



Sarah Tucker
Slightly North of Broad
Charleston, South Carolina

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Annemarie Anderson: Today is August 13th, 2019. I'm in Charleston, South Carolina, for the Career Servers Project. This is Annemarie Anderson interviewing Miss Sarah Tucker.

Miss Tucker, would you go ahead and introduce yourself for the recorder and give us your name and tell us what you do?

[0:00:16.2]

Sarah Tucker: Hi. My name is Sarah Elizabeth Tucker, and I am a career server. I've been in the business over twenty years, and it's what I know and love.

[0:00:25.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, let's start off. Before we talk about your career, could you tell me a little bit about growing up? Give us your birth date and tell us where you grew up.

[0:00:35.1]

Sarah Tucker: I was born July 1st, 1975, in Jackson, Tennessee. Where I grew up is a tiny town, which I believe, Annemarie, you actually know—no one else does, pretty much—is Selmer, Tennessee. It's kind of like a blip on the map. If you blink, you'll miss it. We had a 420-acre farm. We raised our own cattle. We had horses, dogs. I explored all the time out in the woods, and it was over a mile to the nearest neighbor.

[0:01:11.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That sounds good. Can you tell me a little bit about—well, introduce me to your parents. What were their names?

[0:01:16.9]

Sarah Tucker: My parents are Jim and Cathy Tucker. My dad was in the military, he was in the Navy when—I'm the last of five children—when my mom and dad first met. Then he had to go over to Vietnam, and she was left alone with a lot of the kids. Her dream was always to have a farm, which is how we ended up on that piece of property, was having a farm. A farm's a lot of work, but it's really fun too. I learned early on in life that you can get lost in the woods as long as you have your dogs, because they always know the way home, which was amazing. But they are still married to this day and love each other, which I think in this world sometimes is kind of rare, but I love that that's how it is, and that's just how I was raised.

[0:02:17.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. And so what sort of things did you do on the farm growing up?

[0:02:22.2]

Sarah Tucker: I've always been a tomboy, like *total* tomboy. So even though at that point in my life I was very small, I always tried to outdo my brothers in anything, especially when we had to bale hay. We'd be baling hay, and I remember, like, I was down with them throwing the hay bales up onto the cart, and finally it would get to the

point they're like, "You're slowing us down. You have to go up top." And I was not having it. [laughs] And then they would tell me my sister, who was more of an inside person and a bookworm, they'd be like, "But she's stacking them all wrong up there. We really need you up there." They had to tell me that when I was just a kid just to get me up there. They'd throw them up to me, and then I'd stack them all, and I'd tell her how to do it. But, yeah, I mean, it was great. I did that. If I wasn't outside, because I was outside, like I said, getting lost with the dogs and that sort of thing, then I always liked to be in the kitchen with anybody who was cooking, because it intrigued me.

[0:03:40.4]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, tell me a little bit about what you grew up—like when you were growing up, what was on the table? What did your parents cook?

[0:03:45.7]

Sarah Tucker: I know my mom is going to listen to this. Sorry, Mom, but we all know this is truth. My mom cannot cook. She missed that gene. Everyone else in the family can cook pretty well, but she missed that gene, so my sister and I started cooking at an early age, but we did really simple stuff, you know, like we put some honey mustard on chicken and bake it in the oven. But I learned a lot from my grandmothers. Whenever I got to be in the kitchen with them, that's when I really knew stuff.

I've always said that I have the best of both worlds, because I had my country grandma and my city grandma. My country grandma, she was doing okra and tomatoes and stewed rabbit that they went out and caught, pecan pie, coconut cake, and you know

the coconut cake, not the fancy one, the one where the icing on the outside is kind of crunchy. Yes, you all know you want it. And then I had my city grandma, who used to throw parties in [Washington] D.C. So on my mom's side of the family. She was making her own liver mousse and rack of lamb and doing like these ornate baked hams and that sort of thing, like lemon meringue pies with meringue that was like 80 miles high and, for sure, toasted on top, which some people miss. But, yeah, I got the best of both worlds, basically, like food love from my grandparents.

Now my dad, he doesn't often cook, but if it's breakfast, he's always on point, omelets for sure, pancakes, and he always made a mean chili. But he didn't cook a whole lot.

[0:05:37.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense. So how did your parents get to Selmer? Was it that family land, or did they just pick it?

[0:05:44.1]

Sarah Tucker: It was. At that point, my dad grew up in Arkansas, and the family had moved and they were just outside of Selmer, and my mom kind of came and stayed with them. It's all kind of around the Memphis area, so Memphis, Mississippi, Arkansas, like they had several spots in that area. But she came with the kids, my two brothers at the time, to stay with them while my dad was gone.

[0:06:15.1]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense.

[0:06:16.7]

Sarah Tucker: And then they bought a small farm and then a big farm.

[0:06:20.1]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. So, well, tell me a little bit—you mentioned how you went to—is there anything else you want to talk about from your childhood that we've missed that you want to share?

[0:06:30.8]

Sarah Tucker: Not that I'm thinking of right now, but if something comes to me later, I'll let you know.

[0:06:36.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, I have a question too. What did you want to be when you grew up? You said cooking was a big part of your childhood.

[0:06:42.3]

Sarah Tucker: Well, like I said, I spent a lot of time outside, so I think the first thing I wanted to do was be a vet, be a veterinarian, and then I think I was introduced to the ins and outs of it a little too quickly, and I was like, “Nope, I'm not doing that.” I was a little too young for that kind of, like, access. But through my entire life I've always spent a

bunch of time with animals, regardless. I was, like, in the stall with the horse that was giving birth, like loving on her and rubbing on her, which some people think is dangerous, but I knew this horse and it was fine. She was like, “Yeah, we’ve got this.” But I’ve always loved animals, so I thought I would go something more than direction, but I think just having animals satisfies that for me.

[0:07:40.1]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense.

[0:07:42.1]

Sarah Tucker: So I went a different direction.

[0:07:44.6]

Annemarie Anderson: So your education, you went to school in Selmer growing up?

[0:07:48.8]

Sarah Tucker: I did. McNairy County. McNairy Central High School was where I went to. I was actually in the town of Ramer, which is even smaller than Selmer, in elementary school, and then I went to middle school in Selmer, which caused a little bit of rift for some of my friends from elementary school, but it allowed me to not have to get up an hour and a half earlier to catch a bus ride that always made me sick just to go to school. I could just ride with my mom, because she was teaching at that point at the high school, and it was like twenty minutes to get there. But we all reconnected whenever we got to

high school, because it was a countywide high school, and then we all had a good cry-out about how we missed each other and all got back together pretty much. Just last year I went to my twenty-five year high school reunion, and we all talked about how crazy it was that we all still love each other, because it's high school, you know, but we do really all still love each other.

[0:08:55.8]

Annemarie Anderson: That's nice. That's really great. So after high school, where did you go?

[0:08:59.2]

Sarah Tucker: I went to school in Knoxville, because I was a teenager, for sure, and I wanted to go the furthest away that I could from home. I *really* wanted to go to California and go to USC [University of Southern California], but I got tuition discount because my mother was a teacher, so I went to the University of Tennessee, and I would *not* change that because I'm definitely a Vol for life. "Go Vols!" Eighteen days till football season, eighteen days, yep.

[0:09:38.4]

Annemarie Anderson: So tell me, what'd you decide to major in when you were at UT?

[0:09:42.5]

Sarah Tucker: I never finished my degree. When I left, I was about a semester, semester and a half away from multiple different degrees, because my approach to school was more like, “Oh, what do I want to learn about this semester?” And at some point then I realized I am not independently wealthy and I’m going to have to pay back all these loans. But I did all kinds of things. I did religious studies, English. I mean, I was very close to my Poly Sci degree. I studied advertising for a while. History, I did a lot of history. So, yeah, I was kind of all across the board.

[0:10:28.1]

Annemarie Anderson: So you’re just a lifelong learner?

[0:10:30.4]

Sarah Tucker: You know, if I was independently wealthy, I’d probably still be in school. Like, “Yeah, okay, what am I going to learn about right now?”

[0:10:39.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That’s great.

[0:10:41.3]

Sarah Tucker: Yeah, it was fun.

[0:10:42.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, tell me a little bit about your first serving job. When did you start that?

[0:10:47.5]

Sarah Tucker: My first serving job was when I was eighteen, and it was a little dive bar. They served food. I would have said, “Don’t eat it.” Mostly just like bar cocktails, which was right off of the college strip, so you really didn’t need the food aspect.

And then when I was twenty, I got my first fine dining restaurant job, which I moved up. That was Regas in Knoxville [Tennessee], which doesn’t exist anymore, but it was like old-school steakhouse, pewter plates, real silver silverware, and you would, like, take the lobster out of the shell for the people. You would bring around and prepare their baked potato tableside. All that kind of tableside old-school service was what that place was.

[0:11:52.0]

Annemarie Anderson: What year did you start at Regas?

[0:11:53.9]

Sarah Tucker: Let’s see. When I was twenty. I have to do the math in my head really quickly. I don’t know that I can do that. [19]95? Yeah, that sounds about right.

[0:12:11.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool. And tell me a little bit—so I’m interested in this because I’ve talked to some other folks about tableside service. Could you talk a little bit about, you know, what were some major lessons that you learned? What was a typical workday at Regas?

[0:12:27.4]

Sarah Tucker: Well, Regas, when I started there, like I said, it was more fine dining, and I’d never done anything like that before in my life. So, I mean, they kind of train you how to take orders and like what the system is, but I realized really quickly that I didn’t know how to talk to guests, like how to present things. So what I did there was I followed around the management, especially anytime there was an issue, and kind of listened to what they said to tables. And then all of the tenured servers, I would kind of listen into their spiel and hear, like, what they said to tables. I’d be like around the corner, but I’m like, “Okay,” like, because it’s kind of a lot about presentation, how you talk to people and making them feel comfortable and then excited about what’s going to happen here at the table. So I learned a lot there from that.

Tableside service, I think, is something that’s kind of fallen by the wayside and I don’t really think is necessary, but the way that you present things and talk to people, I think, is integral to what we do in our business, because that’s what really helps people who don’t dine out a lot have a really good time. Like, I don’t look at myself as a server; I look at myself as your dining guide. And you don’t have to order the most expensive thing on the menu. I want to help you have a good time and get you to that place without feeling strange. Like some people come in, they see white tablecloths, and they already

feel like, [Gasps] “Oh, what’s going on here? Never dined like this before.” You just want to make people feel comfortable, and that was the first place where I realized how I present things and talk to people was the way to do that.

[0:14:28.2]

Annemarie Anderson: That’s great. Did you have any mentors or teachers while you were there who stand out?

[0:14:34.0]

Sarah Tucker: There was Malachi Dean, who he was shorter than I was, little old man in the kitchen. Two of these I’m going to mention, they smoked a lot, so I always have to, like, [Imitates] I got to make that smoky raspy voice. And that’s also when I met Alexander. He worked there. He worked on the grill at that point in his life. That’s my husband, by the way, y’all.

I would come in the kitchen—and I still think of Malachi so finally and so often because his stature, he was very diminutive, but he ran that kitchen and he didn’t hold anything back. I’d have two days off. My two days off I’d come in, I’d be like, “Malachi, do you miss me?”

He’s say, [Imitates] “I miss you like a headache,” and he’d just giggle and grin as he said it. And I loved him. But he was so good at his job. And then if I came in, was distracting Alexander, he’d be like, [Imitates] “Girl, you get out of the kitchen. Leave that boy alone.”

And then also there were what they called there were the day hags, were these ladies who had worked lunch there for years and years and years, and I definitely learned lessons from them that I will take with me my whole life. The first one was, you know, I was a kid, so I came in one day—I was in college so I did a lot of late nights, but I came in, and my station was out front, so I just started setting it up, and one of the guys that worked there who was more my age, and we were friends, came out a while later, and I was almost finished setting my station up. All I had to do was go to the back and make butters. And he came out and he let me know. He's like, "Oooh, you're in trouble."

And I was like, "For what?"

And all the day hags would come in and they would sit around, read the paper, gossip, smoke cigarettes, back when you could smoke cigarettes in the restaurant, and drink coffee, and apparently they had been back there talking about me the whole time, that I was late. And I was like, "All right. I've got this." My section at that point was set up, and so I went back and I made my butters. And butter dishes in any restaurant are always hard to come by. You better get your butters. So I made my butters and took them back out, and then they had been gossiping about me so long that they were behind. So without saying anything, I just went and offered everybody help. "Do you need help setting up? Do you want me to make some butters for you?" And after that, I was a honorary day hag.

One of the girls, Mary Anne, she's about the same height as Malachi, smoked a lot of cigarettes too, and she and I became fast friends. We would work parties together. She was a more "tell it like it is." Like, I went around and found the way to present things. She was definitely more "tell it like it is." But the combination of the two of us

together, because she would tell you, she'd be like, "If you'd move your elbows, I could set this down," which in fine dining really isn't really something that you normally do. [Giggles] And then I'd come around, and I'd talk to them about wine and this and that and be so, like, circumspect. And then Mary Anne'd come, "You better listen to what she says."

The thing was, people loved it so much, like the juxtaposition between the two of us, they loved it so much, and we made so much money. We worked lots of parties together, and always, on top of every party, they would leave us extra money, and 99.9 percent of the time, they would want to speak with management, which at one point people got sick of, because they'd see us, we'd walk them down, like arm-in-arm, to the manager's office. They were like, "Here they come again because they want to say how great you all are."

We're like, "Yeah, well, we can't help it. We're just doing what we do."

But, yeah, I definitely learned a lot about how to get along with people, I guess, in that environment without causing a lot of angst and craziness, which I loved. And that's, like, good learning for life in general.

[0:19:27.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Sure. How long did you work at Regas?

[0:19:31.3]

Sarah Tucker: I worked there for about a year, and then they kind of changed the system of how things were set up. A lot of the older ladies, who I loved, were kind of leaving,

and they got a bunch of people in who didn't really know what to do or want to work to find out what to do, which, I think, through my entire time in food and beverage, is always a struggle. Like, I was kind of self-taught, and I've even given people the tools. I'm like, "Well, this is what I did, so if you want to figure out how to do this, like, you could do this." So I gave them, like, my secret, if you will, but then they're just like sometimes kind of too lazy to do it, which is frustrating.

But after that, I went to a more casual dining place, because I followed one of the managers, Don Anderson, who worked there, and I went and worked with him.

[0:20:34.9]

Annemarie Anderson: That's good. How do you spell Regas, just for the recorder?

[0:20:38.8]

Sarah Tucker: R-e-g-a-s, and that was the name of the family that owned the business. It actually started as a lunch counter back in the day, and the whole building they added on to and added on to and increased. And then it had three main dining rooms, a side dining room. Actually, there were the three main ones and then two side. The fireside dining rooms were kind of where the lunch counter was, and then a bunch of party rooms in the back with, like, collapsible doors that you could, like, put out or not. They just added on through the years. Yeah, it was kind of an institution when I lived there.

[0:21:21.2]

Annemarie Anderson: That's cool. And so this is, I guess, a little bigger question, but what drew you to service? What was the initial reason for you wanting to go into that job?

[0:21:31.7]

Sarah Tucker: Well, I think for me, I'm naturally a night owl, so especially when I was in college, I mean, I had to go to class and that sort of thing during the day, but I needed something that I could do at night to make money, and it just kind of made sense. And then it was like, "Well, I don't want to just do like the small-time bar kind of scene." I wanted to do something else.

So then that's when I went to Regas, and I was like, "Wait. Like, this is cool." And I kind of like challenged myself, like coming up being new there. I remember working brunch, and I was put in the smoking room, which was like a very long, narrow room, Regas 1. Smoking room was Regas 2. And Regas 1 was where *everybody* made money at brunch. In Regas 2, there were two of us, because it was a long, narrow room, that worked in there. And I told this guy who was several years older than me, I was like, "Oh, no. We're going to make more money in here than they do." And we got a bunch of regulars, and we made it happen, and then you have people peeking around the corner going, "What are they doing over there?"

And I was like, "Yeah, what were your sales today. Hmm. Oh, yeah! This is what *we* did."

And like, "What?"

So I always kind of look at those kind of things as a challenge. It's like, "Okay, let's see what we can do. I'm starting from here, but where can we take it?" which is across the board in F&B [food and beverage]. It's kind of all where you take it.

[0:23:22.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, talk to me a little bit about that, because I've heard a little bit about that competitiveness, maybe, maybe it is in between folks, but like personal, kind of like getting to their personal best. How do you approach that?

[0:23:35.2]

Sarah Tucker: I think that's exactly what it is. I'm not competing with other people necessarily; I'm competing with myself. And I never take it with a negative spirit, like, "You had a great tip, you had great sales, I am really happy for you." It's never like, "Oh, I didn't measure up." But I put that on myself, like I want to do this, like, this is *my* goal, and I think a lot of career servers are that way. Younger people, not so much. They're, "Oh, god, you sold more than me." They're not focused on that. It's like, "No, I'm happy for you. I want everybody to make money. I want *you* to give everybody the same great service that got you that great tip." But for me personally, I just think it's fun to be a little bit competitive, not a lot, not overly competitive, but, yeah, "Look how I changed this." I think it's more, "Look how I changed this. Before, nobody wanted to be in this section, and now people are like, 'Oh, wait, the smokers, they like to drink.'" So you're giving them Mimosas and Bloody Marys, and then they're like having a great time and tipping really well. And then some people, they're like, "Oh, can I work in the smoking section?"

which there aren't any smoking sections anymore, which I'm happy for. But, like, it was kind of like that thing, like "How can I make this better today?"

[0:25:04.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, describe to me how you went about changing the section. Like, what kind of work goes into doing that?

[0:25:12.8]

Sarah Tucker: Well, we had a lot of people coming in there, and it was just to smoke. So, like I said, you have to be aware of your clientele, what they like, what they dislike, and a lot of people that smoke like to drink. So if you're having brunch, a Bloody Mary, Mimosa, you just kind of prompt them for something.

And then there was one family that came in, and they'd been coming there for years, and they were *horrendous* tippers. And I remember when I first started with them, they would just run you to death. As soon as you came back to the table, they would send you away. And it's kind of mental fortitude. I was like, "They will not break me. I'm going to be nice to them, no matter what, because that is who I am and that's what I'm about." And so I was nice to them over and over again, I always did everything they asked with a smile, and little by little, they started tipping better, and little by little, they started being nicer, and at the end, we were friends, like, they were not nasty, and everyone else noticed it too. So I think it's just how you approach people, whether you're proactive or reactive, and I try my best—I'm only human, but I try my best to be proactive.

[0:26:48.9]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, so you mentioned—I'll get back into the chronology of places that you worked. So you moved with Don Anderson, your old manager, to a more casual establishment. What was that called?

[0:26:59.8]

Sarah Tucker: Italian Market and Grill.

[0:27:01.8]

Annemarie Anderson: How long were you there?

[0:27:03.7]

Sarah Tucker: I was there, I want to say—well, two different establishments. I'd have to go back and look at my own chronology and give you exact dates, but I was at the one in Knoxville for a couple of years, and then my husband got transferred to Spartanburg, South Carolina. That was his first general manager job. And there was one that was in Greenville that I worked at for a couple of years, because it was just a long drive from Spartanburg, but there wasn't a whole lot in Spartanburg, so it just kind of made sense that I'd kind of transfer over and work there. But, you know, it was somewhat similar to Macaroni Grill. The first one, the food was a lot better. The second one, something got a little lost in translation. It happens sometimes when you try to go, like, big, and have multiple venues of the same thing.

[0:28:16.2]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense.

[0:28:18.4]

Sarah Tucker: I think I'd probably be more on board with just doing something, like you could have a second restaurant, but doing something completely new, so all the recipes, and everybody doesn't have to be invested the same way. But that's just my opinion.

[0:28:29.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Makes sense. Well, tell me a little bit—so how long did you and your husband stay in Knoxville?

[0:28:37.1]

Sarah Tucker: In Knoxville? We were there for four years while we were together. I mean, I was in school before I met him and that sort of thing. We moved, like, right in between [19]98, [19]99 to Spartanburg, and then we lived there for four long years [Anderson laughs], and then on to Charleston. Yay.

[0:29:12.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, tell me about that. Tell me about what year did you move here and tell me about your first impressions of the city.

[0:29:12.2]

Sarah Tucker: To Charleston? We've been here for seventeen years, and the way we ended up in Charleston was because, like I said, he got his first GM [general manager] job, which was actually outside of Spartanburg. He was working for Sagebrush at that time. We moved to Spartanburg and, I mean, we always would, like, go out to eat and hang out. We had, like, our spots in Knoxville that we went. We moved to Spartanburg, and there was *nothing* there. Like your big night out was pretty much like going to Mexican, and we became great friends with those guys, like, yeah, they saw us coming in, they're like, "Hey, what's up?" We'd sit down, watch soccer together. They were awesome, but you want to go dine.

So anytime—because it's three hours away, anytime we had like two days off together, we would come to Charleston, go to the beach, eat some good food, drive back. And at one point, we were walking on the beach, and we just kind of looked at each other, we were like, "Why don't we live here?" And so we went back.

The whole reason for us moving to Spartanburg was to pay off student loans, which we did, and then we kind of like sat down and went over the finances. We're like, "We can totally move there." And it was about a month from the time that we said, "Why don't we move here?" until we were finalizing our plans to end our lease and move to Charleston, and we really have not looked back since.

It's the best decision. I love Charleston. It's a great food town, but more so than that, it's like the biggest small town ever. Like everywhere you go, you know somebody, or you feel like you do because everybody's friendly because it's a beach town. But then

also you have all the metropolitan aspects you could want. The food scene, of course, is crazy, but you can also, like, go to the theatre, you can go to the opera, you can do all of these things and still have that, like, small-town vibe, which I absolutely love.

[0:31:46.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, talk a little bit about getting into the industry in Charleston. What was that like?

[0:31:51.9]

Sarah Tucker: Charleston in the industry, not so much anymore, but when I came here, was very fickle. Like, you had to have an “in” to get a job; you had to know somebody. It was very cliquy. Your résumé alone, no matter what it was, was not necessarily going to get you a job. So I had a friend that lived here who I knew that gave me a recommendation, and so my first job was at J Bistro, and I was there for six years. But at that point then, I knew a lot of people around town and people knew of me and my work ethic, so when I was leaving there, I kind of felt like the world was my oyster, like it was basically about picking where I wanted to go next, because I want to be in a certain kind of environment in a restaurant that's conducive to my mental health.

[0:32:50.9]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense.

[0:32:52.7]

Sarah Tucker: I like a place that where you work, I mean, it may be a dysfunctional family, but they are all, but it's more like about a family, like we all care about each other and take care of each other and help each other out, which is what SNOB [Slightly North of Broad Restaurant] has been.

[0:33:07.6]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, talk to me a little bit about going to Slightly North of Broad. Tell me a little bit about getting that job.

[0:33:14.6]

Sarah Tucker: Getting that job, well, it starts with, like, kind of like the decline of J Bistro. The owner sold it to someone. And I'm never one to kind of just give up on a place. I was the assistant manager there and also waited tables at that time. My good friend still to this day, Cory Richards, was the GM, and we both kind of agreed that we would give this new guy a chance, maybe he'll step in, make some things better. But that's not what happened. So, like, that one I gave a full year because I loved everybody there so much, and then at one point, I was just like, "I'm going to lose my love for this place altogether. I have to go." So I just decided.

I was looking at other places around town, and SNOB, like I said, it seemed like the one that was most focused on being kind of like a family. The owners were very involved and proactive about people having healthcare and benefits and those sorts of things. So it just seemed like a logical choice, and so I went and had an interview. I remember in my interview, Peter Pierce, who's still the GM there—you know you're

never supposed to talk poorly of the place you came from in an interview. And over and over again he just kept going, “Give me the dirt. What’s going on over there?”

At one point, I almost said out loud, “Tell me I’m hired, and I’ll tell you exactly.” But now knowing him so well, I know that that’s just his personality. He’s like, “What’s happening?”

So many different ways, I was like, “It’s just time for a change. I’m looking to broaden my horizons. I’m ready for a new challenge,” you know, all the ways that you can say something without saying it. Like, just tell me I’m hired.

And then later he said that they walked out of that interview—because it was him and another girl—he goes, “We walked back to the office and went, ‘Is it too soon to call her?’”

And I’m like, “No, it wasn’t. You should have just told me in the interview, and then I could have given you all the dirt.”

[0:35:35.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That’s great. [Laughter]

[0:35:36.8]

Sarah Tucker: But, yeah, I came into a really good situation. Immediately I fit in with all the staff, because a lot of them at that point were really well tenured. I remember within the first couple weeks, Peter—I came in, he’s like, “You’re training today.”

I was like, “I’m new.”

He’s like, “You’re the best one to do it.”

I was like, “Okay.” I was like, “Don’t I at least get a six-month break, training?”

He’s like, “You’re training.”

I’m like, “Oh, yeah, okay, whatever.”

And then like three months in, he started asking me to manage. I was like, “No, no, it’s not going to happen.” I broke that rule once, which that’s a rule that Alexander and I have that I broke for J Bistro. When we were both kind of going into management at the same time, we kind of discussed it, and if you’re a manager, you can’t just like switch shifts around. You *have* to be on all the time whenever you’re needed, and so that would have meant that we never saw each other if we were both managing. So we decided that for our relationship it was best that only one of us would ever be in management at a time, and it made more sense for him. I broke that rule with J Bistro, and I will not do it again. How many Sundays when it was my shift and I had to manage was he upset when he was off? A lot. I learned my lesson. [Laughter]

[0:37:07.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, talk to me—so I find that interesting. Could you talk a little bit about support of, like, the career employees at SNOB? Could you talk about that support and a little bit about healthcare and benefits and how is that kind of different from other restaurants?

[0:37:25.2]

Sarah Tucker: Well, I don’t know about all other restaurants, but I know when I started at Slightly North of Broad it was Maverick Southern Kitchens, and Dick Elliott was way

ahead of the curve on everything, like giving servers healthcare. He thought kind of like that that's a human right. Just because you're in the service industry doesn't mean you get left by the wayside. You deserve healthcare. So he had a program that was set up that it was kind of like a tiered thing. So after you were there for three months, you were eligible for healthcare. After you were there for six months, he paid—I can't remember exactly—I want to say 25 percent of your healthcare. I may be misspeaking slightly on this, but it's pretty basic. And then after you were there for a year, he would pay for half, I think. After you were there for three years, you did not have to pay for your healthcare. So it was a thing to kind of promote longevity. So you didn't want, like, turnover. You wanted people to stay there because they had these benefits.

And then whenever he sold the company to Hall Management Group, Bill Hall is—it's not quite the same tiered program, but all of the people in all the restaurants have healthcare, and it's really good healthcare. I mean, he took that and kind of ran with it, and everybody, like, gets the same healthcare after you've been there for a few months. You're eligible for it, and they do pay a portion of that too. And the healthcare we have is really good.

So I am very appreciative that when that whole sale went through, those kind of benefits didn't get left by the wayside, that he felt like that was really important too. And they do a lot of the—Hall Management Group, people ask me all the time, like, “What are the big changes?”

I'm like, “At SNOB, not so much. Like some of the other restaurants have had more changes,” I'm like, “but they do really cool stuff too.” Like Thanksgiving, they give everybody a turkey, just give it to us, you know, no questions asked. So they're really

cool like that, like what you need, they're going to try and provide for you to be able to do the best job.

[0:39:49.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. So walk me through a typical day of work for you.

[0:39:54.6]

Sarah Tucker: A typical day of work for me, we get in at 3:30, you go up, you sign up for side work. It's kind of first come, first serve. You do your side work. I usually am probably going to go double-check other people's side work, but probably after lineup.

Every single shift we work, they make staff meal. A lot of people think that we're eating things, like, off of the menu. We're not, but staff meal is usually really good. Sometimes it's spaghetti, sometimes it's chicken wings, sometimes it's hot dogs, maybe lasagna. There's always a nice salad. Sometimes you might have gyros. I mean, you never know what it is, but there's always food available and everyone can eat it. And even on your day off, you can come in and eat staff meal. Like if you're short on money or something, you know what time staff meal is, and you can come in and eat staff meal.

So once you're finished with your work, you kind of sit down and eat staff meal, and we'll all kind of like hang out. You can fiddle on your phone or whatever. And then we'll have lineup for thirty minutes before the shift starts, and we'll fold napkins. We'll talk. The managers will talk about any issues going on or any kind of like something we're out of, and then chef will come out and will talk about the menu and we can ask any questions we want. He'll kind of go through all the specials, because the regular

menu we *better* know, but the specials, so we know exactly what's going on, especially gluten-free is so huge these days. Like has this got gluten? Has this got dairy? We'll go through all of those, like, intricacies.

Then we'll break from lineup and then I'll go double-check everyone's side work again, because I like to start the shift organized. Then we'll start service, and from there it's just kind of talking to people table by table and just try and have fun with it. Even when it's quiet, then I joke around a lot, I'm crazy and silly, probably more crazy than silly, but, you know, I like to be cracking up having a good time, which if we're all doing our job, we can, which is one of the reasons I love the job is because you can be irreverent off to the side as long as you have—like Chef [Frank] Lee would say, “As long as you have your *mise en place*,” which *mise en place*, basically for whatever station you're working with, are your tools of the trade. So, for me, it's having all the side work done and having, like, everything in my apron that I need, my appropriate pens, my crumber, my wine tool. And once you have all of that in place and you're doing your work, then you just get to have fun, which another reason I love the job.

[0:42:54.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, talk to me a little bit, too, about how tourism affects your job.

[0:43:00.5]

Sarah Tucker: You know, you love tourists a lot, because you're always going to have tourism. Bringing people into the city definitely gives you a boom. I feel like in the past

few years in Charleston, it has become frustrating for me because of other issues, not the tourists themselves so much, but other issues like parking and that sort of thing, when there's so many people in the city getting around. And, you know, there's not a way to widen the streets downtown. It's historic. You can't, like, take out a building that's historic to widen the streets. So I don't think there's been enough that's gone into that. And not just downtown Charleston, but across the board. They widened [U.S. Route] 17. I live over in Mount Pleasant, but they didn't stop the building over there. So everyone, like, there's so many more hotels and people moving here and things growing up. So being the number one city in Condé Nast brings a lot of people here, but some of the headaches at times, I'm just kind of like, "Whoa." It's a lot and it, I feel like, detracts a little bit from the city.

[0:44:21.5]

Annemarie Anderson: So I was actually talking about this with Mary Forlano at Magnolias, about how people get to work and how there's a bus system now that's put in place for hospitality. Talk a little—I'm kind of interested in that. How do you feel the city has done? Have they done a good job to kind of like alleviate that for you?

[0:44:39.5]

Sarah Tucker: I think that the bus system was a great step forward, a great step forward. For me personally, I do not use it simply because the amount of time that it takes out of my life is crucial, because I would have to drive down, I'd have to go park, get on the bus, and ride all the way around to get off at my stop, and vice versa when I'm leaving.

So when you're adding up all of that time, I had to, for me—and a lot of this has to—like a lot of the younger kids use the system, but for me at my age, that time is *very* precious, so I had to kind of put a monetary value on it. So me paying extra for my parking pass, which is close to the restaurant and I feel is a safe place to park, which is another one, even though we get a paycheck, I still look like a server and I don't feel comfortable walking to my vehicle late night if it's not well lit in a good area. And I'm still always watching out, regardless, when I do go to my vehicle.

But I had to make a decision that it was more important to me to pay a little bit more than it was to use that system, but I think the system is a good start to the problem, but I think the problem is so much bigger than that, because that's just for hospitality workers downtown, and everyone else on the streets, they have issues. We have guests that come into the restaurant now, and the parking meters, they may go till 10:00 o'clock, and they're getting up from dinner and going to pay a meter, and I don't that's very conducive. I'm not sure I know what the solution is, but I don't think that's a very good experience for them, like, "Oh, wait. I have to stop eating my pork chop that you just brought me because I may get a ticket," you know. But just parking and transportation in general completely around the city, I think needs to be addressed more.

[0:47:07.6]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense. That makes sense. Well, tell me a little bit—so in your job, I mean, what's the most challenging and what's the most rewarding part of your job?

[0:47:17.0]

Sarah Tucker: I think the most challenging part of my job is being somewhere for so long and you see so much turnover, and kind of just like taking a fresh breath with all the new people and giving them a chance. I was kind of burned out on training for a long time, and then our chef, who's a good friend of mine, Russ Moore, one night we were just having a talk about it, and, like I said, I was just kind of burnt out on training because you think you're giving people tools, and they're not listening, and it can be very frustrating. And with the newer generation, too, a lot of it has to do with how they were raised. I mean, the real world, not everyone gets a trophy. You don't get a pat on the back just for showing up at work. Like, you have to actually do your job and do it well to get a pat on the back. But he and I talking, he kind of made me see training in a different light, because I think I was approaching it from a bad place, because I had had issues with it in the past. And it's really your opportunity to lead someone. Instead of, like, force a mantra on them, it's your opportunity to help them find a better way and be better. And you might have to come down on them hard at some times, but that's not overall what you're doing. Like, you know, give them the opportunity to grow themselves. And so since we had that talk, I've had, like, a different idea about that, but I think that sort of thing is still my most challenging aspect.

The most rewarding is definitely being someone's dining guide. Like, I go in to work, I am confident that the food is amazing. I know what's coming out of the kitchen. And to help someone have an experience with that and see the joy on their face, they're like, "I talked them into something they'd never had before," and they're like, "Oh, my god, you're so right."

And I'm just like, "It's hard work being this right."

But I love food, I love wine, and I love people, and I've always thought, like, at my table, "You're my captive audience. Like, you're at my table. I'm not your server at your table. You're at *my* table. And we're going to have a good time." And I definitely invest in that, and it's a joy, see that look on people's face. They're like, "Wow! This is amazing."

I'm like, "Yeah, it is. Awesome." [Laughter]

[0:50:09.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, talk to me a little bit about leadership and developing a team. And I know that there's a lot—there can be a lot of turnover. Talk to me how you lead and train at Slightly North of Broad.

[0:50:25.2]

Sarah Tucker: I think the biggest thing that I do is I lead by example. I'm not going to call you out for anything you're doing wrong if it's not something that I'm not—like, we have a service standard, and if you are not doing something up to standard, I'm not going to be a jerk about it, but I'm going to make you aware.

"So I went to your table. They were not marked appropriately for this course." I'm going to make you aware of it, and I usually try and do it in a joking manner. But I'm always much harder on myself. If I miss anything, you might see me over in the corner like, "Oh, I didn't have that soup spoon marked." And it's kind of funny because I am most people's go-to when they have a question about how to correctly ring something in,

or in this situation what should I do, because I'm going to say it to them in a way that they understand. I always need a reason why, like not just, "Do this because I said so." I'm like, "We do this because of this, this, and this. You need to use these specific buttons because it makes it easier for the kitchen to read when they're really busy so that they don't miss that special prep."

So I always give a reason, and then I'm not going to yell at you or make you feel stupid either. I'm just going to be like, "No, no, no, do it like this," and because this is the reason. And I always let anybody know, "Anytime you have a question, I don't care how busy I am, I can take a minute and stop and give you the answer." And then I'm also silly and irreverent and a crazy person, so that goes a long way, too, because we laugh and giggle and have a lot of fun.

[0:52:10.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. I mean, I've kind of seen that like, dining is an experience, you do that for kind of the magic of the food and the conversation with the people—so that makes a lot of sense. But talk to me too—so I'm interested—when I went into Slightly North of Broad and had lunch there, I'm looking at staff at all these different places, and it seems to be there are quite a lot of women who work there, and that's a little different than some of the other places. Could you talk a little bit about, I guess, the staff who works there, but also, like, your experience as a woman? Has that impacted your job in any way?

[0:52:48.1]

Sarah Tucker: I don't think that has really impacted *my* job so much. You went in for lunch today, so we do have quite a lot more female servers that work almost all lunches because they have children. I only have the four-legged children, so that's not so much of an issue for me. But if you come in to dinner, depending on how the schedule that week worked out, it's pretty evenly split between men and women. And I don't think that has really impacted my career at any way at all. I bring what I have to the table, and it has nothing to do with any sort of sexual orientation. And I don't feel like that's how servers are hired necessarily. There have been a couple places that I knew more so they would want cute young girls in skirts or something, but that's more if you're like doing a club scene, but not in fine dining. In fine dining, you find a qualified server. That's your first and foremost goal. Like, you want someone who's qualified and can do the job in an excellent way.

I think one of the biggest things sex-wise that I've seen in the business over the past several years is in the kitchen. There's so many more women in the kitchen now, and they're not shunned. Used to be like, oh, what, like you're the one girl in the kitchen. But, no, we've had like an all-female kitchen staff some days, some nights, you know, whatever it is, which I think is really cool, because, I mean, men and women do have different energy, but then also like having those different sides and being able to play off of each other and have different ideas, I think is great.

[0:54:40.2]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, tell me a little bit too—so you mentioned the kitchen staff. I mean, you're not only having—as a server having to work with, like,

customers and guests that you're serving, but you're also having to work with the kitchen staff. Could you talk a little bit about that kind of relationship that you guys have?

[0:54:56.3]

Sarah Tucker: I love our relationship with our kitchen staff. I mean, everyone has their moments, but I've definitely worked in other restaurants where it was more like here's the front of the house, here's the back of the house, and they're on two separate sides. And I know a lot of places are like that, but that was never how it was when I started at Slightly North of Broad, which I absolutely love. And, like I said, like, I'm a big tomboy, I love to cook, myself, so any restaurant I ever worked in, I was always kind of tight with the kitchen staff in general, because I never thought there should be that divide. But at Slightly North of Broad, everybody does a back wait shift, which every other restaurant calls expo. So all the servers kind of rotate through that. I do Saturday nights because it's the busiest one, and you don't make as much money as you would on the floor, but it's really fun because you're like back there in the kitchen and you're literally a part of the kitchen.

So I've had lots of the cooks who have come through there like, "Oh, my god, you saved me so many times," because it's my job to remind them about any special preps, keep them on point, and I'm the last look on all of the plates going out. And I'm working with whoever's running the wheel that night, which is whoever's the chef or the sous chef that's running the kitchen that night. So it's the two of us, but I'm the final wipe, and I'm like, "You need to finish this. You need to do that."

When I first started, I had never done that position before, so it was very challenging, but I really enjoy it, weirdly, even though I don't make more money. I make less money doing it, but it's really fun. I do Saturdays because I'm the best. No offense to anybody else, but, yeah. Like one of our sous chefs, he was telling my husband the other night, it's like, "She's really good at her job."

And then I've had some other people, they're like, "When do I get you on back wait again?"

I'm like, "I'm on Saturdays, always, unless I'm out of town."

But I definitely enjoy—there have been times where some of the cooks are making a sauce or something and, like, "Tucker." That's my nickname in the restaurant. They're like, "Tucker, come over here and taste this. What's it missing? And that's an element of respect that I never knew I was going to have. Probably comes from National Sandwich Day.

[0:57:31.4]

Annemarie Anderson: What's National Sandwich Day?

[0:57:34.6]

Sarah Tucker: So National Sandwich Day—you can't know me without knowing about National Sandwich Day. November 3rd every year is National Sandwich Day. And I love sandwiches. For all the old-school people out there, I always explained it like, "I love sandwiches more than Joey on *Friends*."

So, years ago, my husband brings me a to-go box of my favorite sandwich and hands it to me—he was coming home from work—and he was like, “Happy National Sandwich Day.”

And this shows my age as well, because it’s before we knew there was a day for everything, before the interwebs blew up. And I was like, “There *should* be a National Sandwich Day.”

He goes, “There is. It’s today. That’s why I brought you your favorite sandwich.”

So that was year one, and then the next year I went out and spent all day going to all my favorite places eating sandwiches. And then I’m like, “Wait. I make great sandwiches.” So the next year I stayed home and made sandwiches. But I like to talk to people, so I kind of missed the human interaction.

So the year after that, I made sandwiches and took them in to a bunch of my people from work, and then we went out and had more sandwiches too. And it kind of grew from there, and people that I’d been friends with for a long time, and they have kids and this and that, and our schedules don’t necessarily mesh, I know I’m always going to see them on National Sandwich Day because I started making the sandwiches and delivering them to them. It’s gotten so big now that I have to do a big downtown delivery where people meet me, and then there are, like, several houses that I go and deliver to in general. But it’s gotten to be so much bigger than sandwiches, like it’s a way to connect with people, which I think that food really is. But every year I do two new National Sandwich Day sandwiches, and I make kind of a version of them for my vegetarian friends. But you get a bag with your two sandwiches, and they’re always different. I invent something new every year.

[0:59:44.5]

Annemarie Anderson: How many sandwiches have you come up with?

[0:59:46.9]

Sarah Tucker: I don't even know. Whew! So many. I'm trying to figure out what I'm going to do this year. Every time I'm making sandwiches, I get so many ideas that I have a little notebook that I write them down in.

[1:00:00.8]

Annemarie Anderson: That's neat.

[1:00:02.6]

Sarah Tucker: Because I'm like, "Oh, what about this condiment? I don't know what that's going to go with yet." But, yeah, it's really fun, and I love it, and like I said, like, the human interaction and then the joy of giving somebody this delicious sandwich. There may be a sandwich shop in the future. We'll see.

[1:00:21.4]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, tell me a little bit about too—I totally lost it.

[1:00:29.9]

Sarah Tucker: Because you were distracted by the sandwiches. It happens to everybody.

[1:00:34.9]

Annemarie Anderson: It's true.

[1:00:36.8]

Sarah Tucker: There was one year—like I said, they are different every year. There was one year I did the same sandwich, and one of the sous chefs that I worked with, he talked about it all year long. He's like, "Can you please make the same one again?" It was the Asian steak sandwich.

And I was like, "I never do this, but fine. I'll make that one again."

And then I made a new one, and he came up. Everybody was so excited about the new one. I asked him, I'm like, "But you wanted the Asian steak."

He goes, "It was just as delicious as I remembered, but I've never had this one before and it's amazing."

And I'm like, "All right. I'm not giving in to you again. I'm just going to make what I want." [Laughter]

[1:01:16.2]

Annemarie Anderson: So you make sandwiches for everybody at work too?

[1:01:18.4]

Sarah Tucker: Oh, yeah.

[1:01:19.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Wow.

[1:01:20.1]

Sarah Tucker: The whole National Sandwich Day schedule is around staff meal, because I have to make it downtown by staff meal. So I have a couple stops on the way out of Mount Pleasant, and then I stop for staff meal. And then Carmella's has been, because it's right there, the big drop-off where people meet me and get their sandwiches, and then we kind of like go back through Mount Pleasant, through our friends at the Isle of Palms, and end up at our friends that are really close to the house.

[1:01:50.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, tell me too—let's see. [Searching notes]
Wow. We've been doing this for an hour. [Laughter]

[1:02:00.5]

Sarah Tucker: I told you, it's hard to get me to shut up. [Laughter]

[1:02:00.5]

Annemarie Anderson: No, this is great. This is perfect. Well, this is a little bigger question, a more thinking question too. What has kept you doing this work for so long? When did you decide this is going to be your career?

[1:02:18.6]

Sarah Tucker: I think once I got into fine dining is really when I decided that it even *could* be a career, because before that it was just kind of a job. And then the more I learned about food and wine and was able to convey that to people so at the table I'm almost an educator in a way but still have that, like, fun, positive interaction. It's just really conducive to my personality in general. I mean, I like to see people happy. I don't want to cause any angst. I do sometimes. I'm only human. But it's just really conducive, and also to my way of life. I'm a big beach bum. I've got my four-legged kids. That's all I want. And I'm a night owl. I've never been a morning person. So, you know, I work a lunch here or there, but mostly then I can get up, wake up slowly, which I do, do some stuff around the house, go to work, come back, run some errands. Nighttime shopping is the greatest when you're going to the grocery store, all the new stuff is stocked fresh, and that's kind of like my time of night. And come home, do some laundry or whatever it is, watch some TV, make some food, it just—it works for me.

[1:03:46.6]

Annemarie Anderson: How did you educate yourself about food and wine?

[1:03:49.9]

Sarah Tucker: Well, a lot of times it's a lot of people depend on the restaurant. We definitely do wine tastings when we get new wines, staff training. We have, like, ongoing education, like you'll have quizzes and that sort of thing. Anytime there's a new menu come out, you have to learn all the ingredients in those dishes and that sort of thing. But I

really enjoy food and wine, so I feel like educating myself is going out to other places as well and dining and seeing what other people are doing for food, and paying attention. I've been in the business so long now that I kind of like look around the restaurant and I can see what's going on behind the scenes almost, which a lot of people might not like.

My husband, who's a restaurant manager, he doesn't want to necessarily look at that. He's like, "I'm out of work. I'm not paying attention."

But I still find it fascinating. I'm like, "Okay. I can see the person over here that's just like hanging out and not doing their work. And then I see this person who's engaging and is great."

And I just want to, like, experience more food and wine, because every time I have someone who is waiting on me who is engaging me, I take something from them in a positive way. Sometimes they'll say something, I'm like, "Oh, I'm stealing that phrase." You know. So just being aware of your surroundings, I guess, and in the moment in this field to be like, "I can always be better," and not think that you've ever reached your pinnacle, because you can always be better. There's more to say and do and learn, and there's always new lines.

[1:05:35.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, tell me too—so this is something that I've been thinking about and reading about and talking to other folks about.

[1:05:43.8]

[Recorder turned off]

[1:05:46.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Great. So we are back for track two. I was going to ask you—I think that I've learned from talking to folks that there's difference between service and hospitality, that the two terms, the two things are interconnected but not necessarily have the same idea behind them. Could you talk about your definitions for service and hospitality?

[1:06:07.3]

Sarah Tucker: Well, I think hospitality is anyone that works in the business, so it could be like someone, like, cleaning your hotel room, like, they're still in hospitality. But I think service is more food and beverage oriented, because you are very service oriented. It's all about the guest. And, you know, if you're cleaning a hotel room, it's kind of picking up after people, if that makes sense.

But then even within food and beverage, even back in the kitchen you're trying to make dishes to some person's standards. We have all these crazy allergies now, so you have to deal with that in a way, but not while you're on stage. So I think a lot of different people, like, they talk about, like, disparities in pay between, like, front and the back of the house—and I don't know if this is where you were going with that question. But a lot of times, some of the people that work in the kitchen, they—I don't want to say they can't, but they don't *want* to work in the front of the house, because they don't want to say something nicely to someone's face when it seems kind of ridiculous. You know, people ask you the craziest questions. The one guy that asked me where our shrimp was

from, and I told him it was local, and he pointed towards the ocean and he goes, “From the ocean?”

And I was like, “Yes, sir, from the ocean.” But you just have to, like, keep a smile, and you don’t want to make them feel bad. Like, whatever.

But, yeah, I think there’s a lot of difference there, and a lot of the more menial jobs are more maybe hospitality oriented, if that makes sense. But it’s also a struggle. We recently had a struggle keeping, like, dishwashers, and if you’ve ever been in the dish pit, it’s not fun. I’ve been in there before. It is not fun. So treating those people with respect goes a long, long way. I’ve had some of my best compliments that I’ve ever gotten come from people in the dish pit. One of the guys, he’s like, “Sarah Tucker, I like you. You know why I like you? Because you’re always the same.”

And I was like, “Herman, thanks, man.”

Our dishwasher right now, Snoop, who I love and does a great job, the other day he told me, he goes, “You know what? I like you because you just make me feel good.”

So having, like, these relationships, like, throughout time, like you were saying earlier, I’m just like connecting it. And that might not have been your question, but I’m just connecting it because that is what keeps me going, is, like, having these relationships and building these relationships. And somebody saying that to me, like, that touches my heart, says, “Okay. You’re doing something right, like, keep on keeping on.” Even if I’m having a bad day, got bad news that day, whatever’s going on, then I have, like, this support group that is also my job.

[1:09:33.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, you've said you wanted to talk a little bit about that community. Tell me a little bit about, I mean, maybe the community within your restaurant, but also larger.

[1:09:44.5]

Sarah Tucker: Yeah. It's not so much just within my restaurant, but people that do this as a career, we definitely all come together. One of my best friends, Delia Smith, is a perfect example. She was working for the same company as I did, but High Cotton right across the street, and her friend that worked there got cancer. We would, like, go out after work and sit and have a beer, talk through it. I'd just listen. But then we were proactive too. She needed help. She couldn't work anymore. So we did, like, these little, like, squares that we sold to people from restaurants up and down the street, kind of like Bingo squares. So you get this silly question asked, you get an *x* on your square. And we got people to donate prizes, and everybody paid money in, and all the money went to Lisa. So we all take care of each other like that.

And then, you know, at the end of the night, you may need to vent a little bit. It's not all peaches and roses, but no job is. So we'll go sit and talk to each other and be like, "Oh, I've got this funny story," or, "I've got this funny story." And then any angst that you might hold on to, you kind of are able to release that. And then I find after we have like a few minutes of our diatribe about, like, what happened in the night, then we get on to, like, really great conversations. Because if you're a career server, you're, you know, probably not a college kid that's going to the club or something. So we're just sitting there like having real conversations, and we form great friendships.

And anytime anything happens to any one of our own, which recently we just had a shooting downtown, like, one of the sous chefs from The Darling Oyster Bar, we all kind of like come together. There have been, like, donations made, they set a cap on it, and it's already surpassed that because we all come together because we are one big family and we know, like, what we go through every day. And it's important for us to come together, and I think it's beautiful that we do all rally around each other. It's like, "Okay. He's gone. He can't work every day, so we're going to raise this money for his kid so that she has something for the future," which I think I can't even say it again. I can say it again. It's beautiful and it's important and that's where it comes from being, like, a tenured server. Like, this is your career path, this is what you're doing, and you've got to support everyone else that's in it.

[1:12:35.6]

Annemarie Anderson: It's beautiful. It really is.

[1:12:38.3]

Sarah Tucker: It's how I feel.

[1:12:40.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, you know, I don't know that I have any other questions, except for, I guess, the last one. You know, what are some of the biggest lessons you've learned from working twenty-plus years in the industry?

[1:12:56.0]

Sarah Tucker: Some of the biggest—that’s a big question. Some of the biggest lessons? Sometimes you can’t always wear your heart on your sleeve. Sometimes you have to put away what’s going on with you personally to be able to do your job correctly, which I still struggle with, because I’m kind of like an open book. Like, something’s wrong with me, you’re probably going to know it, even if I’m like trying to, like, squelch it down.

And then just being nice to people. People, like, the response of you being nice to them . . . is huge. You can watch it and physically see it. When I first started, there was a guy that came in when I was working at Italian Market, and no one wanted to wait on him. And I’m going to curse now. He was a giant asshole. He would come in and he was a jerk the entire time. And I don’t know what his job was, because he would never really talk to you, but the whole time I was just like, “He’s not mad at me. He’s not mad at me.” And I would wait on him every time, and he would request me. I’m guessing his job was *very* stressful. At the end, he would leave with a smile and a “Thank you” and leave me with a bunch of money. I was like, “Okay. Hope you get that worked out, man.” But, you know, hey, I was kind and nice to him, and apparently that’s what he needed in his day. And I think as long as you don’t take it so personally, like unless I’ve done something wrong, you can’t hurt me. [Laughter] This is kind of how I go about it when I’m at the table. I’m like, “Okay. I’ve done nothing to you.”

I worked with another guy who, when anyone would ever get exasperated, Neal Valiet, worked with him at J Bistro, and I’m going to try and do his accent, which I’m really terrible at. But he’s from New Zealand, and he would always tell me, [Imitates] “Sarah, we’re just carrying their dinner, Sarah. We’re just carrying their dinner, that’s all.

Don't get all worked up." And that's one of those other things that's always stuck with me. He's right. I mean, you know, fine dining isn't quite that, there's a lot more that goes into it, but in the end, we really are just carrying their dinner. It's nothing to get, like, hot and bothered about.

So I don't know if that answered your question.

[1:15:44.4]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great.

[1:15:45.1]

Sarah Tucker: I digress.

[1:15:45.9]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, I think I don't have anything else to ask you. Is there anything we haven't talked about or that you haven't mentioned that you want to talk about?

[1:15:54.3]

Sarah Tucker: I don't think so. I mean, not that I can think of off the top of my head right now, anyway. I think I put it all out there.

[1:16:04.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Well, thank you so much for sitting down and talking to me.

[1:16:07.8]

Sarah Tucker: You're very welcome.

[1:16:08.5]

Annemarie Anderson: I appreciate it.

[1:16:09.1]

Sarah Tucker: Thank you.

[End of interview]