

GEORGE ARCHIBALD, JR.
Owner, Archibald's Bar-B-Q – Northport, AL

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Date: October 5, 2006
Location: Archibald's Bar-B-Q – Northport, LA
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Length: 11 minutes
Project: Southern BBQ Trail - Alabama

[Begin George Archibald, Jr.]

00:00:00

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Thursday, October 5th 2006 and I'm in Northport, Alabama, at Archibald's Bar-b-Q, and I'm with Mr. George Archibald, Jr. And sir, would you say your name and your birth date for the record, please?

00:00:18

George Archibald: My name is George Archibald, Jr. Born May 3rd 1954.

00:00:23

AE: And your parents were George and Betty Archibald, right?

00:00:27

GA: Yes, yes.

00:00:29

AE: And can you tell me about how and when they started the business and got into the barbecue business?

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GA: Well it started back in 1962. [*Short pause*] They started back in 1962, and they been going ever since. [*Laughs*]

00:00:47

AE: Were your parents from Northport in this area originally?

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GA: Yes.

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AE: What were they doing before they got into the business?

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GA: Well my father used to work at Holt [steel mill in Holt, Alabama], and my mother used to work at the paper mill.

00:01:01

AE: Okay. And so what gave them the wild hair to want to cook barbecue?

00:01:06

GA: Well they just wanted to get in business.

00:01:08

AE: Now I can't really be in Northport and talk about barbecue without mentioning Dreamland [Bar-B-Que restaurant, which is also Tuscaloosa]. And now they opened, from what I understand, a few years before y'all [in 1958]. Was that—?

00:01:18

GA: No, we was opened before Dreamland.

00:01:18

AE: Oh, really?

00:01:19

GA: Yes, uh-huh.

00:01:22

AE: Okay. And so what is it about this area that you think your parents—did they see a need for good barbecue or they just liked cooking barbecue, or do you have any idea how that happened?

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GA: Well—well I don't know; they just—they just wanted to get in business and—and where I was born—well I was born and raised on this road here, so and this was a good location so he bought it.

00:01:44

AE: So you grew up in the house up front here?

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GA: Yes.

00:01:49

AE: And this—was this building where the pit is and everything was it already back here, or did he build it?

00:01:53

GA: No; it used to be owned by Morrows. Mr. James Morrows built it. Uh-hmm. And he bought it from him.

00:02:01

AE: So was your father a big cook before he got in the business? Did he barbecue a lot for your family?

00:02:06

GA: Well he used to barbecue a little bit, yes. But he was really at Hope.

00:02:15

AE: So when did you start working with him? I mean you pretty much—I would—I would guess came up in the business.

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GA: About twelve when I started.

00:02:23

AE: What did you start out doing?

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GA: Well I started out cleaning up, yeah—going to get wood and stuff like that.

00:02:32

AE: And now Tuscaloosa is an important place in the Civil Rights Movement with the integration of the University [of Alabama] and all that. Can you—you share some memories maybe of what Northport and Tuscaloosa was like back then when you were coming up?

00:02:48

GA: Well as far as I know everything was all right. [*Laughs*] You know you have no rivals back in school days. But it was okay.

00:02:56

AE: And when you started out was—was Archibald's Bar-B-Q serving basically the community here?

00:03:03

GA: Yes.

00:03:05

AE: And when did Archibald's become integrated?

00:03:09

GA: Well we always have been. Yes, uh-huh.

00:03:14

AE: All right, just everybody came for your good ribs, huh?

00:03:17

GA: Yes.

00:03:19

AE: Can you talk about your ribs and—and how they're different from anybody else's and what y'all do?

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GA: I don't know. I imagine they're about the same. We just cook ours slow and easy, yeah.

00:03:31

AE: What did you learn from your father about barbecuing?

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GA: Well just take your time. That's—that's mainly—that's about all of it—just take your time with it and that's it.

00:03:40

AE: Can you describe your operation here in this—this pit and your hose and spraying down the fire and all that?

00:03:48

GA: Well it's just a small little place—and just build a fire and keep the fire low, yes—and cook it slow.

00:03:56

AE: Do you like being in the barbecue business?

00:03:59

GA: Yes. I've been in it all my life.

00:04:00

AE: Was your father proud that you took it over?

00:04:04

GA: Yes. Yes, he decided he would leave it to me, so I guess—I guess, yeah.

00:04:09

AE: And your sister works with you also, is that right?

00:04:11

GA: Yes, uh-hm.

00:04:13

AE: Paulette Washington?

00:04:14

GA: Yes, that's her.

00:04:15

AE: Did she grow up in the business also and been doing it—?

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GA: Yes, she did.

00:04:20

AE: How do y'all share your—your duties here?

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GA: Well I start it up in the morning, and then she comes and releases me. And then I come back at three [o'clock in the afternoon], and I stay until I close.

00:04:31

AE: And that's your nephew out there who is starting the fire. Does he do that every morning?

00:04:35

GA: Oh no, he just started with me. That's my nephew; he just started, yes.

00:04:40

AE: And before he started, were you out there making the fire or did you have somebody else—
?

00:04:44

GA: Every morning.

00:04:46

AE: Can you talk about making a fire and—and what you look for and what you do?

00:04:49

GA: Well I just put—put a little paper on there and then put the wood on there and then put the log and light it up.

00:04:57

AE: What kind of wood do you—?

00:04:58

GA: I use hickory wood.

00:05:00

AE: Do you have somebody regular who brings it to you?

00:05:03

GA: Yes, his name is Charles Thomas, uh-hm.

00:05:08

AE: And then how about your sauce? Your sauce is really famous. Can you talk about that a little bit without giving away any secrets?

00:05:14

GA: No, that's a secret that we can't talk about. *[Laughs]*

00:05:18

AE: Well can you describe like the flavor of it? Because it's so different than a lot of sauces in Alabama.

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GA: Well that's a secret; we can't talk about that. *[Laughs]*

00:05:31

AE: But it's—just for the record, it's more of a vinegar-based sauce. It's more of a tangy sauce. Less tomato—.

00:05:38

GA: Yes.

00:05:40

AE: And I know lots of folks come in here with their own jars and—and get some to go a lot, is that right?

00:05:45

GA: Yes, they do.

00:05:47

AE: And your—your business here, you open at 10:30 in the morning, and I know people are lined up at the door at 10:30. But how—how can you explain the popularity of Archibald's Bar-B-Q?

00:06:01

GA: Just good, I guess. *[Laughs]* That's all I can say. Everybody seems to like it so it's, you know, keep it clean and treat people right. So that's it.

00:06:13

AE: What do you think the future of Archibald's Barbecue is?

00:06:16

GA: [*Sighs*] Well I think it's going to be here a long time. Yes. My daughter is going to take over after I step down, so I feel like it's going to be here a while.

00:06:28

AE: What's your daughter's name?

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GA: Vershonya Archibald.

00:06:31

AE: Okay. She's been working here right?

00:06:33

GA: Yes, uh-hm.

00:06:35

AE: And she's definitely interested in taking it over?

00:06:38

GA: Yes, uh-hmm. Yes, she is.

00:06:41

AE: And what does—what does your clientele think about that? I mean you've must have had multiple generations of folks coming here to eat your barbecue, and to see it being carried on by your daughter, that's—that's pretty remarkable.

00:06:54

GA: Yes, they don't want me to step down, but I know sooner or later I'm going to have to, so she's going to be willing to take over.

00:07:02

AE: So what do you like best about what you do?

00:07:06

GA: Well I like it—it's a job and it just keeps you busy and I enjoy doing it so that's the main thing. If you don't like what you do, you ain't going to do it right. I just enjoy doing it.

00:07:21

AE: Is there any other barbecue throughout the state or the South that you've tried or that you like or have an opinion about?

00:07:27

GA: No, I haven't ate anybody else's 'cause I just get tired of barbecue sometimes so—.

[Laughs]

00:07:33

AE: Do you have a taste of your barbecue every day?

00:07:35

GA: Oh, yes, I taste it every day.

00:07:38

AE: What are you looking for when you're tasting it?

00:07:42

GA: The goodness, the sweet—soft—tender, yeah—slide right off the bone.

00:07:48

AE: Because a lot of folks put you, you know, this place at the top of the list for ribs, and a lot of folks come here and like coming here. Do you have any idea why that it is? I mean you have great barbecue, but do you think it's something else there, too?

00:08:01

GA: Well the way you treat people—treat them nice, right—they'll come back. And just keep the place clean and that's it.

00:08:10

AE: Can you talk about your prices a little bit and what a slab of ribs goes for and—and other things that you offer?

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GA: Well I'm about the cheapest one around. That's about it on that. I'm about the cheapest, and try to keep it right.

00:08:24

AE: How much does a slab go for?

00:08:26

GA: A slab is \$17.99, uh-hmm. Small plate is \$7.50; large plate \$8.50—hmm; **[Laughs]**—\$8.56 and sandwich \$5.40. That's about it.

00:08:42

AE: Do you have any customers that come in and ask for anything special or—or something that's different from what anybody else might get when they come here?

00:08:52

GA: Well no, not actually—just about the same thing, yeah. Because they know I'm a small businessman, and I ain't got too much to offer, but what we have is good.

00:09:03

AE: Well what would you want folks who hadn't been here to Northport and to Archibald's to know about your barbecue and what you do?

00:09:10

GA: Well I'd let them try it, and then if they say they like it, they come back. I usually give them a taste and they come back. So that's it. **[Laughs]**

00:09:21

AE: Now we got ten minutes here. I know you got a story in there somewhere—something—?

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GA: That's about all I can say right now, yeah. I was raised up here and ever since—. [*Laughs*]

00:09:37

AE: And—

00:09:39

GA: I'm a bad reporter in that case.

00:09:41

AE: Is there anybody staying up in this house out front now?

00:09:45

GA: Well no, we usually go in and dress up and, you know, take showers or whatever and come back out.

00:09:51

AE: Okay, so it's just kind of a—an office now where y'all can go and take breaks and do all that?

00:09:58

GA: Yes, that's it. Just sit around and dress up.

00:10:03

AE: Has this interior and—and the building been pretty much the same ever since the place started?

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GA: Ever since day one, yeah.

00:10:12

AE: It's always been pink inside?

00:10:15

GA: It always had been pink inside.

00:10:17

AE: Do you know why it—they chose pink?

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GA: No, I don't know why. They just made it stand out a little bit, that's it.

00:10:25

AE: And you got your handful of counter seats here. I know most people come and take out, but do many sit at the counter here and eat with you?

00:10:33

GA: Well some do, yes, uh-hm. We have about four or five seats at the end so they come in and sit and eat, but most of them, like I say, carry it out.

00:10:43

AE: And when we walked in this morning this place was freezing. I mean, you were saying that you leave your meat out on the counter to keep it cool overnight.

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GA: Yes, when they bring it in and stuff they leave it for it to be cold.

00:10:53

AE: How many ribs do you think you cook in a day and sell in a day?

00:10:57

GA: Well it all depends—varies on how many people is coming in and stuff like that. You never know how many you're cooking for so—.

00:11:05

AE: Do you ever sellout in a day?

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GA: Yes, we do, uh-hmm.

00:11:11

AE: All right. [To woman entering building:] Good morning. [To Mr. Archibald] Well it looks like you need to get to work, so I'll let you move on. Do you have anything you'd like to add for the record?

00:11:18

GA: No, that's it.

00:11:19

AE: Well thank you sir, very much. I appreciate it.

00:11:23

GA: All right. [*Laughs*]

[End George Archibald, Jr.]