yeah, yeah. All the—yeah, all the fresh vegetables. Yeah. We'll have about—uh, around thirty, thirty-five vegetables a day, you know. Yeah.

AE: Do you cook at home?

TH: My wife does all that. [Laughs]

AE: Yeah.

TH: I don't do it at home, but she does. Yeah.

AE: Does she cook—

TH: She's a great cook.

AE: --Greek things and—

TH: Yeah, yeah, *all* Greek.

AE: All Greek?

TH: Oh, yeah.

AE: Do you have any southern items at home--

TH: Uh—

AE: --when she cooks?

TH: Uh, not much. Sometimes but we turn everything to Greek, you know.

AE: Yeah. [Laughs]

TH: But we turn, you know—We cook the Greek way and everything, you know.

AE: Uh-huh.

TH: Yeah.

AE: And, um, so what—what can you say about the Greek community in Birmingham? It seems—

TH: Well, they're good. They're great. Yeah, they're great. We, uh, all belong to the [Greek Orthodox] church and everything, you know. Anybody don't belong to the church is lost, you know. Lonely, you know. But, uh, we get along fine [short pause] with each other. Yeah, we don't have the—it's great. It's good. It's good. Good. Good Greek community.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Of course, a lot of place[s] they have problems about the language and, you know, the ones that were born right here, they want them [the services] in English and, uh, we want them, you know, Greek and everything. But in our church, we, uh, kind of divide them, you know. Half-and-half so, uh, satisfies everybody.

AE: Yeah.

TH: You know, the older people, they don't understand Greek—you know, English. And us, you know.

AE: Well, Pete Hontzas at Niki's West told me that you all had a Hontzas family reunion of sorts on Sunday.

[Short pause]

TH: Uh, yeah, well, sometimes, you know, we get together. We don't get together like we used to.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Don't get together. Back then we used to, um, uh, we don't have no—we don't celebrate birthdays, but we celebrate name days.

AE: Name days?

TH: Back—from back home [in Greece].

AE: Okay.

TH: Name days. And we used to do big parties and all that and everything, you know, but we don't do that a—as much anymore as we used to. And every year it is getting worse. It's dying, you know.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: And, uh, when we're gone, you know, the kids won't do that, uh—you know. But the families get together and they have—you know, eat and drink and whatever, you know. Yeah.

AE: Can you explain what a name day is?

TH: Name days—it's got—"Amy."

AE: Yes.

TH: Just like, uh—I don't know what Amy means in English but, uh, uh, we have the, uh—um, the day of —we celebrate the, um, the people when they get their days. Like, uh, Gus. You—I mean, uh, Pete. Pete was—he celebrates on the fifteenth of August. That's what the, uh--Mary, you know, in Cristos, means when the Christ got born. Celebrate that. We took the names from the, uh, angels—from the, uh, what do you call them? [Mumbles something in Greek]From the S—

AE: Saints?

TH: Sabbaths. The Sabbaths.

AE: Okay.

TH: All the Sabbaths. That's the name, the Sabbaths.

AE: Okay.

TH: And we celebrate n—you know, the names when they're born, you know.

AE: Okay.

TH: Yeah. That's how we get our names and celebrate such a name, you know, yeah.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: Yeah. And the Sabbaths and the Saints, you know. Yeah.

AE: And do you, um, I know you said that—that this is the greatest country in the world, and that you love being in Birmingham but—

TH: It is. It is.

AE: --do you miss things about Greece?

TH: No, uh—Nah, not anymore.

AE: No?

TH: No. To start with I did, you know.

AE: Yeah.

TH: But, uh, nothing now. We go over there now and it's so different. Everything's changed, you know. We changed too right here. But we [are] spoiled from right here because—see, this right here, we [have] got everything and complain about it. That's the problem, we're spoiled here, you know.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: And, uh, when we go back, we want to come back--you know, get out of there. Come back home. This is home now, you know.

AE: What do you think about the Olympics being in Athens this summer?

TH: That's wonderful! Because that's where—that's where everything starts from. Yeah. And it's—it's in the right place this year. I hope it's going to be safe, you know. After what [has] been happening, you know. Yeah. But they, uh—I think they'll be all right, you know. But, uh, they'll be safe.

AE: Can you explain—can you tell me a little bit about what your brother Gus was like?

TH: Well, yeah he worked a little more than, uh. Hard working, you know. You know, he believed in work, you know, more than I do. You know, more than I do. You know, I never put my family in front of the business, you know. My family always comes first, you know. My home, my wife, and family. But he was real different, you know. He was—yeah, he believed in work.

AE: Was he an—

TH: Worked too much—

AE: --older brother?

TH: Oh, yeah. He was older than me, yeah. He took after my daddy. My daddy was the same way, you know. [Beep of Mr. Hontzas's watch in background] he believed too much in work.

AE: Yeah?

TH: And, uh, he couldn't get out there[of the restaurant] anytime. Yeah.

AE: Well, I know that, um—

TH: And that's what got him.

AE: Yeah.

TH: I think that's what killed him, yeah.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Yeah, yeah. [He] had a couple of heart attacks and then, you know, when he got out of there it was a few months before he died. It was too late then, you know. Yeah. But that kill a lot of people, you know, this business. [It would] kill a mule, really. [Laughs]

AE: [Laugh] Well, and that restaurant down the street [Niki's West] has expanded so much from what it--

TH: Yeah, yeah. They—from what it was, yeah. Well, there are two of them and everything [two brothers, Pete and Teddy, now running their father's restaurant].

AE: Yeah.

TH: Yeah, they keep their [own] hours, you know. Yeah, they start[ed] from a small place back then, you know. Yeah.

AE: So, do you ever eat out in Birmingham? Your family?

TH: Uh, not too much. We used to, you know, more. But now—not too--about once a week now, you know.

AE: Where do you do when you go out to eat?

TH: For something little just to get out a little bit, you know. There's not—yeah, for something little.

AE: Yeah.

TH: Nothing—we don't have to go out to eat good food, you know? Good food is at home, really. [Laughs]

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: For us. Yeah. We—and we have all kinds of foods right here. You know, we've been--I've been around food all my life and everything. I'm not, uh, you know what I mean.

AE: Uh-huh. Was your father a good cook?

TH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. He was. He was, you know, he would do some cooking--back home. Yeah. But see, the, uh, really—the people that came from there [in Greece]—well, the, uh, ladies, like my wife and everything. Uh, they're good cooks. You know, we always got more right here. Like my—my daughter cooks and everything, you know. That's a different story altogether. But the ones, when they came from there, yeah. Good cooks.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: Yeah.

AE: Can you talk about some of the things your wife cooks at home?

TH: Well, all the, uh, Greek—Greek things. You know, that, uh—everything. You know, chicken, steaks and everything. But we cook--cook them the Greek way, you know. All that, uh, pastitsio and mousaka and [short pause]

all kinds, you know. Greek. And all kind of sweets, you know. Moulakala (?), kourambiethes, uh, baklava and everything. Greek names. [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs] Have, um, you all had the opportunity to travel much around the United States?

TH: Well, yeah. Uh, not—no, not much. I don't--the United States. But we've gone to, uh—went [to] Florida a lot and then, uh, my daughter was in St. Loius and then North Carolina. I [have] been going there. But I have a place also in Florida . In Destin. And, you know, I go there for, uh, uh, fishing.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: And, you know, vacation and everything. I go probably once a month or so. I go down there, you know, just to get out. You know. Now. Yeah.

AE: Okay. Great.

TH: Now, when I have more time.

AE: You like to fish?

TH: Yeah. Yeah. We go and get a boat and we go on out and, you know, just to get out, you know. Catch some fish, you know.

AE: Yeah.

TH: I got a place down here in Destin, you know. Destin, Florida. That's a good place. Good, uh, good clean town. Yeah.

AE: And you and your wife go down there together?

TH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. She better!

AE: [Laughs]

TH: She better not let me go there by myself! [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

TH: Yeah, we go together. Yeah. Yeah.

AE: Well, what do you—

TH: We're reall—we're real close. You know, my wife. Been married for [short pause] Well, sixty--forty-one years now, you know. And that's going to be it too.

AE: What does she think about the restaurant here?

TH: Well, she never work[ed] right here. I didn't, you know, I always believed that she had a big job at home. And she should have [a big job], you know, with three kids and everything, you know. And, uh, we do our own work at home. She loves to work in the flowers and, uh, we have a garden and everything, you know.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: We do our own work. And she's busy over there--well, you know. As a matter of fact, she works outside now. She's getting ready to put the flowers out, you know--for the summer, you know.

AE: Sure.

TH: Yeah. Yeah.

AE: Well, did--do you know all the guys downtown who have the hot dog stands? Gus--

TH: Yeah. Yeah.

AE: Koutroulakis [at Pete's Famous Hot Dogs] and all of them?

TH: Yeah, yeah. He [has] been there all his life. [Short laugh]

AE: Yeah.

TH: You know.

AE: What do you think about all these Greeks having hot dog stands?

TH: Yeah, it's all right.

AE: Yeah.

TH: It's all right for some people. Like him, you know, he did good.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: Yeah. Make a lot of money. The only problem with him, you know, is he just need--need[s] to get out of there, you know.

AE: [Laughs]

TH: The money's not going to do him no good, you know. [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

TH: It's, uh, [short pause] You have to, uh, to work hard and everything, but [it] comes time when you have to, you know, slow down and everything, you know. You have to, yeah.

AE: Um-hmm. And do you think your son, Pete, will stay here at the restaurant?

TH: Ma'am?

AE: 'Til he retires? Do you think Pete will stay here at the restaurant 'til he retires?

TH: Eh, I don't have no idea, you know. You never can tell about kids these days.

AE: Yeah.

TH: You know they [laughs]—he might change his mind tomorrow. [Laughs]

AE: Yeah.

TH: But so far, so good, you know. He—he like[s] this kind of work and everything. Yeah.

[Sound of recording equipment being moved across the table]

AE: Well, what do you think about the future of the Smoke House [Restaurant] then, with your son here?

TH: Oh, as long as I live it's going to be all right. You know, after that [bangs hand on table], you know, I'm able to come down [to help], you know, and—

AE: Yeah.

TH: Yeah.

AE: Well, do you have any—

TH: Later, I don't--no guarantee. You never can tell. Yeah.

AE: Yeah. Do you have any thoughts to add about the Greek community in Birmingham or the restaurant.

TH: Well, It's a good community. Good people. You know, good family people and everything. We don't have no, you know—of course, good people and bad people [are] from nationalities and everything.

AE: Um-hmm.

TH: But we don't have too many, really, you know. We have pretty good people here, you know. Yeah.

AE: Okay. Well, I appreciate you taking the time—

TH: Sure!

AE: --to speak with me.

TH: Sure, it was my pleasure.

AE: Thank you.

TH: It was—

[END]