

**PAT KNIGHT  
PAT'S CAFE  
Selmer, Tennessee**

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Date: March 1, 2106  
Location: Pat's Cafe, Selmer, TN  
Interviewer: Sara Wood  
Transcription: Shelley Chance  
Length: Forty-two minutes  
Project: A Hamburger by Any Other Name

START INTERVIEW

[*Transcript begins at 00:00:29*]

Sara Wood: I’m going to start rolling.

00:00:30

Pat Knight: All right.

00:00:30

SW: And of course this is all going to be edited, so don’t worry about ums, or if you want to start over. I just wanted to have you start Miss Pat by introducing yourself, tell me who you are and where we are right now.

00:00:43

PK: Okay, my name is Pat Knight and we’re at Pat’s Café in Selmer, Tennessee and I have been in business here for twenty-eight years.

00:00:53

SW: How did you get into this business?

00:00:55

PK: I was—I lost my job at the high school in the cafeteria and a friend knew that I had been working in food service and so she asked me if I would manage this for her. And I said, “Well I’ve never done that before, but I’ll try.” And that was in December of ’87 [1987] and in January of ’88 I bought it. And so, I’ve been here ever since.

00:01:26

SW: So I want to ask you a couple questions about that, that was a pretty short time. What made you decide to buy it?

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PK: I liked it [*Emphasis Added*]. I—the first job I ever had was waitressing and when I got out of high school I was too young to work in a factory so I waitressed here in town at a—at a place called the Dixie Café and—and then I had worked in food services in the elementary school, the middle school, and the high school and I liked it. And then my husband’s father had a little country grocery store and I worked there with them, and I just like people. I like to be around people and feeding them is—is probably a southern tradition with some of us women. We like to feed people.

00:02:14

SW: Uh-hm and what was the name of the—the store that your—your husband’s father had?

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PK: It was Knight’s Grocery.

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SW: Knight’s Grocery. Is it still around?

00:02:23

PK: There’s an apartment in that—in that place that he had the store building. And it looks like it used to. I was there this past weekend and I was looking at the steps and I thought oh those steps have seen a lot of people come and go. It’s been a lot of years, well fifty years I guess.

00:02:44

SW: Wow.

00:02:45

PK: That’s how long I’ve been married or—well it’s forty-nine but I’m working, you know I mean the stairs were there before I got married so fifty years probably at least for the—those steps.

00:02:56

SW: And your husband is Harold?

00:02:57

PK: My husband is Harold Knight, uh-hm.

00:02:59

SW: And how did you meet Harold?

00:03:00

PK: I moved in the neighborhood right down below his house when we were children, when I was twelve and he was seventeen. And he asked me to marry him when I was twelve but I made him wait until I was sixteen. [*Laughs*]

00:03:20

SW: So you guys had been in love ever since then?

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PK: Yes, ever since then, since he was seventeen and I was twelve.

00:03:28

SW: And was that—did you both live here in Selmer?

00:03:31

PK: Uh-hm, yeah. Well we—I had been living in St. Louis and—and my mother—our family is from here and my father got ill. So we moved back here so she could be with her family.

00:03:46

SW: So you were born in St. Louis?

00:03:48

PK: No, I was born in Savannah, Georgia but my father was a—a high-pressure welder and he worked for a lot of large aircraft companies. And so we just kind of went where they needed him and the time that we decided—that my father got ill we were living in St. Louis and then moved back to Selmer.

00:04:09

SW: What were your parents’ names?

00:04:11

PK: My mother’s name was Theda Petree and my father’s name was Louis Eastman. He was from New York and she was from Ramer [Tennessee] and they met in Los Angeles.

00:04:23

SW: How did they meet? What were they doing in Los Angeles?

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PK: I have no idea. Well he was in the navy and so she was a young southern girl out there in Los Angeles and they just met and fell in love and I was born just about nine months to

the day after the wedding. I have the marriage certificate. You know how kids now, you know or people will count months and things, *[Laughs]*—.

00:04:52

SW: Now when you said you had family here, your mom’s family is from here, your mother’s family?

00:04:56

PK: My mother’s family is from here, yes. They lived at Ramer, her—her parents and then lived at Michie and Michie there was the—I guess the only oil well in—in the state of Tennessee or at least in West Tennessee—was on my grandfather’s farm at Michie. And they—they boarded it up though and never did pump any oil out of it, but they drilled it.

00:05:23

SW: What were your grandparents’ names?

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PK: Sarah and Andrew Petree and then Sarah and—I mean I’m sorry, Hattie and Myron Eastman, yeah.

00:05:39

SW: Is Petri, P-e-t-r-i-e?

00:05:42

PK: No, e-e is how they spell theirs. I’m sure it’s the same family but you know when you move places to place people will change the spelling of your name or they used to back then and a lot of times people couldn’t even spell. *[Laughs]*

00:05:56

SW: Oh gosh. Now did Sarah have an H on the end of her name?

00:05:59

PK: Yes.

00:06:00

SW: Okay and before I forget, could I get your birth date for the record Miss Pat?

00:06:03

PK: Sure, it’s July 3, 1950.

00:06:07

SW: And I wanted just to go back and ask you, were you—when you were working in the food service for the school was that here in McNairy County?

00:06:13

PK: Yes.

00:06:13

SW: Could you tell me the name of the school?

00:06:15

PK: It was Selmer Elementary, Selmer Middle School, and McNairy Central High School.

00:06:21

SW: So when your friend called you when you—when you stopped working there and you tried this you said you loved it, but what was—do you remember the first day being in here and what it was like or what—?

00:06:33

PK: I was scared to death. I was scared to death. But the people are really kind and some of the customers that I had then I still have. And but after I bought it, then I was really panicked

because my husband’s mother told him, she said, “She’ll lose everything you’ve got right down there.” And but she was wrong. But you know there—there is a burden that comes with your own business because if it fails, it’s all your fault. You know if it succeeds then somebody else is responsible, you know. But you know the pain of failing has never been a good one anyone likes to—to feel. And so I’ve been here for twenty-eight years, so I guess I’d have to say she was wrong. *[Laughs]*

00:07:31

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

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PK: I like my customers. I like the visitors that come. I’m kind of nosy, if I don’t know you I’ll ask where you’re from and then like that gentleman sitting down there, you know he’s in the navy and his wife is retired from the navy and usually people don’t retire to the navy and come back here to live. So I—I’m interested in what—what they found in our county to make them move here, you know and spend—buy homes and cars and you know what—everything that comes with that. And they tell us—tell me that it’s the low property taxes and the low price of land. And we have a lot of folks from Florida that move up here. They’re tired of hurricanes. And I told one of them one time, I said, “You know there’s enough of y’all here that you could start your own club.” And they just smile and say, “We don’t want to have our own club. We want to be in your club.” And so I—I think that’s pretty good.

00:08:46

Of course now they always get disenchanted because we don’t have a movie theater here. We don’t have a drive-in theater here. We don’t have a bowling alley but now all those things



are just twenty, twenty-five miles away. So you know thirty or forty-five minutes you can be there doing whatever it is you want to do from here.

00:09:10

SW: I mean, Miss Pat you grew up here. How have you watched the town or this county change since you know being little? Or, you know you’re a business owner, so you have—and you know all your customers and it definitely feels like family in here to somebody—an outsider.

00:09:27

PK: Yes.

00:09:27

SW: I’m just wondering, can you talk about some of the changes you’ve watched over the years?

00:09:31

PK: Well, that’s been hard. We used to have a tractor dealership. We had three car dealerships. We had three lumberyards. Now we don’t have any dealerships. We have some—a lot of used car dealerships but we don’t have any new car dealerships. We don’t have a tractor dealership. We don’t have a lumberyard. So we have to go to places like Corinth to Lowe’s or you know one of those big stores to—to buy anything.

00:10:04

Now we—we have hardware stores. We have—we have two hardware stores, which is good but we used to have you know more. We used to have a Ben Franklin Five & Dime Store and we don’t have that anymore. We used to have a dry—we used to have two dry cleaners, we don’t have a dry cleaners anymore. But—

00:10:27

SW: What happened? Why—why did everyone—why did everything go away?

00:10:32

PK: Mobility, mobility. You know the Bible says about Jesus that a prophet is not recognized in his own hometown? I think that people when they got mobile they could go to Jackson [Tennessee] and get a new car or they could go to Corinth [Mississippi] and get a new car. And so that really cost us a lot. I think mobility has cost us a lot of things that we didn’t think. And of course a lot of people here, we don’t have much industry. We used to have two shoe factories and now we have none. We used to have a lot of garment factories. We don’t have—well I think we have one down in the—what is that place where they built the factories at—? But anyway I think we have one garment factory and we used to have several in the county. And so mobility has cost us a lot.

00:11:37

Now you have to drive to Jackson to get a job or drive to Corinth and get a job. And our—our kids graduate from high school and go to college and they don’t come home. You know so that’s pretty bad. We used to have several doctor clinics, you know right—right local but now we have some but you know a lot of them are sending their patients to Jackson hospitals and Corinth hospitals. Corinth has a big heart addition to their hospital and—and our little hospital actually just closed yesterday except for the Emergency Room, yeah. So it’s tough to get a job, it’s tough to stay in business, you know when everything is leaving town and going to those big box stores and—.

00:12:32

SW: That’s kind of—it kind of segways into your business because I was thinking about this. I’ve been spending a lot of time talking to people about slugburgers and the tradition and how it started during the Depression when people didn’t have a whole lot and they stretched it to go farther. And it’s interesting that the tradition is still around and I know for a lot of people it could be they—it’s something that they grew up eating so that you know their parents had them eating and the grandparents. But do you think there’s a tie between you know just in your experience of having this business since 1988, you know is there a tie between this tradition of food and—and the state of things in terms of the economy for people? Do you ever think about that?

00:13:13

PK: I think about it a lot. I think when the economy is bad, my business is lots better. You know my hamburgers are \$1.25. Cheeseburgers are \$1.60. That’s just unheard of, you know, and I think it ties with the economy a lot.

00:13:33

You know when people are making money and—they can go anywhere to eat. You know they can go to Corinth. They can go to Savannah [Tennessee]. They can go to Jackson. And I tell my girls all the time you know they have to have a reason to come in here. They can eat anywhere. But a lot of folks just like the burgers and a lot of folks just like—they can come in here and no matter what’s on the menu, if I have it I’ll cook it for you. You know it doesn’t matter to me what you want. It’s not you know you can get pancakes this and this is all you can get, well here you can get biscuits and gravy and pancakes if that’s what you want. You know so I think that catering to people’s needs or—or what they want to eat, you know there’s Mexican

right over there, there’s Chinese down there, there’s vegetables out there, but you know we—we have slugburgers and we have breakfast.

00:14:32

But now we have all kinds of sandwiches, you know we—you don’t have to do that. But the slugburgers I would say would be half of my business and—and I really—I like that, I appreciate that, yeah.

00:14:47

SW: Did you—I mean did you grow up eating slug burgers here in the county?

00:14:50

PK: I did when my—I was a little girl. My mother was a nurse at the hospital and they’d get paid once a month. And I have eight brothers and sisters and my mother—my father was sick when we moved back here. And mother would stop on payday and she would get a dozen burgers and a carton of Cokes. Now you know that Coke in a carton comes six bottles in the carton. You got nine children and a mother and everybody wants to drink out of those bottles. You know I don’t know how in the world she did that but you know her—her math was better than mine I guess. [*Laughs*]

00:15:38

But yeah, we used to come in here and she’d get—. Of course now she didn’t bring us in here. You can imagine a—a woman with nine children does not go anywhere with those children except they’re confined to the car. Nowadays you know that would be child abuse wouldn’t it? You know you leave the children in the car and they’re—everybody is like no, you didn’t do that

you know. But I can remember when it was, “Don’t you get out of this car. Just roll the windows down and I won’t be long.”

00:16:08

SW: Who—who—what was—so you actually—your mother came here to get slugburgers, this place here?

00:16:13

PK: Uh-hm.

00:16:14

SW: Can you tell me a little bit about the history of this place before you bought it and what you know of it?

00:16:18

PK: It—they opened it in the early ‘60s [1960s] and it belonged to a man named Buster. And—

00:16:29

SW: Do you know his last name?

00:16:29

PK: No, I can’t think of his last name. He came in here a couple of times after I had bought it and he told—he sort of threatened me. He said, “Girl if I was twenty years younger I’d go in business here and I’d run you out of business.” And I just smiled at him and said, “You want to start today,” you know? I was teasing him that he could just buy it then but I wouldn’t have sold it for nothing. But he—he liked to aggravate me and—and then he sold it to Oliver

Leonard and his wife, Betty, and Oliver got cancer and died. And then Miss Betty got cancer.

She got breast cancer and she thought it was more than she could do. And she sold it to a girl that worked for her in high school. I think the girl had said, you know, if you ever decide to sell this I want first chance at it.

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And this girl was a Memphis policeman and her husband was a Memphis policeman. And so they weren't working here and it wasn't thriving. It was going down the tubes. You could almost hear the sucking sound of it going down the drain. And—and she asked me if I would manage it for her. And then had bought it as kind of a retirement thing so when they retired from the police they'd have a place to go, but this is a really small town and I don't know why McDonalds can do it or Burger King can do it but in a small place like this if your name is on the building they want to see your face every now and then.

00:18:05

And so it—it was just going really bad. Lots of days it wouldn't even do \$200 and which is pretty poor. If you're paying the employees you can't pay them on that. And so I really liked it, I—I panicked but I was—I really liked it. And so I bought it and then I—when I bought it I called Miss Betty who had owned it before and I asked her, I said, “Would you come to work for me and show me how to do this?” And she said, “Well, I might be a little bossy.” And I said, “Well I'll just treat you like I do my mother.” And she said, “How is that?” And I said, “Well I'll just listen to everything you've got to say and then I'll go on and do what I wanted to.” And so she laughed and she worked for me for about twenty-three years.

00:19:05

You know she didn’t work full-time, no forty hours, but she worked two days a week and—and I think she was—she was in her 80s when she quit. And she’d come back to work right now if her knee wasn’t bothering her so bad. And I think she’s ninety-seven now, yeah. She—and she and my mother used to play together as children. I didn’t know that until after you know I had bought the place and she began to tell me stories about my mother when she was a kid and—but come to find out they had been great friends when she was a kid.

00:19:41

SW: That’s amazing.

00:19:42

PK: Yeah.

00:19:44

SW: And now right now how many—how many employees do you have now here who work for you?

00:19:49

PK: I have two full-time employees and a part-time employee. My daughter-in-law who is not here today and Jo Jo, they are the full-time and then Miss Billie is part-time. Miss Billie is seventy-six. Yeah, I think that’s pretty awesome.

00:20:11

SW: Do you know people say things often that you know that’s what keeps people going is like they—they don’t retire, they keep working. I wonder if there is—like you’re talking about Miss Betty you know the fact that she’s ninety-seven now and she would work her if her knee wasn’t bothering her, I think that says a lot.

00:20:28

PK: Well now I—I found that I like to hire older people because they know what it is to work. They’ve done a lot harder stuff than this. And they’re dependable and they don’t call in and they show up on time. And like I said, Miss Betty was a lot older than me when she came to work for me. Miss Billie is older than me. And—and I just had several employees that stayed ten years, you know five years, and Miss Betty like—well Miss Betty, she was here twenty-something years and so I—I find I like older employees.

00:21:12

I like the young ones with that—is it OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder] that they have? I really like to have some young ones that have that ‘cause they just can’t stand for anything to be out of order, you know and they’re just—just so compulsive. So I like that too.

[Laughs] It would be nice if you could find an older person with that. [Laughs]

00:21:34

SW: We could—we could start looking.

00:21:36

PK: Look for it, yeah, put an ad in the paper for an older person with OCD. [Laughs]

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SW: I bet someone is out there.

00:21:42

PK:I bet they are.

00:21:43

SW: I just have a couple more questions, is that okay? Do you have time for a couple more questions?

00:21:46



PK: Sure, yeah.

00:21:47

SW: I’m wondering if you could talk a little bit about—I mean we don’t ask people to divulge—give away their recipes or anything like that, but do you—I was talking to Harold outside a little bit and he was talking about the soy meal. So your slugburgers you make them with soy meal?

00:22:01

PK: Soybean grits.

00:22:05

SW: Okay.

00:22:04

PK: Is what it’s called. And—and that looks like real coarse cornmeal without the flour stuff in it and we—we use that and flour and water and shortening and ground beef. Now I think that the—the old way to do it, they used—what they did was butcher shops made it and they would use pork scraps and beef scraps to make it. And—and but about probably twenty-five years ago they stopped us, we used to go to Corinth to C.F. Gray’s the butcher shop and get our meat. And they stopped us from going across state line because Mr. Gray would not give up his recipe. The—they started having the Slug Burger Festival and they got a new health [health inspector] man and he wanted the recipe. He wanted to know what was in it. Well Mr. Gray said, “No, I—I won’t give that to you.” And he said, “Okay,” and they went through his files and

found out who he was selling his meat to and they stopped him from selling it to restaurants. And then our health man came to us and said, “You can't go across state line and transport meat, uninspected meat,” and so that scared me half to death because that’s half of my business, you know and I—I’m just sweating turnips. And—and I’m thinking *what am I going to do?* But my son happened to be dating a girl whose grandmother used to have her own slugburger place on one of the back streets.

00:23:43

SW: Do you know what it was called?

00:23:44

PK: Miss Armor’s and so I called Miss Armor and she really liked my son. And I said, “Miss Armor, do you remember how to make slugburgers?” And she said, “Why sure honey.” And I said, “Would you sell me your recipe?” And she said, “No, but I’ll come up there and show you how.” And I said, “You would?” And she said, “Sure.” I’m just—I’ve got so much relief, you know, I’m thinking thank you God, thank you God, thank you God.

00:24:17

When she came up here and we got a big stainless steel bowl and she made hers with her hands. Well I had to have considerable more meat than that you know and so I got the recipe and I increased it you know and until I got it like I wanted it and then we had to find a way to mix that ‘cause you can't mix that much meat with your hands. I mean you know you’d be walking around like this. [*Gestures*]

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And so we—we tried a five—let’s see, we had a stainless steel, it used to be a beer keg and we had a—a drill and a—one of the things that you stir sheet rock mud with and we tried it

that way but you—we couldn’t control that thing. It was just you know jumping everywhere. So we’re still sweating turnips, how are we going to do this, you know? And so I went and bought a Kitchen Aid mixer and I’ve been using a Kitchen Aid mixer ever since. I—but now it takes two batches. I make it in five-pound batches and put two together so I have a ten-pound bag of—of the meat. People are always trying to buy it raw. But that’s against health food rules.

00:25:40

Now Mr. Gray could sell it to you to take home to cook. But he couldn’t sell it to me to take to the restaurant to cook and sell it again. And so—but I could buy the grits from him, bring that across the state line and make my own burgers, and then sell them, but I cannot sell it raw.

00:26:03

And Mr. Gray was really a sweet man and I—I bought my meat and then made—he could sell me grits and so I would go down there and buy the grits. And he got sick and then I was worried again *what in the world am I going to do*, you know? And before he died he told his wife, he said, “You give Miss Pat the address and the telephone number of the place to buy the grits. But you tell her not to go alone down in Memphis ‘cause it’s in a bad part of town.” And I thought that was so sweet that he’s dying but he’s thinking about me. You know and so when it came time for me to buy grits, I called the place and—and I—you know I’m asking about directions and all this stuff. And—and I’m thinking you know I—*I just really don’t want to do this ‘cause I—I didn’t have a pickup truck so I’d have to borrow a truck*. It would take me all day to go to Memphis and come back. And it’s in a bad part of town, so I probably would have to take somebody with me. And come to find out you cannot buy two or four or six bags. You have to buy twenty fifty-pound bags of soybean grits.

00:27:25

SW: So that’s 1,000 pounds?

00:27:26

PK: Yes.

00:27:28

SW: *[Laughs]*

00:27:28

PK: A thousand pounds. So I was calling this lady, her name is Bonna, and I was talking to her and I said, “You know I just—I just really don’t want to come up there.” I says, “Is there any other way that I could get this?” And she said, “Well we can send it on a truck.” My eyes just lit up, you know I had won the sweepstakes. And I said, “How much will it cost to send it on a truck?” And she said, “About \$89.” And I said, “Ship that today if you’ve got it,” you know ‘cause you know I was just worried half to death and \$89 didn’t sound bad to me since you know I’d had to took off all day. So I would have missed work or I’d had to pay somebody to work my place and then I’d had to buy gas for somebody’s pickup and got them to go with me down there and \$89 looked like a bargain. But still what do you do with twenty fifty-pound bags?

00:28:25

And so there’s another little slug burgerplace back here [referring to Brenda’s Snack Shack] that belongs to a friend of mine, Brenda Taylor, and I called her. And I said, “Brenda, you make your own slugburgers don’t you?” She said, “Yeah.” And she said, “What are we going to do? Mr. Gray has died.” And I said, “I can order it but we have to get twenty fifty-pound bags.” I said, “I don’t have any place to put twenty fifty-pound bags.” And she said, “What if we half it?” And I said, “Would you do that?” And she said, “Yes.” And I said, “Well

it’s going to cost about \$89,” and she said, “That will be cheap.” And I thought *Oh, here’s a girl after my own heart*, you know.

00:29:01

And so we’ve been doing that and she gets ten bags and I get ten bags. And that’s pretty hard to find a place to put ten fifty-pound bags of something.

00:29:14

SW: Yeah, where do you put it?

00:29:15

PK: I have a room in the back and I have a stainless steel table that has a shelf under it and we just stack them two and two and two and then try to fill the bin up, you know so it—it’s been tough because this is—you can tell, this is a really small place.

00:29:33

SW: How long does all of that last you for?

00:29:36

PK: We have to order about twice a year. But I will use my bags and then probably half of hers and so I—I use about thirty fifty-pound bags a year of that stuff.

00:29:54

SW: Hmm.

00:29:54

PK: It’s pretty cool. People will say, “Will you give us your recipe,” and I say, “Yes, I will.” And they say, “You will?” And I said, “Sure.” “Well why are you going to give us the

recipe?” I said, “Well most people don’t want to order twenty fifty-pound bags of grit.” And they said, “We can't order that much.” I said, “Well there’s no need of giving you the recipe then.”

00:30:15

SW: Have to go to Memphis to get it, too.

00:30:16

PK: Yeah, you got to go to Memphis. You got to get twenty fifty-pound bags. What you going to do, you know? *Well we just wanted enough to make* you know—. And I said, “I’m sorry.” But now we do—we will cook the—the patties and pack them up and—and sell them. We have sent—we’ve sent 150 to Tampa, Florida one time.

00:30:37

SW: I heard you telling someone about that earlier.

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PK: Yeah.

00:30:41

SW: Because people miss them.

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PK: They miss them. They’re away from home and they want them. We’ve sent some to New York and to Lake Tahoe and Denver, Colorado. This girl that was down here that was talking, you know so much and so loud? Her stepfather was going and he came in here one morning and—and he said, “I’m going on the plane to see her and I can't go without slugburgers.” And I said, “You think they will let you on the airplane with food?” And he said, “I don’t know but I’m going to try.”

00:31:10

And so we fixed them but we—we put them in plastic bags and tied a knot in it, you know so nobody could smell it or anything. And—and he put it in a little carry-on bag, you know with some ice stuff in it, and so there they went to Denver, Colorado. And we have served them—we had a couple who were in school in Nashville and every time their parents would go they’d stop and get them a bag and take it to them. And when the kids would come home, they would get a bag and carry it back with them.

00:31:43

And that’s really two stories I guess. They shared them with their neighbor. And one day when they were coming home, he wanted to see where those burgers he had been eating came from. And so he came in and—and ate his fill and he said, “Oh it’s a lot better sitting here isn’t it?” I said, “I don’t know if it’s ‘cause you get them fresh or it’s—it’s all the stuff going around.” My sister calls this dinner theater. And one day he showed up with the airport car and four strange men. And I said, “What are you doing driving the airport car?” And I’m nosy, I—I’m nosy. “What are you doing driving the airport car?” He said, “Well, he said these guys have never had a slugburger. And so we just flew down to get a slugburger.” And I said, “You flew from Nashville to get slugburgers?” He said, “Well they hadn’t never had one.” I thought *wow, that’s pretty cool.*

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And but the couple who were going to school, when they got married they asked me if they could have slugburgers for their reception. So—

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SW: And so did you do it?

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PK: Yes, I did. I thought that was—

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SW: How did you make?

00:32:54

PK: —cool. Oh it was just about two dozen but they used them like hors d'oeuvres. They cut them in fourths you know and stuck [*Laughs*] a—

00:33:01

SW: That’s so awesome.

00:33:02

PK: [*Laughs*]

00:33:03

SW: That’s one of the best—I think that’s the best slugburger story I’ve heard so far.

00:33:05

PK: That—it was pretty cool, yeah. We—we enjoyed—we had a man come in one morning like at 4:30 and he said, “Are you cooking slugburgers yet?” And I said, “Yeah, we’re cooking them.” And he said, “Can I have about four?” And I said, “Yes, what are you in such a hurry about?” And he said, “My daughter is having a baby and I’m flying to Memphis and she wants slugburgers.” And I said, “Hot diggity dog!” You know and she showed up a few months later with that baby. She said, “This is the cause of that slugburger craving.” I thought *oh man*. So in twenty-eight years a lot of cool stuff happens, you know.

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SW: That is so neat.



00:33:42

PK: You know and I—I enjoy all of it. You know it’s—it’s cool. People—most people are really, really sweet and really, really nice. We had this lady who came in one day and I was cooking them right there in the front. And if I don’t recognize your face I’ll ask you do—if you order a cheeseburger, “Do you want an all-beef burger or do you want one of our little slugburgers?” And so I asked her. And she was real indignant and she said, “Well a beefburger of course.”

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And I—I wanted to say, “That’s all right, I’ll make more money off of that than I will the slugburger,” you know. But I just ordered it for her and it was Saturday and we were just sending them out by the sack-full you know and I could see those wheels turning. You know, *I’m missing something here*. And she said, “Excuse me, would you fix me one of those hamburgers while I wait on that other hamburger?” And I said, “Yes, ma’am, I will.” So I fixed her one and gave it to her. And she just soaked that thing up and in a minute she said, “Excuse me,” and I said, “Yes, ma’am?” And she said, “Would you fix me another one of those and wrap that one up for my dog?” So her—her whole demeanor changed, you know. She was so indignant at first, you know. And I like to watch that change too. You know this is just a little dump but it’s my dump, you know. And I like people to be comfortable and I like them to want to come back.

00:35:06

And so it delights me when some come in and they’re real [*Sighs*] you know got that nose turned up and it—it’s fun to watch. We had some people come in from New Orleans. And now my favorite thing to tell that they’re made out of is I usually say I only use the ones [*referring to actually slugs*] that are this long. [*Gestures*] And—and they were just gasping and carrying on.

“Oh this is—oh no, I couldn’t eat that.” And I said, “Y’all shut up.” And they looked at me and I said, “Y’all are from New Orleans. You people will eat anything.” *[Laughs]* Of course you know and then I’d—I tell them that, well first I say that’s not true. Then I say we’ll use the short ones, too. And then I have to tell them no, no, no, we don’t have any slugs in our burgers.

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We—we’ve always called them cerealburgers here in Selmer, but when the Slugburger Festival got started then it—people changed what they asked for.

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SW: Interesting.

00:36:06

PK: You know uh-huh.

00:36:07

SW: So do you—do you know why? Were they made of cereal? I mean—

00:36:12

PK: Well the soybean grits and the flour is like cereal. And so that—that’s where that came from.

00:36:19

SW: That’s so interesting. I was going to ask you like you know we are not too far from Corinth and I know there’s a big deal about the Slugburger Festival there. And I wondered how like if—if you know the slug burgers became cerealburgers, I mean it was a tradition everywhere. I think Corinth sort of tries to take—it seems like—everyone points to Corinth but I just wondered if there was a tradition here independently in Selmer and then it sort of got—?

00:36:46

PK: No, it—it came from Corinth. But basically you know this is a really poor community and used to people would come to town on Saturday and they’d stay from early in the morning ‘til late at night. And so a hamburger was a nickel. And when hamburgers were a nickel then you can afford to feed a large family. And back then they had large families. And so this was something that they could feed the whole family and they could stay all day and maybe feed them two times, you know. And it wouldn’t break them down.

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I know my husband, we used to have a theater down here on the corner but there’s a museum there now. And he would—his grandfather would give him a quarter and you could go to the movies, buy a box of popcorn and a Coke, and for that quarter. But now when I went to school, when I finished high school, I could come down here to the café and eat—you could get a cheeseburger and a Coke for twenty cents. And then you could—that nickel left over out of that quarter, you could buy your lunch in the lunchroom for a quarter, or you—and that nickel you could go down to the end of the block to the drugstore down there and get a dip of ice-cream or a candy bar for that nickel.

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So you know it’s pretty important. Money is hard to come by. I remember when Cokes were a nickel and they went to six cents and I was just crushed. I was—I knew I couldn’t get that other penny out of my parents you know. And then after that they went to a dime, you know and—and kids are thinking *oh I’ll never get another—never get another Coke or a grape* or you know whatever it is you want. Kids—you know you just know you don’t have any money and it’s going to be hard to get out of them.

00:38:41

SW: Well Miss Pat you have been so wonderful and I could sit her and ask you questions for two more hours but I don’t want to eat up the rest of your day. But I just wanted to ask you if there’s anything else you think is important for people to know about your business or the history here, something that I didn’t think to ask you or—?

00:39:02

PK: I don’t—no, I can’t think of anything. Only that Mr. Oliver Leonard could come back alive and come here and he could find everything where he left it. Well I’ll take that back. This year the health department has decided that the meat can no longer be kept in the meat crisper up in the upper part of the refrigerator. The meat has to be kept on the bottom in the vegetable crisper and the eggs have to be kept on the bottom in the crisper, which is—it’s not good ‘cause we always kept it in the meat drawer. We even kept it on the same side of the drawer that he always kept it in.

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Now I’ve added a toaster oven and a microwave. The back room there didn’t—was not—it had ends in it but the middle—it didn’t have a floor in it and it had a dirt floor in it. And—and my husband, the—the bathroom was built like an outdoor toilet. You had to go out that door and walk across into the corner and—and open you know—go to the bathroom.

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So we closed it and put it down at the other end and put the floor in and—and but he—he could be—he could feel real comfortable about coming back to—. It hasn’t changed much, you know maybe the color of paint, but now I enjoy hearing stories about *my grandpa used to bring me here*, you know and that’s from the old people. You know and—and that’s always cool. The kids like to sit on the stools you know. And ladies, not so much, but yeah the—we have—most

of our business is probably men but that’s all right, too. But yeah, we just—we just love it. I haven’t done anything in my life for a longer period of time that I liked more besides have children and—and be married. I’ve done those two things longer than I’ve been here but that’s been the only thing that I’ve done that long that—that I’ve liked as well.

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SW: Hmm, I think that’s a really good point to end on.

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PK: All right.

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SW: Thank you so much for doing this Miss Pat, I really appreciate you letting me get in your hair all day.

00:41:17

PK: You’re welcome. You haven’t bothered us a bit hon.

00:41:20

END INTERVIEW