

MICHAEL MATSOS
Golden Rule Bar-B-Q – Irondale, AL

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Interviewer: Amy Evans
Length: 42 minutes
Project: Southern BBQ Trail - Alabama

[Begin Michael Matsos]

AE: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Tuesday, October 3rd 2006; and I'm in Irondale in Birmingham, Alabama, at the Golden Rule Headquarters with Mr. Michael Matsos. And Mr. Matsos, would you say your name and also your birth date for the record, please, sir?

00:00:20

MM: It's Michael C. Matsos. My birthday—I don't usually give it out but I'll tell—it's November 8th 1918.

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AE: And you were telling me earlier—you handed me this wonderful history of your life, *From Brooklyn to Birmingham*. Could you talk a little bit about your Greek heritage and how you ended up in Birmingham?

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MM: My mother and father both came from Greece, and I was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts. We migrated to New York as a small boy. I went through elementary school and high school in Brooklyn, New York, and—and then my mother stayed behind me to go to the university. So after I went to the New York Public Library, I wanted to go into the commerce school. I realized that the University of Alabama Commerce School, at that time, with Dean Bidgood, was the best buy for the money. **[Laughs]** This was right after the Depression in those days. So I migrated to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and—at midnight and—and woke up a cab driver

and said, “Where’s a place to sleep around here?” *[Laughs]* And that’s how I started at the university. So I was—I’m real proud of being with the university all these years. And after I finished school in three-and-a-half years, I was lucky enough to make good enough grades where I was a—a grader and a teacher’s assistant. And then World War II broke out, so I got a degree in one hand and a report to Fort Benning in the other. So after World War II, I came back and settled in Birmingham and that’s—that’s—then from then on, I went into business on my own. Other than that, I’ve given Amy [the interviewer] a little synopsis of most of my work and my history here. If there’s anything as far as the Golden Rule Bar-B-Q, at that time it was—the fellow’s name was Jabo Stone owned it, he and his wife [Ellene]. Her name [maiden] was Williams, and she and her sister used to operate it. It used to be across the street of where we’re located now in Irondale. And Highway 20 came in and took that property—the Interstate. He had no children, no one to leave it with, so he kept after me about taking over the business. He used to come downtown; I used to operate the Michael’s Restaurant, the steakhouse which was known for most of the sporting people in—back with Coach Bryant [of the University of Alabama] and—and those years. And also being involved, I had a group of investors and we built the Hyatt [Regency Hotel] downtown, which is now part of the Sheraton and the Civic Center.

Anyway, to make a long story short, I told him, “All right, I’ll take it over. But I’m not going to pay you anything for it.” So he—he locked me up with a twenty-year royalty agreement, so in the long run, Jabo Stone made lots more money than I anticipated paying him on the royalty. But the—the twenty years have since passed. So since that time, we’ve expanded the Golden Rule concept with about—we have now twenty-two franchises. In fact, there’s one under construction at Corinth, Mississippi, right now. And we’ve given the fellow, Andy—he’s from Decatur in Alabama; he owns Domino’s Pizza, but he knows the restaurant business, and we’ve

given him an area and development and agency agreement for the State of Mississippi. And he's—he's going to be a good operator. We also have an area development agency agreement with Teddy Moats is his name; he was the original developer of the steakhouses that he sold out to Cracker Barrel, so he knows it. And so they built one that's in operation now up in Clarksville, Tennessee, which is on a border, I think. I think where the—there's a big army base up in that area. As far as the Golden Rule is concerned, the granddaddy—after I bought it from Jabo Stone, when the Interstate came on, I was lucky enough to acquire the land right smack across the street where the exit is, which is Exit 133 into Irondale. So that's the granddaddy of them all because, at that time, it used to be a dirt road and it takes—oh, in order to get it copyrighted I went to the copyright attorneys, and I found out that I was on US 78 before they even come up with the Interstates, so it was very easy to get the Golden Rule copyrighted on a national basis. So that's how we're protecting the name and anybody else—which they do try to copy us now. However, we've branched out where what we call proprietary items. We have a manufacturer that does all our sauces, and then we made some deals with national outfits like Sysco Company, which is on the New York Stock Exchange, for the products and—and do the deliveries. Because when you go beyond a 300-miles radius, you've got to have somebody that's able to fulfill your product development and so forth.

And so my son, Charles, he came into the business, so he's more or less running it; however, I still come to the office every day to make sure that things are done right. **[Laughs]** How—however, the—the restaurant business as a whole is—is very difficult because you may have a great product, but if you don't have good service to go with it, you have nothing. And that's always been—because I've always believed you can't compromise quality for a price. Quality comes first. And that's been our motto, and I think we've been very good at it.

00:07:21

AE: Well could I back up a little bit and—and ask you about when you returned to Birmingham, did you immediately get into the restaurant business?

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MM: Yes. When I got—I was in the Air Corps in World War II and when—when I got dismissed I was in El Paso, Texas and I—I came to Birmingham but at the same time no sooner than I landed in Birmingham I had a letter from the Department of Commerce to report to Atlanta, so I had to go back to Atlanta because we had some problems with—as an Airwave Traffic Controller with my flying experience and being in the Air Corps, so I wound up being the—working for the government again. I was at an Airwave Traffic Controller at the Atlanta Airport, and then I used a local friend of ours’ physician that I was needed in Birmingham **[Laughs]** to run the business so through that I was able to get discharged and finally get away from working for Uncle Sam. **[Laughs]** So that’s how I wound up in Birmingham, and my first restaurant was the La Patee Restaurant, which is still—was a landmark right next to the Tutwiler Hotel. I—I backed into that. And then from there, I brought in a fellow named Bill Demois, who was well known as a partner, as a chef, and we had—we were the number one restaurant in downtown. Then Bill, with the guerilla warfare in Greece at that time, he—we—I signed up, so we put them all to work and he brought in about six people of his family from Greece that were involved with all that guerilla warfare right after World War II. So I told Bill, I said, “Bill,” I said, “You’ve got too much family, and I’m by myself,” so I said, “You—we’ll split up; you take the restaurant—the La Patee—which he did, but at the same time I was involved with the Holiday Inns and Kemmons Wilson out of Memphis, when he first started the Holiday Inn chains

so I was—I was involved with the fifth Holiday Inn on the Bessemer Super Highway, so I went out there and started the Michael's Restaurant out there. So the Michael's [restaurant] got bigger and then opened the other one downtown after that. But that's how it all started. And Jabo Stone used to come visit us, and he kept after me about taking over his business because he was getting old and his—he had no children and his wife and everything. So that's—I sort of backed into it.

[Laughs]

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AE: Now the—the La Patee Restaurant, what was your role there?

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MM: The La Patee Restaurant I was owner/operator. My role, I actually opened up and closed it and helped the chef out and learned all his recipes and wrote them all down.

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AE: Because I—as I mentioned before we started recording, I did an oral history project about three years ago, documenting Greek-owned restaurants in Birmingham, and La Patee came up quite a few times, as I remember. Is that where you had the burnt butter spaghetti, do I remember that?

00:10:46

MM: Right, yes. I started—I started the La Patee Restaurant. It used to be right adjoining the Tutwiler Hotel, and I still remember the doorman back—Albert, and I told—I had a deal with Albert. I says, “Albert, you don't have to worry about any meals. You come in here and eat what you want.” Because at that—on 5th Avenue they used to park their car, and the La Patee was on

5th Avenue right adjoining it. And he was my doorman together with the Tutwiler Hotel. So we did a big evening business just from the hotel guests. And we were famous for—I started the shish kabob back then and the pilaf rice and some Greek dishes and—and spaghetti with burnt butter and stuff like that, yeah. That's where it all started.

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AE: And as I remember also you had a—a lot of—of people with Greek heritage that came—who came through the restaurant as employees and whatnot. Can you—can you talk about what that culture is like in Birmingham and how so many Greek people are in the restaurant business here?

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MM: I don't know how it all started but when—when I came here, I noticed there were a small group of Greeks and most of them all in the restaurant business but they—the whole thing is that the—they were dedicated and they were willing to work. And that was the thing. And they stayed on top of it. And naturally, I had an edge on them because I was a university graduate and I understood the business sense. But still, it was very difficult to achieve some of the work the way they did. And they understood cooking because it was sort of handed down from their—their grandmothers and mothers and so forth, so—and they kept the recipes. Up to this day, some of the recipes are really hard to beat.

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AE: Now did you have an interest in cooking when you opened La Patee?

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MM: When I was at the La Patee, I used to walk behind [Bill] Demoos, who was an excellent cook and he was—he was so—he wanted—if he wanted something lean, he made sure there was no fat on the meat, and he was a perfectionist when it came to cooking and—and I used to write the recipes down and go behind him. And I used to tell Bill all the time, I said, “Bill,” I said, “some days you’ll get sick,” I said. “You know, I’ve got to come back here.” Which there were times when he didn’t show back, and I had to go back there and help bring up lunch or something. But that’s the way it all started.

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AE: And then in what—what years did you have La Patee?

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MM: The La Patee was in the early [nineteen] ‘50s, right after World War II; that’s when I started the La Patee. And around 19—or 1948, I think it was—something like that. I forget. That’s been a long time ago. [*Laughs*] And then the Michael’s was on the Bessemer Super Highway—was in the ‘50s and then we branched out with—we built the Holiday Inn up in Huntsville, Alabama, on Memorial Parkway, and I had a Michael’s there. And then we put a Michael’s at the Ramada Inn out there in Madison, Alabama, and so forth. But I used all the same recipes and the same shish kabob and steaks and—and Greek chicken and pilaf rice and stuff of that nature.

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AE: And the—the Michael’s Restaurants that you’re speaking of, those were the Michael’s Sirloin Room? Was that the full name of it?

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MM: Yes, right, the Michael's Sirloin Room downtown. It used to be across the street from the Parliament House, and we have a lot of celebrities that used to come through: Bob Hope and Coach Bryant and—and I have pictures. In fact, I copyrighted that name, and there's a local fellow named Rusty Creel to this day, who opened up two Michael's after I got out, but it's on a royalty basis, and I've given him all the recipes and everything. He opened one up at the Galleria [shopping center in Birmingham]. It's open right now. It's fairly new, the Michael's out there.

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AE: And so the Michael's, those were—would you say those are more white tablecloth restaurants? Fine dining?

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MM: It's—it's a dinner house restaurant, yeah. And I introduced way back then to Michael's the steer butt steak, which is—which is pretty well-known with the—especially the sports crowd used to come in for football games and everything else and Legion Field back in its heyday with—we had *Birmingham News*, Zipp Newman [Henry "Zipp" Newman] was the big sportswriter then—Van Hoose [Alf Van Hoose] and all those. And they—they made sure that all the different cultures and everything used to hang out at Michael's back in those days.

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AE: And so you said that Jabo Stone used to come to your restaurant, but had you been to the Golden Rule, being in—in—?

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MM: Oh, yeah. I used to go to the Golden Rule, like a bunch of guys get together just to get some good barbecue and—and I loved their barbecue sandwich the way he did it and everything and the sauce, so—and he knew I used to come out there and then he—he kept after me about taking over the business, and I told him I was a—a steak operator. I didn't know anything about barbecue back then. But I learned quickly, watching him. *[Laughs]*

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AE: And so Jabo Stone, from what you said earlier, he married a woman whose maiden name was Williams, and they originally opened the Golden Rule?

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MM: Yeah, they're—they're the original owners of the Golden Rule from way back. It used to be in that family, the Williams family, and he married one of the sisters. And they both passed away now, but they had no children, so that's why he—he sold it to me on a royalty basis more or less—with no money down. *[Laughs]*

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AE: But so the original Golden Rule, it opened in the late 19th Century correct?

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MM: The original Golden Rule opened when it was a dirt—I have some old pictures here—in 1891, when it used to be a dirt road and then eventually became US 78 highway going to Atlanta. That's—so I—I think, according to some of the photographs I have, I think it moved about four or five times. I'm not quite sure. But where we're located now is we moved over there about

thirty years ago. He used to live right next to it. See, he used to own that property that Highway—I-20 came through so that—he knew that was coming. That’s why I was interested in—I was lucky enough to get the piece of property right across the street from the exit.

00:17:47

AE: Do you know much about the Williams family or Jabo Stone and their—were they—how far back they go in this area and how they got into the restaurant business?

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MM: Well he owned—he was an electrician and his name was Stone Electric Company. And finally, I think, one of his nephews has taken over the company. And she came from Gadsden, Alabama—the Williams [his wife’s family]. So that’s all I know about them but—she and her sister. Other than that, I really don’t know too much about them because they were a very quiet-type family, you know, and they didn’t have many children to speak of. I do remember when he passed away, having to pay those royalties that I had contracted with. If I remember correctly, we did a lot of bookkeeping because I had to send out about six different checks to different nephews and nieces that he left the money to. *[Laughs]* That’s—that’s all I remember.

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AE: Can you describe what the restaurant was like when you were eating there as a customer?

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MM: Yes. Originally since I was raised in the streets of Brooklyn, when I first visited there the first thing that—it was just a—a regular barbecue place and he used to sell breakfast also. But what got me, they had a separate dining room in the back for the—for the blacks with their own

jukebox and that was something—I wasn't used to that, being from up North. So finally, when I first took it over, though, that was over with [*meaning, segregation*], and I didn't want to be involved with anything like that. So I've never had that problem because to this day I have employees in the Golden Rule, for example, Bernice Kelley, she started as a teenager, and she's now seventy-five years old still working. And I have several other employees with us that have been with me for thirty years. But—but we're just like a big family.

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AE: So you're saying when you bought the restaurant, which was in about—it was 1969?

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MM: I bought the restaurant and it was about 1970, I think—something like that.

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AE: Okay. And so you immediately wanted to do away with the segregated dining room?

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MM: Well at that time then it was already done away with, so I didn't have anything—any problems like that. But the main thing is that where Jabo Stone got the best of me, he had me sign a contract that I was going to have at least another operation because the more I had, the more royalty he got from the sales standpoint. So I opened one up in [the] Hoover [area of Birmingham], which is still in existence and it's—it's a great location. And that was the second one. And then from there we went onto—further out. But anyway, I fulfilled my obligation to Jabo for twenty years.

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AE: Can you talk about the food in the early days? Because, as I recall, reading from the history on your website, it was a very limited menu with just the—the pork and a salad with a dollop of mayonnaise on it and whatnot.

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MM: Yes, but I sort of elevated that—upgraded it quite a bit. I introduced our chickens the way we do it and then loin back ribs and then introduced the—some beef, you know, brisket of beef. And then we were using fresh French fries, which to this day that—if we try to change it and the customers rebel against us. But it's—it's a lot of prep area, and it's a lot of old-fashioned hard work but we don't—we charge a little bit more but they—they don't mind because somebody has to overcome the expense involved, and it works out real fine that way.

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AE: Was Jabo cooking all the barbecue himself when he had the restaurant?

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MM: Jabo never cooked; he was an electrician. But he had the—these old pit fellows that I inherited. Some of them have passed away. And we've trained them all over the years, and they do a good job. Because one of the things I kept up was having the pit in the dining room, where the customers see that it's fresh—that there's nothing hidden in the back. The only thing in the back of the house is the dishwashing machine and—and maybe some prep area of getting things ready, that's about it. But all the cooking is done right out there in front of the customer, and he knows what he's getting.

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AE: Can you talk about the barbecue process a little bit and how that works?

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MM: Well we—in order to keep up with the volume, I eventually bought a big smoker that holds 600-pounds at a time. So we start it in the smoker because with the smoker you sort of are cooking from the inside out, see, and this way you want to make sure that when you're cooking pork, it's cooked well done. And then we finish it on the pit. And the way we finish it on the pit is—is important because we don't just chop all the meat all the time but we—we make a custom-made sandwich. In other words, if a fellow wants outside meat, he gets some outside meat; if he wants just inside, he's got just nothing but inside or half-and-half and—and so we have customers that are more or less spoiled, where we make it exactly like they want it and—but our sauce is the main thing, too, because ours is a tomato-based sauce, and people like it in this area. Because you go to the Carolinas and other areas, it's more vinegar-based and—and you go to Georgia, it's mustard based. So you have different personalities and different locales where the—however, in the long run, I think our sauce is more or less from a—from a consumer standpoint is—is accepted as a whole. So we're doing all right with it.

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AE: Did you develop the sauce recipe?

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MM: Yes, we've—we've developed the sauce recipe, and then we've improved it some and made also a sweet sauce that goes better with the ribs and on chickens and we sort of—in other words, I had the basic sauce that I first got from them and then developed from that—added to it

different ingredients, which you make it different according to the type of meat that you're cooking.

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AE: So you have a number of different sauces depending on—?

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MM: We have a number—we have them all on the table for the customers and some customers like—we even have the sweet sauce and some of them have—we have a mustard sauce, too, so when we go to Georgia [with the franchises], we have a mustard sauce, too, for them. So we—we sort of—we're dedicated to the Southeast, more or less.

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AE: So is that something—a conscious effort to look forward to franchising, when you were developing the sauces to have a—a sauce specific to a particular area?

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MM: I didn't intend to franchise because I had a lot of requests for it, but after my son, Charles, came into the business. And he got with it, so I said, "Charles," I said, "I'm getting too old to be doing all this. You go ahead." And so that's how I started the franchising, because of Charles. And then brought—then Charles brought Todd Becker in that he went to school with, so they're doing pretty good with it.

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AE: And the—did the sauces develop—the multiple sauces develop as the franchising developed?

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MM: Yeah. The different multiple sauces have developed more or less the last—oh, I'd say the last ten years. That's—in fact, but we've put them all under our labels now. For example, we do our own potato salad because we—we used to make our own fresh potato salad, and we have one outfit that makes it for us with our label, and then we used a sweet-sour slaw. I don't like—I don't like to use mayonnaise-base because that's how, if you don't watch it, that's how people get sick from it. And we—we're very careful about things of that nature, so you don't have that cross-contamination and people get upset. So everything is freshly prepared and all followed according to our recipes when we issue a franchise.

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AE: So can I ask you about the transition from fine dining to barbecue and—and what that's meant to you and—and your position now with Golden Rule?

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MM: Well all I can say is that when I first took over the Golden Rule, it was all cash and we didn't have credit cards in those days, either. And it was—it was much easier and I used to—because I remember doing the fine dining fifty-percent of your business, it was all credit and you had to wait to get your money. [*Laughs*] And then the credit card companies charged you such a large fee; it's amazing when you look at your statement how much is going out for the credit

card arrangement. And you can't very well keep increasing it because the barbecue business was much—to me was a—a cash business and much quicker. *[Laughs]*

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AE: Did you expect that when you took the—the Golden Rule over?

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MM: No, I never expected that, no. But it's amazing the—the volume that you could do and—you—you serve twice as many customers as in fine dining because your checkout average is not that high, but the net result that your expenses are not as high as the fine dining either.

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AE: Do you ever miss some of the kind of creativity of the fine dining and—and influencing the menu and changing things around or—or not really?

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MM: I miss some of it because when I—when we did the fine dining, the Michael's, and naturally, it was a pleasure to sit down with—different celebrities used to come in town, you know, and then somebody bringing them in, and they wanted to be recognized, you know. That's—that's human nature because the top businesspeople used to come in and say they'd bring in the coach of their alma mater. It was—and then if you recognized them, that was a big plus for them. That's all just part of what I call being a good maître d'. That's—that I miss nowadays, but I let the younger ones take over now.

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AE: Now if I can go back again now to Mr. Stone and the Williams family, do you know why they called their barbecue place the Golden Rule?

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MM: I have no earthly idea. I think they must have been reading the Bible or something, and so the name just stuck with it—Golden Rule. But what got me is I used—I had to spend money for the attorneys and everything to get it copyrighted because, if I was going to expand, I didn't want everybody copying me. So—and I used to kid Jabo Stone. I said, "I had to do your legal work." And he'd just laugh because he was just an old electrician, and all he wanted was the royalty.

[Laughs]

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AE: Can you describe the—the pit that they had at the original restaurant that you took over?

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MM: It was a small pit; it was half the size of the one we have now. I'm—I'm going to take Amy [the interviewer] to Irondale, and she could see what I'm talking about. The pit we have is twice as big, and then I have with the red-glazed brick, where it stands out and do a little marketing with it. So it's—anyway, it's—it's a long ways from the original Golden Rule.

[Laughs]

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AE: What was Irondale like in those days?

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MM: Irondale was just a—the last stop, really, going to Atlanta. In fact, he [Jabo Stone] used to sell a lot of beer over there because that was the last stop before you got into a dry county. I remember that, but I never pushed the beer business. That was—I think Jabo Stone used to sell quite a bit of it back in those days when he had it because that was—see, the—the liquor laws were really—I don't know. It all depended in which way different preachers controlled certain counties, and so a lot of these counties were dry back in those days. So he sold a lot of beer. But when I went across the street, I didn't fool with it. In fact, we're lucky to sell 500 dollars a week of beer. We don't push it. Ours is a family-oriented—that's—I don't know what else to say. This—I think I'll take Amy and let her see what the Golden Rule looks like and let her try some of this good barbecue. **[Laughs]**

00:31:22

AE: Well with all the—the barbecue in Alabama and in Birmingham, how do you think yours is different from anything else?

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MM: Well I'll tell you one little thing that I noticed: we still serve the individual Coca-Cola, the six-ounce bottle, and put it on the table with a glass of ice. And it's amazing how I see some lovely old ladies come across town because of the Coca-Cola bottle. **[Laughs]** Just a little—see you have to—little things like that you can—you can hang your hat on to this day. Because at one time I talked to the Coca-Cola, and was talking about talking me into just using the—the fountain Coke, and I said, “Uh-uh. You just keep bringing those small bottled Coca-Colas.” And little stuff like that is what makes us different.

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AE: Can you talk about the rest of your menu? You mentioned a lot more of the items, but as far as sides and desserts and—and things like that?

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MM: Yeah, we—we do our own pies, like the lemon icebox pies is one of our favorites—is one of our biggest sellers. There's a recipe we've used at Michael's, and we have coconut and also banana pudding and—but that's made daily every day—fresh and we—we do our own pies. And that's about it. And then we sell a lot of sauce. But we've also upgraded and we sell quite a bit—I started the barbecue salad many years ago. It's—we just—now we chop it sometimes—now we give them a choice; they can have either chicken or they can have barbecue or they can have beef—whatever they want in their salad or even half-and-half. We even have smoked turkeys also—just the turkey breast only. And we have our own honey mustard sauce to go with it and everything, so we've—just in ordinary barbecue you can get a pretty good variety, if you want a good lunch.

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AE: So the turkey, can you get that on a sandwich or just—?

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MM: We have turkey sandwich or turkey plate, whatever you want, with honey mustard—and then we have side dishes as our own recipe. The baked beans which we—we don't just open the can; we actually cook them. And then we have the fresh French fries and coleslaw with the sweet-sour slaw and then we have individual corn—corn on the cob. That's about it. And then the potato salad. So that—that gives them a pretty good variety.

00:34:14

AE: Now when you were talking about when you were at La Paree and had Michael's and everything about having some Greek inspired dishes on the menu, the Greek chicken and things like tha is there anything Greek about anything at the Golden Rule today?

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MM: No. But one operation is on the Pinson Highway is a Golden Rule, where we do some catering. We do—we do make a Greek chicken, if they want it and stuff like that. We've done that. And we've also [done] standing—rib—rib roasts and [things of] that nature. From a catering standpoint, we can do that. We have the people that can do it. We've been doing that catering on the side, but it's under the Golden Rule on Pinson Highway there. So those recipes are there, if they want them, but we hadn't pursued the catering; however, most of the catering nowadays we even have where we haul a little trailer and actually a barbecue pit, where we actually can do right on-site—a big party like 1,000 people, if they want it. So we—we can—we got the personnel to do it with, if they want to. All they have to do is pay for it. **[Laughs]**

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AE: Were Jabo Stone and his wife, were they surprised at how much the—the Golden Rule grew—grew after you got a hold of it?

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MM: Yeah, I think he was pleasantly surprised because he made more money, but too bad he's not around to see it now. Anyway, that's been—he's been dead now about four or five years at least. Is there anything else that you'd like. I don't know?

00:35:54

AE: Well was he—was the business a big success for him when he had it. do you know?

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MM: Oh yes. he knew—I knew that he could sell it and he could get a big price, because I know people were trying to buy it, but he never would sell it to anybody. But in the long-run he was—he was—I think he outsmarted me; I think he made lots more money in twenty years than what he would have got with a cash offer upfront.

00:36:20

AE: So he saw you as a good businessman and knew that you were going to do right—?

00:36:24

MM: Yeah, I think he saw how we were doing at Michael's downtown, and he used to come over there and hang around there. He—Jabo was pretty smart. He had—his electric company was very successful; he was well known in town—Stone Electric Company. But his—but his wife did all the work. And then he used to go over there at night and then help clean up. And he had no children so—. He was a hard worker. I'll say that for him.

00:36:53

AE: And now the long history of the Golden Rule, having been in operation for more than 100 years, really, and on your website the history is part of your presentation of the Golden Rule there. How much does that heritage figure into daily operations?

00:37:09

MM: Well I think the heritage in some of the old employees that's been there and everything else has a lot to do with the success of it. Because when some of these new franchisees open up we try to give them the history of it and then we send a team, and we always try to put one or two of the old folks up there on the team. And we pay the out-of-pocket expenses and everything else. We insist that the franchisee—the new franchisee, you know, takes them and—and I—we have on our menu their names and everything, so we sort of dedicate our menu to a lot of the old employees. And when you go there, you'll see our menu and how it's done, and I think that has a lot to do with it, too.

00:38:03

AE: What do you see as the future of the Golden Rule?

00:38:07

MM: I don't know. The future, I don't—I really don't know what it will be. Some big outfit like Wendy's and them wants to take it over, make me an offer and I'll listen. **[Laughs]** I think that's what it's going to take eventually, too, because I really don't know what to say about that. Personally, I think we have an outstanding product and—and eventually, somebody is going—I've turned down different offers but some big outfit come in that knew—that had the management capabilities to do it, then that's what it's going to take to—because the barbecue business is—is tough to go on a national basis, you know, but from the regional standpoint you can do it and—but it just takes a lot of hard work, that's all. And there comes a time when you have to smell the roses and too much hard work is—my days are numbered. **[Laughs]**

00:39:12

AE: Well outside of the business success of the Golden Rule, what has being in the barbecue business in Alabama meant to you?

00:39:20

MM: Well it's been—it's been a pleasant surprise to me that's what it was because I didn't realize—I never paid much attention to it other than I enjoyed a good barbecue. **[Laughs]** But after I got into it, I realized the possibilities with it and also, you know, being in the—developing the Hyatt Hotel back in those days and—also the Michael's—this was lots easier than those other developments. I—I'm sorry that I wasn't about twenty years younger where I could have really done something with it. That's about it.

00:40:02

AE: Well and I have a question that is off the subject, but in my interviews with other Greek restaurant owners in Birmingham there are a lot of great folks who have hotdogs, and there's that special sauce on the hotdogs here in Birmingham. I wonder if you have an opinion about that and where that came from?

00:40:19

MM: Yeah, Pete's Famous Hotdogs on 2nd Avenue **[Laughs]**—I know—I remember—because he—he's dead now; he went to Greece. But I remember when I first came to Birmingham, I used to go down there, and he still serves the best hotdogs [*Gus Koutroulakis is the current owner*]. And he makes—I know he makes his recipe, this sauce—he used to make it at home. He lived in Norwood, Alabama, and—and every time he'd make it, you could smell it all over the neighborhood. **[Laughs]**

00:40:50

AE: But there's—there's definitely something particularly Greek about that sauce and just—it's just kind of a mystery. And it's so specific to Birmingham and—do you have any idea or heard over the years what it consists of at all?

00:41:05

MM: No, no, he—he was always tight-lipped about it. But the fellow that has it now [Gus Koutroulakis] is a nephew of his and—and he's gotten pretty old, too, because I kid him that—that the quarters are so tight and he's so hunched forward, trying to make those hotdogs, but they're hard to beat, though.

00:41:32

AE: Yeah, I enjoyed two of those yesterday, actually, and they were very good. [*Laughs*] Well is there anything that I haven't asked you about Golden Rule and the business and the barbecue that you'd like to add?

00:41:43

MM: No, I—I don't know of anything else other than when we open in Mississippi, I hope everybody from Mississippi enjoys the good Golden Rule Bar-B-Q. That's all I can tell you.

00:41:54

AE: Well ,all right. Well Mr. Matsos, I really appreciate you giving me this time to speak with you. It's been lovely.

00:41:59

MM: Well you're welcome.

00:42:02

[End Michael Matsos]