



William Slade Stokes
Magnolias
Charleston, South Carolina

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Annemarie Anderson: Today is August 14th [2019]. It is Wednesday. I'm at Magnolias with Mr. Slade Stokes, and this is Annemarie Anderson recording for the Southern Foodways Alliance Career Servers Project.

Let's start off and, Mr. Stokes, would you please introduce yourself to the recorder, tell us who you are and what you do.

[0:00:20.5]

Slade Stokes: Hi, my name is Slade Stokes. I am a server at Magnolias Restaurant in Charleston, South Carolina. October 12th will be my twentieth anniversary here and started here October of [19]99. I had worked at another restaurant before that, called Celia's Porta Via's, a small Italian restaurant, and she retired. A friend of mine who had worked here had set up employment with one of the managers, and at the time they said they weren't hiring, but they liked me so much, they put me on the schedule.

[0:01:00.2]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, tell me a little bit. Let's start off and would you give your birth date for the record, please.

[0:01:07.4]

Slade Stokes: February 15th, 1960.

[0:01:09.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Great. And tell me a little bit about your early life. Where were you born and raised?

[0:01:15.0]

Slade Stokes: I was born in Hickman, Kentucky, spent my first few years there in Kentucky with my brother and my two sisters and my mom. My dad passed when I was a week old. All my family and everything is there, but my mom wanted warmer weather, decided to move to Charleston in June 1st of 1969, so I've been in Charleston ever since.

[0:01:42.4]

Annemarie Anderson: Oh, wow. So you grew up kind of in between Kentucky and Charleston a little bit.

[0:01:47.2]

Slade Stokes: Yes, exactly. Went home a couple times, not as often as I should, but now I pretty much consider Charleston my home. I actually bought a house in the early 2000s kind of right across the street from where I used to live when I was twelve.

[0:01:59.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Oh, that's cool.

[0:02:01.0]

Slade Stokes: Yeah, on Magnolia Road, so I work at Magnolias and live on Magnolia.

[0:02:04.4]

Annemarie Anderson: Oh, that's cool. Well, tell me a little bit about the Charleston of your youth.

[0:02:08.4]

Slade Stokes: Well, moving to Charleston, initially I went to Porter-Gaud for my first year, and at that time it was an all-male school, and there was very little diversity or anything to the school, and I just preferred the public school system, and, of course, it was a lot cheaper than going to a private school. And went to a school, West Ashley, Orange Grove, and then CE Williams, St. Andrew's High School, and grew up West Ashley, ten minutes from downtown.

[0:02:42.8]

Annemarie Anderson: That's cool. Well, tell me a little bit about that neighborhood. What was it like?

[0:02:46.6]

Slade Stokes: Well, my mom had a habit of moving several times. We actually lived in West Ashley the entire time, and I can tell you that where I live now, I live just within a mile of every other place that I lived. We lived in West Oak Forest for a couple years and then moved to an apartment and then moved to another place called the Plantation Apartments, which is actually where my brother lives now, and lived there until high

school until I moved out, and then I moved downtown, where I went to the College of Charleston.

[0:03:20.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Great. And you were kind of mentioning the lack of diversity in the boys' school. How did that change with moving to the public schools? Because I know from talking to another person who is your contemporary in age that she was talking about her experience during segregation. Do you remember any of that?

[0:03:38.8]

Slade Stokes: Not really. I mean, it was 1970, so things were already becoming more integrated into the public schools and everything, so I never really had any issue with problems with integration. I mean, I always got along with everybody.

[0:04:00.8]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great.

[0:04:02.7]

Slade Stokes: My mom taught me that, you know, to always respect everyone, that diversity is good. And anyway, that's—

[0:04:13.4]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, tell me a little bit about your mom. You talked about her, but what was her name?

[0:04:19.1]

Slade Stokes: Her name was Susan Stokes, wonderful woman. My dad passed when I was a week old. So I was a week old, my brother was six years old, my other sister was eleven, and my other sister was twelve, and so she raised four kids pretty much just by herself. I mean, I had some aunts and uncles that would help, and grandmothers, too, but it was pretty much, you know, she did the day-to-day. She was an amazing woman. She lived to be ninety-two. She remembered everything. She had some mobility issues toward the end, but she was bright. She was sharp as a tack.

[0:04:57.9]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. And when you were growing up, what kind of food did your mom put on the table?

[0:05:02.3]

Slade Stokes: Southern. She was a great southern cook. My mom, even my grandmother, one of the best cooks ever, made all homemade bread, preserves, you know. She would cook for our entire family, and during the holidays, fifteen, twenty people, just by herself, no help, and she was just a great cook. She actually taught my mom, and my mom was a great cook as well, and she would teach me too.

[0:05:27.4]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. So we like to talk about the potato/rice divide. People in Kentucky eat a lot more potatoes. Did that change? Did she kind of adopt some more Lowcountry dishes?

[0:05:38.8]

Slade Stokes: Yeah, exactly. We always had rice with just about everything. Rice, yeah, exactly. Like pilaus, things like that, you know, where you're adding some kind of stock. She made like a great chicken pilaus, things like that.

[0:05:50.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, tell me a little bit about—I'm interested in this. What did you want to be when you grew up, like when you were in middle school, high school?

[0:05:58.6]

Slade Stokes: Actually, I always wanted to do like premed things, premed, and went to the College of Charleston and started that for my first year, and I realized it was not for me. I will just say it wasn't for me. The blood and the guts and everything, it just was like—ugh.

[0:06:21.0]

Annemarie Anderson: I understand.

[0:06:22.5]

Slade Stokes: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And during that same time, that's when I started working in a restaurant, too, to help put myself through school because I never owed any student loans or anything. I put myself through school either through grants that I received, got us a couple grants and scholarships from like the Rotary Club in West Ashley and got other grants, too, just because—I'm not bragging, but I was a good student.

Anyway, I started working in food and a restaurant during then at a place called East Bay Trading Company downtown. It was on East Bay Street. It was one of the first restaurants on East Bay Street when they started renovating downtown, the initial kickoff of renovating Charleston.

[0:07:11.1]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. So let's get into your career and tell me a little bit about your first job at East Bay Trading Company.

[0:07:17.6]

Slade Stokes: I was a busboy—now they call them SAs, server assistants—and did that for a few years. It was a high-volume restaurant, real busy place. It was two floors. You ran a lot, just setting tables, make sure the servers were backing up the servers, things like that. I did that for a few years, and I wanted to become a server because that's where you make more money, because I was putting myself through school. I eventually went to one

of the mangers, who was hesitant about doing it because he knew I was a really good server assistant, didn't want to lose me for that, and so that's where I first became a server, though, because he was fired. [Laughter] And the other one put me on the floor.

[0:08:08.5]

Annemarie Anderson: So tell me a little bit about this restaurant you worked for. What kind of restaurant was it?

[0:08:13.4]

Slade Stokes: It was opened by a gentleman, Van Weatherspoon, who was from Charlotte, okay, and the chef at the time was Andy Cook, who was there for years. They wanted to say they were southern, you know, emphasis on southern style, but it was kind of like American cuisine, I would say, more so than southern.

[0:08:43.7]

Annemarie Anderson: Was it more casual or was it fine dining?

[0:08:46.4]

Slade Stokes: It was casual.

[0:08:46.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay, cool. So tell me a little bit about—I mean, what was your initial draw to getting started in the food and beverage industry?

[0:08:56.3]

Slade Stokes: Well, I'm a people person and enjoy working with people and the public, and, again, it's good money. I mean, at the time, I was going to college and everything, and, of course, when you're in that time, I liked to party just a little bit too much, and so it helped with that as well, in addition to school.

[0:09:23.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense. And tell me a little bit about getting started as a server. How was that different than being a servers assistant?

[0:09:30.6]

Slade Stokes: It's more direct contact with the customers, and, of course, you had to have more knowledge of the food and things like that, of the wine list, the drinks that were available, what we have, just simple things, what we have, what we serve for beers, for wines and everything. Just more knowledge, a lot more knowledge.

[0:09:51.7]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. And how did you develop that knowledge?

[0:09:58.3]

Slade Stokes: Well, I studied. I made sure I had knowledge of the dishes and what ingredients are in the dishes, because it's always good if you take any job seriously, it's

good to know every aspect of it, and it's very important to not BS your way through what a dish is or things like that. It's just to expand your knowledge.

[0:10:27.1]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Were there any people there who were either teachers or mentors to you who helped you kind of get your sea legs, I guess?

[0:10:35.2]

Slade Stokes: Yes, there was a couple. There was Hal Washington, who was one of my managers. Also the GM there, too, at the time, David Pedard, and his wife Sandy, and the chef there, too, who was a really good chef, Andy Cook, as well.

[0:10:55.3]

Annemarie Anderson: Great. And what sort of things did they teach you?

[0:10:57.7]

Slade Stokes: Well, they had been in the business for a little while longer than myself. One thing if you are a server or you work in this business, you need to multitask. Otherwise, you're going to wear yourself out. Concentrate on knowledge of the product that you're selling as well.

[0:11:18.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. So what year did you start at East Bay?

[0:11:21.4]

Slade Stokes: It was, I think, '79, 1979.

[0:11:26.7]

Annemarie Anderson: And could you kind of describe the Charleston restaurant scene at the time?

[0:11:31.7]

Slade Stokes: At the time, it was up and coming. I mean, the East Bay, on East Bay Street there was East Bay Trading Company. There was, I think, the Colony House, which was there for years. There was a couple in the market area and a couple on Meeting Street kind of near where Charleston Place is now. But that was about it. There was a couple meat-and-three places up on King Street, but there weren't a lot of—there was Perdita's, too, a nice French restaurant that had been there for years as well. But there weren't a lot of fine dining restaurants or a lot of restaurants in Charleston at the time, but it started. When East Bay opened, that was one of the first restaurants, because when I was a kid, East Bay Street was a lot of dilapidated warehouses, and that was one of the first ones that they renovated for a restaurant.

[0:12:26.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense. How long were you there?

[0:12:28.4]

Slade Stokes: I was there until [19]89.

[0:12:32.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Well, tell me a little bit about your decision to kind of make serving your career.

[0:12:38.0]

Slade Stokes: Well, I had graduated from college, and I was looking to get—as some of my customers have said over the years, “What’s your real job?”—to find a real job. Sitting in an office and just sitting down was not for me, I just like to move around, and as I got older, working around younger people keeps you young too. And contact with the public and everything, I just prefer more face-to-face contact than being on, as time went on, a computer screen or things like that.

[0:13:13.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense. What did you major in at College of Charleston?

[0:13:17.9]

Slade Stokes: Business, and a minor in economics.

[0:13:19.7]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. And so you got a job in business?

[0:13:21.9]

Slade Stokes: Well, a friend of mine had opened a business. I was kind of helping him to start out and things, and I just wasn't a big fan. I just went back to doing restaurant work.

[0:13:31.2]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense. So after you were at East Bay, where did you go?

[0:13:35.0]

Slade Stokes: After East Bay I was at Poogan's Porch, which is still there actually now, real busy place, still busy after all these years, on Queen Street.

[0:13:45.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, tell me a little bit about working there.

[0:13:47.9]

Slade Stokes: It was a super busy place. I mean, you did your desserts, you made your salads at the time. I think it's changed since then, but you were very much multitasking because you were not only doing their orders and, of course, getting their drinks, but you also were plating up their desserts and doing their salads. Salads came with every meal, as opposed to being a la carte, so you had to mix that. And having a bunch of servers, you

know, all working together, sometimes servers, it could be every man and woman for himself sometimes. [Laughter] But it was a super busy place. It's a really nice restaurant.

[0:14:22.6]

Annemarie Anderson: What year did you start there?

[0:14:24.8]

Slade Stokes: It was spring of [19]89.

[0:14:27.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. And how long did you work there?

[0:14:28.9]

Slade Stokes: I was there for a few years, for years until I actually went back to work at East Bay Trading Company for about a year or two, and then they changed management, and I wasn't a big fan of that, and I ended up going to work at Celia's Porta Via, a small Italian place, about fifteen, twenty tables, downtown.

[0:14:54.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Could you talk a little bit about that restaurant, kind of describe it for us?

[0:14:58.5]

Slade Stokes: A wonderful small Italian restaurant. Celia Cerasoli, whose parents, one was from Sicily and the other from northern Italy. It was traditional, a little combination of northern- and southern-style Italian cooking, so lots of homemade pastas. She made thirty-layer lasagnas, homemade bread, these baguettes and stuff that she got from her recipe from her grandmother. I mean, people would come all over Charleston, because she had a little deli there, too, where you could come in and get her fresh bread daily and little things from the case too. She made great pasta salads, things like that, lavash sandwiches, things like that. They would make great Tiramisu there, Tiramisu and great pasta dishes.

It wasn't a super busy place. It was more inclined if locals knew about it, and, of course, that was the beginning of the parking situation in Charleston, so she didn't have great parking, so that kind of reflected on the business sometimes, but it was a great restaurant. She was a *great* chef.

[0:16:05.2]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Like kind of compare for me, you know, working at somewhere like Poogan's Porch, which was really busy, as opposed this place. What was that like?

[0:16:15.8]

Slade Stokes: Well, it was just it toned down because, I mean, people—I would say at Poogan's and stuff, you know, it was more well known, too, not only to locals but to the tourists as well. So you would get a lot more families, things like that, and they cater to

sometimes—you know, I think they all had a different menu for kids as well, so you had more families, more family-style oriented, just much quicker, fast pace. I mean, you had a pantry person, say, at Celia's, they would make all the salads, and at Celia's you would still do the desserts, actually, the server would. But it was just a lot slower place, I mean, because they didn't have nearly as many tables.

Poogan's, when they expanded, they had multiple—they had one, two three, four, six different dining rooms, and basically Celia's was downstairs maybe fifteen tables and maybe four or five upstairs. So it was just a lot slower pace. A lot more wine, too, because it's Italian, just more concentration on the wine service at stuff. I learned a lot about Italian wines there. There are more than just Chiantis in those little baskets that my mama used to drink, and things like that.

[0:17:32.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, tell me a little bit about that, like how did you kind of expand your knowledge about wine there?

[0:17:38.4]

Slade Stokes: Well, the manager at the time, Catherine, she knew a lot about wine, so we would taste different—you know, we would have—and I'm sure they do it more often now at Poogan's and other places, too, where you have wine tastings and stuff for your staff, for your front of the house staff or servers, and they didn't really do that. I didn't really have that a lot at the other places. I mean, we'd do it periodically, but not as often. So we'd try different wines, get better descriptions of different wines, and just the

knowledge expanded just because they would give printouts of everything so you'd know whether it's a robust red or lighter red, things like that, or full-bodied, things like that.

[0:18:20.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Makes sense. So tell me a little bit—so we've talked a little bit about the different places that you've been. How long were you at Celia's?

[0:18:29.1]

Slade Stokes: It was from mid, I would say [19]95 to [19]99, October or September of [19]99 when she retired. Now you can actually buy some of her products online and actually in the local section of the Harris Teeter, and she does some teaching as well.

[0:18:47.1]

Annemarie Anderson: That's cool. That's really nice. I'm interesting in—so how have you seen kind of your job or just the restaurant industry in general change since you've started in Charleston?

[0:19:03.6]

Slade Stokes: Well, of course, a ton more restaurants now. Because they're opening up so quick, it's hard to staff front and back of the house at the moment with qualified people, you know. Some people at times, you know, a lot of times, I mean—and I understand it, too—they use it as a steppingstone for their career or for school. Like a lot of people come here, you know—a number of my friends that are servers downstairs, you

like, for example, my friend Matthew, he puts himself through school from working here, and he started here when he was in high school. He'll now be graduating. He paid his entire way, without help from anyone, grants or anything, by working here. So that's always a plus. I'm digressing, but I just have a lot of respect for that, because I did the same thing. [Laughter]

[0:19:03.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, definitely.

[0:20:04.1]

Slade Stokes: But it's really expanding. I think one thing, it's really expanding, and one thing, I think, because we have so many more fine dining restaurants here, is that a lot of places don't give the fine dining training that they need to get, which I think we do here better than just about any place.

[0:20:22.9]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. So let's get into that. Let's get into your time you spent at Magnolias. So you started in [19]99.

[0:20:29.9]

Slade Stokes: October [19]99.

[0:20:30.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Great. And could you tell me a little bit about—well, let's start and talk about that training, because I'm interested in that aspect. Could you talk about that?

[0:20:39.7]

Slade Stokes: Sure. The first couple weeks here, first day, you're basically in the window with an expo who pretty much sets up the food for all the servers to take out, so you're looking at the food the first day so you can see what the food is. And they also will give you basically a whole booklet on all the ingredients in the food, which you have to learn, the different liquors, beers, things like that, the thirteen aspects. There's the thirteen aspects of services which I'm sure you're familiar with. It's about what you do when you come into a restaurant, just the things that are very important. Initially, of course, is always the greeting. You've got to smile. It's a lot of smiling. You have to.

So, anyway, the training aspects. You'll work lunches and follow somebody during their service, during that time, and you'll follow them and see how they do their presentation, because everybody's different in their presentation.

You're not initially put on the floor until you're ready. You have to go through three tests, and they're not multiple choice; they're written. We have to describe the ingredients, and if you don't do well, you have to take it again. Sometimes training programs can be extended if you don't necessarily get it. Okay. But you'll at least follow, like during the day, three days of training there, three more at dinner. You also are trained at the door to host, train also to food run, train also to SA. So you're training to do just about every aspect of the front of the house.

[0:22:34.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. And do you remember your first day of work here?

[0:22:38.0]

Slade Stokes: Yes, I do.

[0:22:40.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Can you talk a little bit about that?

[0:22:40.6]

Slade Stokes: Yeah. It was I walked in and, of course, October in Charleston businesswise is one of the busiest months of the year just because there's so much going on. There's a fall Tour of Homes, just fall festivals, a lot of people come in town. It's actually a great clientele that time of year too. It's that time of year, spring, are the two best clientele, the type of year, customers that spend the most money, I would say. Of course, we still have our locals that come in.

But I remember walking in, going, "This is one of the busiest places I've ever been in," because it was busy then and it's even busier now. But I was just amazed at how well it was run, because I've been in some places where you have like certain duration duties for each station that you work in. You have a partner in most cases, but sometimes it's on you, and if you drop the ball, it affects everybody. And I don't know if Ed [Edward Murray]—I think Ed might have been my first server that I worked with, but

I remember him asking me if I was going to be short term or long. I said, “I think I’m going to be long term.” Well, it’s twenty years later.

[0:24:05.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That’s great.

[0:24:07.7]

Slade Stokes: And also it’s just the knowledge that everyone had about the dishes and everything, more so than most places that I’ve ever worked.

[0:24:14.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That’s great. Well, walk me through a typical day of work right now for you.

[0:24:19.3]

Slade Stokes: Okay. Lunch or dinner? Does it matter?

[0:24:22.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Both.

[0:24:23.6]

Slade Stokes: Both?

[0:24:24.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Why not?

[0:24:24.9]

Slade Stokes: Lunch, typically I work nights but dinners. Lunches, I'll work Mondays, okay. So I get in a little bit earlier than most because I like setting up my station, doing my opening duties, and have time to chill and relax before the rush. So I will come in. You immediately polish your stations so that just in case you have guests that come in before service, that they see a set-up restaurant. That's the way it should be.

Typically we do that, you know, have some coffee, check to make sure your station is set up properly, just the little things, glasses, the bread plates, the silverware. Check to see what the reservations are like. Typically the host would come in and say, "You're going to have right off the bat a big table," like a ten top, things like that.

And typically Mondays are typically one of the busiest. I kind of sometimes will check how many reservations are on our check, because we always will look and see what we did the previous year, because usually typically that's a great indicator of how many we're going to be doing for the day and just how setting yourself up for either going to be a busy day or slow day.

[0:25:53.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That's really interesting. What about dinner?

[0:25:56.2]

Slade Stokes: Dinner, again, I come in a little bit early. I fold my linen for service.

Everyone has to do that when they come in. I know what station I'm going to be in at dinner. Polish my station. Again, you find out how many reservations, which are usually a lot [Laughter], and what you're going to need in your station set for five sixes, large parties, things like that.

I did leave one thing out at lunch. Toward around 11:15 during the day, around 4:45 during the evening, we go over our specials, so we taste all the specials so you become familiar, if something needs a little more salt, a little more seasoning, and give our feedback to the kitchen about what we think about the specials.

[0:26:50.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. So talk to me, too, because I'm interested in this, as somebody who works in the dining room and is front of house, you have to deal with customers and guests, but also you have to have a good relationship or some sort of relationship with people who are working in the kitchen.

[0:27:07.4]

Slade Stokes: Of course.

[0:27:08.3]

Annemarie Anderson: Could you talk a little bit about that relationship?

[0:27:09.8]

Slade Stokes: Well, that's another thing I've noticed here at Magnolias, is over the years we have probably one of the best back of the houses ever because we all pretty much get along, as long as we're doing what we're supposed to do, because there's no chef that's really angry unless he or she has good reason to be. If you continually make mistakes, things like that, you'll be called up. They'll make sure that doesn't happen, you know, things like that. But we have one of the greatest kitchen staffs ever. I mean, in the last twenty years, people have come and gone, but it's always been replaced with someone who was just as good or if not better than the previous in their position.

[0:27:51.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great.

[0:27:53.5]

Slade Stokes: One thing that I think we do emphasize better than a lot of places, that every position, be it somebody from the GM all the way down to the—not “down to,” but including dishwashers or anybody, the back prep, everyone has an integral part to the restaurant, because we're all working together. If you lose one of those, then it's not going to run as smooth as it should, of course.

[0:28:20.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. Could you go into a little more detail about how you build that communication between front of house and back of house?

[0:28:25.9]

Slade Stokes: Well, it is one of the things that's emphasized by our managers here at Magnolias. Necessarily going directly to the kitchen, we have an expo who runs the— basically he's in front of the service line who puts together all the hot food and/or the cold food as well for us to take out. So if we have something, an issue that we need to bring up with a special request or things like that, we go through them, and then they go to the—because we don't want to interrupt the kitchen or the chefs as they're cooking, and we mention to them, and then when they're able to, they mention to the chef certain issues that we might have with a certain guest or a request.

[0:29:08.6]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. So I'm interested, because I've heard some other folks say that in their restaurant, like, servers have to be in the expo position like once—

[0:29:17.4]

Slade Stokes: Yeah, we do, we train at that as well, yeah, and it's not the easiest. Probably I find it to be one of the toughest jobs ever, because you know when you're dealing with all the chefs, you're dealing with all the servers, and so we have twelve servers, we have four chefs. And just getting everything together, because you have certain people who have allergies, so you have to make sure those plates are specially marked for certain people, because, I mean, some people will come in, they'll have a list of allergies, and some of them are—I mean, they're bad ones. Your life is in their hands. So you have to make sure everything is done properly.

[0:29:54.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. So tell me a little bit, too, about the relationship between other folks in front of the house industry, both—I think, the relationship that you have with other servers here at Magnolias, but if you have, you know, relationships outside, just kind of like more in the city of Charleston.

[0:30:14.4]

Slade Stokes: Well, I know a number of people over the years that have worked in the industry and have moved on from it. I don't necessarily go out like I used to. I have, of course, a lot of friends here, and I know some at our sister restaurant, Blossom, as well. But outside of that, I've seen some people out and about and I'll just say, "Hey," but we don't necessarily hang out anymore, things like that.

[0:30:41.6]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense. Let's see. What do you think you would consider the most challenging part of your job and also the most rewarding?

[0:30:51.6]

Slade Stokes: Most challenging. Interesting question. Most challenging. Most challenging aspect is, again, I would say not necessarily the most challenging, but just things that it's the toughest thing to get through to some of the newer people is the aspect of time management and just doing less steps, do multitasking as much as you can versus

otherwise you're going to be worn out by the end of the shift. Okay. Most rewarding is always giving our customers a great time, a great experience, and a reason to come back.

[0:31:40.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. That's great. Well, you've been kind of talking about this, and everybody else I've interviewed so far has, too, just the sheer physicality and also kind of the mental and emotional labor it takes to do your job. Could you kind of talk about that, talk about the support it takes for you to kind of like do this job and to continue doing it for like a long period of time?

[0:32:07.2]

Slade Stokes: Yeah. Well, you've got to stay positive, because sometimes you will have shifts where—I mean, I would say most people are very nice, but you will get those night shifts where you have just people that you just you can't please anybody sometimes, and then that becomes very frustrating. And that's when you still smile and you still do what you can, and if you can't and if you see that there is a problem, that's when you grab the manager and see if they can rectify any issue. And some people you just can't please. That can be very frustrating.

[0:32:43.1]

Annemarie Anderson: I bet, definitely. And what about—I mean, I found it really interesting and notable that here at Magnolias there are a lot of people who have worked

here for a long time. Why do you think—I mean, what is it about this environment that allows for that to happen?

[0:33:01.1]

Slade Stokes: One reason, we have a great GM and great management. Diane Howard, she's been here sixteen years, which that's a long time for manager. And typically I would say Magnolias probably has the least turnover than any other place I've worked at, just because, well, again, even though we do complain, because that's what servers do, it is run better than, I would say, and the company itself is run better than most. It's just because they train you well. They're fair. If you do mess up, they will give you another chance, but, again, they're fair. You just have to stay on your toes and to make sure that you do.

[0:33:47.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense. So another question I kind of have, well, you were talking about—so this is interesting, because I thought about this as a silly thing to ask, but I think it's actually something that is of value to talk about. Talk about transportation and kind of the city's response to—

[0:34:06.2]

Slade Stokes: Yeah. Well, the city's response has not been great. I mean, they have done the HOP aspect, where it is a park-and-ride, basically, and it's free, which is great, but they have one. I mean, you have restaurants are opening every single day, and, of course,

some are closing every single day too. But the city, they could do more for the food and beverage staff for parking, at least give us, like, deals in the parking garages, as opposed to paying full price, you know, just show a ticket stub, things like that, because we're providing a service to the guests that come to Charleston and making sure they want to come back and spend more money and pay more taxes of the hospitality tax, which they love getting. I think they could do more for the food and beverage industry in this city.

[0:35:00.7]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely.

[0:35:02.3]

Slade Stokes: And not necessarily food and beverage, but people work in offices downtown. I mean, parking is, I know, limited, but we deserve—I mean, I know we're catering to the tourists and everything, and it's great that you're giving them the free rides for the buses and things, the CARTA thing, and we have that one parking lot, which is great, but, again, they could do more for parking especially, because it can be up to almost \$20 a shift, okay, if you park in the parking garage. That's ridiculous. I mean, if you have five, six shifts, that's four, five thousand dollars right there a year that you're paying. That's crazy.

[0:35:57.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That's a lot of money.

[0:35:58.3]

Slade Stokes: I mean, I, personally, at the moment I don't own a car. I mean, I'll do Uber, but I can do Uber back and forth, as long as it's not surging, of course, and it'll be cheaper. Because I live ten minutes from downtown, it'll be cheaper than me driving a car downtown and parking.

[0:36:13.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. That's really interesting.

[0:36:15.5]

Slade Stokes: Yeah. I mean, they also have, you know, with the parking, too, even for the guests, they changed this a couple years ago, where they check meters until 10:00 at night, which is crazy. It's crazy for my guests to have to get up and leave the dining room to go feed their meter. Anyway, that's—I can feel my vein coming out [unclear].

[0:36:32.1]

Annemarie Anderson: I'm sorry. I got you upset. [Laughter]

[0:36:33.9]

Slade Stokes: Yeah, I know. [Laughter]

[0:36:34.9]

Annemarie Anderson: There was a lady I talked to yesterday said the same exact thing about customers having to get up and go pay—

[0:36:41.3]

Slade Stokes: Yeah, it's just ridiculous for them to have to do that. I mean, they don't even—they stop at 8:00 o'clock in New York City.

[0:36:46.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's interesting.

[0:36:48.6]

Slade Stokes: I know. That's crazy. I mean, they used to do it at 6:00. Six I can understand, even 8:00 o'clock maybe, but 10:00? Really?

[0:36:54.7]

Annemarie Anderson: Interesting. Well, tell me a little bit—so we were kind of talking about this, but how does the tourism industry here in Charleston impact your job?

[0:37:03.9]

Slade Stokes: Of course, they have helped pay for the house that I bought in the early 2000s. The tourist industry since I started, you know, in college, we used to have, for example, summertime, we used to slow down quite a bit. Not anymore. We still, of course, remain busy. It's a different clientele, of course, a lot of families that are great.

[Laughter] And it's just the whole industry, I mean, Charleston becoming the number one place to visit in the world, in the country. It's increased. I mean, it's crazy the amount of people that are in town, that come into town these days. And we appreciate it.

[0:37:48.5]

Annemarie Anderson: I bet.

[0:37:50.0]

Slade Stokes: But, again, they need to slow down on some of that development, too, because it's nice that they're building hotels and restaurants, but where are your workers going to park and/or live? Because there's no affordable housing, things like that downtown anymore, because everything's—you know, the gentrification of the city, particularly in the last ten years.

[0:38:12.1]

Annemarie Anderson: I mean, I think this is interesting because, like you said, this has allowed you to buy a house.

[0:38:19.5]

Slade Stokes: Yeah.

[0:38:20.3]

Annemarie Anderson: But, I mean, do you know if, like, in your experience or seeing other people kind of struggle because of this gentrification, people who are working in the [unclear]?

[0:38:30.0]

Slade Stokes: If you wanted to live close to your work downtown, to any restaurant downtown, you would have to get multiple roommates just because rent is so high. I mean, a number of them, of course, live West of the Ashley where I live or on James Island or in Mount Pleasant, which is not the cheapest either there, actually, but most people have roommates. And if they don't, then they will struggle. You will struggle, yeah.

[0:38:51.4]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, I'm sure. So talk to me a little bit about—so this is a little more of a thinking question, I guess, but I'm interested in people's kind of approach to hospitality, their kind of theory or belief in it and how that's kind of evolved since they've worked in this industry. Could you tell me—I mean, I think that there might be a distinction or people have been drawing a distinction between service and hospitality. Could you talk a little bit about your definitions for both of those terms?

[0:39:21.5]

Slade Stokes: That *is* a good question. Service. Well, service, what I do, it's my philosophy, or other servers, is when a guest sits down, I want to be there for them when

they need me, but I don't want to be one of those ones that hover and just continually talks, you know. I try to, if you see that something needs to be done, you do it without asking. You don't say, "Would you like more coffee?" You go get the coffee, you know. If you see the water's almost empty, you just fill the water. You don't say—you know. Just get things done without asking, because, it always, I mean, it's a small thing but it always impresses. Like, "I need more. Oh, I already got that. Oh, you already did it. Oh." Things like that.

Because I like service, when I go out, not that I go out a lot anymore, but, I mean, I judge and see. I can see servers just wasting so many steps, and things like that. I try to anticipate what the guest needs as opposed to asking, "What do you need?" And for hospitality, I just try to make everyone feel at home, just try to be nice.

[0:40:29.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. How do you do that?

[0:40:32.2]

Slade Stokes: I don't know how I do it. I just try to be just very nice. I mean, even if it's a difficult table, I just smile, because you can get a lot more—you know. I mean, there are certain times actually where I have had some of the managers say, "Okay, this is going to be a difficult table. Turn 'em," and I do because I'm nice. I just pour it on. I just try to be, you know, cordial, talkative. If I can see they don't want to talk, then I will push back. Obviously, if they want to, I'll just find out about them, where they're from, if they're from local or if they're not. If they've had to wait longer for their reservation, I

try to get there immediately, smile, and say, “I’m sorry you had to wait,” and just try to make them feel at home.

[0:41:26.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That’s great. Well, talk to me, too, a little bit about—well, I mean, how have you kind of—how has your ideas about hospitality or service or your job and the way you approach that, how has that changed, if it has, since you began?

[0:41:42.6]

Slade Stokes: I don’t know necessarily if it has changed, because I just try to be—I mean, I was raised in the South. It’s just the way I was raised. I mean, I’ve had people say, “You don’t have to say ‘Yes, ma’am’ or ‘Yes, sir.’” It’s like, “I’m sorry, that’s just the way I was raised.” I was raised to respect other people’s feelings and just try to be a good person.

[0:42:08.9]

Annemarie Anderson: That’s great. Well tell me a little bit about—so we talked about kind of the tourist industry, but I’m interested in, too—like, tell me about some of your regulars.

[0:42:19.0]

Slade Stokes: Some of the regulars that I have? Unfortunately, I mean, I’m always really good with faces, but I’m terrible with names. I figured it out last year, actually, over the

nineteen, eighteen years at the time I have worked here, I've waited on over 100,000 people.

[0:42:19.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Wow. That's a lot.

[0:42:38.6]

Slade Stokes: So with my regulars and stuff, I kind of will recognize them once they sit down. They give you those little sheets for requests made, and I have this one gentleman that comes in, he should be coming in sometime this month, he's a doctor out at the Seabrook, and he always leaves me a \$100 bill.

[0:42:55.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Wow.

[0:42:56.6]

Slade Stokes: Yeah, always. And in the past couple years, of course, I can't remember his name, but once I get that little sheet, I'll go, "That's him." But, yeah, I'll have families that come in every year to visit Charleston that will request me, and I try to remember them all. [Laughter]

[0:43:15.2]

Annemarie Anderson: That's okay.

[0:43:16.7]

Slade Stokes: I mean, you talk to Ed, and Ed has in his—did he show you? In his wallet, descriptions and names of people that—because he’s been here almost since we opened, of people that request him constantly. And we have that all the time with servers that have been here a while who request the same server over and over again.

[0:43:33.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. I mean, how does that make you feel as a person who does this job?

[0:43:39.2]

Slade Stokes: Well, it makes you feel good, you know. The people will come back and they request you, because you know you’re doing your job. You’re giving them another reason to come back. That’s what we try to do, is just to try to make sure you’ll remember us when you leave. You’ll remember Magnolias and it will be at the top of your list. And we’re actually in the book *1,000 Places to Go Before You Die*.

[0:44:01.4]

Annemarie Anderson: That’s cool.

[0:44:02.9]

Slade Stokes: You can see it downstairs, actually. You see it right there in front of the restrooms as you go down the stairs. It's right there on there. It's a plaque. It's right in that book, too. I think we're the only restaurant in there.

[0:44:14.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Oh, that's cool. That's interesting. So, well, tell me a little bit—let's see. I think I'm almost done with my questions. But I guess this another one of those kind of big thinking questions. But what are some of the most important lessons you've learned since you've started this job?

[0:44:36.2]

Slade Stokes: Patience. It's one of the things my mom always taught me, "Patience is a virtue," of course. Okay. Repeat the question again. [Laughter]

[0:44:56.6]

Annemarie Anderson: What are some of the most important lessons you've learned since you've been serving?

[0:45:00.2]

Slade Stokes: Just, you know, how to get along with people is, I guess, the best thing, one of the biggest things, is because just the diverse people that you work with, just everyone. We are one big dysfunctional family in most restaurants, where we pretty much look out for each other and just get along with people. I mean, that's one of the

biggest things, you know, just because we're all one big family, you know, and just learning how to deal with some situations which can be kind of stressful. I think that's the most thing, is just getting used to learning to deal with people, dealing with the public, getting along with different people that you work with, and just trying to make the best of everything and just trying to stay positive. Stay positive, because negativity, trust me, will bring down the entire staff, because sometimes people will complain and some people *love* doing that all the time, and I've done it before, too, but I try not to, just try to rise above it, you know, just appreciate. Appreciate people and appreciate—I don't know, just—

[0:46:07.1]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great.

[0:46:10.7]

Slade Stokes: Okay. I don't know what to say, you know.

[0:46:13.4]

Annemarie Anderson: No, no, that's great.

[0:46:14.1]

Slade Stokes: Was that good? Okay.

[0:46:14.6]

Annemarie Anderson: That was perfect.

[0:46:15.5]

Slade Stokes: Oh, okay.

[0:46:16.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Anything that you say is perfect, because this is all about you.

[0:46:18.2]

Slade Stokes: Okay, cool. Excellent.

[0:46:19.1]

Annemarie Anderson: So I think that's all I have, questions for you. Do you have anything that you want to add or anything that we haven't talked about?

[0:46:28.8]

Slade Stokes: No, you seem to be very—are you sure you only dish-washed? You seem to know a lot about this. [Laughter]

[0:46:33.6]

Annemarie Anderson: I've talked to a lot of people.

[0:46:35.3]

Slade Stokes: Yeah. But no, I just recommend it. It's like one thing that gets me with the hospitality industry, it's annoying for some guests, and it hasn't happened lately, but just the times over the years, it's happened a couple years ago when I was working, and a gentleman and his wife, very nice, and they loved me, but the guy said, "Well, what's your real job?" And I could see that his wife kicked him under the table, because I could see him jump.

And it's like, "Well, sir, this is it."

And I've had this happen to other friends of mine too. It's not necessarily a respected industry. It looks as something you're going to do to put your way through school or to get extra money to go party or things like that. And it's not. I mean, I have friends that have bought a house, put their kids through school, through college, they're out of college, and, of course, they're not in food and beverage anymore. Their kids are. But, you know, it deserves more respect than it gets.

[0:47:41.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, for sure.

[0:47:43.2]

Slade Stokes: Because I think everybody should have to work in food and beverage or some kind of service industry, just to teach people how to get along and how to respect other people who aren't like you. Okay?

[0:47:52.7]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, for sure. I mean, how does that make you feel when people do those kinds—or say those kinds of things?

[0:47:58.5]

Slade Stokes: I smile. I smile, I do grit my teeth, and I tell them in a nice way, “I have bought a house because of working in food and beverage. I’m ten minutes from downtown. I have a number of friends who have done it for years, and they’ve done the same thing. They raised families on this.” And it deserves more respect.

[0:48:23.7]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

[0:48:25.3]

Slade Stokes: Yeah, because we provide a service, because who else is going to be serving your food, bring your drinks? We are, you know. I think that’s all.

[0:48:37.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That’s great.

[0:48:37.6]

Slade Stokes: Okay.

[0:48:37.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Thank you very much.

[0:48:39.0]

Slade Stokes: Alrighty. Thank you.

[0:48:39.7]

Annemarie Anderson: I appreciate it.

[End of interview]