

CELESTE ALBERS

Green Grocer, Wadmalaw, South Carolina

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Marion Square, Charleston, South Carolina

Interviewers: Kate Medley, Sara Wood

Transcription: Shelley Chance

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Project: Charleston Food + Wine Oral History Bus

[Begin Celeste Albers Interview]

00:00:00

Celeste Albers: Nobody wants to live out there because—so bad. Now that the [inaudible] everything—so bad. But it's still—it's out there; you know when you get out there you have to turn around and go all the way back to get anywhere.

00:00:21

Kate Medley: I remember visiting a seafood guy once who I felt like was at the end of the road; a guy named Michael LaRoche.

00:00:30

CA: Uh-hm; down to Cherry Point.

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KM: Cherry Point; that's kind of toward the end isn't it?

00:00:33

CA: Yeah; that is just about the end. Rockville is the very end. Turn left to get to Cherry Point and keep going straight on the [Inaudible] and it dead-ends. Then you're—the old village of Rockville so which basically has always been made up of shrimpers and fishermen and farmers—not quite that way anymore.

00:00:56

KM: Okay; huh. Is Cherry Point still in business?

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CA: Uh-hm; yeah it's still there.

00:01:00

KM: I can still hear his voice because he said my name is Michael LaRoche.

00:01:04

CA: [*Laughs*] Yeah that's right; yeah.

00:01:07

KM: He was such a nice guy.

00:01:08

CA: And his son Daniel has kind of taken things over and Mike is doing a lot more missionary work and that kind of thing. But Daniel is out there working on boats and unloading, although there's not nearly the activity that there used to be—hardly any shrimping left. There's only a few fishing boats still working, so—.

00:01:31

Sara Wood: Yeah.

00:01:31

CA: It's greatly reduced from what it was.

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KM: How long have you been out there?

00:01:35

CA: Well let's see. We were on John's Island—

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KM: Getting things, getting the oral history—

00:01:42

CA: We were on John's Island for a long time and got kind of pushed out of there by development. And we've been on Wadmalaw for about 12 years. We were renting some land kind of in preparation of building knowing we were going to have to eventually move, so we did some farming there for longer, but all together—

00:02:07

KM: Got ya; cool.

00:02:11

CA: Had to relocate a few times.

00:02:12

KM: Yeah; all right. Well Sara you want to get it rolling?

00:02:20

CA: Okay; do I keep my jacket on or off?

00:02:22

Sara Wood: You know it's up to you. I kind of like it on. What do you think?

00:02:27

CA: Brushed corduroy—yeah. It's my mom's.

00:02:34

SW: Definitely—that will be nice, yeah.

00:02:36

CA: So how is it going to work; are you going to ask me questions?

00:02:42

SW: Yes.

00:02:41

CA: I'll do my best to answer.

00:02:44

SW: Yes; we're going to ask you questions.

00:02:45

CA: Put me in the hot seat?

00:02:47

SW: You know all the answers to these questions—promise.

00:02:49

CA: Okay; good. [*Laughs*]

00:02:50

SW: I'm going to have you sit in the middle.

00:02:51

CA: In the middle, okay.

00:02:57

SW: And I'm going to—let's straighten this behind you a little bit. Yeah; there we go, all right.

00:03:13

CA: How's that?

00:03:26

SW: Yesterday I moved these cameras down. So I think actually it's set. You might be at the right height. Do you want to try that? [*Off Mic Conversation*]

00:03:42

CA: Yeah; you don't want—you don't want to be uncomfortable.

00:03:43

SW: Well poor Kate yesterday you were like—kind of like—you were like—an air chair.

00:03:52

CA: Yeah; you don't have much—

00:03:53

SW: My back is hurting today.

00:03:57

CA: There's nothing worse than a partial bend or a partial squat. It's—

00:04:03

SW: Today I'm like oh my back is out of whack. Maybe it's because of that partial squat.

00:04:06

CA: That strain.

00:04:08

SW: Okay now you sit and I'll move the cameras around. [*Off Mic Conversation*]

00:04:22

SW: So you guys just feel free to visit.

00:04:26

SW: So now did you—were you coming out—do you have an event today? I feel like you might have mentioned it.

00:04:31

CA: Uh-hm; yeah, I'm going to be at Snob for the local [inaudible] luncheon. They're using some of our beef for tamales and then Chef Lee will be kind of emceeing so he'll be asking me questions for the—the group at the lunch too.

00:04:48

SW: Oh my god; we're going to be so much easier than—

00:04:51

CA: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

00:04:52

SW: This will be a warm-up.

00:04:54

CA: Yeah; that's right. Yeah.

00:04:58

SW: You know what? I'm going to—can you—?

00:05:00

CA: Yeah; get it the way you want it.

00:05:04

SW: Okay then scoot in against it. Yeah; there we go. That's good. And then if you'll scoot just a half inch that way.

00:05:14

CA: Did I move the drape?

00:05:16

SW: Yeah.

00:05:18

CA: And the drape went with me.

00:05:20

SW: And don't go all the way back. Come forward just a tad. Yeah; there we go. That's perfect.

00:05:29

SW: I feel like—

00:05:33

SW: You're our first interview of the day so bear with us.

00:05:35

CA: Okay; well that's why I'm early to give you plenty of time to—

00:05:39

SW: Could you—something is running that wasn't running yesterday. Will you ask Jeff to check—but I can—. [*Off Mic Conversation*]

00:05:55

I was really interested; I was reading that your—you guys—your father, was he shrimping in Bulls Bay or—?

00:06:04

CA: My grandfather was um, was like a jack of all trades in Awendaw, which is north of Mount Pleasant. He had a small farm. He had a country store. He had a small shrimp boat. And he and his cousins you know were in the—the pristine, that—that era is completely gone now. But they would shrimp in Bulls Bay and now you see shrimp boats and they have big outriggers and winches that pull in giant nets.

00:06:40

In those days they had a small net that they drug behind the boat and then they pulled it in by hand. Everything had—and they would break for lunch and everyone would anchor and the black crew would fry up fish and shrimp that they just caught and they'd cook rice and they'd all like get in a little circle and have lunch and then start out again. And no one would ever shrimp on Sunday, on a holiday; if there was a funeral on Awendaw there would be no shrimping [*Laughs*]. That's all gone now. But now there's hardly any shrimp boats left.

00:07:16

SW: You know I was hearing—trying to find the people who were left who are doing that kind of work and I talked to Andrew Magwood. Do you know—?

00:07:25

CA: Yes; yes.

00:07:26

SW: He is the nicest man and he just—I mean he told all these stories of his family and Big Bulls Island and Little Bulls Island.

00:07:32

CA: Uh-hm; yes.

00:07:33

SW: Just about how I mean—

00:07:35

CA: His grandmother used to harvest oysters in Bulls and bring them downtown in—in quart Mason jars and sell them to the attorneys that were like her big customers. But she would come downtown with these quart jars of oysters that she harvested and shucked herself. There used to be a lot of crab. There was a big crab-picking house in McClellanville and so they—they stayed for as long as possible but it was the late '90s I guess that the last crab house went. There's—there's so much different—

00:08:13

SW: You rolling on audio? All right; you ready?

00:08:16

CA: Sure.

00:08:18

SW: Let's do this. [*Claps*]

00:08:27

SW: So Celeste just to start could you just say hello and introduce yourself and tell me who you are and what you do?

00:08:31

CA: Hello; my name is Celeste Albers, Celeste [Fort] Albers.

00:08:36

SW: I'm going to have you—I'm sorry; I should have mentioned this before I asked you that.

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SW: And hold on; y'all keep talking one more sec. I just want to straighten this.

00:08:43

SW: I'm going to have you try—I know it's hard because there's like all these lenses in front of you and if you can talk to me—look at me when you're—.

00:08:52

SW: Excuse me; sorry, sorry.

00:08:59

SW: Okay; okay so I'm sorry.

00:09:02

CA: Start again?

00:09:03

SW: Yeah.

00:09:03

CA: Okay; hello my name is Celeste Albers. I am a farmer, currently a dairy farmer. We've done lots of different types of farming in the past though my husband and I.

00:09:16

SW: And I wanted to actually ask you know about where you grew up and you know about what it was—can you talk about what it was like there, the land, and your experiences there?

00:09:28

CA: Well I am—I'm a transplant. I have roots in various places. I grew up in Delaware. My father's people were from Awendaw here in South Carolina. My father moved to Delaware when he was a young man. He was the only son of a subsistence farmer all around, jack of all trades; grew up milking cows, feeding pigs, working the land with the mule growing corn and vegetables, working on his father's small shrimp boat, going to school in the small school in Awendaw and then graduated from another small high school in McClellanville.

00:10:16

And his family really encouraged him to better himself, to get an education and get off of the land, do something where he could make money and have a retirement and all of that. So he went to the University of South Carolina and got an accounting degree and ended up working for the DuPont Company. So he was sent to Delaware where he met my mother who was a secretary at the DuPont Company and her family was from Pennsylvania, lots of farming in that background too.

00:10:54

Her grandmother had an egg operation; my mother spent every summer at Ninny's farm and swore that you know that was the last thing in the world that she would want to do **[Laughs]** was be an egg farmer. But those roots were there, old German, hard-working people. During the Depression my grandfather worked on a carrot farm and drove a truck delivering produce from the farms around Norristown into Philadelphia and he never would eat chicken or carrots the entire time growing up. But I lived with them for a little while too and that was something that always fascinated me. And he would tell me about—because when during the Depression, sometimes all they ate were chicken and carrots, chickens that they killed that were from Ninny's farm and carrots from the—from the farm that he worked on. **[Laughs]**

00:11:53

So my father spent his whole life missing the farm frankly. Working for DuPont he had that stable income and indeed he has a sterling golden retirement, which I don't know if anyone will ever have now, but he never felt fulfilled I don't think. And still I feel like I think now that he's—at first was kind of nervous about the idea of me being a farmer full-time but he really enjoys hearing about what's going on, on the farm and being there and being with the animals. It kind of brings him back. But my whole growing up we had a vegetable garden and did canning and freezing and ate from—from our—our little plot of land.

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And as a child I did resent that a little bit because I'd have to be hoeing the peas or picking the bean beetles off the plants or doing something in the garden when my friends were playing. But it stuck; that—that dirt was under my fingernails. And I tried hard to do other things. I—I went to college and I worked all kinds of different jobs and just never felt like it was what I was supposed to be doing.

00:13:13

Then my grandmother gave me a copy of Elliott Coleman's book, *The New Organic Grower*, and that kind of said—told me that yeah there is a path that you can take because of course in the '80s and '90s if you talked about farming you were expected to do something big—a big monoculture or the University of Delaware, we used to call it the University of DuPont and Monsanto because [*Laughs*] that's who supported the University. And you went to the Ag Department and all you saw was how to grow soybeans, how to grow corn with all the latest technologies. If you wanted to do dairy you had to do it big. Everything was get big or—or don't do it at all. It was—so that definitely didn't appeal to me.

00:14:00

But then when I read Elliott Coleman's book and thought about growing things for specific small markets and having a relationship with the people that would be eating the food that really appealed to me. And my father, too; and then when he retired from DuPont, he and my mom moved back here to Mount Pleasant and he started—he still had 15 acres left of the old family land and he started growing cover crops and kind of getting the land ready to start growing vegetables.

00:14:33

So in the early '90s I moved here and we started just growing stuff organically and bringing—bringing it downtown here to the Farmers' Market right here where we're sitting right now and we were the first people to sell to restaurants in town. At that time the local movement, there really wasn't one and certainly no organic interest either. I spent a lot of time educating people. What is organic? Why would you do it that way? What's you know what do you mean this is fresh and what I get in the grocery store isn't? And why—why should I care? It was—it was quite a struggle for a while but it really caught on. People are really finding—I find more and more people want to know where their food comes from and how it was grown and who cared for the animal, who milked the cow, who put it in the bottle, how did that animal live; it's—it's good.

00:15:43

SW: And Celeste I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about—to go back for a second and you know you spent time in Delaware and then you moved here; I'm wondering could you kind of describe for someone who has never been to this part of the country, this region, the Low Country, what—what that land is like, the difference between you know you talked about your grandmother you know—grew up with the farming roots in Pennsylvania and then your father's

background, but could you talk about what the land is like here, like and its—like its defining characteristics as a farmer here in the Low Country?

00:16:23

CA: Well the first thing that you notice when you come to the Low Country is the water. We are surrounded by water. To get anywhere you're going over a bridge and marsh and it's salty and humid and it's low. This is the Low Country. We're very close to sea level. You can't dig a really deep hole without it filling with water. We don't have a lot of topsoil and we don't have any rock either. So it's—it's a beautiful place and it tends to be warm except for right now, but we tend to have a lot of heat and humidity and you think of it as there being a long growing season. But in some ways that's not true because we have a lot of pressure from weeds, from insects and the lack of topsoil and rock-based soils makes it difficult.

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Growing things in Pennsylvania and Delaware you have a rich mineralized soil and you have your—your waters coming from deep, nice deep wells, really good quality water, a lot of minerals in the soil, true loamy topsoil. It's much better to grow vegetables in Pennsylvania or Delaware than here. We have a hard time because we have a lot of clay and sand. And the—the soil will change just over a couple of miles—one side of the river to the other. We deal with a lot of hard pan and trying to keep up—keep the minerals but get them released too. The clay holds them hard. And it doesn't—the land doesn't perk very well. And our water is not the best because we have a lot of shallow wells and when you go deep you get salt intrusion. There's a lot of challenges to grow here and then the fact that we don't really have a winter. We don't have a dormant period. That makes a difference for a lot of things, too.

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The ground doesn't really freeze for any period of time. We never have snow cover, so you don't have that down time. The earth responds better when there's an awakening and a dormancy and a down time. And the bugs are active all the time. Disease is active all the time. Weeds are going all the time. So there's—it's more difficult really to grow things here and then you have the pressure for the animals from the humidity and the heat. And then you have the pressure from the animals from the humidity and the heat. And when it's cold it tends to still be wet and that's really hard.

00:19:17

When it's really cold and dry an animal does much better than when it's wet and dry—us too. *[Laughs]* Aching joints—

00:19:27

SW: That's very true. I'm wondering you know you said that you moved down here in the early '90s; you came back in the early '90s. I mean why—why did you come back; is it because your parents were here? I mean I'm just curious as to what—?

00:19:41

CA: Well because the land was here and my father's roots were here and therefore I had some strong roots here too. And at that time just to be able to have a piece of land that you could work was really important. And Delaware and Pennsylvania were being developed at such a rate that it was—the idea of finding a piece of land to work was—was kind of not even a—a question.

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And then just—there was just a pull; there was just a really strong pull to come here and reconnect.

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SW: Can you talk about the reconnection? What was that like for you in the first—the first part of when you came back?

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CA: Well one thing I've—that was wonderful for me is I had a—I had a young child at the time and now she's about to graduate from college [*Laughs*] and the family church in Awendaw was very welcoming to us. And it was really great to get back into like just a small community where everyone knew each other and—and that—I think that made a big impression on me. And connecting back with just the—the way of life, getting back close to the water, meeting people who were still shrimping and fishing and just making their living from the land and the sea, a much slower pace, it felt right.

00:21:30

SW: Can you talk—can you describe for somebody who is not from here how you know you mentioned Awendaw and McClellanville, can you talk about that particular part of the Low Country and what you find is so unique about it in comparison to other spots in the Low Country?

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CA: Well Awendaw has remained rural for much longer. Mount Pleasant was the place that you came—went to from Awendaw to go shopping and—and do things and it—Mount Pleasant was still very small too into the '70s and '80s and it's gotten to be very developed now. And it is

starting to encroach on Awendaw but there's—it's sort of like Wadmalaw where I live now where there's like basic—a group of families that have been there since the 1600s, many of them. They all have their roots there. They all know each other. They—most of them are very self-sufficient. Even if they're not still farming or fishing they're doing other things that—where they're working for themselves, lots of welders and people in construction and landscapers and anything that where they can still you know rule their—their world. They can do what they want to do and be their own boss. That's kind of just the way the people are.

00:23:05

And it used to be in Awendaw everyone worked together. My grandfather had a small store but there used to be you know just general stores up and down the road. Highway 17 which is a four-lane highway now was a two-lane. I can still remember when it was a two-lane and you had your little stores on—like every six miles it seemed like because a lot of people didn't drive. My great-grandfather never drove. He rode a mule and that was it. **[Laughs]** I don't even know if he even rode in car, let alone—but he certainly didn't drive. And everyone worked together. My grandfather had a sawmill. He had a sugarcane press. He had a smokehouse. All the people—local people had their own gardens. They would grow their own sugarcane, their own vegetables. Everyone had a sweet potato hill. It might be in their front yard. It was wherever the driest spot was. They would make a hill and store their sweet potatoes all winter long. Everyone had an okra patch and peas and beans and they were pretty much self-sufficient. And then they would come to the store for provisions—flour and sugar and bring their sugarcane to press with the mule-driven press, bring their hams to smoke, although a lot of them had a lot of their own smokehouses, too.

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They would—it was—it was just different. It was less connected. You could go to town but you didn't go to town all the time, not every—certainly not every week. [*Laughs*]

00:24:54

SW: How are we on time?

00:25:01

SW: We're good; you're about 20 minutes in.

00:25:04

SW: Okay Celeste, I wanted—obviously I want you to talk about your farm. And I know you were talking about outside, about all of the—all the times you had to move the farm. Can you kind of retell that story again for the camera about the evolution of your farm and where it started and where you are now?

00:25:25

CA: Well my dad and I started growing vegetables in Awendaw and all he had left, the last remaining shred of the family land that he had was 15 acres. But we could grow a good bit of vegetables on that. The land in Awendaw is very sandy. But with irrigation and we used a lot of composting, we did a good job.

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Then I met my—my husband, George here at the Farmers' Market and he was growing organic vegetables also on Johns Island and he was also shrimping. So that kind of got—brought me back to that side, too, kind of reconnected in a lot of ways because my grandfather had a

small shrimp boat as well. Now George's boat has—had two big 50-foot nets and a—and a winch to pull them in and—and it was still small but big compared to my grandfather's boat. His boat was just one net that you'd put out by hand and pulled in by hand and but it was yet another connection. And so it wasn't long before George and I really started farming together. And we had about 20 acres on Johns Island and that—a little roadside stand too out front and I sold his shrimp and the vegetables from the stand and also at the downtown Farmers' Market. And we were some of the first people to sell to restaurants. Glen Roberts used to come to the market and bring the produce back to Anson and he worked for Anson Restaurant now—then; now he's Anson Mills doing all the grains. And Chef Frank Lee would—would say just bring anything you have to Snob and I'll buy it. **[Laughs]** And he was an early supporter and still is. And we just grew more and more vegetables and started our—the first CSA in the area and we were the first Certified Organic Farm as well. And we did some wholesaling too; there was some really good small organic wholesalers in those days. And then we joined a co-op and started selling to restaurants in Atlanta as well.

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So we were growing a lot of vegetables. We had a big crew working for us and George was running the boat as well. And right in the midst of that, the land where we were farming was sold for development and we had to move off of that. We had kind of seen the writing on the wall so we were already starting to rent some land on Wadmalaw and then we had to make the—the full move to Wadmalaw. And then also during that time it started to get really hard to find labor. For a long time there was some—some bigger farms on Johns Island, Wadmalaw, even James Island still then although now James Island is practically completely developed. But there was a lot of tomatoes, cucumbers, snap beans, even still some cabbage and potatoes grown here. And there was a lot of migrant work—workers that would come and we would usually be able to

work with the crew leader and get some workers for our farm, too when I had some full-time people as well. But then as those farms went out of business it—there was less and less labor coming through and really hard to get full-time workers that we could afford.

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So we started kind of phasing the vegetables out a bit and then we—we added on chickens. George's uncle was in the egg business. He had chicken houses at Charlestown Landing. At one time that was farmland too; now—now you can go and see the history and that's good. But he actually had big egg laying houses at Charlestown Landing and George grew up helping him and—and running his egg truck and delivering to all the grocery stores and everything. So he had that connection with eggs and always wanted to be in the egg business where it could be profitable. And then my great-grandmother was an egg farmer too **[Laughs]** so that just seemed natural. So we started off with just a few chickens. We were good friends with Mepkin Abbey, the monks there and they were in the egg business at that time, too. So we got some of their spent hens to kind of try things out and we came up with a way to move houses—put the chickens in a movable house and where they could be on the pasture and we could move them every day to fresh pasture. And we made some really good eggs. So we did really well with the eggs for a while, too.

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And we—we were doing the shrimp and we had to phase out the shrimp as the shrimp got scarce and fuel prices got high. When fuel went to \$4 and the price for shrimp was still what it was in the '70s and it was harder and harder to catch we decided to get rid of the shrimp boats. And at that time we were thinking about adding cows, too, so we have just evolved and evolved and evolved. So we got our first cow and started milking cows too and got into the raw milk business and now that's all we do is cows. We've got a couple of people that are—that have our

old chicken houses and we're mentoring them to get them doing the eggs the way that we did. But we've just—we've had to move the farm a couple of times and we have added and subtracted and changed with the—the times, what's available and the market and—and what we want to do.

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And I just find more and more we really get a lot from making food that goes right to families that nourishes them and the raw milk and the grass-fed beef really fulfill that.

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SW: Well you know the—the journey to this point, I mean most people might just throw the towel in you know?

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CA: Well there's been many times when I thought I would. [*Laughs*] There's a lot of joy and satisfaction in this lifestyle, but there's also a lot of stress and there's a lot of loss that you go through and there's times when I've just been in tears in saying I just can't—I can't do it. Why does it have to be so hard, because you're not making a lot of money? Basically we're happy if we can just keep going. We don't take vacations. We don't spend money on things. We survive. But it's something that we just kind of have to do. And I feel very fortunate in my husband because he is as committed as I am and luckily we don't have the breakdown times at the same time. [*Laughs*] Usually the other one is able to kind of pull us along and say yeah; it'll be okay, it'll be okay and we just keep going and think about new ways to do things and reinvent ourselves when necessary. But it's not an easy—it's not an easy life. It's something that you know young people ask me about it and I tell them well you have to do this because you can't

help yourself. And you have to be prepared for failure because there's going to be a lot of it. It's going to be the most rewarding thing you've ever done if it is something that you absolutely have to do but you can't do it because you want to make money or you want to be a celebrity. You have to do it because you—you can't do anything else.

00:33:57

SW: And you said your daughter is getting ready to graduate from college?

00:34:01

CA: Yes. Yes.

00:34:03

SW: Does she show any interest in—I mean do you—would you want her to farm if she—?

00:34:08

CA: Well it's the funniest thing. You know George and I say a lot of times, you know why didn't we have like 10 kids? So then we could have children you know taking over some of our responsibilities and kind of working into the farm because that's really the best way to grow the farm and the best way to get labor.

00:34:30

But George and I were a little bit older when we got together and we didn't have children of our own. We just had my Erin. And she was always very bright and very interested in the farm. I mean she grew up at the Farmers' Market and going to restaurants and working on the farm and you know all the chefs that have been downtown for any amount of time have watched

her grow up and know her well. And she has such a connection and she loves it. But she always would say to me mommy; I would never be a farmer. You work too hard for too little. I would never do that.

00:35:12

And so well we were fortunate that she got a scholarship to Ashley Hall which is a wonderful private girls' school here in Charleston and I never would have imagined that I would have a daughter graduating from Ashley Hall. But it just worked out perfect. And they did such a great job of mentoring her too and helping her just to be this woman that knows what she wants to do. And she went to Auburn University and I didn't really even know about Auburn until Erin started exploring it and that's in Alabama and it's a wonderful school. And she applied there to the Business School. She was going to get a Business Degree and then go to Law School because she wanted to make some money.

00:36:03

Well when she went to Auburn and she meanwhile had—she visited a whole—every college in South Carolina, in Georgia. She visited American University. She went to Pennsylvania where her father is and—and visited Villa Nova, University of Pennsylvania, Penn State; she visited many, many colleges and she kept saying—luckily my mother was able to take her because I didn't—I was working on the farm. But she would call me and say it just doesn't feel right mama. It just doesn't feel right.

00:36:32

And meanwhile she had been accepted at Auburn and my mother took her to Auburn and she called me and she said mama this is the place where I'm supposed to be. I said okay; we'll figure out a way to afford it. And then meanwhile she's touring the campus and she goes to the Ag School just for fun and the—the Dean of the College takes her around and shows her the Ag

School and talks to her about their programs and she's—then she calls me back and she said how would you feel if I changed my major to Agriculture? I was like I can't believe it. **[Laughs]** She said well, you know I started thinking about what my life would be like and where I would live and who my friends would be and I think I really want to be in Ag. But I want to be one of those people that does research and—and helps people to do a better job, not actually be on the farm. So she's graduating this year with a degree in Animal Science, Production Management, and then she's going to start a two year Master's Program in Ruminant Forages. So she's going to have a great education on how to do things on the farm, how to feed animals, how to grow forage, and I have a feeling she'll end up teaching but she's—she's in Ag without working on the farm every day. **[Laughs]**

00:38:06

SW: That's really incredible.

00:38:07

CA: And she's made lots of connections and lots of the professors have really taken her under their wing, too, so—. She may one day come back and work on the farm but I don't know.

[Laughs]

00:38:23

SW: Kate how are you doing on time?

00:38:25

SW: You're a little over 30 minutes in.

00:38:28

SW: Okay; do you have any questions?

00:38:29

SW: Yeah; I want to hear your love story.

00:38:30

CA: Oh well—

00:38:31

SW: But tell it to Sara.

00:38:33

CA: Yeah. **[Laughs]** Well so my dad and I were at the Farmers' Market selling our vegetables and this guy just keeps coming to my booth. And meanwhile I had picked a lot of wild blackberries from the farm and I was selling these blackberries. So this guy turned out to be George and he was wearing sunglasses which was kind of bugging me, like he just always had these sunglasses on. I found out later he had eye surgery so he had to have the sunglasses on. **[Laughs]** But he'd come by and buy these blackberries and then he'd just keep talking to me and—and eventually we just talked more and more and found out how much we had in common.

00:39:15

And it was just one of those things that just seemed to be meant to be and I'll never forget the first time I went to his shrimp boat and went out shrimping with him for the first time. That was—that was amazing.

00:39:31

SW: Can you talk a little bit about that?

00:39:32

CA: Well you have to get up very early in the morning. I guess I got up—I got to the dock about 4 o'clock in the morning and it's dark and you—the sound of the diesel engine in the darkness and you put out in the creek. We were—at that time he was docked in Shem Creek and later he went to Rockville. But at that time he was on Shem Creek. And going out of the creek and then the other boats coming in and just the sounds and smells and the feel of the boat, and then it's a very kind of a laid back and then suddenly a lot of activity. You know you get out where you're supposed to be and you—you put down the outriggers and—and let the nets out and the big wooden doors spread and spread the nets and you just—you're just dragging. You're just putting along and dragging, pulling the tri-net every now and again see how many shrimp are in the tri-net and that gives you an idea of how many are in the big nets. And then okay; time to pull back.

00:40:35

And that's when the activity starts. Then you start up the winch and pull in the nets, swing them over the deck, and open the bag and [*Gestures*]*—*out comes everything, shrimp, fish, crabs, and then you sit there on a little bench and go through and pick out the shrimp from the by-catch and put the shrimp in the baskets and push the by-catch over the side and pull out—if

there's any nice size whiting or spout, good eating fish, you put them in the basket, too. And fry some up later for lunch.

00:41:13

SW: I'm just curious as to you know going out with George the first time and like you know it doesn't sound like the most glamorous job.

00:41:20

CA: No. [*Laughs*] Really I think I—I was probably scared to death. You know all the equipment and the winch and the—the nets and having no real experience, but it—it was—it was good.

00:41:36

SW: Did you have any—

00:41:37

CA: And dirty, very dirty. [*Laughs*]

00:41:40

SW: —did you have any reluctance falling in love with another farmer? Or is that—like how is that—how do you reflect on that?

00:41:47

CA: Well I think—I think other people had more reluctance than I did. It just seemed like the—the best thing in the world at the time and it still is. But other people were like I don't know; are you sure you know because you see so many farm families today that you have one spouse has a real job that has benefits and a stable paycheck. Where for us this is it, and that's hard but also not because when your partner is not fully invested in the farm there's friction. There always is; it's just inevitable because that other person is—just gets paid for their time. I guess I'm kind of—I don't mean to belittle that and make light of that but you put in your time and you do a job and you come home with a check. And it's not that way with farming and it's very easy to spend a lot of money, very easy. I could break a very rich man in a hurry.

00:43:01

When you're both doing the job there's not one person resenting. On the other hand you can't really vent; it's hard to vent because the other person can take it personally you know because you can't say oh my boss did this or my partner did that because that is your boss and your partner. But to me it was the best—the best possible match. And it still is.

00:43:32

SW: Can you say that last part again, like but say it in a full sentence, like to me, meeting George and—?

00:43:38

CA: Yeah; okay. To me, meeting George who was someone that has the same values and the similar goals and aspirations, meeting him at the Farmers' Market and joining my life with his is really the best thing that could have happened to me. It made life more—just it's—it's really good to have a partner that's with you day in and day out.

00:44:17

SW: Kate do you have anything else?

00:44:20

SW: I just have one more question. Is farming—what's—what's your favorite thing about your job? Is it a good job? Is it a drag? Is it awesome? Is it—

00:44:30

CA: [*Laughs*] Well it can—it changes day-to-day.

00:44:34

SW: Is there one moment in the day that you look most forward to as a farmer?

00:44:38

CA: The morning; I love the morning. I love getting—getting—you know we don't live on the farm and that's good and bad. Sometimes it's a pain to have to drive to the farm to do something, but it's also—driving up in the morning as the sun is coming up and unlocking the gate and driving along and looking at the—the—just the beauty of the land and the livestock waking up, the wildlife that you see. The other morning unlocking the gate and there was this beautiful mist and the sun just coming up and—and there is a wild turkey there just silhouetted against the mist. And the crows are calling and it's just the morning time is the best time. Sometimes the evening too but the morning is like everything is just getting ready to start. And I love that.

00:45:39

And I love knowing what I'm going to do every day. There's no—I'm going to get up, I'm going to feed the calves, I'm going to bottle the milk, I'm going to take care of the animals, I'm going to deliver everything now. Things go wrong and you have surprises and some seasons are harder than others but you still—you have a basic rhythm that you can just fit into. And it gives you time to look around; it gives you time to think because you're not constantly worried. You just kind of get in your rhythm and I really like that. That's the best part.

00:46:20

SW: That's great. You're really good at talking about what you do.

00:46:26

CA: Because it's me. [*Laughs*]

00:46:29

SW: It comes through; there's an authenticity there.

00:46:31

CA: Oh thanks.

00:46:33

SW: Celeste is there anything that you want to add that we didn't ask you or didn't know to ask you that we should have?

00:46:40

CA: I don't think so. I think that's—

00:46:44

SW: How do you wake up livestock? I just never—I mean I guess I never imagined—I mean obviously they have to wake up. Do you actually—

00:46:51

CA: No; they kind of—no, they wake up on their own. You know they're—

00:46:58

SW: What time do they wake up?

00:46:58

CA: Well sometimes they're awake before daylight. It depends on the weather. Other times they're still kind of sleepy and foggy as the sun is coming up. In the heat, they're—they actually stay up later in the night time and then they're more sleepy in the morning. In the winter time they're kind of hunkered down all night and just kind of get up as—as the sun comes up. And the—the babies, the calves, they hear my truck and they get up. The chickens were that way too. They know—they can tell the difference too. Someone else could drive in and they don't pay any attention. When I drive in certain sounds that the engine makes they know it's me and you can see them just kind of jump up and look. Where's my bottle? Where's my mom? **[Laughs]**

00:48:01

SW: That's really sweet. And I mean you mentioned that earlier, waking up livestock and I just kind of imagined you like tiptoeing and like time to get up now and just never really—.

00:48:11

CA: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

00:48:14

SW: Well Celeste thank you for coming out here this morning. And I think we can turn the tape off.

00:48:20

CA: Okay.

00:48:22

SW: This was really wonderful; thank you so much.

00:48:23

CA: Oh good.

00:48:26

[End Celeste Albers Interview]