



Bernita Joyner
Charleston Crab House
Charleston, South Carolina

Date: August 12, 2019
Interviewer: Annemarie Anderson
Transcription: Diana Dombrowski
Length: Fifty nine minutes
Project: Career Servers

[00:00:00.00]

Annemarie A.: All right. Today is August 12, 2019. I'm at the Charleston Crab House on Market Street, and I am with Ms. Bernita Joyner.

[00:00:11.00]

Bernita J.: Um-hm.

[00:00:11.02]

Annemarie A.: Ms. Joyner, would you start off and introduce us? Introduce yourself for the recorder, please?

[00:00:17.28]

Bernita J.: My name is Bernita Joyner. I'm a native Charlestonian, here at the Crab House for twenty-five years.

[00:00:25.01]

Annemarie A.: That's great. Could you, for the record, give us your birth date?

[00:00:31.07]

Bernita J.: August 12, 1960.

[00:00:31.07]

Annemarie A.: Happy birthday. [Laughter]

[00:00:35.02]

Bernita J.: Thank you.

[00:00:35.02]

Annemarie A.: Let's start off and—introduce me to the Charleston of your youth. Let's start and let's tell me a little bit about your parents.

[00:00:42.25]

Bernita J.: My parents, both here are from Charleston. My father, actually, from further in, in Eutawville, South Carolina. They have nine kids. Been married for all their lives, till the day they passed. [Laughter] My mother passed seven years ago, and my father passed last year, in October. All of us live here in Charleston except one brother. He lives in Charlotte. And one passed on, my one, middle-age brother. He pass on from cancer. So, it's eight of us now, yeah.

[00:01:23.29]

Annemarie A.: That's great. Can you tell me a little bit about—well, what did your parents do for a living?

[00:01:29.11]

Bernita J.: Well, my father actually worked for different—in this area, in **Cane Street**, like Fox Music, he was a jack-of-all-trades, they call it. He was a plumber, a carpenter, a mechanic,

whatever. My mother, she actually worked for various people—Morris Sokol, as a secretary, and then she went into housekeeping, you know, at the Holiday Inn. She was there for forty years.

[00:01:59.03]

Annemarie A.: Can you tell me a little bit about the Charleston of your youth? Where did you grow up?

[00:02:04.08]

Bernita J.: I raised up downtown Charleston, what they call Eastside, off of Columbus Street—excuse me—of Columbus Street. My grandparents lived on Aiken Street, and I born and reared off of America Street. We lived in that area till the mid-[19]60s, and then we moved in the middle of town, what we called the West End, off of Congress Street. I lived there until I got married out and moved back in the middle part of town. [Laughter] In the [19]80s, [19]80.

[00:02:40.25]

Annemarie A.: So—I'm sorry.

[00:02:42.07]

Bernita J.: No, go ahead.

[00:02:42.10]

Annemarie A.: So, tell me a little bit about what it was like to live here. What are some things that stick out about your childhood?

[00:02:51.04]

Bernita J.: Well, I mean, my mom was a type of mom who was very active in the school system, so education was a must. The times were so different, you know? 'Cause I born in the [19]60s, 1960, to be exact. I didn't know anything about racism or prejudice, anything, until I got in my twenties, because we always had a community where—which we called the East Side now, and then, we called it the East Side, too—but it was a community consists of black, and they focus on education and stuff like that. When affirmative action and integration and everything came through, I was in high school, you know? So I went to a high school, which was an all-white school, and here I am, the second year they integrated it. I was able to go there—which I didn't like, 'cause, I didn't, all my life I was around my community of blacks. I've seen white and been around white, don't get me wrong, but I never—mingled with them, and especially as a teenager going there, it was kind of challenging, you know?

[00:04:04.20]

Annemarie A.: Yeah.

[00:04:04.20]

Bernita J.: It was different, you know.

[00:04:07.14]

Annemarie A.: I can only imagine.

[00:04:07.14]

Bernita J.: Yeah. But other than that, I've always worked around mostly whites, more than blacks. So, it kind of just blend in, I'm just natural with anybody, yeah.

[00:04:23.08]

Annemarie A.: What were some of the challenges of integrating a school?

[00:04:26.05]

Bernita J.: Well, because, I guess it was a fear. I didn't know—especially me. I didn't know whether I could be friendly with them or not, you know? I saw a difference. Our hair texture was different, and not so much our language, but the way we talked. We had our street slangs, and unlike their, other whites, when they in school, they had more proper English—which I knew too, but we just had our street way out talkin'. There was like a code among the blacks and stuff like that. So, that was kind of challenging for me, trying to separate myself from how I was raised and being one way when I'm not in school and in school. You know? I felt I adapted well.

[00:05:21.12]

Annemarie A.: Definitely.

[00:05:22.27]

Bernita J.: Um-hm.

[00:05:22.27]

Annemarie A.: Could you talk a little bit about, maybe describe, the community that you lived in on the west side of town? Tell me a little bit about maybe some of the businesses or the school that you went to as a young child?

[00:05:35.27]

Bernita J.: Yeah. Well, it was like I say, predominantly black. We had our own businesses. I can remember. We had a few . . . businesses like Nice Food Store that was white-owned, but majority of people who worked there was blacks. It gave us chances to get a job. We had our own black restaurants, little corner stores, and stuff like that. So, the community was very tight-knit. I guess that's what was the challenge, because I never really went out the community until I got to be, like, twelve. That's when my mom started taking me to work. I mean, I went to school later with whites, so I didn't even—up until twelve—I wasn't really around any white person. I've seen them, we had, like, a white insurance agent, we had—like I said—white grocery stores, but I never intermingled with any person of my age of different color than myself. You know? So, when I became a teenager and went to high school, that was a challenge, too, for me. Tryin' to—okay, are they the same as me or not? [Laughter] 'Cause you say one thing, and then you see—well, she's friendly, she plays just like I do; she's learnin' just like I do. So, I had to learn that everybody's the same, because even though I don't feel that it was prejudice among blacks to whites more

than whites to blacks, but it was some prejudice from blacks, you know? My grandmom would constantly tell me, "You've gotta be careful on certain part of town, you can't go over here," and being around her—her mother was just shy of slavery. She would tell me things when I would go shopping with her on Cane Street and stuff like that, and she was like, "Now, be careful what you say here and get out the way." And I was like, "What's she talkin' about? I'm not in nobody way." I didn't look at it as a black and white thing until, like I said, I went to high school. But we was a very tight community. We tried to keep the kids—well, the elders tried to keep the kids within that community, and trying to not expose us to anything but education. So, I think that's how it was with us, you know.

[00:08:08.06]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense.

[00:08:08.06]

Bernita J.: Yeah.

[00:08:08.06]

Annemarie A.: Could you tell me about some of—I want to get to education—but I'm interested in the restaurants in your community. Could you talk a little bit about some of those restaurants and maybe some of the people who might have owned them?

[00:08:20.27]

Bernita J.: Yeah. We had, like, we had . . . Gertie's Kitchen, which was off of Columbus Street.

We had Bertha's. We had different, it was always some kind of lady name for some reason. [Laughter] I guess it was the owner's name, and that's why, they name it after that. They had their own cuisine. One might have fried chicken better than the next one, one might have made the best oxtail, so you'd know where to go to get whatever you wanted, as far as that way concerned. Friday, for the black community, was a day off for the mothers to cook. So, we always would—on Friday—it was like, "Oh, we going to get some Bertha's red rice, and some Gertie's fried chicken," so that was a treat for us. You know. It was just a day off for the mothers, that's how I looked at it. I grew up with that. Even with my own family, I did that: Friday, okay, Friday, we're goin' out somewhere. We're goin' to—where's your favorite restaurant? Each one of my kids had a favorite restaurant, you know. So, we would do that. That was instilled in me from a young child, yeah. I mean, we had so much, I can't even remember. It was always one on every corner, seems like. They had they own specific crowd. This was a port city, so a lot of sailors and different people would come to these different restaurants, especially on the East Side, 'cause it's right there. They get off the ship and they had whatever hours to spend, and they would come in the mostly black communities and stuff like that. And migrate to these different restaurants, um-hm.

[00:10:02.22]

Annemarie A.: That's great.

[00:10:04.08]

Bernita J.: Yeah.

[00:10:05.03]

Annemarie A.: Which was your favorite restaurant?

[00:10:07.05]

Bernita J.: I think Gertie's was my favorite. Yeah. But I gotta remember, my grandma was a chef, too—she was a cook, they didn't call it a chef then—but she could . . . do a good part. A lot of blacks used to sell out they homes. You know? So, they would have a fish fry or chicken fry or whatever. So, they sold out they homes, so my grandma was my favorite cook. That's my most favorite cook.

[00:10:36.26]

Annemarie A.: What was your grandmother's name?

[00:10:36.26]

Bernita J.: Louise Sanders. Yeah, we used to call her Weeze. And yeah, she taught me how to cook, 'cause I loved to cook, too. I cook now for the church and for the community, any function and whatever, whoever, asked me to cook something. My specialty—I got certain specialties, but if they ask me to cook, I'll figure it out. [Laughter]

[00:11:04.16]

Annemarie A.: That sounds great.

[00:11:06.22]

Bernita J.: Um-hm.

[00:11:06.22]

Annemarie A.: And what was your favorite thing that Mrs. Sanders cooked?

[00:11:11.02]

Bernita J.: It was called potato poon. It was a yam dish, really. But it had lemon zest and orange flavor, just, it was unlike potato bread or potato pie. It just had—I don't know, I can't even describe it, 'cause it was grated potatoes instead of smashed, like sweet potatoes, and her macaroni and cheese.

[00:11:38.16]

Annemarie A.: That sounds great.

[00:11:38.19]

Bernita J.: Yeah.

[00:11:40.01]

Annemarie A.: And so, she sold food out of her home? Did she do that for a living?

[00:11:42.22]

Bernita J.: No. She actually worked at a hospital, Roper Hospital, in the dietary department. No, she didn't really sell—they would do function, like church function, and have fish fries and stuff to raise money for the church and stuff like that. But no, my Grandmama more was a cook for—just like I am, not for pay, it's just 'cause I love to cook. When people ask me to do something, especially when it comes to the family affairs and the church, I'm more than willin' to cook. So, she was that type of person, to cook for the community. Weddings. Somebody havin' a birthday party, a sixtieth anniversary, whatever anniversary it was, she would—if someone asked her, she would say, "Yeah."

[00:12:31.20]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense. That's good.

[00:12:34.06]

Bernita J.: Yeah.

[00:12:35.05]

Annemarie A.: So, tell me a little bit. You were mentioning the emphasis on education. What elementary and middle school did you go to, and were there any specific educators there who influenced you?

[00:12:47.11]

Bernita J.: Well, yeah. I went to what they call—well, they changed the name, but it was called Columbus Street Elementary, when we lived on the East Side. Then we moved on the

West Side, and I went to Jameson Elementary, which still is in existence today. And I graduated—we didn't have a middle school then, we went from elementary to high school—and then I went to Charleston High. That's, like I told you, integrated, all-white school. I went there. But my mom took me out there because, like I say, it was hard for me to separate myself. She took me out there and then I went to Burke High School, which is a well-known black school.

[00:13:35.06]

Annemarie A.: That's great. And when you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

[00:13:40.06]

Bernita J.: You know what, I guess I always had somewhat food or beverage, but I couldn't put a name to it. 'Cause like I say, I raised up around a lot of people who was doing that. I had an aunt and my grandmom, both of them were cooks, and I always been the prep person, in a sense. I always been the one who cut the potato or something, being the oldest granddaughter living here. 'Cause—well, no. Let me rephrase that. Only living . . . grandchild that lived and would be around my grandmama as much, 'cause I had cousins who lived on the other side of town, but they weren't, for some reason I don't know why, they weren't there as much as my mom and her kids. So, I always been under my grandmom feet as far as doing things. So, I didn't have a name for whether I wanted to be a cook or whatever, I just always enjoyed serving people, since I was a young child.

[00:14:46.19]

Annemarie A.: That's great. Well, tell me a little bit about—you were telling me this when we talked last week, but tell me a little bit about goin' to work with your mom as a child.

[00:14:55.00]

Bernita J.: Yeah. Like I say, I had brothers. I had two older brothers and two younger brothers, so I'm smack dab in the middle before I even had a sister. My mom would take me to work; I was, like, twelve, eleven/twelve. She would take me to work, it was a place called Scarlett O'Hara, and it was fine dining on the water, here on Charlotte Street. I just used to see the bartender doing things, he would be polishing the glasses and stuff. Every now and then, he would call me over. He'd say, "Benita, fold this napkin." And he would show me a style and stuff like these fancy napkin folds and stuff like that. So, I would. He would give me a couple dollars and ever since then, I started going to work with my mom more and more. 'Cause at first, I wanted to be out with my friends and all this, it's a Saturday morning and stuff, but I went to work with her more and more 'cause I knew I could get a couple of dollars. [Laughter] And then I started working for them at fifteen, doing the napkins and polishing the glasses and setting up the tables. So, that was my first experience with food and beverage.

[00:16:04.20]

Annemarie A.: That's great.

[00:16:05.24]

Bernita J.: Yeah.

[00:16:07.09]

Annemarie A.: I'm curious, too, because I think we've seen a shift in . . . in gender and, a little bit with race but not so much, what type of people were servers at Scarlett O'Hara at the time?

[00:16:22.10]

Bernita J.: It was really young whites. Males. I don't even recall them having any female servers. I only remember male servers. [Coughs] So, that was the norm in finer dining then . . . I had seen white female waitresses at coffee shops and stuff, but finer dining, it was mostly males. So, that's a shift, 'cause now they got female and male. I don't know. I never figured out why that was, but it was mostly males.

[00:17:04.04]

Annemarie A.: Interesting. So, do you remember what year it would have been that you started at Scarlett O'Hara?

[00:17:06.23]

Bernita J.: This was, like, the early [19]70s. I know I started, for me working, in [19]75.

[00:17:14.24]

Annemarie A.: Okay.

[00:17:16.04]

Bernita J.: 1975. My mom might have started in [19]72, [19]71, soon as when they opened, 'cause we lived maybe a block and a half away from this restaurant. So, around [19]72, I guess, I started going there, [19]71, [19]72, with my mom.

[00:17:34.29]

Annemarie A.: Cool. What did your mom do there?

[00:17:35.28]

Bernita J.: She was the housekeeper. She cleaned up and washed the linens and stuff like that and brought it back, 'cause she had to go out to do that, I remember that. [Coughs]
Excuse me. Yeah, she was the housekeeper, um-hm.

[00:17:51.15]

Annemarie A.: That's great.

[00:17:51.15]

Bernita J.: Yeah.

[00:17:52.14]

Annemarie A.: How long did you work there?

Bernita J.: Till [19]78, and then I went to this area, in the heart of Charleston in the market area.

There was a hotel restaurant there. I actually work in housekeeping for years, and one of the horse—matter of fact, he owns one of the, horse and buggy owners, Jan Moore, he said, "Bernita, I think you'll do good in the restaurant. I want you to work in the restaurant." I was going to school for accounting then, 'cause I went to—it was a extension center, they call it, Shaw University. I was going there and taking up accounting. He told me at first, "Well, let me try you in the office doing payroll." But it was the set in the way, older white ladies, two of 'em, who'd been there for years, they couldn't adapt to change. Me and her would always—I didn't disrespect her, but I would always find myself frustrated. So, when I told him about it, he said, "I think you'll do good in the restaurant." So, I was the first front of the house employee at what we call the Heart of Charleston Cafe at 200 Meeting Street here. That's where the Bank of America, that big bank, in that area. And so, I was the first one there. Ever since, I've been in food and beverage.

[00:19:18.28]

Annemarie A.: By first one, what do you mean?

[00:19:20.21]

Bernita J.: The first front of the house employee. I was a hostess/cashier.

[00:19:25.01]

Annemarie A.: Okay, gotcha.

[00:19:27.01]

Bernita J.: Yeah. They had—the majority employees was black, but they were back of the house.

They was cooks and dishwashers, and they never had any people of color, a minority, come and work in front of the house. But he, affirmative action and different things, I guess, he had to balance it out. So, I was the first one in front of the house.

[00:19:49.08]

Annemarie A.: Was that difficult for you in any way?

[00:19:52.09]

Bernita J.: Yes, it was. It was. Like I say, two things happened in my life: when I went to school,

as far as how people felt separate, blacks and whites, 'cause I never felt that way until I got into the world of working. But it was an incident where we used to do a coffee tally—everything handwritten. You know how you do the one, one, two, and slash, that mean five? Back in the day, that's how it was. But at the end of the shift, we had to put it on paper, so we had to use the old calculator. And this older lady—name is Helen, I'll never forget her—she would do the coffee for, like, ten cents a cup. She would do ten cents, and keep doing the ten cents. I just told her, I said, "Mrs. Helen, why don't you put the ten cent in? You can just punch plus, plus, plus, and it'll keep adding the ten cents." Oh, she just went off. It was like, "Who are you to tell me how to do my job?" And I was like, "I'm just makin' it easy for her. You know? We can hurry up and get outta here."

[Laughter] Yeah, that was a hard one for me, because I realized—'cause I mean, she went

out the way. She went to front desk and, oh, she went to the general manager, and I was like, "Oh, my goodness, what did I do? I was just trying to get us out of here faster. She's takin' her time." Yeah, so, that was. I kinda had to separate myself from her, let her do her way and I did it my way. That's how it was then. But this was—it was in like [19]78, so, it was still there, the separation. But times have changed a lot now. I've seen a big change now. You know? It's, "What you know?" Got nothin' about who you are. [Laughter] It's what you know.

[00:21:49.16]

Annemarie A.: Could you talk a little bit about that change?

[00:21:52.13]

Bernita J.: What do you mean by the changes?

[00:21:59.08]

Annemarie A.: Well, I guess, as far as change goes, just the change in the industry—or, let's see, well, I think you kinda answered that question. Let me ask you about—so, you were at that establishment until [19]78. Where did you go afterwards?

[00:22:19.07]

Bernita J.: No, I started in [19]78 there.

[00:22:19.13]

Annemarie A.: Oh, okay.

[00:22:21.18]

Bernita J.: Now, after that, I went to Charleston Place. It's down here. It was the Omni Hotel then. I went there, I worked there for nine years. [Telephone rings]

[*Pause in recording*]

[*Recording resumes*]

[00:22:34.25]

Annemarie A.: That's okay. Okay. We're good. All right. So, you were at the establishment that you were at from 1978 to—

[00:22:45.11]

Bernita J.: [19]80 . . . I wrote it down. [Laughter] To [19]86.

[00:22:54.24]

Annemarie A.: Okay. And you were a hostess there that entire time?

[00:22:56.14]

Bernita J.: Okay. I went from Scarlett O'Hara, and I went to a place called Golden Eagle from [19]76 to [19]78. Then the Heart of Charleston from [19]78 to [19]86. Then the Omni Hotel from [19]86 to [19]95. Then, here, from [19]95 to current, to the Crab House.

[00:23:19.12]

Annemarie A.: Cool. So, I'm interested, too, because you talk a lot about hotel and restaurants, how has tourism affected your job? If that makes sense? Or, this is a tourist economy, so how has that impacted your job in any way? Have you felt like it has?

[00:23:39.22]

Bernita J.: It has its ups and downs, you know. We go through our slow season. But it seems like, for the last five years, Charleston hasn't really slowed down, to me. Especially if you're a regular employee, 'cause we got a lot of seasonal, and we have to get a lot of seasonal. Because in the summertime, when we're in season, we need double the staff. But I've seen it be extremely slow in the wintertime whereas, even the full-time employees couldn't get enough hours. But now, I haven't seen it slow down in almost five years in this area. Working here, I—you know, it might not be as busy, but being with less staff, you still make your money being a regular full-time employee. Yeah, it's a big shift in Charleston area. I guess that's why they're buildin' all these houses and high rises and stuff, because it's a lot of people that migrate here and stays. A lotta retirees. I've met regular retirees and everything else. So, it's— something's going on. [Laughter] It's a big shift.

[00:24:53.09]

Annemarie A.: Definitely. Well, so, you've been here for a long time. Could you talk about how you've seen Charleston's restaurant industry change?

[00:25:03.09]

Bernita J.: Yeah, it's changed. It's a lot more finer dining here. More people can afford it, I guess. We had a lot of Mom & Pop stores kind of on the corner. Like I say, we had the black community had their restaurant, the white community had their restaurants, but now, it's more upscale. Focus more on service than it ever did. Of course, the food, repeat customers, the food has to taste good; but it's like they focusing on everything from the appearance to the food to service. So . . . I've just seen so much things happen as far as . . . employees. Employees gotta be more dedicated, 'cause you know, you can have them turnover ten times in a year. But now, people are more—you have your core group and then you have your seasonal, kind of mix-in, and that kinda works. Especially here at the Crab House, that's what works for us. But it's just . . . I don't know what kind of change you want me to talk about, but . . .

[00:26:17.22]

Annemarie A.: That's great.

[00:26:18.27]

Bernita J.: But it's just, it's not only the food. Like I said, it's service and the employees, and everything else. Yeah.

[00:26:28.01]

Annemarie A.: That's really interesting. I want to talk about that, and I want to talk about your time here, because this is the place you've been longest, right?

[00:26:33.16]

Bernita J.: Yes.

[00:26:33.16]

Annemarie A.: So, you started here in [19]95?

[00:26:34.25]

Bernita J.: Um-hm.

[00:26:34.25]

Annemarie A.: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about how you got this job?

[00:26:40.12]

Bernita J.: Well, I was working at Omni Hotel for almost nine years. I took a leave of absence 'cause I got kind of burned out. 'Cause it was so . . . stiff to me. You couldn't talk to the guests like we do here, a lot of things you couldn't do. It was like you had to be standin' off from the guests. It was finer dining, it's totally different from casual dining. I was working with this young lady, her name's Karen **Seamen**. She was the manager at the Charleston Place and she left and came with the Crab House. She called me up one day while I was on leave. She said, "Yeah, I've heard. I came down here and they told me you were on leave." And she asked me, she said, "Come on, fill out an application over here. I think you would love it here." So, that's what I did. Then I put my notice in there and

came here. But that was more—I guess she influenced me, because she said, "I think your personality will fit the crab house more than Omni Hotel." It was too stiff over there for me. I just, I mean, I loved the food and the job was great, but it just didn't fit my character. I was more outgoing, and it just wasn't me.

[00:27:58.08]

Annemarie A.: So, at the Omni Hotel, you were a server there as well?

[00:28:02.03]

Bernita J.: I started off as a cashier/hostess, that's more like a supervisor position, and then I became a server. I did banquet serving over there, though. During the time, I was part-time, but my full-time job was a hostess, cashier and all that combination. Then a banquet server.

[00:28:26.13]

Annemarie A.: So, did y'all do single-serve or more team serving when you did those things?

[00:28:31.23]

Bernita J.: I first started off with banquet, which is team serving. Then I worked in the restaurant. But I always worked in Palmetto Cafe. Then I started serving, single-serve. Had my own section, my own tables, and everything like that. Once I left there, I came here to the Charleston Crab House, and single-serve if that's what you want to call it.

[00:28:54.14]

Annemarie A.: So, tell me a little bit about getting started here. 'Cause I know you've been here for a long time.

[00:28:59.11]

Bernita J.: Um-hm.

[00:28:59.13]

Annemarie A.: So, tell me about workin' in the dining room. What was a typical day like at the beginning?

[00:29:06.27]

Bernita J.: Well, when I first started, I worked at James Island location [James Island Crab House]. It was a difference, because like I say, I went from fine dining to casual dining. So, little things, details, I think that's why I stood out, because I was more detailed. The salt and pepper had to be right. The napkins had to be right. And so I was very particular about how I treated my guests. And I started getting regular customers. So, I got a better station, you know, it just kinda worked for me. Even here, although this is casual, we still try to be particular about certain things. So, I'm considered a closer. So, I can scan a room and see somethin' out of place. My eye was trained like that through the Omni Hotel and the Scarlett O'Hara and stuff, 'cause that's what fine dining is. Everything had to be just right. So, once I started workin' there, I just kinda—my personality mellowed out. Like I say, started gettin' my regulars and worked there for years. Then I left there to come here

because it got too regular. I had too much regulars. I had older groups that would come in on Sundays or whatever day, and the hat ladies from this Presbyterian church or this group of people. Then they started dyin' out 'cause they were older people, and I would come to work, like, "Oh!" [Sadness] So, I didn't realize how I got so close, up personal with these people just by serving them. I'd know, "Oh, oh, that's Ms. Mary. Let's give her half tea and half water." Or, "Oh, that's Mr. John. He'll want a bourbon on the rocks." I can tell how they like they food. They give me that nod, "You havin' the same?" "Yeah." Oh, she just wanted this or he wanted that, so I could serve them without even talkin' to them, 'cause I got to know them personally through their food and beverage. When they started dyin' out and I go to work, I was like, "I gotta get from here." Or they'll come in and tell me, "Oh, you wouldn't guess what happened to me." And now I'm talking while I'm trying to work with my other tables. I'll be like, "Oh, Lord, I've gotta get from here. There's too much regulars here." So, I came here, which I do have a few regulars here, but it's more . . . every three months or every six months, and then I got a few that comes every day. But not as much as over at James Island. So, I enjoy it here. I got one lady, CiCi, who comes in every day. I just look at her, "Yeah." I just point at her, "You havin' the regular?" She said, "No." I said, "Okay, then I'll give you a minute to think about what you want." Then—she rarely changes, you know? [Laughter] Out the whole year, she might change four times, you know? But yeah, so, I got my regulars and then I got a few that comes for medical reasons, and once they finish all that, they might be out further, live further in South Carolina, maybe a couple of hours away, or Columbia. And they come to the V.A. here. They'll come down every three months, every six months. So, when . . . yeah, you build up a clientele. It's based on food and beverage. It's funny that

you get to know people and people like you because the way you serve them, but it works with me.

[00:32:46.11]

Annemarie A.: That's great.

[00:32:44.07]

Bernita J.: Yeah. It works.

[00:32:48.10]

Annemarie A.: I think talking to people, I realized that there's a distinction between service and hospitality.

[00:32:53.17]

Bernita J.: Um-hm.

[00:32:53.17]

Annemarie A.: Could you talk a little bit about that? Like the terms, what you feel—what is your definition of service and what is your definition of hospitality?

[00:33:01.08]

Bernita J.: Hospitality is the whole picture, from greetin' at the door to—it's the whole experience. Bein' hospitable means presentin' yourself. I use this term when I train: I say,

"If you want to be in hospitality, you gotta first look at it like this. You gotta be willing to accept anybody that comes in the door, 'cause you don't know their personality. You don't know their character. You don't know anything about it. So, you as a person gotta approach that person." And I use this scenario as, "Just imagine somebody comin' to your house. So now you have to clean up the house and got everything set up and the food, you know, taste the food, everything tastin' good. The beverages, nice and chilled and cold. And you open the door. The first thing you want to do is, 'Come on in!' Welcoming. You gotta be welcoming. Bring them in, and once you bring them in, then you sit them down. 'Well, have a seat here. You comfortable?' Make sure they're comfortable. You gotta be open to, 'Okay, I'm here, to serve you. So tell me how you like it. Tell me how you want it.'" That's hospitality. You can do it without serving. But no, I'm reverse—you can't serve without having hospitality in it. It's welcomin' everybody in. Once you prepare the food and make sure they're enjoying the food, and the drink is—that's how you like it, make sure they are well-fed and the beverages as well, they're to their liking, then you thank 'em and welcome 'em back. "Make sure you come back and see us, now!"

[Laughter] Yeah. So, you gotta be open-hearted, I feel. 'Cause you deal with all kind of characters. You can have the tough ones. There's a couple, table, came in the other day. And the lady said, "Oh, he's a tough character." I said, "Oh, this day and time of my life, I can deal with the toughest." 'Cause you learn how to. You learn how to. I think that's why a lot of people leave, and it's such a turnover, is because you don't really know the person. So, you be like, "Man, I don't have to deal with this mess." But if you stay in the field, you learn how to. 'Cause I've had some terrible guests, but, "Okay, I'll give you a minute to get yourself together." I say it within myself. "Okay, I'll be right back." And I walk off.

Now you're feudin' with yourself. You ain't feudin' with me anymore. So, I just . . . it's different ways you can deal with different situations. And you learn that if you stay in this field. A young lady had an incident the other day. I say, one thing I learned: it takes two to argue. The best thing to say, let them vent, don't say nothin' at all. And when they see it's not gettin' next to you, they'll calm down. So, I'd be like, "Okay. Um-hm." I don't try to explain. I don't try to reason. Just, "Okay, you vent. I'll be alright." I just walk away. Yeah, so, it's some difficult people in this field, yeah. You can have some. Especially if one thing go wrong. So, that's why you gotta be willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done, yeah. But hospitality is just willingness to serve. That's how I look at it.

[00:36:44.14]

Annemarie A.: That's really great. That's really beautiful.

[00:36:46.14]

Bernita J.: Yeah.

[00:36:47.26]

Annemarie A.: Could you tell me—I mean, you keep talkin' about it's challenging but you love this job. Why do you come back every single day? What's the thing that draws you to this job?

[00:36:58.04]

Bernita J.: Serving. I love to serve. It's a experience every day, 'cause you don't know who's comin' in. I've met so many people from all over the world. They got some interesting story. It's like . . . openin' a book every day and going through a new chapter. I can say I do it for the money, but that's not the case, 'cause I can come to work and not make no money. It's a gamble, serving, 'cause that customer do not have to leave anything. And you get those kind, too. It's just like a poker game that's comin' to you. I open a hand, “I got a good hand today.” “Oh well, I can fold on this hand today.” 'Cause I always, when I train, I say, “You ain't gonna always get a percentage tip that you feel you deserve. You might not get no tip at all. But it always balances out.” 'Cause you can have one person who tipped more than, and you have one who don't tip at all, so it kind of balances out. You can't let the one who don't tip at all affect the one that could tip more than. If I have a bad table, like I say, I walk away. And they'll tell you here, anybody who knows me, I go outside and I let it go. Once I let it go, I come back in and I deal with my other tables. I can't let that one table upset me, you know? And get to me, rather. So, I vent. I let them know. I go outside for a second and I tell my co-workers, “Let's walk outside for a minute.” You'll be surprised, the air, just walk outside for a minute, breathe, and come back in. You done released that negative. 'Cause that person got negative energy. Let it go. So, I just love coming here. I love my co-workers, 'cause I got a few that have been here with the Crab House for years. And, like I say, I'm a cook myself. So, I like when people enjoy my food. It's just . . . it's just like, it bows me up that God has blessed me with this talent to be able to serve. You know? 'Cause he was a servant. So, I just love doing it.

[00:39:36.25]

Annemarie A.: That's great.

[00:39:37.14]

Bernita J.: I just love doing it.

[00:39:37.17]

Annemarie A.: Could you talk a little bit about—so, this is kind, I have two questions I want to ask. I'll ask you this one first. Could you talk a little bit about some of the long-term employees that you've developed relationships with that you work with?

[00:39:54.08]

Bernita J.: Yeah. Garrett Davis, the one you met earlier. I think he taught me a lot about dedication, 'cause I see this fella when I first [Knocking on door]—that's somebody tryin' to get in. I first met him, we actually went to school together. And so I knew of him. But when I started with the Crab House, he was already, like, seven years in with John Keener and Joe **Naughton**. He would be to work on time . . . sometimes, hours before he even was scheduled. I was like, "He is such a dedicated worker. I want to be like him." You know, it's not all about clockin' in on time, but sometime you gotta go the extra just to make sure *your job* get done right. So, that's what I would do. Even today, I might come in twenty minutes early so I wouldn't have to rush around to get set up. I just come in and give me a few minutes to wind down and kind of look around and see if anything else needs to be done. You know? His name is Garrett Davis, I said. Then this other

young lady, her name **Koniki**. Her name Chaniqua, like I say, but we call her Niki. That's one used to be here, and she's off today. I thought she was here, that's why I said 8:30. She's dedicated herself. She's a hard-workin' young lady, and she's thirty-nineish. She goes out her way to make sure that food comes out lookin' good and on time. So, I give her credit. She's a hard-workin' young lady. I think she learned that from workin' around Garrett also. You know, he got that drive to make you want to do better. Who else I work up with? It's so many younger ones that, like, our G.M., Chad, he was here as a young boy. Joe work at the bar for years. Sueden, Mike Sueden, he's the bar manager. He worked here for years. I think, server-wise, it's a few of 'em been here, but some of 'em got other careers and they're most seasonal now. Lauren Clark, she worked for years with me, but she now works Monday thru Friday, a chiropractor or something and then she works the weekend here. Thursday nights and weekends here. Oh, my goodness. I don't know who all else. [Laughter] There's so many people.

[00:42:42.04]

Annemarie A.: That's great.

[00:42:43.16]

Bernita J.: Yeah.

[00:42:44.25]

Annemarie A.: So I know, too, that you are Ms. B. here, and you do most of the training, right?

[00:42:49.28]

Bernita J.: Um-hm.

[00:42:49.28]

Annemarie A.: Could you talk a little bit about that, tryin' to train younger employees, what you try to teach them?

[00:42:57.09]

Bernita J.: Well, we have a young lady named Erin. She created a packet, training packet, so it's a lot easier 'cause it's step-by-step. But I'm here more, they look at me as—especially a person who never been in food and beverage—let her train with Ms. B. here and get her opinion, whether she feel this person can make it in this field. 'Cause like I say, when I train, I let them know, I use this scenario: "If you can't welcome that person in, you're gonna have all kinda people comin' here. If you can't know how to get around that, you don't need to be in this field." Because some people can be outrageous at times, especially when they food is wrong or somethin's not right and they payin' for it. You gotta learn how to—"Okay, let me take that away from. Tell me exactly what you want." And go from there. So, they look at me as, "Let's see what Ms. B. says." [Laughter] But she came up with a great program and we go by step. So, at some point, they can come with me throughout their training. Not always the first day, but at some point. Or they'll put, once they finish their training, they'll come downstairs and work a couple days with me. And I will give them pointers and stuff like that, to make sure they—'cause we got a system here, and it works very well if they put it in place. Every now and then, we see this one

not doin' it the Crab House way, and we go this thing whereas, first, you gotta go to that person. If you got a problem with me, come to me first before we go to the management. We want to be a team, whereas we should be able to come to that person and say, "Hey, look now. You know you not doin' it the Crab House way. We need you to work through this, 'cause we got a reason for this." Then, if it's not working, then we go to the next step, which is management. But that rarely happens, 'cause we be in each other's face like, "Hey." [Laughter] You know? Yeah. So, we work good as a team here.

[00:45:03.17]

Annemarie A.: That's good.

[00:45:05.00]

Bernita J.: Good work as a team. We make it a team, and more family team. 'Cause we concerned about personal, whatsoever's goin' on personal-wise. So, I'm more like the mother in the family, and these are all my younger kids, you know? I got a few older ones, what we call closers, do all the training and stuff like that. So, we like, "Ah, now, he's not doin' the right thing! We gotta get on him." But we work as a team. I think that's why, when we have somebody here who we feel is not clicking, we don't even have to weed them out. They weeding themselves out, 'cause they see how we bond together and work together. And they know, "I can't get over on them, 'cause they can tell Ms. B., Ms. B. can tell this one, and they can get on me." You know? Yeah.

[00:45:59.13]

Annemarie A.: That's great.

[00:45:59.13]

Bernita J.: Yeah. I guess everybody come to work now. [Laughter]

[00:46:02.18]

Annemarie A.: I only have a couple more questions.

[00:46:02.18]

Bernita J.: Okay.

[00:46:04.08]

Annemarie A.: And then I'll let you go, 'cause I know you're busy. So, tell me, you were talkin' about the team effort. You've been here for a really long time, and I know that this work is really challenging emotionally and mentally and physically. What way do your employers kind of take care of you, if that makes sense? Like how do they foster an environment that makes sure that you are physically and mentally . . . taken care of?

[00:46:33.25]

Bernita J.: Well, for one thing, if you need any time off, you can take whatever. For instance, I've taken months off several times during my career here, as well as on the hotel, because . . . it can be personal or it can be health-wise, and you don't have to worry about gettin' your job back like some places. 'Cause like I say, we have a lot of seasonal people.

It's different factors, they can fill in until you ready to come back to work. I had a death in my family and I believe that's one reason why I stuck with this company in [19]99. I lost two nieces. John and Joe was there, right there—that's the owners—and they supported me and my son, 'cause my son and daughter work there. And they paid for me to be off. It wasn't even a question. It's just like, "Hey. Take your time. We got you." And so, I think that kind of made me more dedicated to this company, 'cause I could have left and go other places, and I put my all in. 'Cause they didn't hesitate. And the love that they had for me as an employee, 'cause that's the only thing I can say more, the one fact that I was the best employee, probably, 'cause they had some great employees workin' who I learned from. But during that time, I was still young with the company, but they gave me a opportunity to take off some months to get myself back together. Then I had a few health issues. With my mom, I had to take a leave of absence for three months, and they were willing—I worked, took off two months, and then I said, "Okay, I need to come back to work." For my financial reasons. So, instead of workin' daytime, I worked night-time. Only a short period of time, then she passed on. So, I mean, the company worked with you. Food and beverage works with you, if as far as personal things. Yeah.

[00:48:39.21]

Annemarie A.: That's great.

[00:48:41.10]

Bernita J.: Um-hm.

[00:48:41.10]

Annemarie A.: And one last question in regards to tipping, you were kind of talking about the gamble of tipping. But I was wondering if you've seen any change in payments since credit cards and debit cards are a lot more prevalent than cash. Has that changed the way that you've been paid?

[00:48:58.17]

Bernita J.: Yes, 'cause now we get a check. Before, we used to—even though it was still credit card and stuff, at some point, we would put it in but we would get our money and walk with our cash every day. Now, all credit card tippers come through with checks, so we get a physical check, and then you walk with whatever cash you get. But it's a change. Some people, customers, guests, they would use a credit card and leave cash tip, also. So, it's all kind of trends goin' on now. Ninety percent of people put the tip on the credit card, yeah. So, but before, most people used to pay cash. [Laughter] They rarely use a credit card, 'cause in the [19]70s, [19]80s, people weren't using the credit card. It was mostly cash when I first started this business, and then when I came to Charleston Place, it was mostly all credit cards. So, it just depends on the business, I believe. Some people prefer doing cash at smaller business than well-known businesses, you know. I guess they don't wanna get tied up with the credit card or if somebody misusing their credit card. So, I see people be cautious using the credit card versus cash in different places.

[00:50:27.05]

Annemarie A.: Has it been a difficult transition, or just a different way of doin' things?

[00:50:32.00]

Bernita J.: It never was difficult for me, 'cause I was always the type of person to put that money in the bank. You know, I put it away and put it in the bank. So, it's easier for me, to be honest with you, to keep track of. The way it is now—'cause I was spendin' more money if I had more cash in hand. [Laughter] But now, since ninety percent of it goes to the bank, I don't spend as much, as far as on-hand. So, it helps me, the way it is now.

[00:51:09.13]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense.

[00:51:11.19]

Bernita J.: Yeah. But . . . it's gamble with this job. 'Cause, like I say, you can go in and not make no money at all. Which rarely happens, but I'm just saying. You come in—or you could have a hundred dollars in sales, I'm using this as an example, and you should—fifteen percent is fifteen dollars, but we ask for eighteen, of course. [Laughter] But you might just make five. So . . . but then you might come in the next day, that hundred dollars, you can make twenty-five dollars. So, it balance out. It really do. It balance out.

[00:51:47.24]

Annemarie A.: That's really interesting.

[00:51:48.20]

Bernita J.: Yeah. It is.

[00:51:50.20]

Annemarie A.: So, I don't have any more questions for you and I know that you have to get ready for work, but is there anything that we've not talked about that you want to mention or that you want to say?

[00:52:01.01]

Bernita J.: Well, one of the reasons I feel confident in this company, too, 'cause I didn't mention, John mentioned me for the Employee of the Year. When I came to work, I actually took that day off for some reason, but that's all right . . . my spirit goes. Anyway, I took that day off, and John [Keener] and Kim Jackson, the secretary, called my daughter. My daughter called me and said, "Mom, you need to come to work. John and Keener down here lookin' for you." So I'm thinkin' in my head, "Oh, Lord, John about to close down this restaurant. I ain't gonna have no job . . ." And then my daughter-in-law called me and told me . . . well, technically she's not my daughter-in-law, but my son's girlfriend called me. She said, "I'm going downtown. Anthony called me to tell me to bring you downtown." Anthony's my son, so I'm like, "Well, why do they want me to come downtown here? To the Crab House?" So, when I came—I came—she told me, "Put on something nice. We'll go out to lunch." That's what she said. So I—'cause I had on some jeans and t-shirt. She said, "No, put somethin' on nice. We can go out to lunch." So I put on a little outfit or whatever, so when I came downstairs, right in this building, and I saw Kim and I saw John Keener, and then I saw a couple of my co-workers from—I think one

was from James Island, I was like, "What's going on here?" So, when I came and John handed me this envelope. So I saw it, the State of South Carolina, whatever, Hospitality-something. So I open it and it said, "You have been nominated and won the Front of the House Employee of the Year for the state of South Carolina." I said, "The state of South Carolina?!" I never knew it was a thing like that, you know? I knew about hospitality and different things that they had goin' on as far as meetings. John used to go to and tell us about. But I never knew that they nominated people from all over South Carolina and they had this nice conference—not a conference, but a program, banquet in Columbia. And I met people from Myrtle Beach that won the Back of the House, some towns that I didn't even know about, and they won for the Front Desk Clerk and Busboy. Excuse me, Busboys. Different things. I was like, "Wow. State of South Carolina actually got a program where they honor people?" That was a big thing for me in my life, and that kind of boosts my spirit up. You know? 'Cause he . . . I guess he saw it in me, you know. He saw it in me, and I guess they shop you. And shop me. They come in and have lunch or dinner or whatever and see how you are as a person and stuff. And I remember this young man coming in one day. He said, "How you feel about this? How you feel about that?" I was talkin' to him and stuff like that. One question, he say, "How are those ones who don't—you know ain't gonna tip? How you treat those kind?" I said, "Well, to be honest with you" —like I said— "It balance out. If I got a regular, if I know they come and they might just leave two dollars but they should leave four, I don't deal with them no less. I don't treat them no less than I would do something who give me ten dollars. 'Cause see, those regulars, they carry you over in the wintertime. And they might not give you the monetary tip, but they pass it on. Whereas they'll say, "Go over there and see Ms. B."

'Cause I've had people in the door and say, Um, they tell me to come over here and see Ms. B.' So, they refer me, 'cause they see how I treat them. So, they help me out, as far as especially during the winter months. Yeah.

[00:56:02.29]

Annemarie A.: That's really great. What year was that?

[00:56:04.24]

Bernita J.: What year was it? 20 . . . 10? I don't—I can't remember. [Laughter]

[00:56:11.01]

Annemarie A.: It's okay.

[00:56:12.10]

Bernita J.: [Laughter] You gotta ask John. I don't know.

[00:56:15.20]

Annemarie A.: I'm sure I can probably find it online.

[00:56:16.14]

Bernita J.: 2009? Now I can't remember. To be honest with you . . . I felt good, but that don't define me. 'Cause whether I got that or not, I go out of my way to be the best server I can be. I go out the way—when I see customers, I help the hostess out. I've had managers

here who—they've gone, though—I've had managers that tell me, "Ms. B., you need to stay from front of the door!" I can't help it. I cannot help it. It's the hostess in me. If I see a plate that doesn't look good— it don't have to be my table. "unh-unh, let's do better than this. That's not us." You know? That's the service in me. That's the hospitality to me. That's just me as far as, I don't want to be served . . . how I'm gonna say that. I don't want to be served, I want to serve like how I want to be served. You understand what I'm sayin'?

[00:57:15.04]

Annemarie A.: Yes.

[00:57:16.18]

Bernita J.: I'm not gonna treat you no differently than how I want you to treat me. It's not a thing with me. It's race—'cause some of my best tips came from people who, if I were to stereotype, I would probably never have gotten that table, you see what I'm sayin'? I've had some guy in the cowboy boots and he was from Texas with a drawl, and he was the best tipper I ever had. I had little old ladies who slipped me fifty dollars. I'm like, "No, no, no!" "Yeah, yeah, yeah!" [Laughter] You'd be surprised who. So, you can't really say who. I have a lady in the market, she comes here every single day and she just gets tea and coffee or whatever. John, you know, kind of works with them and gives them water. We don't even charge them. And she came in the other day, she was like, "Here, this's for you." It was fifty dollars! I was like, "Okay, thank you. I appreciate that." She said, "Yeah, 'cause you always go out of your way. Even when you see me and it's busy." They

usually go to the bar, but she didn't go to the bar. She'll come to me sometimes, and I know she wants the—she gets lemonade and ginger ale mixed in a big cup like that. She just gave me fifty dollars, you know? I don't stereotype, I just treat everybody the same. My hardcore tables, the ones who I know to be . . . [Laughter] Oh, my goodness. I got some tales from . . . some horror tales. [Laughter] You know we have those. But I treat all of 'em the same. I really do. Yeah, and I enjoy my job. And I love . . . my owners, my workers, and everybody else. My G.M., he's a good guy, Chris. He's a really good guy. He keeps the glue, he's the glue that keeps it on the—well, I guess his title is C.E.O. To him, it could always be Chaz. He's been here as a young boy. He's John's right hand man. It's a good team we got here. Really good team.

[00:59:32.14]

Annemarie A.: That's really good.

[00:59:32.29]

Bernita J.: Um-hm. Yeah.

[00:59:33.11]

Annemarie A.: Well, thank you so much for talking to me.

[00:59:36.20]

Bernita J.: Okay.

[00:59:36.20]

Annemarie A.: I really appreciate it.

[*End of interview*]