

**MELANIE KING**  
**JACOBS GROCERY & CAFE**  
**Hornsby, Tennessee**

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Date: March 2, 2106  
Location: Jacob's Grocery & Cafe, Selmer, TN  
Interviewer: Sara Wood  
Transcription: Shelley Chance  
Length: Eighteen minutes  
Project: A Hamburger by Any Other Name

START INTERVIEW

00:00:02

Sara Wood: Okay and your last name is King, correct?

00:00:03

Melanie King: Yeah.

00:00:05

SW: Okay; okay. So I'm just going to mark the tape. This is Sara Wood with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's March 2, 2016. I'm sitting here in Jacob's Grocery with Ms. Melanie King. And we're in Hornsby, Tennessee. And she's in the middle of a rush right now but she's got a little break. So Melanie, I'm wondering if you would say hello and introduce yourself and tell me who you are and where we are right now.

00:00:28

MK: Hi, this is Melanie King. We are in Hornsby, Tennessee, a very small town of around 300 people. About the only thing we have in Hornsby, we have a school that's pre-K through 8 and our business and one more small business and a post office. And right now we're sitting in our café, which is Jacob's Café. It goes along with Jacob's Grocery. It's the only little convenience store and café within fifteen miles of either direction.

00:00:56

SW: And I know you told me this over there but will you tell me again how you got into this business?

00:01:02

MK: Sure, this store was built in the--the store part was built in 1978 by Norris Jacobs and he still lives just a--about a block away. And several years later he came along and built the

café part. It was not open to the store but it was attached to the store. You just had to go outside and come in another door.

00:01:24

A few years later he sold the business to Donnie and Stacy Spence, who still own the building. They ran the store and café for many years. And Stacy's health declined and they ended up getting out of the business. But a few years later, maybe four or five years later they cut a hole in the wall so that you could go straight from the grocery store into the café and now it's readily accessible.

00:01:48

We came here June 30, 2015. My husband owns a small business here in town and felt like there was a need to open the store back up because there wasn't anywhere anybody could buy a soda or anything like that. So we opened this June 30<sup>th</sup> and we've been going full speed ahead ever since; a couple things we take pride in are our scores. Our most recent score, we scored a 97. The first time we scored 100 but we weren't cooking. But we did score a 97 this time and we're very proud of that.

00:02:15

We have--we can seat forty-four on a general day and then if we need to we can move some stuff around and add some tables and chairs and seat more than that. We had thirty-four in our back section at one time. And we have some Christmas parties, but basically we've been here since June 30<sup>th</sup>.

00:02:34

SW: And can you tell me what you were doing before and what that--what that change was like? It's a two-part question.

00:02:40

MK: Well, before I came here I was working in sales and I was a sales rep for a newspaper and a radio station selling advertising. That's something I've done for several years now. And I really enjoyed what I was doing. If you had asked me a year ago if I was going to be in the restaurant business I would have said, "Absolutely not," because I would have never thought I was. But I have learned to do all the stuff along with this. I've learned how to cook on the grill and the fryers and all this stuff. And I enjoy what I'm doing now. I miss what I did. I enjoyed that too.

00:03:13

SW: How did you learn? What was the learning curve like here because you're basically running the show back there?

00:03:19

MK: It was--it was a big thing to learn. We have two twenty-four-inch grills and three fryer baskets. The hardest part to me is learning how to get everything done at the same time so that your fries are hot if your meat is hot and your meat is hot if your fries are hot and remembering to cook a roll to go on the plate and all the things that--that it takes to get the food all done at the same time for it to go out hot.

00:03:43

SW: Uh-hm; and Melanie for the record will you tell me your husband's name?

00:03:46

MK: Sure; Aubrey and that's with an A-u-b--as in boy--r-e-y.

00:03:50

SW: And I--for the--for the record we also--can I have your birth date?

00:03:56

MK: Sure; June 29, 1964 and his is May 4, 1963 and he is currently battling bone cancer with multiple myeloma. He's getting ready to do a stem cell transplant so we are in a transition stage here of trying to get some new employees in. And as you can see, today I have a new--a cash register girl that's in her second day and a waitress in her first day. So we're trying to get some new employees in to get enough help for me to be off with him while he has this transplant.

00:04:23

SW: Where is he getting it done?

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MK: In Memphis at Methodist University Hospital on Union Avenue. He is a patient of the West Clinic and they're all tied together.

00:04:31

SW: Wow; what is the process going to be like for him? I mean that sounds pretty--when you say stem cell transplant, it makes me think of the height of science.

00:04:42

MK: Very much and they gave us a three ring notebook of information to read. If they hadn't I would have had no idea what we were going into. But I didn't even know what a stem cell is. A stem cell is an immature baby cell that is sitting in your bone marrow. When your body needs red blood cells, white blood cells, or platelets, it tells the stem cells to move from the bone marrow into your bloodstream and mature.

00:05:06

So beginning on the 11<sup>th</sup> he will get a shot for three days that's a growth shot and this--we'll have to drive back and forth to Memphis as an outpatient and that will make the stem cells

mature and move to the bloodstream. Starting the fourth day after that they will start harvesting the cells and they want to take extra because they won't be able to do another stem cell transplant.

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His cancer is not curable. It can go in remission. But it normally comes back in about two years. And so they want some extra stem cells to be able to give him some good ones, so they will harvest these stem cells and then in about a week after that he will go in-patient and they will give him really high-dose chemo. It will make his counts pretty well go down to nothing. The second day following that they'll put his stem cells back in and he'll be very sick, lose his hair; some of the things that he hasn't done yet. And then his--his counts will get really low and then he'll start improving and then from there he'll move to the American Cancer Society's Hope Lodge.

00:06:06

And he'll be there about two more weeks, so we're looking at about five weeks in Memphis once we get--get going with all this process.

00:06:12

SW: Well--.

00:06:15

MK: It is.

00:06:16

SW: Has he had radiation and chemo before?

00:06:19

MK: He--he's had chemo. He's been doing chemo since November when he--he was diagnosed November 6<sup>th</sup> [2015] and he's been doing chemo ever since, but no radiation for this type of cancer. It's in the bone marrow so there's no radiation for this type of cancer.

00:06:31

SW: And you guys took it over in July?

00:06:33

MK: We opened June 30 [2015].

00:06:35

SW: June 30<sup>th</sup> and then in November [2015] he got--

00:06:37

MK: Yes; got news of the cancer in November.

00:06:40

SW: Is he still working at the shop?

00:06:42

MK: Yes; he is. He is still trying to work as many days as he doesn't go you know for treatment. Monday he had a PET scan; Friday he has a doctor's appointment, so Tuesday, Wednesday, today, yesterday, and tomorrow he's--he's trying to work.

00:07:00

SW: And you said tomorrow is your daughter's birthday?

00:07:02

MK: It is; my baby--the guy that's not the cash register now is my stepson. I have a stepdaughter and then my husband and I have a daughter that will be twenty-four tomorrow, so she's looking for me to come take her to lunch tomorrow. *[Laughs]*

00:07:15

SW: Where are y'all going for lunch?

00:07:16

MK: Well you know we were just talking. You and I were just talking about different places and I mentioned to you Borroum's Drugstore in Corinth [Mississippi] and that--I asked her where she wanted to go and she said it doesn't matter. So I'm thinking Borroum's might be the place.

00:07:28

SW: That will be special. Can I ask you some more questions Melanie? Do you mind?

00:07:32

MK: Sure.

00:07:33

SW: Can you talk a little bit about what the menu is here and how y'all decided on the menu and if you changed it at all when you took over?

00:07:42

MK: Sure, give me one second.

00:07:43

SW: Sure.

*[Pauses tape so Ms. King can work for a second to help employees]*

00:07:53

MK: Menu, when we came two things I wanted on the menu were slugburgers and milkshakes. And we--we started with slugburgers and we've done very well with them. Since you've been here tonight we had an order for five for one person--him and his mom. He orders about once a week. Milkshakes, when it was hot weather we were going through three gallons of milk--of ice-cream a day. We have thirteen different kinds of milkshakes. The thing we sell the most probably are our burgers. They're fresh ground beef from the local grocery store on big potato buns and they have a very nice presence when you--when you look at them. They look really nice and taste good, too.

00:08:30

Oh we sell a lot of pizzas because we're handy just to pick up a pizza and run home. We sell a lot of pizzas. We also have hamburger steaks, pork chops, catfish, shrimp, jumbo shrimp and popcorn shrimp; do a lot of chicken strips. Chicken strips are popular. We are just across the street from the--from the school. Kids will walk over after school between school and a ballgame and get some chicken strips.

00:08:54

Of course we have appetizers. We do--do ice-cream sundaes, floats. We have a new menu item that we've just started. We've got--sort of picked that idea up off of some more restaurants where we've got a chocolate chip cookie cooked in a little miniature skillet. When that comes out hot we put ice-cream and you get your choice of caramel or--or chocolate syrup on that.

00:09:16

We--the main--main things that I wanted for sure when I did this was slugburgers and milkshakes and both of those have been a very good seller.

00:09:24

SW: Why did you want slug burgers on the menu?

00:09:26

MK: Because nobody in--we're in--we're in Hornsby and east of us is Selmer [Tennessee]. You have about three restaurants there that sell slugburgers. West of us is Bolivar. Nobody sells slugburgers. So people from Bolivar [Tennessee] drive to Selmer to get a slugburger and my hopes were we would stop them in mid-route before they got there.

00:09:46

SW: That's pretty clever. Did you grow up eating slugburgers?

00:09:48

MK: Yeah, I have all my life pretty much.

00:09:50

SW: Where did you grow up?

00:09:52

MK: In Selmer.

00:09:52

SW: You did?

00:09:53

MK: Uh-hm; I live there now.

00:09:54

SW: Okay; well I'm wondering--I was going to ask you this. Can you talk a little bit about--for people--Selmer, the town, could you describe it?

00:10:03

MK: Selmer--Selmer is another small community about 22,000 in West Tennessee. Most people when they hear Selmer, the only thing that they remember from Selmer is there's been two--two accidents that's happened in Selmer. One was in 2006; a Cars for Kids Car Show, there's a dragster that went into the crowd and killed several people, and then the Mary Winkler story where the Church of Christ Minister shot her husband and they made a movie about that. Those are Selmer.

00:10:32

Selmer also is the county seat for McNairy County and McNairy is the home of the legendary Sheriff Buford Pusser. So that's--that sort of stands out in people's minds because he had several movies made about him.

00:10:45

SW: Okay and who was he?

00:10:45

MK: He was just a famous sheriff that really just didn't take anything off of anybody. He just--they say he carried a big stick. I don't--I never knew him. I was like eight when he died, so I didn't--don't really know him. I am pretty good friends with his daughter. Aubrey and I up until this year, we have hosted the Buford Pusser Festival Car Show for about six or eight years now.

00:11:05

And we've also done one in Selmer--a big show called Rockabilly and usually have almost 200 cars at that show. We shut down downtown Selmer, but due to his illness we've taken a back step and we're not going to do those shows this year. I hope they do go on. But we're not going to--we're not going to do them. But that's--that's our hobby. We have an old car and we go to car shows and play with cars.

00:11:27

SW: Is there a connection; I know that there's the Rockabilly Café in Selmer but is there a connection between Rockabilly in Selmer and--?

00:11:35

MK: It is. The Rockabilly Highway runs from Jackson, Tennessee to Tupelo, Mississippi. So when we came up with the idea, a group of us to do the Rockabilly Festival we called it the Rockabilly Highway Revival. When you use the word *revival* people come looking for preaching and a lot of people don't come because they think it's going to be preaching. So I tacked on the word *festival* and called it Rockabilly Highway Revival Festival so--to give them an idea.

00:12:00

But on the second Saturday in June about--about 4,000 people will be in downtown Selmer. We block it off from one end of town to the other and line the old cars up the Main Street and just really have a--a really neat day.

00:12:13

SW: And you kind of talked about a few things that Selmer was known for that people would read about in the papers from the past. But what would you--what do you want people to know about Selmer?

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MK: I want people to know that Selmer is a quiet town in West Tennessee. It's not about a woman shooting her husband. It's not about a car running into the crowd and--and killing people because that's not normal things that happen in Selmer. Selmer is--is a good town. We have a great sheriff that really does a good job of keeping law and order and--and keeping drugs off the streets and that type of thing.

00:12:44

SW: And how--who are your customers? So we're here in Hornsby and you--and I'm wondering is it mostly people who live here in town or--.

00:12:52

MK: I'm going to say we've got 30/30/30 maybe; you've got probably--maybe 40/30/30, maybe thirty percent from McNairy County and thirty percent from Bolivar and then forty percent from here in Hornsby.

00:13:10

[*Aubrey King, Ms. King's husband, walks up to the table and Ms. King begins talking to him*] She might want to ask you some questions. This is my husband, Aubrey.

00:13:13

Aubrey King: You can answer--

00:13:17

SW: Do you want to say anything?

00:13:17

MK: He grew up in Hornsby.

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SW: You did? What was it like growing up in Hornsby?

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AK: Oh it was great, small town, a lot of good people.

00:13:25

MK: Everybody knows everybody.

00:13:26

AK: Yeah; everybody knows everybody.

00:13:28

SW: Can you tell me when you bought the shop what--what--like how long you had the shop and why you decided to take on the shop?

00:13:36

AK: I've been there for nineteen years now. I always wanted to detail cars. It just is something I always wanted to do and the opportunity, I got laid off from a factory job and the opportunity was there and I just--things worked out for the best and I opened it up and it's been good ever since.

00:13:57

SW: And what--did you like to tinker with cars when you were younger?

00:14:01

AK: Yeah; I was always fascinated with everything--bicycles, motorcycles, cars, just all things like that.

00:14:09

MK: Still is. [*Laughs*]

00:14:12

SW: And can you talk a little bit about--oh what factory were you working in?

00:14:15

AK: Harmon Automotive in Bolivar.

00:14:18

SW: How did the two of you meet?

00:14:20

AK: We met at a car show.

00:14:24

SW: You did? Can you tell me about it?

00:14:26

AK: Uh--

00:14:27

MK: It was a Cars for Kids at Selmer. We were just talking about the--the dragster going into the crowd. This was many years before that and we had some mutual friends that wanted to fix us up at--at the car show because they knew we both sort of liked the same things and that's been our main hobby ever since.

00:14:41

AK: Yeah.

00:14:43

SW: Do you remember the first time you talked to him?

00:14:46

MK: Yeah; I think so.

00:14:49

SW: Do you remember what you said?

00:14:49

MK: No, I don't remember what I said. *[Laughs]*

00:14:52

SW: Aubrey do you remember?

00:14:53

AK: No; I don't remember. *[Laughs]*

00:14:56

SW: Can you--so I was asking Melanie about you know going--switching from you know doing sales to working here and I'm wondering what--what was the--the learning curve like for you to decide to do--to take on this business here.

00:15:09

AK: Well I just mainly seen the opportunity that--that once I--you know I'm getting--growing older and I thought the store would be a little bit less stressful far as physical-wise and it might be something for me to fall back on if--if I decided to ever quit doing what I was doing at the detail shop or at the car shop. And it was just an opportunity at the right time to--to maybe make it successful once again.

00:15:42

SW: Uh-hm; I don't want to take too much more of your time, but is there anything you want people to know about the café here or the grocery that I didn't think to ask you? I know--

00:15:53

MK: Just that--just that you know we have pretty much anything you would need--milk and bread to keep you from having to go to town. We keep sugar, flour, meal, a little bit of that. We have all kind of soft drinks. We do sell cigarettes and beer and gas to keep you from you know having to drive to town to get some of the--the--you know the things that you might need or want.

00:16:13

SW: It sounds like you guys stay pretty busy throughout the day then since you have all--everything here.

00:16:19

MK: We do. You got to see a little taste of it. I came in at three this afternoon and I haven't stopped ever since then, so it's--you got to see a little taste of it. This being Wednesday night, usually Wednesday night is not real busy because the local Baptist church has a meal for their--their people on Wednesday night. So usually we're not that busy but as you can see, today we got busy early and we've slowed down a little bit. But hopefully it's going to pick back up and we're going to have a good night.

00:16:42

SW: Aubrey do you want to add anything else that you want people to know about the business here?

00:16:48

AK: Yeah; we just want everybody to come out and we have a good family atmosphere. You can come down--come down and sit and eat and see a lot of friends, friends from around

town. If you come from [Inaudible] you might see some people from [Inaudible] you know and you can just sit and relax and enjoy your meal while you talk to some friends.

00:17:11

SW: Well I want to thank you both for doing this. I appreciate it.

00:17:14

MK: Well we appreciate you Sara for coming and talking to us and--and learning about our business.

00:17:20

SW: May I--I'm going to turn the tape off--?

00:17:21

END INTERVIEW