

Donald Williams & Kevin Lamm
Parker's Barbecue - Wilson, NC

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Interviewer: Rien T. Fertel
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[Begin Donald Williams & Kevin Lamm — Parker's Barbecue]

00:00:02

Rien Fertel: All right; this is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is Monday, November 27, 2011. I'm on the North Carolina BBQ Trail and it is quarter until 10:00 in the morning. I'm here at Parker's Barbecue in Wilson, North Carolina and I have two of the—two gentlemen introduce themselves; start right now.

00:00:29

Donald Williams: I'm Donald Williams, May—May 29, '46 was born and one of the owners.

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Kevin Lamm: I've Kevin Lamm, born October 10, 1971 and I'm forty years old and one of the owners here at Parker's.

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RF: And let's—let's jump right in with founding of the business. How old is Parker's Barbecue?

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DW: Sixty-five years old.

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RF: So when was—what year was it founded?

00:01:00

DW: Opened up in '46, August—August 25 of 1946.

00:01:06

RF: Okay; seventy-four years old?

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DW: Sixty-five.

00:01:12

RF: Sorry; sixty-five years old, and tell me about the—the founders. There were several founders as I understand.

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DW: There were just three of them, three—we call them Parker Brothers is what we call them. It was Ralph, Graham, and Henry. And they—they—when they come out of the Service they decided to go in the barbecue business because they worked in the barbecue business in Greenville—wasn't it Greenville?

00:01:32

KL: Uh-hm.

00:01:32

DW: What was the name of that thing?

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KL: Respass [Brothers].

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DW: Respass that's where two of them worked at so they decided to go in the business for their self. So they went looking for land and come over here and the man helped them get this land, and they started building and they cut the lumber off of their farm, their daddy's farm and brought it down here and built it their self.

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RF: So they were—they were—how old were the Parker brothers at the time?

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DW: Now Ralph when he—when he opened up he was twenty-three—twenty-three years old. And I think Graham would have probably been twenty-six—

00:02:10

KL: That's about right.

00:02:10

DW: Henry was probably about a year or two older than him, right? He would have probably been about just a little bit—about twenty-eight.

00:02:16

RF: And you said they were just out of the Service. Did they—what kind of Service did they see? This is right after the War.

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DW: See, Ralph didn't; he didn't go to the Service. It was Graham and Henry, and I forgot exactly what—they've told us a lot about it but I couldn't tell you exactly when they got out. They wanted to go into business for their self. That's all I know.

00:02:38

RF: So three members of the Parker family go into business, start Parker's Barbecue because they had worked in an earlier barbecue place in Greenville, where did they come from and what did their family do?

00:02:50

DW: Well they grewed—they grewed up around Greenville. What was it, the Monkey's Den down there they called it? It was a place down there they called Monkey's Den.

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RF: Is that a neighborhood in Greenville or area?

00:03:00

DW: It was a neighborhood outside of Greenville somewheres called the Monkey's Den and they grewed up around that. And on the farm they just—they were raised on the farm.

00:03:08

RF: Do you know what kind of farm it was?

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DW: Just like a tobacco farm and corn, tobacco and all that there.

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RF: And so they opened in '46 and—and what have you heard about those early days and years in business?

00:03:25

DW: Well, I knowed at first you know they didn't know if they were going to make it or not. And then Ralston Purina opened up in '54 and that's really what they say put them on their feet, because when they got through serving them 17,000 people at seventy-five-cent a plate they said—they said it was the biggest check they'd ever seen. **[Laughs]** So they paid off all the bills and they didn't owe anything from then on. It was uphill.

00:03:48

RF: And so this is Ralston Purina, the—the pet food company?

00:03:51

DW: Yeah; that's right. That's—that's it.

00:03:53

RF: And so they attribute this factory to their kind of boom?

00:04:01

DW: That way, you know, when everybody—everybody come from everywhere when the grand opening was. And so they'd eat the barbecue, so the people started coming here eating and so it just kept growing and kept growing.

00:04:13

RF: And so that first kind of decade in business what was on the menu?

00:04:17

DW: The same thing.

00:04:17

KL: Same thing.

00:04:17

RF: So barbecue and chicken?

00:04:19

DW: The only thing that has ever been added is string beans and hushpuppies and fish.

00:04:24

RF: String beans, hushpuppies and fish, okay—.

00:04:25

DW: That's the only added—in sixty-five years. [*Laughs*]

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RF: Okay; so what stories—well, tell us what happened to—to the brothers. Tell us about that history.

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DW: What do you mean now?

00:04:41

RF: Well, where did—there was Graham, Ralph, and Henry. How long did they all stay in the business, until they passed or we know one of them is still alive?

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DW: Well, one of them is still alive, Mr. Henry he passed you know—while the business was still going on and then that was '87 when he passed. That's when we got it. Then Ralph and Graham sold it to us. And then Graham, he—he died in '99 or '98?

00:05:14

KL: Ninety-eight.

00:05:14

DW: Ninety-eight; and then Ralph, you know, like you said, he's still living and he still comes out here and drinks a cup of coffee.

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KL: You can get some more stories from him.

00:05:22

DW: Oh, yeah.

00:05:24

KL: If we want to know it we have to ask him now when he comes in.

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DW: He still bitches a little bit. [*Laughs*]

00:05:30

RF: So how often does—does Ralph Parker come in to have some coffee?

00:05:32

DW: Every day except Saturday and Sunday.

00:05:35

RF: Every day except Saturday and Sunday and what time does he come in? Does he come in the morning?

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DW: Ten o'clock—ten o'clock in the morning.

00:05:40

RF: Ten o'clock in the morning.

00:05:41

KL: Yeah; these old retired guys they come every morning. Of course the table has narrowed down, but it's about three people. But they come in and they tell us the old stories.

00:05:51

RF: What kind of old stories does he tell? What are some of your favorites about the early life in this restaurant or anything?

00:05:59

DW: Well, the only thing I know that he told us is just they had to work. I mean all three of them had to work. There weren't no resting. They had to cook the pigs when they first opened up and do everything, wait on the customers, and cook. When Ralph first started cooking now he had a frying pan, a big frying pan; he cooked in a frying pan. [*Laughs*] I'd hate to know they had to do that now.

00:06:26

RF: And so you said Ralph did most of the cooking.

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DW: Well he done all the cooking. He done all the cooking.

00:06:33

RF: And the other two, what did they do?

00:06:33

DW: The other two were the PR men, looking at the customers coming through the front door, right.

00:06:38

RF: What kind of—what kind of man is Ralph? Can you—can you just describe him?

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DW: Oh heck, he's a good—a good man. I mean I'd rather work for him than anybody. That's why, like I said, when he was here everybody was going to work. There weren't no lagging around.

00:06:53

RF: And Mr. Williams, what year did you start working here?

00:06:56

DW: In '63.

00:06:59

RF: So '63, and how old were you?

00:07:01

DW: Seventeen.

00:07:02

RF: You were seventeen years old, and all three members of the family were still here?

00:07:08

DW: Oh yeah, oh yeah. They were still here for a right good while.

00:07:10

RF: Okay, and—and how was it working with these three?

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DW: Oh, I enjoyed working with all three of them because, you know, they were—they were good men. But as long as you done your job everything was fine. But don't be lagging around.

Do your work. [*Laughs*] Like I said, I'd always rather work with Ralph than the other two because I knew everybody was going to do their job when they was here.

00:07:35

See, it used to all three of them used to work together, every day. And then they started working one week and off two. So there would be one of them here at all times, but it was just work one week and then off for two weeks.

00:07:51

RF: So you have two brothers and the other was a cousin, right?

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DW: Right; more like a cousin. He—he was more like I say an adopted—in other words, he was —what's the name of that place—that home he was in? He was in a children's home, so they got him and from then on everything went good.

00:08:12

RF: And did they—from what you saw did they—did they get along? You have three brothers running a—?

00:08:17

DW: They got along when everything went right. **[Laughs]** But if somebody didn't do something right they'd be fussing with one another. I mean but they got along though. And you know, they're just like me; if I get mad with somebody I'm going to settle—I'm going to tell them and then it's over with. I don't want to hear nothing else about it. Then we go on like nothing ain't happened.

00:08:37

RF: And so you started working here in '63. You were seventeen years old. Was it a job when you were in high school? Were you out of high school?

00:08:42

DW: That's when I was in high school; started when I was in high school. I wasn't even looking for a job. See I was helping daddy farm and—and I was in school. But Mr. Henry come down there, the truck give out, and my brother worked here before I did. And the truck give out so they come there to get a chain and then he saw me in the yard as I was getting the chain for him and he asked Larry; he said, "What does he do?" He said, "Helps Daddy." "Tell him to come on down here and go to work." *[Laughs]* So I come here and went to work. *[Laughs]*

00:09:10

RF: And tell me about your family farm, where it was and—and growing up on the farm.

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DW: It was right straight down 301 south from here—Parker's, about two miles ain't it Kevin?

00:09:18

KL: Uh-hm.

00:09:19

DW: About two miles. We farmed the Boyette land, Roland Boyette and JB Boyette's land.

00:09:27

RF: And what did you grow?

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DW: Tobacco, corn, oats, wheat, little cotton but back then they—they didn't grow a whole lot of cotton. We just quit growing cotton and now they're growing a whole lot of cotton.

00:09:39

RF: And what was—what was Wilson like? Describe Wilson growing up in Wilson.

00:09:44

DW: Well, it was a good time, a nice place to stay, and, you know, it was small, a whole lot smaller than what it is now but it's grewed but it's always been a nice place to stay. The people have always been nice.

00:10:00

RF: And so what was your first job here when you were seventeen?

00:10:02

DW: Waiting on tables. That's it; waiting on tables.

00:10:08

RF: And what was that like? So 1963 is this kind of beginning of a restaurant, you know; that's when people really started eating out and—and you have a car culture. What was working in the restaurant in the front of the house like in '63?

00:10:22

DW: Well '63, you know, working here when I was in high school I always had money in my pocket. I didn't have to ask Mama and Daddy for no money. I always had money in my pocket. And back in them days you know you get a check back in them days you're talking about a nickel, ten, fifteen, twenty-five cents; that was it. And if you got—ever got a dollar, you waited on somebody and got a dollar you remembered them when they walked back through that door.

[Laughs]

00:10:48

RF: And what did you save up your money to buy?

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DW: Well, a car.

00:10:51

RF: A car? What kind of car—

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DW: A car.

00:10:52

RF: —what was your first car?

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DW: My first car was a '61—'61 Chevrolet—'61 Chevrolet.

00:11:01

RF: And did—did Parker's Barbecue ever have drive-up service or car hop service?

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DW: No, no; uh-um they didn't—never had that. It was always a takeout. Like I say, now that little window there on the—behind the register here, that was the takeout window back in the days. You didn't have takeout back here, so later on they just built that and made a takeout door back there. And that helped things out a whole lot better. You didn't have all those people standing up here for takeout and people trying to get waited on. So that worked out good.

00:11:35

RF: And you were telling me, so you started here as a waiter and you eventually moved into the kitchen.

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DW: I moved into the kitchen. I moved into the kitchen, waiting on the back door, then moved over and took the fryer and started cooking and I cooked for about fifteen years. And then I started working out there back where they fixed all the vegetables and chopped the barbecue and

cooked the pigs and started working there too. And then—and then Ralph asked me one day or Graham because they had one to leave; would I come up front and start looking over the—helping to look over the guys?

00:12:08

So I did that and started helping looking over the guys. You know, at first I didn't want to because I—I enjoyed working back there. So I said, “I don't know.” Graham looked at me and said well, “I'll tell you what.” He said, “I know you don't want to go back out there but come on back out there and try it. If you don't like it you can come back to the kitchen.” And I said, “Okay. I sure will.” So I come out here and started looking over the boys and helping Bobby look over everything, and shucks. I looked at this and I said, “This is a pie job.” *[Laughs]* So that's where I stayed.

00:12:40

RF: And you were telling me what—you—you were telling me that Ralph ran the back of the house, the kitchen and that his—who ran the front and what did she say when you left the—the front originally?

00:12:49

DW: Ralph's wife wanted to know why—she got me to go to work in the kitchen and Ralph said, “Well, I needed somebody.” She said, “Well, you didn't have to get my best damn help.” *[Laughs]* So from there on and then, you know—there on, you know, when I come back out front to start helping take care Ralph looked at me and he said, “You know where you're supposed to be at lunchtime?” I said, “In the kitchen”; I said, “Yes, sir.” *[Laughs]*

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RF: What was his—Ralph's wife's name?

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DW: Ginny.

00:13:22

RF: And tell me when you started working here?

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KL: Well, I started here in about Summer of 1985.

00:13:28

RF: Summer of '85, and how old were you?

00:13:28

KL: I was fourteen. My sister, she worked the cash register so we come out here to see her, me and my family, and anyways Donald's partner at the time, Bobby Woodard, he—they got behind one day and so he sent word for me to come out here and work. So I started right there in the kitchen, what we call drawing tea, but I just made tea, you know, filling up cups of ice, pouring tea, all day. I done that for about a year.

00:13:55

Then I was able to come out front and start working and waiting on tables. And I done that and just kind of been back and forth all along working the kitchen some and stayed out front waiting on tables and kind of just being at the right place at the right time is how I fell in the groove with Donald and Bobby at that time, just stayed right here. After graduating high school, just stayed right here waiting on tables, so—.

00:14:20

RF: So you both worked waiting tables here. Tell me about that. I think it's one of the first things you notice when you walk into Parker's is a group of young men—tell me about that, how that came about and—and especially the kind of uniform that they wear.

00:14:33

DW: Well, you know, back in those days when they first opened up everybody in the restaurant wore a paper hat. All right; and that's what they stayed with and so that's what we stay with that paper hat and that apron. And, you know, they got to have a nice haircut, clean cut, no baggy pants, anything like that.

00:14:57

KL: Have a belt, no tennis shoes, socks, clean, you know, work shoes; we didn't never allow—or they never allowed tennis shoes, a dark work shoe, keep everybody uniformed and that's the reputation we try to hold right now and keep it going.

00:15:12

RF: So do many of these—these young guys, do they work here just a couple years while in high school or college?

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DW: Most of them are in high school and a lot of them, they all the way through college will work here. And then, you know, some of them would go on. And you had lawyers, doctors work out here; we got lawyers and doctors now. I mean that's—it's been—

00:15:33

KL: Mostly they guys, they leave, like—like he said. They'll work from the time they're fifteen until they graduate college and they will—they will always stay in touch. And even right now they'll come back and see us and it's fun to see where they've gone and what they've achieved. And now with Facebook, you know, you can check the Facebook. It's—it's fun to see—somebody started—somebody that's not even affiliated with Parker's in Wilson started a Facebook page. I think he lives in Roanoke, Virginia and, I mean, the last time I checked it was a couple thousand people, you know, just the comments you hear from all over the world and not just the United States. I mean there's people all over the world commenting like, you know: "A large combination. I wish I had one right now." You know, but anyways it's—it's a fun place to work. You meet people from all walks of life every day; it's a fun place.

00:16:21

DW: You would be surprised of the people that come back that worked here and thank us for what we've done for them. They said if it hadn't been for y'all we probably wouldn't be where we're at.

00:16:34

RF: Do you have any old waiters here that have sent their sons to work here? Do you have any kind of family lineages? Have you ever had that?

00:16:44

KL: Oh, we have people right—we have guys now, like you're saying, that worked here you know that their fathers did. That's what you're saying? We sure do. They—they'll bring them in and it's almost automatic that we're going to hire them because we know their work ethic and where they come from and, you know—you know, who—

00:16:59

DW: And they know they got to work because daddy has already told them you're going to have to work now if you're going to stay there. *[Laughs]*

00:17:05

KL: Their daddy knows the process from working with the Parkers and when they come in they said you work them and you get on them if they don't do right. And that's how it goes.

00:17:14

RF: And how do they split up? The restaurant is large; there's lots of dining rooms that have been added on over the years. How do the—how do those waiters split up the—the service? Is it by room or is it as people come in?

00:17:26

KL: Yeah; what they do—we got seven full-time waiters, so every—Monday through Friday we do what we call a split. And they split that money seven ways; one might take your order, another one might run it out, and one might come by and check your table. But it's seven ways and they split it. And at nighttime the guys work on their own, so what—whoever they—you know, they line up at this—at this counter, whoever they wait on they get to keep.

00:17:54

DW: Most of the weekend is split—

00:17:56

KL: That's why they're running around here because they're trying to take care of everybody, you know, because they know that's what pays them that tip on the table.

00:18:03

DW: Well this guy waits on the table—it's not—it's not his table; it's everybody's table, so everybody checks him.

00:18:14

RF: And tell me have you ever had a—a waitress, a woman?

00:18:19

KL: Well all right; here—we would hire—I mean, you know, the Parkers, I mean I've seen the cashiers run out of here and wait on some tables if we get backed up. Waiting on tables ain't all the guys do. At the end of the day, them hogs we showed you outside, we're going to send one of these guys out there to put them pigs on, and for example, we put on you know—well night before last it was twenty-six pigs, so well, that's fifty-two halves, right? So most—most women that come in, they just want to wait on the tables. They can't do the heavy lifting and that's part of the—you know, that's part of the job description is a lot of heavy lifting and so that's kind of how we, you know—

00:19:03

DW: Just like waiting on tables and not the only job they got. They got—

00:19:05

KL: That's right.

00:19:08

DW: —they do everything but them in the kitchen, they're going to the kitchen to wait on the backdoor and fix orders back there. If there ain't nobody back there they'll go out back, but they put pigs on in the back.

00:19:17

RF: All right; and let's—let's start on the pigs since we're going there. **[Laughs]** And let's kind of go step-by-step. First, where do the pigs come from and—and how often are they—do they arrive here?

00:19:31

KL: Well, we can—we get them about four days a week. They come from Brewer Meats, Steve Brewer and his family and then we have—we buy some from Bailey Meats also, which is right here in Bailey. But like I say, we—well Donald had a—they had—the Parkers had a hog farm for many years and then Donald ended up acquiring that—him and his partner and what, you closed that about five years ago?

00:19:56

DW: Probably about four or five years ago we closed it. It was really costing us more to raise that pig and pay for everything than what we could get the pig for from them.

00:20:10

RF: And why is that; is that changes in economy or changes in farming?

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DW: Well a lot of it has got to be because of the farming because of corn shot up so high.

00:20:22

KL: It's just better, you know; it's a lot easier for us. We've got two suppliers we—we can call them and they're going to take care of us. We like them, you know—they know what weight we're looking for and most time they're real consistent as far as that.

00:20:35

DW: They don't give us a little 100-pound pig and then give us 150-pound pig. Most times they're right there together.

00:20:41

KL: You can't put a small with the big with the hours we're cooking, so I mean, you'll burn the small one up so they know what we're looking—and they've been good to us.

00:20:50

RF: So these are whole hogs. You do whole hog barbecue. How much do the pigs weigh when they come in?

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KL: Well about 110—anywhere from 110 to 120 pounds.

00:21:00

DW: Yeah; that's dressed weight—dressed weight.

00:21:03

RF: And when they're—when they arrive are they arrived full or split down the middle?

00:21:08

DW: They already split them. They know that's the way we want them so they split them.

00:21:12

KL: Cut the head off and the front foot and then we just hang them on the back foot and, like I say, every night—there's not a night we—we do not miss one night cooking pigs. We just can't; that's how we do. We have some—we're open—well we have somebody here twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

00:21:30

RF: So tell me when the pigs go on during the day and—and the process of—on the grill.

00:21:35

KL: Well we put them on about 8 o'clock at night. We'll send one of these guys when they end up you know getting through working and waiting on tables, we'll—we'll just pick one and they'll ask us how many we want on. They'll go out there and they'll physically put them on. And then they're through for the day but they go on about 8:00 or 8:30 at night. The night—the two nighttime guys come in; they'll light them up and they'll watch them up all night. And we, like I say, we allow them about ten hours—ten, eleven hours. And they'll just watch them and they'll make sure you know they don't burn up. And they stay in; they clean the kitchen. All them fryers you saw, they filter all the grease out every night. You just can't miss it; I mean you got to be consistent. And so that's what they do.

00:22:16

RF: And tell me about the process of putting them on the—on the pit. Are they skin-side up, down?

00:22:22

KL: It is skin-side up and they stay skin-side up. And like I say, that hood you saw—it'll come—after about an hour they'll leave the heat on for about what an hour; they'll let that hog get warm all the way through then they'll drop the hood on it and they'll set the temperature like they want it and really just hang around. You got to have them here. You can't just light them up and leave.

00:22:45

RF: And—and why is that?

00:22:46

KL: Just in case of a fire. So we want to make sure somebody is here with them.

00:22:53

DW: We want them to stay from 300 to 325 degrees. That's where they keep it at.

00:22:57

RF: Have you ever had a fire?

00:22:59

KL: Yes, sir; probably about eight or nine years ago and we—well let's see. We lost I think it was thirteen or fourteen pigs that night. It was one—it was the back part of that room, where you saw the pits. We were able to salvage the front part, so we had about eleven or twelve hogs to go on for a Sunday. It was on a Saturday night. So that Sunday morning, a day just like today when we came in all we had was half of what we normally have. So we run out of barbecue that day about 3:30—four o'clock. And we just couldn't help it. And they couldn't help it. You know, the pigs—what happened, the grease was dripping on the—on that burner and he happened to step outside and he happened to see it, so thank the Lord they got here and they stopped it in that back room. That's the only—I do know of that one time we had a fire.

00:23:48

DW: I know they had some when they were here, but—just like they were just burning there at the pit; that was it.

00:23:55

RF: And tell me about the—the gas pits, how long they've been in service and who made them?

00:24:01

KL: I know Mr. Parker and them they said, you know, because we still ask these—I love to hear the stories and in the morning time they—the picture on the wall I showed you, for so many years they hauled wood in here. And they just said it—it just got to the point they just couldn't

keep up. So he said it didn't take them long and when he says long I'm thinking what—seven or eight—ten years?

00:24:19

DW: Late '50s when they put in gas.

00:24:22

KL: They went strictly with LP gas and have been with it ever since.

00:24:25

RF: And what were their first pits like? Have—do y'all know; have they told you—was it brick, was it in the ground?

00:24:30

DW: [Unintelligible] the first pits they had. It was just something that was there probably like a brick thing with a bar all across them and put the coals up under the pigs. That's the only way it could have been really—about like you'd cook something you know at the house like that picture on the wall there with that pit in the wall. But they just had some kind of cement pit there and then they wanted to do away with it when they wanted to go with gas.

00:24:56

RF: And so the pits they use now they had them built in the '50s?

00:25:00

DW: Probably late '50s, late '50s because that picture there was in '52 and they were still cooking with wood. And then Ralph said it didn't take—take him long to figure out they made gas. [*Laughs*]

00:25:09

RF: And are they the same pits in operation for over fifty years?

00:25:13

DW: Oh yeah, oh some of them are, yeah. He—you have to keep, you know, fixing them once in a while but, you know, most of them are.

00:25:21

RF: Here's a question. Who do you call to fix a pit that's over 50 years old? Who knows how to do that?

00:25:26

DW: Our gas—works on our—

00:25:27

KL: We got service guys; service guys that work here—Martin Bissett so we just call him and he does all the gas work—on the fryers and you know there's one long gas line in that pit, so I mean he replaced that. I mean stainless steel work we get Evans to do that because we might have to replace a door, like I showed you the door that comes off of there. If one finally just tears

up they will replace that, Evans will, but the actual frame, I mean that thing has been there as long as I can remember with the motor on it. They designed it and so anyways—.

00:25:59

RF: And so the hogs go on at 8:00 at night, right?

00:26:03

KL: Between 8:00 and 9:00; between 8:00 and 9:00, uh-hm.

00:26:04

RF: Between 8:00 and 9:00 and what time do they come off in the morning?

00:26:07

KL: Well, what they'll do they'll raise—about six o'clock they'll raise the hood on it and they kind of—they'll let them dry out for a little bit and then they'll, you know—so when them guys get here at 6:00 in the morning, they get everything ready, they get all their vinegar, salt—everything that goes in it they'll get their stuff in and after about—about seven o'clock they'll start taking them up. And then the process starts and they'll like I say if there's six hogs or twenty-six hogs they'll stay right there and do what they got to do and clean everything up and by one o'clock they're ready to go home.

00:26:38

RF: And are they ever spiced or sauced while on the pit? Or does that come after?

00:26:42

KL: There's nothing on it. There's no tricks; you just put the pig on there and cook it.

00:26:48

DW: And then season it and that's it.

00:26:49

RF: So tell me about the chopping process, how that goes on.

00:26:52

KL: Well every morning, you know, well what they'll do, they'll just take the—they'll take the skin off and we'll deep-fat fry that and like we showed you in the one big old—it's like a big pork skin. And they grind that up. They run that around the chopper and the meat, they just—they grind the meat up and then they—we just put the ingredients in. It's no trick. It's vinegar, salt, crushed red pepper, and a little grease, you know, from the drippings of the hog. The pit is designed to catch the drippings, which there's not a lot of fat on the hogs no more. But used to—you know, and we still put the pan up under there to kind of—the pit is kind of beveled, so when you stick that pan up under there when they—when they did drip a lot of grease we'd put that right back in the barbecue also.

00:27:38

RF: And you just mentioned changes in hogs. What sort of changes have you seen for the past many decades?

00:27:45

DW: A hog now don't hardly have no fat. I mean it's all—you might as well say all lean. It's a little bit of fat but not like it used to be.

00:27:54

RF: And how do you feel about that?

00:27:55

DW: Well, in a way it's good but in a way it's not because, you know, if you don't watch it you're going to have mighty dry barbecue.

00:28:05

RF: And do you think it's the farmers or consumer demand or a mix of the two?

00:28:10

DW: I think, you know, back in the days everybody wanted a leaner pig and that's what it—that's where it's come from. They breed the pigs and that's what—that's where it comes from, making a leaner hog.

00:28:22

RF: And—and right now I think in America you kind of have these small farmers that are breeding old—heritage pigs or trying to put the fat back in the pig. What do you think about that? Would you support, you know, pigs with a bit more fat content or—?

00:28:39

DW: It would probably be better as far as, you know, having—consistent on being moist and but you can't really find nobody who can furnish you enough pigs that's growing them that way.

We've—we've tried it; I mean, we had one guy come out here and we said well, we'll try it. And then I told him how many we were going to use and he said well I can't—I can't furnish that many pigs. So, but it was a good pig; it was a good pig.

00:29:04

RF: So how many pigs do you go through?

00:29:06

DW: Hundred fifty to hundred sixty a week.

00:29:10

RF: Hundred fifty—hundred sixty a week. And when is your busiest season or time?

00:29:17

DW: It's in your summertime; it will start—start what—in June, Kevin, and July and August and September, October?

00:29:26

KL: Especially when school gets out, people travel. You know they're going to the coast or they're going up and down I-95 from Florida back up to New York either way and they still plan their trips around coming here. They know they can get off of 95 and still be right here and jump

right back on. Probably January and February is the slowest time and, but I mean like I say, we still—our weekends we're still busy. I mean even during the week during that time you just have to stick around and see, like I told you, and you'll see how it works. It's—it's amazing.

00:30:00

RF: Does one day stick out in your memory as a busy day?

00:30:03

DW: The busiest day is Mother's Day. We cook forty-four pigs one day for Mother's Day and most of the time we sell out.

00:30:15

RF: On Mother's Day do people—I'm guessing you can't make reservations; do people just line up?

00:30:18

DW: No; we don't make no reservations on Mother's Day. In other words, on Sunday we don't make any reservations until after three o'clock.

00:30:25

RF: Oh; so you can you get reservations after 3:00?

00:30:27

DW: Right; on Sunday but not on Mother's Day.

00:30:30

RF: But only on Sunday can you make reservations?

00:30:32

DW: Well, you can make reservations any time but like on Sunday we don't let nobody you know make reservations for the morning. It's just after 3:00 because you have that—

00:30:42

KL: There's not a day—that's right; there's really not a day that we don't—we have a calendar book in there that we take parties, people book this little room. We can book a party for 100 or 120 in this room but any—every day—we'll take reservations every day but Sunday because—because of the line. And people will call and they'll say—well they'll tell us who they are and well, you know—. I said, "Look," you know, "Donald makes his own family—he'll make his own family wait in that line because," you know—.

00:31:11

RF: And that's true?

00:31:11

DW: That's true. [*Laughs*]

00:31:13

KL: You can't afford to make somebody upset, you know, if you hold—you can't—we just can't hold tables. We—we just can't, and—and over the years people have—they've—they've come to understand the reason why, but it moves—you know, Parker's doesn't—has never had a dessert, I know in my time. And I think the theory behind that was they want to move these tables; get them in and get them out. And so they line up on any given day. They'll line up but they know that they're going to get in and get out pretty quick. And so they felt like, you know, I'm pretty sure—people come in, “Where is the banana pudding?” And, you know, it sounds good and we love it but I mean we can't—we're not going to change it. And so they'll—we'll turn these tables pretty quick. That's why they wait in that line; they don't care. You can stand right at the front door and look out and there will be 200 people and the person at the back of the line within fifteen—twenty minutes they're going to be standing there talking to you because they're going—it moves so quick.

00:32:11

RF: So what makes Parker's so popular? Why do people come back? Why do people wait 200-deep in line?

00:32:18

KL: I think it's the fast, friendly service that they've always been used to and the quality of the food and it's consistent and, you know, we hear that every day. And we just—we're just going to continue to carry that—that tradition on. And if something is not right—that's right; if something is not right we want them to tell us, you know, because we're not perfect. Sometimes we might forget to put a little salt in the potatoes or, you know, or string beans or—or whatever it is but

we're going to jump right back on it and we're going to make it right. And we don't reheat anything as far as, you know, chicken, anything. I mean it's fresh every day and that's what keeps them coming I believe.

00:33:00

DW: That's right.

00:33:04

RF: And how can you order a barbecue here? Let's go through the—the menu and the ways to order a barbecue.

00:33:08

KL: Well I mean, you can—we have a barbecue sandwich. We have a barbecue plate which is the barbecue, slaw, and the cornbread if you just want the plate. If you want to get the dinner you're going to get the barbecue, the slaw, the cornbread, and then we'll give you a choice of Brunswick stew, boiled potatoes, string beans or French fries. Sweet iced tea. You get all the bread and slaw you want. Or you can get a combination with the—with everything I just named plus a piece of fried chicken. And then we also offer seafood—fish, shrimp, and then when the oysters are in season we have those also. And it's—and barbecue chicken and then other than that that's—I mean the menu don't change. It's just what you see is what it—I mean what it is.

00:33:55

RF: And how would you describe the—the barbecue? How would you describe the texture and the taste?

00:33:59

DW: I—I—you—

00:34:04

KL: It's just—the other day I mean, you know, it's—it's just chopped, vinegar based barbecue. And yeah; come try you some.

00:34:18

RF: And—and—

00:34:19

KL: When it's good—when it's moist, you can tell when—when that pan comes up, when you saw Charlie doing that, you know, when it's good and moist and it's—you know, you just stir it up, it's just hard—it's hard to beat. *[Laughs]*

00:34:32

RF: It was really good. I had some yesterday and I want to say there's two sauces on the table, right or there's two containers of—. Tell me about each one.

00:34:38

KL: Well one—the one right here that's just plain vinegar, apple cider vinegar.

00:34:43

RF: Straight up vinegar?

00:34:44

KL: Straight up vinegar right out the back and so this one right here is Texas Pete and vinegar and a little crushed red pepper.

00:34:50

DW: In case somebody wants it a little hot.

00:34:52

KL: And it's not terribly hot but it's I mean—it adds a little bit to it. And but other than that there's no special sauce we put in that barbecue when we chop it. That's what I named out while ago and it's simple—it's simple.

00:35:04

RF: Why does simple work? Why—it's a question I hear a lot in—in Carolina barbecue; why—why is it?

00:35:13

DW: Really it stays the same; being simple is going to be the same. It's supposed to taste the same. Go by the recipe it's got to be the same and it's going to be good.

00:35:22

RF: And have you had—have either of y'all had a chance and I'm sure you have to eat other barbecue, especially I want to ask about Western or Lexington style barbecue, and what—what you think about that and then I want to ask about if you've had barbecue in other places maybe Tennessee or Memphis or Georgia?

00:35:41

KL: Well, I've never had none from there. We've had some Lexington. We've had that, and I mean it's good to me. I can deal with it. I had to get used to their slaw you know. It's a red—a red slaw, but look, I can—I can deal with it. I have no problem with it. I'm used—we're used to this.

00:35:58

And as far as trying other barbecue, a lot of times believe it or not we might ride—we'll ride to different places right here in Eastern North Carolina and try their barbecue, you know, other famous places and we love—we love to try it. We sure do.

00:36:14

RF: So no—yeah; okay. **[Laughs]** I've heard other people say that's not barbecue. You do—I mean you like it? You enjoy it?

00:36:20

KL: Well we've had some that's good and we've had some that we thought well—. I mean and other people might like that but it's not what we would—

00:36:27

DW: It's not what we were really brought up with. Just like Lexington, they were brought up with a ketchup-based barbecue. And it's good; I've tried it. It's good but you know I'd rather have Eastern, vinegar-based barbecue.

00:36:39

RF: Did either or both of y'all eat here before you started working here? Was this the barbecue you grew up with at Parker's?

00:36:47

DW: It is because, you know, we farmed and the people that helped us farm, Daddy would come down here and get them lunch and stuff like that. And always you know would like Graham; he married Dot and that—and they stayed right across the road from us on the farm but—and I was brought up—we was brought up—me and Kenneth were brought up together. That's—that's Dot's boy—son. And I've always eat—ever since, you know—because they would always bring some home.

00:37:17

KL: We'd eat it especially on Sundays after church. That was our thing. We'd come out and get a take-out and just go home and eat it. And something we've not mentioned either; people around here know if they want to take some ribs out of the pigs, if they call us a day ahead of time we'll hold the ribs out for them. We—we don't sell them here in the restaurant but we do sell them to go and so that was our big thing. You know, that was—that was a treat for us to get

the ribs on Sundays, you know, so we've always come here, every—I grew up right here in Wilson also so we've always done that.

00:37:52

RF: And let's—let's talk about the customers. We mentioned that a lot of people come often and you were telling me there's a gentleman who is ninety-eight and tell me about that guy.

00:38:03

KL: Well it's like I said earlier, he comes at least three times a week and Mr. Ward, Richard Ward and he said, you know, he was here the very first day it opened and of course we've asked Mr. Parker several times and of course he literally can't remember. And then in Mr. Ward's mind he was here. But we do—you know I know he's been from Wilson because I went to church with him also but he's ate here all his—ever since the doors have opened, you know. And there's several people that come—that comes right now. You know, we had a gentleman yesterday, matter of fact; you know, he's been coming fifty years and he's from—

00:38:34

DW: Wanted to know how long I had been working here.

00:38:37

KL: That's right. I mean, you know, there's not a day that goes by we don't meet somebody like that. They come off that interstate and they're excited to get here and they have to tell you their stories and they—and the one good thing, well one thing we hear they'll say boy, "It's just like it

was fifty years ago.” And you hear that more than anything, so we know we’re—we’re consistent and so—.

00:39:00

RF: And—and one of you also mentioned that recently Ralph Parker told you that the barbecue is as good as it’s ever been. Can you tell me that? Why—why he said that and how that makes you feel.

00:39:13

DW: I don’t know. We was just sitting there at the table and he was drinking his coffee and he said, “I’ll tell you what, Donald, the barbecue is better than it’s ever been.” I mean that—that makes you feel good.

00:39:21

KL: Well you know what—well like I say with the three brothers they said one week when Mr. Henry was here he had it his way. One week when Mr. Ralph was here it was his way. And when Mr. Graham was here it was—he done it his way. They all three kind of done—it was basically the same but it was just they had it their own way. Once they all retired it just—it was one way all the time then. So that’s what even made it more consistent. And he—like Mr. Ralph said, he said, “Boy, it’s better now than it’s ever been I believe.” And I—in my mind I’m thinking, you know, it’s because it’s the same every day.

00:39:56

RF: And why is that—or whose way is it? Is it your way Mr. Williams?

00:40:01

DW: Well, it's always been, you know, I was brought up with them fixing it their way but, you know, I just went by the recipe. And just let it stay all the time; they was this one wanted it like this, this one wanted it to be like that. So we just—I said go by the recipe and that's it. And that's it. That's it; they cook—and make sure the pigs are cooked right.

00:40:22

RF: Do you—*[Laughs]*—when you started working here in '63 did you ever think that you'd own the place?

00:40:29

DW: It didn't never go through my mind to tell you the truth because when Firestone come here I was going to quit and go to Firestone. So I went there checking it and I said, "Well, I'll be making all this and that and the other." I said, "Shoot! Parker boys are paying me more than that," so I stayed with the Parker's. *[Laughs]*

00:40:42

RF: The Firestone factory?

00:40:43

DW: Yeah; so I stayed right here. And it worked out good.

00:40:46

RF: And—and how—how long do you want to keep working?

00:40:52

DW: I probably—I probably—only about two or three more years. I'm going to let these boys hold it then I'm going to work for them.

00:41:03

KL: [*Laughs*]

00:41:04

RF: And tell me what you mean by that? How is that going to work?

00:41:05

DW: Well I got to have something to do until you get old.

00:41:10

KL: Donald is probably going to be like I'm thinking I'm going to do one day. You—this place gets in your blood and I have people—I have friends right now and we had some yesterday, they come back and they still want to work here. I mean, we've got guys that do all—they do all kinds of professions and they still want to come back and cater parties. I mean it just gets in your blood. But he's going to be the type he ain't going to be able to go home and just sit down. It's almost like if you don't, you know—I take a trip. I'm going to call him or Eric my partner, the other guy, you know. I'm going to call one of them: "How's it going to day?" It just gets in your

system and like I said he ain't going to go home and just sit down. That ain't Donald and that—that's not going to be me. I mean I'm not just going to one day: "We'll I'm gone." You're going—you're just always going to want to keep a check on this place.

00:41:55

RF: So three owners; do you consider yourselves—is it kind of like a family? Is it—how does that—?

00:42:01

KL: Well, we feel like family. I mean I love Donald like my family and my Daddy but my Daddy is still living. I have a mama and daddy right here, but—and Eric is like a brother. I mean we just—we have ups and downs like anybody else but we're—we stay together, you know. But yeah; we feel like family—everybody here does. We've named out the people we—you know, we have people thirty-five years plus work here as we've showed you. But yeah; we're all family.

00:42:28

RF: And you did—you brought me in the kitchen and introduced me to someone who has been thirty-two years, someone who has been twenty years, someone—. Tell me about—and there's one man here who—who doesn't work on Sundays but he's been here the longest and tell me about him and how long he's been here.

00:42:43

DW: I'm going to say what—sixty-two years?

00:42:46

KL: Sixty-three years.

00:42:46

DW: Sixty-three years, been here sixty-three years starting when he was fifteen. He started when he was fifteen.

00:42:51

RF: And what is his name?

00:42:54

DW: June Brunson.

00:42:55

RF: June Brunson.

00:42:56

KL: He just turned seventy-six years old about two weeks ago.

00:42:58

RF: And how often does he come in? When does he come in?

00:43:00

DW: Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

00:43:03

KL: That's right.

00:43:06

DW: Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

00:43:07

KL: And cater any time we need him to.

00:43:08

DW: Well if he caters—he caters—he was in Carolina yesterday catering.

00:43:13

RF: And—and what does he do or what has he done over the—since you've known him here?

00:43:19

DW: Well, when he first started he started—he was cooking cornbread in the oven. The corn sticks, we used to bake them ourselves. And then, you know, when we got the cornmeal he started baking them so we done away with the oven that we cooked it in and started buying the corn sticks from him. And then he come to the kitchen and started cooking, waiting on the back

door just like I did, but he done it before I did. We worked together a long time back there. And from then on that's what he done is cooked.

00:43:44

KL: He's literally done—there's not a job here he hasn't done. And we respect Mr. June. Even, you know, I know in my position I'm in and even Donald, you know, we still—you know, we might—we don't go to June do this and do—you know because he—he was here way before us. And so we just respect him and—.

00:44:05

RF: Does he teach you things or has he taught you things about the business?

00:44:08

DW: Well he taught me how—things in the kitchen when I started working in the kitchen, what to do here and there and this, that, and the other, you know, as far as that. You know working back there and everything and what they expected from us.

00:44:21

RF: And I think you told me his status is kind of semi-retired, right?

00:44:24

DW: Uh-hm.

00:44:27

RF: Will he—do you see him working here for—forever and living out his years here?

00:44:30

DW: He probably will.

00:44:32

KL: Oh yeah; he'll work until his health won't let him. That's how—you know, that's how June will be. He had to stay out for just a little while with his shoulder, but I mean, he stayed in touch with us and he—he, you know, he never was off the payroll. He just had to get straight from that and he's right back in there.

00:44:50

RF: And we talked about family and how you know it feels like a family. Have y'all encouraged some of y'all's family members to work here?

00:44:58

KL: Well I have—I have a daughter, thirteen, and a son, eleven, and, of course, he's already said, "I'm coming out there," you know.

00:45:06

DW: "You all can be my daddy." [*Laughs*]

00:45:08

RF: So are you going to encourage your son and maybe your daughter to—to work in the restaurant?

00:45:10

KL: Well, you know, if that—you know if my daughter, well my daughter she always talks about doing something else but I mean she wants to come here and work that cash register. And I said, “Well girl, you ain't going to work this cash register with all these young boys running around here,” you know. **[Laughs]** And you know but if she—if she would do that—that wouldn't be no problem but—and my son, if he wants to come I'll bring him on when he's ready you know maybe when he's fourteen or so. We're going to have him out here hopefully. And I'm going to treat him like everybody else. If he don't do right he's going to have to go the house and he'll have to do something else because I'm not going to show no favoritism. But yeah; they love it. It's—they love it.

00:45:46

RF: What would you tell your son is the hardest part or what would you tell anyone the—what is the hardest part about running this restaurant and about barbecue?

00:45:54

KL: Well, there's really not a hard part here at Parker's. It's just demanding and it's seven days a week.

00:46:03

DW: Long hours.

00:46:03

KL: It's long hours; it's literally, you know, we're here anywhere from twelve to fourteen hours a day when we work. You know we got here at 8:00 this morning; we'll get home at ten o'clock tonight and we're open from nine a.m. to nine p.m. seven days a week. That's the—that's the hard part. And when it's your day to work it's your day to work. You know, we rotate me and Eric we rotate and Donald has done it for so many years, but now me and Eric rotate and we—you know, we go ahead and look on the calendar. You know, I'm going to look up and say well, next year I already know I'm going to be off that week of—before Thanksgiving. You know, this year I'm having to work it, so Eric is going to be able to be with his family. That's the hard part—being away from your family some on certain special days. But you—you know, you adjust to it and you make it up. If you—if you have to work it this day then you make up the next day for it, so—other than that it's a fun place to work. You meet a lot of people. I don't have no problem.

00:46:58

DW: Well it got me out from being so shy. When I first started working I was a shy guy when I was in school.

00:47:04

RF: When you started waiting tables?

00:47:06

DW: Waiting tables; that just brought me out more and more talking to people. And on Mother's Day nobody's off.

00:47:15

KL: And everybody knows that.

00:47:17

RF: Everyone works. How many employees are here on Mother's Day?

00:47:19

KL: Oh, we have everybody—we'll bring in the back up then; we'll bring in—

00:47:23

DW: We'll bring in some backup help.

00:47:24

KL: —yeah, we'll bring the guys in that don't work here full-time that they cater for us. They'll all come in and they just make take-out orders. We have a—I'm talking about a pile—that's half of the business that day is the take-out orders and—. So yeah, we have everybody. And after about three-thirty or four o'clock it's over with. We work—we—I mean we bust it up from about 10:30 to about 3:30 and it's over with.

00:47:48

DW: See, Mother's Day that's just like two Sundays put into one.

00:47:52

KL: And combined into one, yeah.

00:47:54

RF: So what do you think it is about Parker's Barbecue and—and celebrating mom?

00:47:59

KL: Well, I mean like I say, it's fast and they know they can get in here. They know they're going to get in here and if they've got eighteen—twenty-five people or whatever we're going to get them in here and we're going to bring the family style out to most of the people like that. We just bring it out; they eat and they're out of here. And I don't know; it's just hard to beat some good fried chicken and barbecue and cornbread. I mean, that's what we're known for and so that's basically it.

00:48:23

RF: All right; well I want to ask one or two questions about the—the cornbread and the chicken, but first one more question. What do you think Parker's Barbecue means to Wilson and to the area in North Carolina?

00:48:36

KL: Well me personally, I mean a lot of people, I was telling somebody the other day; we very seldom say, "No." If somebody comes in here and needs something we're going to support the community. People come here on a daily basis and I think we mean a lot; I hope we do. We—we

try to take care of everybody here in—in Wilson and surrounding counties for that matter. So we've—I mean it's just a known place. People—people come in; they're family also. These customers that come in, they're family and they feel a part of this place and they have a connection. And so that's just—that's it. We just try to take care of everybody.

00:49:19

RF: Would you like to add anything?

00:49:21

DW: No; not really because that's right. And like I say, Parker's brings a lot of business to Wilson too—people traveling.

00:49:31

RF: They stop through Wilson just to eat here?

00:49:33

KL: If something happened and Parker's closed I don't know what would happen. I wouldn't even want to think of it. I think it would be—I mean these people in this country they have a—it would just be a—it would be bad because they're so used to it being here for all these years.

00:49:48

DW: And just like, you know, we closed that week on vacation. And we'll be out here and people will be stopping in and wanting to know what we're doing closed. I said, "We're on vacation." And they say, "Where do you think we're going to eat at?" **[Laughs]**

00:50:00

KL: They get really upset.

00:50:02

RF: Is that week the same week every year so the people can plan or they should plan?

00:50:05

DW: Every Father's Day.

00:50:08

RF: All right; let's talk about the fried chicken. I think it's just as famous or almost as famous as the barbecue. The logo on the shirts you're wearing has a pig and a chicken; alright tell me about the fried chicken.

00:50:20

DW: Go ahead.

00:50:21

KL: Well, I was going to say you know like I told you earlier, we—we sell between 7,000 and 8,000 whole chickens a week. Nothing—it—we just move it so quick it don't have time to sit around here. That's basically for anything from the cabbage to the potatoes, on any—all of the stuff, but the fried chicken, we're known for that fried chicken, now. I mean because we don't reheat fried chicken. We roll four chickens and put it on a tray and we fry it. When it comes up

we sell that pan and it's just constantly—we go all day. At the end of the night when we're getting ready to close at nine o'clock, about 8:30, twenty minutes to 9:00 they'll wind it down. They'll just put on a couple more chickens and as—you know, when they come up that's it. I mean because, you know, we allow about seventeen minutes to fry a pan of chicken.

00:51:03

And so at nine o'clock the doors close. What's left it's gone. You know, which is very—if there's just a few pieces left if the help wants it we let them have it. If not, you know, there's—there's really nothing left here. So there's no waste. But the fried chicken is good.

00:51:21

DW: When it stays crisp—crispy; it comes out crispy—.

00:51:24

KL: Not greasy and it's just like Donald say: it's crisp.

00:51:29

DW: It's a recipe like grandma used to have—flour, salt, pepper that's it.

00:51:34

RF: Does it go back to the original—the founding of the restaurant?

00:51:36

DW: Oh yeah; the same—the same recipe. Everything is the same.

00:51:40

RF: And does fried chicken go with barbecue? Do people eat it together?

00:51:42

DW: Oh yeah, the combination. You have a piece of fried chicken and the barbecue pork— combination and that's the biggest seller is the combination. And like, you know, if we get new customers and we say—they say we hear so much about you we wanted to try it. What's—what do you suggest?

00:51:57

KL: What do you recommend? And we tell them that.

00:51:59

DW: You know, we say the combination if you want to try something but—that's usually what they—.

00:52:04

RF: And tell me about the—and I think you have two kind of cornmeal based products. You have a corn stick and a hushpuppy right?

00:52:10

DW: Uh-hm.

00:52:10

RF: And the hushpuppies are newer you told me.

00:52:13

DW: Oh yeah; we're—

00:52:13

KL: I think we put them in—in about '95—'95 or '96.

00:52:18

DW: I tell you it's always been a corn stick and then we started some hushpuppies because a lot of people asked for hushpuppies.

00:52:23

KL: Really what put them in—I remember Mr. Graham, just like it was yesterday; he said, “Boy, don't tell everybody we got these,” because we didn't want—you know, we were going to try them but now all the sudden they've took off and we use just as many hushpuppies as we do corn sticks. **[Laughs]** And then we had to add the green beans because people just kept asking for them.

00:52:38

DW: They kept asking for green beans.

00:52:39

KL: And it weren't because we were not wanting to do it. We just didn't really have the room for it. But we found room. And so—and that's been a good—that's been a good seller for us too.

00:52:52

RF: And so why did they start with corn sticks and not hushpuppies?

00:52:55

DW: Well, we didn't have hushpuppies when we started.

00:52:58

RF: Oh, okay.

00:53:00

DW: It was cornbread, strictly cornbread and that's what they started with. And that's what they stayed with. And, you know, to me I'd rather have a corn stick to go with my barbecue than a hushpuppy. Now hushpuppies with barbecue chicken and something like that is good. But the corn stick with barbecue, you got to have that.

00:53:20

RF: And—and so I've been traveling around and eating a lot of barbecue in this State. What do you think or why do you think barbecue is so important to North Carolina? Why does everyone eat barbecue; why is it so prominent?

00:53:34

DW: Really to me barbecue started back putting-in-tobacco days.

00:53:40

KL: That's right.

00:53:40

DW: When they get through putting in tobacco with the man that owned the farm they would always cook a pig for the help. And that's where barbecue started—to me. Barbecue and then—then it just took over and people started serving it in restaurants. And that's the only fact I can really say about it.

00:53:57

KL: They still do that for some farmers right now. When they get through putting in tobacco they—we'll go out there and cater them or vice-versa. They'll pick up a pig and—but I know one in particular we just—we went to him right back three or four weeks ago. We went and served his whole—all his crew.

00:54:14

DW: It's just like Scott's farm. Jerome [**Unintelligible**], he—he got sixty combinations a day for three months—wasn't it—for three months for all of his help.

00:54:28

KL: He got chicken in it one day, a combination, and then barbecue chicken. He rotated.

00:54:31

DW: He rotated sixty plates a day.

00:54:34

RF: So it's much of the same, just how farmers—100 years ago maybe farmers ate barbecue and cooked their own and now they're eating barbecue.

00:54:41

DW: Yeah; yes that's right because, you know, when they get through putting in they're going to feed their help. But Jerome now he feeds them; he feeds them all the time, but, you know, it's—it's winding down now because the potatoes and everything is about through so—. They don't get as many as they used to but—but when he does, you know, it's sixty plates a day.

00:55:01

RF: Hmm; and what changes have you seen in barbecue culture here in this area in North Carolina in the past fifty years? Are there more barbecue establishments, less; do people eat more or less?

00:55:16

KL: Well, you know, I'm still young but I—I see a lot of places wanting to pop up and try to be like Parker's or—or the ones that's been here for so many years and I think, you know—I think if you have good food they're going to come to you, you know—.

00:55:33

DW: Treat your customers like you should and you got to—you got to treat your customers good. And if you got good food and treat your customers, I don't care if you got good food, if you don't treat your customers right it's still not going to work. They go together. You got to treat them.

00:55:51

RF: And so Parker's has been around for sixty-five years. How long does it go? Does it go on forever to—100 years?

00:55:58

KL: I hope so.

00:55:58

DW: We want another sixty-five years. *[Laughs]*

00:56:03

KL: And this building, look; it's sturdy. We've checked it and looked at it up underneath it and hope to keep going.

00:56:12

DW: We thought about building another place, you know, going up to the side over here and building one. But—but then customers probably tell us it don't taste the same so we're trying to keep this building in good shape. So we just keep using it.

00:56:24

RF: So there's something about this place that—?

00:56:28

DW: People want to come and eat here.

00:56:30

KL: This building right here; we could do it the same because we know how to do it but like Donald said they could come in. It's just not the same. So that's what we've hesitated on and we've actually thought about—you mentioned the drive-thru earlier, Mr. Henry's wife Sue that's one of the things she did tell us, you know, "I wish you boys would get a drive-up." And we thought about that but we just—I reckon you got to catch it just right to do it because I think it would be fine. I think we'd be okay with it. Got a lot of people—you know, in today's time that's what people like; they like to go through a drive-up and so I think it would work. I don't think it would be a mistake.

00:57:08

DW: I think it would work. It wouldn't be a mistake because, you know, like you said, a lot of people don't like to get out of the car. Just pull up there and order and go.

00:57:20

RF: And so we're—we're ten years away from a seventy-fifth anniversary. What—are you thinking about it? I mean that's a big—that's a big deal. I mean very few restaurants in the world can last that long. What—what happens when Parker's goes that long?

00:57:36

KL: It's not telling what we're going to do is it?

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DW: Absolutely; just like, you know, I think Dick's Hotdog Stand is the oldest place here in Wilson. How long has Dick's been there?

00:57:46

KL: It's been many—

00:57:47

DW: Eighty some years ain't it?

00:57:47

KL: Yeah; it might be more than that. I can't remember.

00:57:50

DW: Eighty some years it's been here.

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KL: Ain't no telling what we're going to do on the seventy-fifth. I don't—I don't know what to do. If I could—

00:57:57

DW: Man.

00:57:59

KL: I don't know; we'll come up with something.

00:58:00

RF: So do y'all feel like—we can wrap up on this—do y'all feel like you're—you're a part of history, kind of living history you know working and owning and cooking at Parker's?

00:58:10

KL: I'm proud to say I worked at Parker's.

00:58:10

DW: I am too.

00:58:12

KL: When I go—like I say when I go somewhere—I'll give you an example: we just went to Disney World and, you know, people down there you know they might hear your accent or just whatever and they'll say where are you from? And then you say North Carolina. And they will tell you right quick; have you ever heard of Parker's? And I just start laughing, you know. Went to Virginia the other week to Bass Pro Shop and—and the lady up there, she got our zip code and she said, "Oh no, you're from where Parker's is." And my wife, we just laughed; you know, I didn't even want to get into the story but—but yeah we see people like that all the time.

00:58:39

We got a guy that does our refrigeration work and I won't keep you but a second on this one, but he went in the Army and I reckon it was in the '50s and went all the way to California and said he got off the plane and the Drill Sergeant was just letting him have it. "Where you from boy?" When he told him North Carolina he narrowed it down to Eastern North Carolina. He said, the Drill Sergeant said, "When is the last time you had Parker's Barbecue?" He said, "About twenty-four hours ago, sir." **[Laughs]** From that day on he said that man just took a liking to him, and—. Anyway I mean there's stories—and that's just another story but so yeah; we love—I love to be a part of it and say I'm a part of it, as well as Donald does.

00:59:13

DW: That's right. If you're lucky enough to be a part of this place right here you got to love it; got to love it.

00:59:20

RF: Okay well, I think that's a good place to end. I want to thank y'all and if y'all have any concluding comments—but I want to thank y'all. This was wonderful.

00:59:27

KL: We enjoyed it; thank you.

00:59:29

DW: We enjoyed it. Just tell the people to come on and try some barbecue.

00:59:32

RF: Good. I will—I will definitely. All right; thank y'all.

00:59:40

[End Donald Williams & Kevin Lamm — Parker's Barbecue]