



Charles Marshall Stivers
Pat's Snack Bar

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Interviewer: Sara Wood
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[00:00:00.00]

Start of Interview

[00:00:17.15]

Charles Stivers: I'm Charles Stivers, and I help manage Pat's Snack Bar.

Sara Wood: So tell me how did you get involved in managing Pat's Snack Bar?

[00:00:35.06]

CS: I got involved in it by accident. I had a friend come to me and he wanted to put Pat's Snack Bar back in and that was in 2011. And we was supposed to be fifty/fifty partners and when we started spending the money, it was all my money. So I got rid of the partner before we opened. Then we opened it back up in June of 2012.

SW: And who owned it before you did?

CS: Actually, it wasn't the same. Pat's son Morris owns the building, and he owned it—and the building has never been transferred out of the family since it was built. This place has been here—the last I heard was 1947.

[00:01:29.16]

SW: What do you know about the history that you could tell me? About 1947 and this building? How did it start? Do you know?

CS: It started a pool room and they sold cheeseburgers. And there is a furniture store on that side. That side over here. And it evolved, and they ended up—the furniture store moved and they put the cheeseburger side over there and this was a pool hall. And it was a pool hall until, well, in the early 2000s it was still a pool hall. And before we put the bar in it was just an old pool hall. We worked on it and opened the bar up in February of 2016.

SW: So it's really been open just this year then?

[00:02:15.18]

CS: This bar has only been open since February— Super Bowl Sunday, actually.

SW: That is good timing.

CS: That's when it opened.

SW: I have a question—because somebody told me about House's. Was it called House's Pool Hall ever? Do you remember anything ever called House's Pool Hall?

CS: It was called Pat's.

SW: And what do you know about Pat House?

CS: I knew Pat House.

SW: Tell me about him. What was he like?

[00:02:44.02]

CS: I mean he was a all-state basketball player, went to college on a basketball scholarship, a smart guy. And he come back— he was from here— he come back here and he opened a pool hall. And you would see him, he was a character. I mean, he kept his cash register in a cigar box.

SW: Always?

CS: Always. He would buy local food, local meats. He would buy two days worth and then he buy— it was all fresh. And his hamburgers, his cheeseburgers never had lettuce on them.

SW: Do you know why?

[00:03:30.02]

CS: Never knew why. So the one's here never have lettuce. Just a tradition.

SW: I came here to ask people about chili buns, but I know that Pat's is well known for their cheeseburgers. So, was it always known for the cheeseburgers since the beginning?

CS: Yes, they always had cheeseburgers and chilidogs, so that's the way it has always been. And the menu hasn't changed that much.

SW: Where did he play basketball? What school? Do you know?

CS: I don't know. I was told but I don't know.

SW: Was it somewhere in Kentucky?

CS: It was Kentucky. He got a full scholarship.

SW: Was he a tall guy?

CS: Yeah he was probably six-four.

SW: Do you have any other stories about Pat or the pool hall? Like when you were younger that you heard growing up?

[00:04:26.16]

CS: They had an accounting office above it. Pat's brother Ed was a CPA attorney. And he did tax returns and he done some lawyer business, but he only worked probably twenty years and retired at a young age. He bought stocks in these banks. One bank in Louisville, particular. And the only thing he did was go to Louisville and pick up money every month.

SW: It sounds like a good gig.

[00:05:01.20]

CS: And Pat had a pool room or a pool hall in London, and he kept it open for a year and half. Paid the building off and shut it down.

SW: He just didn't want to do it anymore?

CS: He didn't want to drive to London. He said the drive was too hard.

SW: Do you know if that one was called House's Pool Hall by any chance? Or was it just called Pat's? Do you know?

[00:05:23.07]

CS: I don't know.

SW: Okay. I am just curious because someone kept saying House's. But everybody has a different name for something. But I know that everyone refers to this as Pat's.

CS: But I know that there was a sign hanging out here for a good thirty years that said Pat's Snack Bar 'cause I've got the original sign. It's getting redone right now.

SW: And you put in the neon sign?

CS: I put the neon in.

SW: It looks nice outside.

CS: We redid the neon twice. That's the second neon sign.

SW: Okay, I have a few more questions, is that okay? I'm going to let him walk back through there just in case. I want to ask you about growing up. Did you grow up here in Manchester?

CS: I grew up here.

SW: Can you tell me—and, for the record, what is your birthday?

[00:06:09.03]

CS: 1962.

SW: What day?

CS: July 11.

SW: What was it like growing up, can you describe for people who are unfamiliar with Clay County and Manchester, what was it like growing up here in your experience?

CS: In my experience there was nothing but downtown. You know there wasn't any WalMart, there wasn't any other businesses. Everything was originally downtown. And I have an

office two doors downtown. And they used to be a huge, huge store, and clothing stores and a Benjamin Franklin's and all kinds little neat stores. Downtown Manchester reminds me of downtown Lebanon, Tennessee. If you have ever been to Lebanon, Tennessee.

SW: I haven't been.

[00:06:57.26]

CS: It's a square. It's a old town square and there are little businesses everywhere. That's where they make a lot of country music videos. But I mean— and I had pictures of the world's tallest man in Manchester, Kentucky. He worked for a shoe store, and he would come and he would show up at different shoe stores and show us what size his shoes were. I've got an original pictures from that, which was actually only two doors down.

SW: Do you remember his name? That's so interesting.

[00:07:33.06]

CS: He's still the world's tallest man.

SW: Is he still alive?

CS: Now he died. He died in his early twenties. But I've got original pictures.

SW: What size shoe did he wear? Do you know?

CS: I don't even remember.

SW: That's amazing. If you remember his name, just holler it out. I can probably look it up though. I'm curious as to what the industries were like here. What were the biggest employers?

[00:08:03.28]

CS: Coal mines and logging. Mostly coal mines.

SW: What's happened to that industry?

CS: The government shut it down. The government’s devastated— and you know our coal business has been out for thirty years. I worked in the coal mines.

SW: You did?

CS: Yes. I worked for a company called Shamrock Coal Company going through college. I’ve been underground, I’ve been above ground. My father was a coal miner, my grandfather was a coal miner. I was in the coal mines at four.

SW: Working?

CS: I wasn’t. They showed me what a coal— they took me underground of thirty-five inch coals. No, its—a but our coal business has been out for probably thirty years. In a town like Hazard, which is forty miles from here, it's destroyed them. They've got six foot seams of coal.

[00:09:08.25]

SW: It's been thirty years here in Manchester, but do you still see that? The affects on people, even after thirty years?

CS: Yeah, there's people, you know, that was their whole family, and generations, that is all they could do was mine coal. That was their job, and since then they are doing whatever they can. No, its— Clay County, Kentucky, used to be one of the top ten poorest counties in the United States—that's here in Manchester— and it is still probably in the top twenty-five. So we're the poorest of the poor.

[00:09:56.04]

SW: Part of the reason that I am interested in this chili bun thing is like you start talking about food but it ends up, you know, talking about people and place. I mean, you grew up here. I live in Mississippi, but I grew up in Michigan, and I think there is this tendency of people to want to helicopter in, see something, perpetuate a story, and leave. And then tell the world that

story. But what I'm interested in in this work is going to a place and hearing stories from people who live there, in their own words, what this place is like. So, you know, it is one of the poorest counties in the state. What does that look like, both good and bad? What are the good things that you would want people to see in Manchester?

[00:10:36.23]

CS: You know, in Manchester most people know each other. I mean, you know their father, their grandfather, their daughters, you know most people that come in Pat's Snack Bar. You know most everyone that ever comes in here. But in the last two years where there's people travel. One week we had people from London, England, Australia, and Oslo, Norway, in here in the same week. We've had bicycle rides from Miami, Florida, to Manchester, Kentucky, that eat at Pat's Snack Bar. They told me that. And these other people told me that was the reason. There was a guy in here from Hilton Head, South Carolina, Saturday night. Just to come to the Halloween party.

SW: That must feel good.

[00:11:32.04]

CS: It feels good to get a lot of different. You know, we're attracting half of our customer base now is coming from out of the county, out of the city. So that means that we're doing something well.

SW: Why do you think that is? What's happened?

CS: It's hard to find good cheeseburgers and good hot dogs and good fries. Everybody is tired of eating McDonalds. Everybody's at Hardee's and Wendy's and they all taste the same. So they're looking for something better to eat.

SW: Can you tell me what you know about chili buns? ‘Cause chili buns I feel are unique here. Not every state has a chili bun.

[00:12:17.05]

CS: I know very little about the chili bun. You’ll have to ask Johnny— the guy that’s been here for twenty-five years.

SW: Did you grow up eating chili buns?

CS: Yes. I ate the Drive-In chili.

SW: Manchester Drive-In?

CS: Manchester Drive-In.

SW: Can you talk a little bit about that? Because you were mentioning that last Saturday.

CS: It's the best chili I ever ate.

SW: What makes it that?

CS: It's probably a eighty-year old recipe. And we’re thinking of putting it in here. We have the recipe. My wife's great-great-aunt made the chili recipe.

SW: And that's Peanut Abner?

CS: Peanut Abner.

SW: And she's still around?

CS: Maybe. I don’t know if Peanut’s still living or not. I don’t think she is.

SW: [00:13:01.01] But she made the chili bun?

CS: Yes, yes. She made the original chili. She passed it down to her—no, it's the best chili I’ve ever eat.

SW: So you're kind of in a cool intersection here, Mr. Stivers, because you have the Pat's legacy chili and the Peanut Abner legacy. So you're like smack in the middle. That sounds pretty awesome.

CS: The Peanut Abner chili is better.

SW: I mean, I know we don't ask people to divulge the recipe, but can you describe Peanut's chili? Can you describe it for someone who's never had it? What makes it so good?

[00:13:39.03]

CS: The taste. I've never had a chili that tasted that way. I mean, once you start eating it, you can't stop. I mean you can't eat one chili bun. You got to eat four. I mean, and then you'll put it back and you'll put it in your refrigerator and reheat it until it is gone. Now, the difference between Peanut's chili recipe and Pat's is that Pat's, it's more meaty. It's thicker meat. But Peanuts is more—I guess the meat is thinner. It is cooked differently.

SW: Is it a little saucier?

CS: A little saucier.

SW: Is it spicy?

[00:14:23.23]

CS: It's not a hot chili. I'm going to say medium.

SW: And this is the last chili bun question I have for you. I don't expect people to be an expert, it's just about your relationship to it. But could you describe a chili bun for people who have never had one before? 'Cause I know a lot of people—I didn't know what a chili bun was before I got here.

[00:14:50.00]

CS: A chili bun is just— they make a hot dog bun and they usually have a old family recipe of chili. And they put it in the bun and eat it— just the chili in the bun.

SW: Do you think that there’s a special connection between eastern Kentucky and this specific kind of chili? Because I feel like everywhere I go, you know, some people will just say hot dog because they assume that the chili is going to be on it already. I am wondering if, in your experience, there is a special connection between chili and eastern Kentucky, or this part of Kentucky at least.

[00:15:21.26]

CS: Yeah. There's people been eating chili and making chili and homemade chili here for generations. They were making chili before there was ever a hot dog. And my mother makes chili and she is eighty-three years old. I have had people a hundred years old make me chili. So there’s lots of different family chili recipes in this area.

SW: Do you know why the connection between this place? Is it— I mean, I’m wondering if it’s a hearty, filling meal when it gets cold?

CS: It was easy to make. It was easy to make, you could let it cook half the day, and you could make a meal out of it. So that's the reason people eat it. And it was cheap.

[00:16:16.12]

SW: Do you know in your experience in the mines— I mean, I feel like it might be, ‘cause I have heard of how in West Virginia they have pepperoni rolls and the miners would take the pepperoni rolls. Did anybody take chili buns into the mines?

CS: No.

SW: I assume that would be kind of messy.

CS: No, they took potted meat, Vienna sausage, beanie-weenies and crackers, baloney sandwiches, ham sandwiches. That's usually what is taken into the mines.

SW: Do you remember being down there for the first time when you were four? Do you have any memories of that moment? Can you talk about that?

[00:16:50.03]

CS: [Laughs] Yeah, I was with my father and two other guys and probably worked in the mines fifty years at least in their lifetime. And they said, well, we're going to teach you how to me a miner now, you gotta learn how to chew tobacco. They said all you gotta do is put it in your mouth, and when your mouth gets full, you spit. Well, that didn't work out, and it made me sick. So that's the reason I remember. I was four.

SW: Did you get sick in the mine?

CS: I got sick.

SW: I can't even imagine.

CS: You're four and you're sick.

SW: With a mouthful of tobacco?

CS: Well they didn't give me a whole mouthful. I guess just give me just enough to make me sick. [Laughs]

SW: Did you ever do it again?

[00:17:36.08]

CS: No. No, I don't chew or smoke or anything like that.

SW: I imagine if you had that experience going into it, you probably wouldn't want to do it again.

CS. No.

SW: I have a question. I grew up in Michigan where the auto industry was the lifeline. And here it is was coal industry. Was it expected of you to be a miner, like growing up?

CS: I enjoyed being a miner.

SW: What did you enjoy about it?

CS: The different workers. The different—there were a lot of characters that worked at the coal mines. A lot of different personalities.

SW: Can you describe some of them?

CS: Some of them had worked in them since they was twelve. My father worked in the coal mine, he started when he was fourteen. And, you know, they worked together and they joked a lot, had a good time. You don't see that in a lot of places now. Everything's too serious. Everything—and those guys worked hard. [00:18:45.11] It was dirty. I had a college accounting degree and couldn't find a job in this area, so I went back to the coalmines and worked for three years. After I had a accounting degree.

SW: Right after college?

CS: Right after college. I went straight, graduated college and took off a month and went, worked at the coalmines for two and a half to three years.

SW: What made you stop after three years?

CS: I found a job.

SW: Were you looking forward to getting out of the mines?

CS: Well, I enjoyed working at the mines. I wanted to try and improve myself, make things better. I didn't want to work in the mines for the next forty years.

SW: How come?

[00:19:33.02]

CS: Well, I just didn't see— you start thinking about working in the mines and you work eight to ten hours a day, all the hours underground, and you wouldn't see the sun. So that's the reason I didn't. I wasn't scared of the mines. It didn't bother me working the mines. I'd work in them tomorrow.

SW: That's something I'm kind of fascinated with because I feel as though miners get to see— it's almost like you get to walk on the moon. You get to see the earth in way that most people never get to see it.

CS: You do. And you find fossils while you're working. I've seen whole trees of fossils— fossilized trees in the mines.

[00:20:12.25]

SW: Can you even describe what that looks like?

CS: It looks like a petrified tree. Base is, you know, eight foot circumference around. You see a whole tree laying the mines. Stumps, fossils, I mean, it's fascinating. The guy that owns Shamrock Coal Company, B. Ray Thompson, he made his money here, and he build Thompson Bowling Arena in Knoxville. That's where that money come from, from Manchester, Kentucky. He sold his coalmines to Sun Oil.

SW: When did he sell?

CS: Probably in the [19]80s.

SW: Holy cow.

CS: Maybe in the early, Maybe in the [19]90s. Yeah that's where all the Thompson Bowling Area— and actually, his family still controls the land that the Thompson Bowling Arena and the Tennessee Stadium sits on. He rents the land to them every year.

SW: Wow.

CS: Yeah, he gets a rental check.

SW: They're pretty comfortable. So when you left the mines, you're a CPA. So how long were you doing that in Manchester— just to give a sense of time— before you decided to buy Pat's?

[00:21:41.01]

CS: Twenty-six years.

SW: And I know that we talked about this when we started the interview, but I just want to ask you. I mean, you already have this intense job. Why partner up and go in on Pat's?

CS: Well, I wanted a good cheeseburger. There wasn't anywhere good around here to eat. And I feel Pat's had a history. I tried to get Pat's son to go in with me, he didn't want to fool with it. And we just started and then it got to be an obsession. Get the cheeseburger joint in. And about that time, Manchester become wet, where you could sell alcoholic beverages, beer and liquor. So we decided to put beer in. And then when I got that started there was no bars in Manchester and people needed a place just to hang out on the weekends. There's nowhere to go. There's no movies. There's no— I mean, people meet at the grocery store and Walmart.

[00:22:39.00] So I figured, well, they need a place where they can come in and maybe bring some bands in and have some live music. And so that's the reason the bar was put in.

SW: It's beautiful in here. Jason was sort of describing what it looked like before you guys redid it.

CS: It looked like the back.

SW: He said that's the original back.

CS: You see the back back there? That's what it looked like. Except it was so nasty you couldn't walk through here.

SW: This is a labor of love.

[00:23:09.12]

CS: I mean, we spent probably just getting the stuff out of it to start working on it, we spent probably a month. I mean, there was old pool sticks and pool tables and there's signs. I mean, there was— I don't know how much stuff.

SW: Pool tables are pretty massive and extraordinarily heavy. How the heck did you get rid of them?

CS: I sold them and made them move them. Sold them for 200 dollars a piece.

SW: They came and got them?

CS: They had to move them.

SW: That's smart.

CS: And the smell where they had been here for fifty years, you couldn't— you'd have to redid the wood. They were junk. The county judge actually bought them, bought two of them.

SW: Are they in his house?

[00:24:00.05]

CS: He actually has them stored. He hasn't redone them yet. I talked to him about two weeks ago.

SW: Did he grow up coming here, too?

CS: This place used to stay open until four or five o'clock in the morning.

SW: Back in the pool hall days?

CS: Sometimes all night. Juanita— that run it before I did— she had a chair over there and she slept in it sometimes on the weekends. She didn't go home she would just sleep in the chair with the gun. From what I remember of Juanita—and Juanita had, she didn't have to do

this. I mean, she had houses in London, she had farms in Manchester, she was well off, she didn't have to do this. Somebody come and stole twelve dollars off of her while she had it closed, and she stood there for three months, slept in the chair with the shotgun, waiting for him to come back in. Guess that's why I remember Juanita.

SW: At the time, I know that in pool halls there never used to be women. Was Juanita a rarity?

[00:25:05.09]

CS: No, there was women in here.

SW: There were? Okay.

CS: Yeah, there was older ladies. There was several women that worked here.

SW: Jason said that Juanita and Pat were tight.

CS: Yep, Juanita worked for Pat for years.

SW: Do you know her last name?

CS: No, but Johnny does.

SW: Yeah, Jason couldn't remember it either, and I thought that was cool. She sounds like a real spitfire.

CS: Oh she was a nice [unintelligible] Juanita.

SW: So she just must have been here 'cause she loved it.

[00:25:39.22]

CS: She took it over after Pat retired. She was a cook with Pat. When Pat retired, she just kept cooking.

SW: That's really wonderful. I mean it sounds like this is the one place that has been steady in Manchester all of these years.

CS: It has been pretty steady here. If you fix people good food, they'll come back.

SW: What's the hardest part of having this place?

[00:26:03.28]

CS: Managing the people. A lot of headaches. Managing the people. Manage employees. Seeing so many people go broke in the restaurant business and food industry. I had a friend last year who lost 300,000 dollars in nine months putting in a restaurant and a bar. It don't take long to go through 300,000 dollars.

SW: What do you love most about having this place?

CS: Well it's good for the people. You know, honestly, I haven't made— the only thing I have done with my money here is expanded and tried to make a better place. And, from my personal standpoint, I'd have been a lot better off never put it in. I mean, it's cost me hundreds of thousands of dollars. And whether people realize it or not, I mean, you know, I haven't made anything off of it. It's made me work. I don't even get paid to work here. But, you know, they need to realize, you know, it's an investment for everybody, not just me.

[00:27:26.26]

SW: So it sounds like you came into this to keep it going for the people here.

CS: That's what I did.

SW: What do you see happening to this place down the road when you get up into the retirement years? What do you hope for Pat's? What do you see next?

[00:27:43.16]

CS: Expanded. Maybe franchising out.

SW: Do you think that you will ever bring pool tables back in here?

CS: Maybe upstairs.

SW: Is upstairs like kind of empty right now?

CS: Yep. It's the same size as downstairs except it's empty. You know, back here we even had it measured for a pool table. You can see there's no light back there. It's measured for a pool light. It's even got plug-ins and electrical warrant for pool lights. But it took too much space. It takes like a— I don't remember the exact dimensions—about 20 x 20 space to put in one pool table. That's a lot of space for one pool table.

SW: Yeah, they're huge.

CS: They are huge.

SW: So upstairs was the accounting office?

CS: It was the accounting office.

SW: And it hasn't really been anything since then?

[00:28:38.06]

CS: No, we cleaned a lot of it out.

SW: Mr. Stivers, I don't have too many more questions for you. You answered a lot of them. But is there something you want people to know about this place that I didn't ask you or that you really want to talk about that you think is important for people to know about Pat's? Or even about Manchester?

[00:29:01.13]

CS: I mean Pat's has a— I mean it started basically in 1947. It's had a tradition since then. And I've travelled a lot of different places. I mean, a lot of people they need to come up here and experience this. And I have travelled a lot of states, been to a lot of restaurants, and you won't find a tradition or food like you do here.

SW: What's your favorite thing to eat here?

CS: Cheeseburgers. There's no better cheeseburger. Actually, they're ranked— last year it was ranked third best in the state of Kentucky. Took buffalo to beat them.

SW: That's pretty food.

CS: The top one was a buffalo cheeseburger in Louisville, Kentucky.

SW: Like buffalo meat?

CS: Buffalo meat. And I don't think Buffalo meat is as good as our cheeseburgers.

SW: I don't know if I've ever had a buffalo burger.

[00:30:01.27]

CS: I've had buffalo burger, elk burgers, moose, and all that. I worked in Alaska for three years on and off.

SW: What? What were you doing there?

CS: I was on the board of directors for the Oil and Gas Company. We had oil and gas fields and cooking in Alaska. And then we bought a project in the North Slope. I was there, too.

SW: What was it like there?

CS: Alaska is kind of like, its kind of like—Pigeon Forge, Manchester, Kentucky, except it's more country.

SW: What brought you out there? Was it the working for the?

CS: I was on the board for Tennessee Oil and Gas Company and they bought oil and gas fields in Alaska and opened an office up there.

SW: Were you excited about going?

CS: I had never been to Alaska. The first time I was there, it was different. I mean, it was basically the same people as here just more wide-open spaces. So all of the stuff they were trying to teach us up there, I grew up in southeastern Kentucky, we already knew all that. So it's no

different. [00:31:40.26] I always said, If you can live and make it in Manchester, Kentucky, you can make it anywhere in the world.

SW: Did you miss home? Were you homesick when you were up there?

CS: No.

SW: And did you come back to Manchester?

CS: Yeah, I didn't stay up there more than two weeks at a time.

SW: So did you fly?

CS: Fly.

SW: I was going to say that’s—

CS: No, I didn't drive. Nine-hour flight from here.

SW: Still.

CS: You can leave at six a.m. in the morning and be up there for supper in the evening.

Four hour time difference.

SW: Do you go back there anymore?

CS: I was there two years ago.

SW: Well, let's see, so you've worked in Alaska, you've worked in the mines, you worked in accounting, you have this place. What else have you done? I feel like you have done everything.

[00:32:31.28]

CS: I have rang the opening bell in the New York Stock Exchange. I've rang the closing bell at Nasdaq.

SW: Did you work on Wall Street?

CS: I’ve been on Wall Street.

SW: I don't know if I could deal with that.

CS: It's tough.

SW: How long did you do that?

CS: I was in and out.

SW: What was it like to ring the bell?

CS: It was no different than you see on TV. They give you a tour of the New York Stock Exchange, give you the history, give you a meal. They take you down to the floor and you can watch them trade on the trading floor, watch them trade stocks. But it wasn't as big as I expected.

SW: Really?

CS: I expected a bigger place.

SW: It's not big?

CS: To me it wasn't. [00:33:39.06] Not what I expected. Smaller than I expected.

SW: What does the energy in the room feel like right before you ring the bell? Does the room feel electric somehow? Everyone waiting to go? I’m just curious what it felt like.

CS: There’s people watching you to see if. And once you ring it, it’s over.

SW: What was ringing the closing bell like? You said you did the closing of Nasdaq?

CS: Nasdaq.

SW: What’s that like?

CS: Simple. [00:34:12.16] You got there thirty minutes before it. They put your picture on the big billboard at Times Square. And it was live on Time Square's billboard. Then they give you a free Coca-Cola. Then you ring it.

SW: You get a Coca-Cola?

CS: A small coke. That was their big prize.

SW: Do you what know the story behind that?

CS: Don't know. But that was what I remember.

SW: How cool. What else?

CS: No, that's enough.

SW: Okay. Is there anything else you want to talk about, about Pat's?

CS: No, I'm fine with it.

SW: Thank you for doing this and that you for being generous with your time and everyone's time.

CS: We really appreciate you being here and helping us.

SW: This is really cool. I appreciate. it.

CS: Thank you.