

STELLA DIKOS and KATRINA GIAVOS
Stella's – Richmond, Virginia

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Interviewer: Sara Wood

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

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Project: Women, Work, and Food: Richmond, Virginia

[Begin Stella Dikos/Katrina Giavos]

00:00:00

Sara Wood: Okay; so this is Sara Wood with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's March 6, 2013 and I'm here at Stella's in Richmond, Virginia. And could I have you introduce yourself please, Stella?

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Stella Dikos: Stella Dikos.

00:00:15

SW: Could you tell me where we are and what you're doing right now?

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SD: What can I say?

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Katrina Giavos: Where we are and what we're doing right now?

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SD: Oh well, we're at right at Stella's and we are having an interview.

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SW: And for the record could I have your birth date?

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SD: January 31, 1942.

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SW: And if you could introduce yourself, too.

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KG: Katrina Dikos Giavos; my birth date is July 19, 1966 and we are at Stella's Restaurant conducting an interview.

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SW: And could you just – could you start Stella by telling me where you were born and – and how you got here to Richmond?

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SD: I was born in Greece and I finished high school and then I came to America via an arranged marriage. And I ended up in Richmond, Virginia because my husband immigrated to America in 1950. He already established business here and he came back to Greece to find a bride.

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SW: And that was you?

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SD: Yes; that was me.

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SW: And how old were you at that time?

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SD: Nineteen.

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SW: And what was going through your mind when you first got here? What were you thinking?

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SD: It was kind of difficult but I made up my mind; my father did not push me. He asked me if I wanted to come to America. And I told him yes because the situation back in the Old Country back then it was kind of tough. If you had a dowry you could secure a very good marriage, but if you didn't have any – you didn't have no property, you didn't have money, and you didn't have a degree from a university just to guarantee income coming in into the marriage it was very difficult.

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And the role of the woman back then it was to get married.

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SW: So had you, you know ever worked in a restaurant before or had a job or anything like that?

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SD: No; I did not. I did not but necessity makes you learn a lot of things.

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SW: And so you got to Richmond and what – how did you get started in the restaurant business once you got – ?

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SD: My husband already had a place named The Village on Harrison and Grace close to RPI. The school was RPI and then it changed to VCU [Virginia Commonwealth University] in 1966. So we were there and I had my children and then little bit at a time I got into working there.

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SW: And for the record could you tell me your husband's name so we have it?

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SD: Stavros Dikos.

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SW: And your children's names?

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SD: Katrina and Dimitri.

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SW: So what was that like for you to start working in a – what kinds of things did you do at The Village?

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SD: I – I learned how to make sandwiches immediately and I immediately started working the bar, too and interacted with customers. We had a lot of instructors from VCU/RPI back then and it was very interesting and they were interested in me teaching me the English language and when I was making mistakes they were telling me otherwise and everything. It was very nice and that's how I got – .

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SW: And can we talk about in terms of you know coming from Greece to Virginia, what were your thoughts about the food here? I mean what were the differences like and how did you kind incorporate?

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SD: It was a big difference. It was almost like a shock. But little bit at a time you know you go to the grocery store and you buy ingredients that you think that you can make the dishes that you left behind at home and everything and then slowly you get into – into the habit of eating food from another culture.

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SW: So how long were you at The Village before Stella's opened 'cause you have – is that how – in terms of the order of things?

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SD: Yes; we – my – I have brought my brother here and he had already Joe's Inn and he would come and he would say, "Come into business with us. You're not going to work long hours. Sell The Village." And we sold The Village in 1981 and we went into business at Joe's Inn and things did not work there and I found myself out in the street with no business, working for other people.

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Luckily we owned the building that I had – that is there today and I told my husband that in November when the lease expires I want to go upstairs. He says "Nonsense; what are you going to do 24 steps upstairs?" I said, "You know I'm going to fix it and I'm going to work it and I'm going to cook the dishes that I know how to cook and I'm – I'm going to make it." And it happened; it happened. It was very successful.

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SW: What did that change for you from The Village to your own place where you got to make what you wanted to make and call the shots?

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SD: It was a good feeling, very good feeling, yeah, kind of empowerment.

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SW: For that time was it hard to be a woman with your own business? I mean were there – did you know a lot of other women who had their own restaurants or anything like that?

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SD: At the time – no; I did not know anybody, no. But I was with my husband then and I don't know if that makes any difference. It – it was I guess.

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SW: And what were some of the challenges that you were presented with when you started Stella's?

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SD: Just creating more dishes and putting them on the menu or on specials every day and see their happy faces that the people were satisfied.

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SW: Is there something about you know you're not only cooking for people but you're making them feel a certain way. Does that – do you – how does that make you feel to see people not just you know – they're not just eating because they're hungry but because it's a nurturing – ?

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SD: Well it makes you feel a very warm feeling inside that you can make the people appreciate what you're making and enjoying it.

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SW: I imagine to – to have your own restaurant and run it you must have been working. Were you just working all the time?

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SD: Very much so; yes, ma'am. Yes; and worrying about I had teenage children and everything and it was a challenge. But everything worked out.

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SW: Could you walk me through like a typical day of what it's like at that time when you started the restaurant, what it was like from start to finish?

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SD: Yes, ma'am; five o'clock up [AM], you had to get the flour ready to make the bread by hand, roll the dolmatas, the grape stuff, the grape leaves, chop things to start soups for lunch and everything in the morning and then the help started coming in around 8:00 or 9:00 [AM] and from that point very long hours – 17 hour days there. Dinner, I was there, lunch and dinner, and in the afternoon prepping. It was – it was hard work, but it paid off; yeah.

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SW: And then what happened after – so the restaurant moved from Harrison to another location?

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SD: Yes; we – my husband ended up selling the building and I did not want to stay there after that. So I sold the business and took a little bit off for two – three years and then when I saw the corner on Sills and Main I told my – I told Katrina, “Katrina is this a nice – a nice corner. I can make it; I can make it go in here.” And I had that feeling, the warm feeling that you get. And we fixed it and we opened and it did work out.

00:09:01

SW: And what year was that?

00:09:02

SD: I beg your pardon?

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SW: What year did you guys move?

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SD: What year was that?

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KG: We opened there in '97 – '96.

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SD: Ninety-seven; yes.

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KG: Ninety-seven.

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SW: And then how long were you there for and what – how did that change things – that new location?

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SD: We stayed there eight years; yes?

00:09:23

KG: Ninety-seven – yes.

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SD: No? Yeah, eight years and then my husband, her father got sick. He had spinal stenosis and he could not walk or anything and I told Katrina, “Katrina – ”

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KG: He had already retired. But really that was his heart and soul and so he insisted on helping – helping if you will even after retirement but she was working too hard and he was not doing very well.

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SD: Not doing very well and we decided to sell it in order to look after him.

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KG: We decided to sell the space – never sold the restaurant name, let’s you know get that clear; just sold the space.

00:10:04

SD: The space; yeah so – . And I took care of him for six months –

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KG: And then he was fine. He was fine.

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SD: For six months yeah –

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KG: I couldn't not work; it's in her blood to work.

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SD: And then I worked for –

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KG: So she came to help us at another restaurant.

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SD: Another restaurant that they have, I worked there for five years. And then I had a friend that lived across the street from here and she was telling me, oh, this lot – it was an empty lot –

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SW: The space here?

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SD: Yes; and I said – and she was telling me that someone was interested in getting the narrow lot and developing it. And I said, “I would be interested to get a little spot there.” And they told the pharmacist across the street told the – they told the developer, they said, “I know a lady, Stella; she’s got a good reputation in Richmond and everything and she’s interested in getting a spot.” But the deal did not go through with the first developer. And then comes the second one and it happened with the second developer.

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KG: We had really missed it; we had really missed Stella’s or I had really missed it.

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SD: Because everywhere we would go the people would say how much they missed us and –

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KG: We wished you were back.

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SD: – we wished you were back. We wished you were back and then it happened. This developer got it and –

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KG: Almost two years we’ve been here, two years in July.

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SD: Two years – yeah – August, July yeah.

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SW: What does that make you feel like when you go places and people keep asking you when are you going to open? I mean what does that mean for you to hear that?

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SD: Oh it meant a lot. I don't know; I don't know how to put it in words. The – the recognition and the –

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KG: The reputation.

00:11:56

SD: – and the reputation and the trust the people had in me with my cooking and with my – whatever I was making and everything and oh, when the word came out and everybody knew oh my god. [*Laughs*] It was very busy.

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SW: And it's still pretty – it's pretty busy.

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SD: Yeah; pretty busy, yes.

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SW: Everybody I talk to when I mention you they say, “make sure you call ahead and reserve a table.”

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SD: We are; well we’re very lucky, yes.

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SW: And so what is your – what is a day like here for you? I mean when do you start here and what – ?

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SD: I start at 5:15 – 5:30 – 5 o'clock in the morning depending how busy the – the day before is. That depends what I’m going to do in the morning. And it starts again with the bread, the homemade bread, the dolmatas, soups, everything to get ready for lunch and then you start prepping for the evening, the items that we use in the evening and make a few desserts. And that's how.

00:12:56

SW: I mean in terms of you know back when you came to Richmond up ‘til today I mean this is – like you’re cooking food that like you know and you – you love. It’s part of your culture.

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SD: Right; exactly.

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SW: What do you think it does for the Richmond landscape? I mean we're sort of at this – Richmond is sort of the northern-most place in the South and the Southern cuisine is you know like mac and cheese and fried chicken. And so how do you think that this – that your menu has contributed to Richmond or changed in terms of the landscape?

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SD: It's –

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SW: Or impacted it I guess is what – ?

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SD: Yes; impacted it. People were very brave to come and try. There's was a lady here today that came and told me she never had the kreatopita, kreas – in Greek it's the meat and you roll it in phyllo and you have the cream, the vegetables and everything and she said they were delicious. And she says I was brave enough to try something different. And she –

00:14:01

KG: I also think with the focus on health these days, the Mediterranean Diet which has really you know like every time you turn the TV on there is a new ad for Greek yogurt, Greek yogurt, you know so I think with the focus on health and – and Mediterranean Diet and how it has impacted you know that country and your other European countries I think that that's made a big

– a big difference in the midst of this whole Southern cooking thing which is big now. I think that we sort of – we – we fall into some – some sort of category there that I also think it's –

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SD: The medical studies they've done – it has a big impact in the community because we have fresh fish every day. We get it every day; vegetables, beans, everything that's the diet that we had back home.

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KG: I also think you know people eating out a lot in Richmond is being placed on the map now for restaurants – the restaurant scene and what we've done as a community to bring good food to the city, I think with people coming out to eat, I think they're also focused on what they cook at home, so they know what good food is. They recognize it, you know it's not – and so that's I think everyone – all of us in Richmond really, really feel that and it's – it's a great thing. It's a great thing because Richmond has so many restaurants. It wasn't like that at one time.

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SD: Not – not at all.

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KG: And we all feed of each other which is a really nice – it's a nice thing.

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SD: Exactly; exactly.

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SW: And I have a question here because I sort of want to ask about how you got involved because you know you grew up here and you're working and – and you're taking care of your family? I mean how did – how did you get involved Katrina 'cause you yourself own restaurants now?

00:15:56

KG: Yes; yes. Well she was primarily taking care of us in the restaurant so she was really hardly at home – both of my parents were hardly at home. And that's – that's what we knew, so after school it was at The Village sitting in a booth, doing homework. That was our life. Rarely – or holidays would we have a meal cooked at home; when I was young before she was really working a lot she was home, and so the few things that she did do at home I will never forget and I'll always remember. So everything I've learned I've learned from my parents, you know.

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And it's – I've learned things that you know you don't learn in culinary school and you don't learn in hotel restaurant management school. I learned true old-school –

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SD: You learned from experience by working and by being involved –

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KG: – experiences.

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SD: – with us.

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KG: So as a teenager you know being in the restaurant and growing up in the restaurants of course I didn't want to be in the restaurant business. I wanted to be far from it. I went to VCU and I studied Art. I wanted to go to New York. That was my thing – fashion was my thing and I happened to meet my husband now while I was in high school whose parents were in the restaurant business. So that's why I'm here today. [*Laughs*]

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SD: That's how she got involved.

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KG: And this is how I opened up 13 restaurants in my lifetime; yeah.

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SW: And what is your husband's name for the record?

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KG: Johnny Giavos.

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SW: And his – was his family from Richmond or did they – ?

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KG: Well actually they had moved back and forth from Greece, so that's why I didn't know him growing up. So finally they moved back in '81 and he started high school here and then they opened up a Greek restaurant in '82. And that's how I met him.

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SW: And what was the name of that restaurant?

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KG: Athens Tavern; yeah on Robinson Street.

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SD: On Robinson.

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KG: So he was waiting tables there as a teenager and my parents had taken me in for dinner and that's how we met.

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SD: And she was going to an all girls' school, St. Gertrude's and he would wait out there.

00:18:02

KG: Oh that was after the courtship, mom. [*Laughs*] Twenty-seven years we've been married and in the restaurant business together, so – yeah.

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SD: And I was telling her, “Don’t get married; you’re too young. Don’t do what I did.” I did it because it was – that’s the way it was for me, but here you have different – but it was – it was meant to be that way.

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KG: Well I think when you – when you grow up in the business, I think those – those hard times aren’t shocking. Does that make sense? It wasn’t we worked very hard and we worked very hard being married together which was not always easy and it was never easy for my parents. And I watched that, but I’m – we – we did it anyway and we had two children in the process and they were you know – they weren’t raised – . I – by that time, you know I knew that I needed to be at home more than my – my mother really didn’t have a choice. Back then it was a different time.

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So I was able to – Johnny and I were able to balance me being home with the kids which was great.

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SD: And when you were there I was there.

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KG: So mom would help –

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SD: With the children.

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KG: But they did grow up and you know knowing what we did in the business and now they both live in Manhattan and they're in college and so – . My son does all the branding, all the restaurant branding and – . Yeah; so it's kind of neat how it's all – all sort of evolved. We'll see if they end up in the business. [*Laughs*]

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SD: No; I hope not. No.

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SW: You don't want them to?

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SD: No; I don't want them to.

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KG: You never know though. You never know.

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SD: Oh god I hope not. I hope not. They're going to a good college. I hope they find a way and get a different type of job.

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SW: Now you said back when you – you said when you were growing up it was a different time and do you mean that it was just hard to make ends meet, so you had to work all the time?

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KG: No; I meant a different time when – when you have people that have come from another country and that's – I mean they just work and work and work. And back then I feel like because I've done this all my life now, I feel like back then you know you really didn't just trust anyone to run your business. You know they were – they're old-school. That's – they – they closed the restaurant one week a year and that was vacation. Otherwise, there weren't managers and you know – they were there working it.

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SD: Day and night.

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KG: I always said as I was opening restaurants, you know in order for me to have a life and in order for my husband and I to have a little bit of a life, we have to trust people. And sometimes you know it's not the same as when you're there. However you can't have a life if you don't trust people to take over a little bit sometimes. So that's why I was able to even now – even now after opening so many places having a couple of days off you know – still feel a little guilty because I've learned that from my parents, but it's not so bad. You know I know – I know I have good people which we're very lucky here especially, so – .

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SW: Do you have – can I just ask you a couple more things and then I'll let you go?

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SD: Definitely.

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SW: I really appreciate this. I know you're very busy. I'm just wondering; I mean you know I've read some articles that have been written about you and people say that you created the domino effect for people who want to open restaurants. You sort of knocked down the bridges, knocked down the barriers for women who wanted to start their own business in the region. And I wonder how you feel about that. I mean what – what – do you think that's true and what was that like for you?

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SD: Do you think – well that's – .

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KG: I don't – well I think – well you don't give yourself enough credit. I think that –

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SD: I'm very –

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KG: – you know I think that women especially women you know coming from the culture, coming from another country, you know and – and I find most of my friends' parents who are you know from Greece, the – the wives, the women always sort of are in their husband's shadow which my mother was never really like that.

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SD: No.

00:22:18

KG: Because I think she's educated herself being in the business and being back at The Village and speaking with all these people back in the '70s and she's just educated herself. And but she's never given herself credit for being able to – to run her business, being able to speak to vendors, ordering; I mean she's brilliant at it. You know and – and I have – I've learned from that. But she doesn't – I don't think you give yourself –

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SD: Interaction with the customers I think it was a trial for me but I – they were so interested in talking with me and explaining things to me and teach me and everything, especially those part-time professors or instructors and everything that – from the school there, from all of the departments of VCU.

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KG: But you had friends who opened restaurants with their husbands and they were very strong women also and we always recognized that. I just don't give yourself the credit you deserve for you know – .

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SD: Yeah; but I – it was good. The Village, the years at The Village were very good for me. I learned so much. And especially the communication with the people, with the public, and seeing they're adoring – you know they loved me and I loved them back. And that's what I accomplished.

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KG: They hold her in high regard.

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SD: Yes; very.

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KG: She just doesn't recognize that sometimes I think; yeah. [*Laughs*]

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SW: I mean when you look at what you've created though I mean what does that feel like because you've worked so hard for this? I mean you've worked so hard all your life and I just wonder do you ever take a moment to step back and look at all of it and just feel so – ?

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SD: Well I look and I see my – my children that they've done well and in the absence that I wasn't there all the time and I worked and then I see my grandkids and I pray every day for them to do well and keep a better life, easier life than us, and it feels good. It feels good.

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SW: Do you see like in Richmond today as you know compared to when you started working at The Village when you guys had The Village, do you see like a culture of other women starting their own restaurants and businesses? Is there a trend there that you see or – ?

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SD: Sort of – sort of.

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KG: Well I think – I think so.

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SD: Yes; because when we had The Village we had Linda.

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KG: Yeah; Linda Marcuse who is our friend.

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SD: Linda Marcuse who is our friend. She –

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KG: Started catering little-by-little.

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SD: – catering in all vegetarian – the vegan and she started that little bit by a little bit and then she opened her own place and then –

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KG: My friend? Who?

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SD: – no, the other lady that's got Roosevelt now.

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KG: Kendra [*Feather*].

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SD: Yeah; Kendra when she opened Ipanema, we were still down there and we were at Stella's upstairs when she opened that. And that's when it started the ball rolling and so many women opened their own little places.

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KG: I had a good friend. My friend Michelle Williams who has a number of restaurants also, we have so much in common and that's why we're really good friends. So it's – well it's nice; it's nice and we feed off of each other and we learn from each other.

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SD: Which is great.

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KG: In a – you know a kind of inadvertent way I guess.

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SD: Yeah; it's good.

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SW: Well I know that you need to go but I'm wondering if there is anything else that you think is important for people to know about you and your story or – or all the work that you've done over the years and continue to do for Richmond.

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SD: No; I think the public has said it all. But the recognition and patronizing the place and everything – that's enough. I don't have anything else to say. Thank you so much.

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KG: And she will continue as long as her hands allow her. [*Laughs*]

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SD: The carpal tunnel has done so much in my hands, all the work in the hands –

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SW: Oh you have carpal tunnel?

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SD: Yes.

00:26:41

SW: Oh how does that affect what you do? I mean you're making all this – ?

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KG: She has learned to now delegate authority.

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SD: A little bit now. Ask the people to lift things for me, pots, pans, heavier things that I can't lift and I can't do no more damage to the hands.

00:27:02

SW: Well thank you for doing this – this afternoon. I appreciate your time.

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SD: Oh you're welcome. You're very welcome. And you're very kind.

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SW: I got to talk to you –

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SD: Well thank you so much; thank you. Everybody says that and I –

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KG: She's very shy.

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SD: – very shy and humble, very.

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SW: But that's just your way though; isn't it?

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SD: Yes; yes.

00:27:25

SW: I mean it seems like that's part of your work ethic too.

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SD: Yes; yeah, I've always been like that. I always want to stay in the corner. I let the other people get there in the front. [*Laughs*] Yeah; it's like I said, the recognition – the recognition by the community it's – I'm honored that I can't describe how it feels and that's the highest I can say about the community of Richmond. Yeah; and the support, the community – no matter where – which location I went everybody followed and I can't forget that. I appreciate that so much.

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SW: Thank you so much.

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SD: Thank you.

[Stella Dikos has to go home – she's been working for 10 hours! – so Katrina and I sit down after Stella leaves and she begins by telling the story about why Stella worked so hard after her husband, Starvos, closed down The Village and opened Stella's for the first time.]

00:28:18

SW: I'm wondering if I could – . Okay; so here we go. Can you talk about – so it was – was it heartbreaking – it was heartbreaking for them, I mean they – ?

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KG: Well I'll tell – let me tell you this story. So after having been at The Village for all the years they were and as hard as they worked, when my uncle came to my parents – to my mother especially and said you know you both are working so hard – . Now when he – when my mother brought – when my parents brought him from Greece he worked in The Village with them. My parents taught him the restaurant business. And so when he left on his own which was fine and he went to open a place and he had a family, but then he came to my parents and said, “You're working extremely too hard. You know let's go into partnership together. That way we can you know share the responsibilities, so you're not working so hard.” And so my mother sort of thought that was the right thing to do and really, really begged my father to do it.

00:29:24

And my father was a very proud businessman. He was an amazing businessman. He was very well-loved and respected in Richmond. And having had opened The Village before going to marry my mother he was very attached. You know that – it was an institution back then; everyone knew my parents. Everyone remembered The Village, etcetera. So when he finally decided, “Okay, we’ll sell; we’ll go to Joe’s, we’ll share the responsibility,” and then you know the – it didn’t – it didn’t work out and my parents were – . That was very hard on my parents. And so when my mother said you know, “I can make it go upstairs. Let’s do Greek,” you know and I think it was a whole new dining experience than The Village was, but she had – she had added Greek entrees onto the specials at The Village so you know she sort of put her own cooking in there. So you know after deciding what she wanted to do at Stella’s it was you know – it – it was good and she’s an amazing cook and that went well.

00:30:40

But I think she worked so hard upstairs there because she felt guilty. Of having pressured my father into selling The Village and she felt so responsible for you know my father was very down. Even though Stella’s was a huge success, she swore, she swore to me and to him that she would work day and night to keep that place so successful because she felt so bad having had him sell – made him sell The Village.

00:31:14

So in essence, that place holds true to her heart because you know – I know she didn’t want to say in this interview with her but there were nights when she spent the night there because she was too tired to drive home and she knew she had to be up first thing to do – to make the bread.

00:31:37

So now it's hard to take her up there. She loves Ed Vasaio who owns Edo's [Squid] and Mama Zu's you know and when she had Stella's Ed Vasaio would come in every day for lunch. So he loves her and respects her but it's very hard to get her up there. But she has come a long way since then. You know I – I – being in high school I waited tables there and then towards the end that's when my husband and I opened up our first place and etcetera – etcetera. And then we went into partnership with her on Main Street and she was a spitfire. My mother has been a spitfire all of her life. And towards the end of Stella's she was working extremely too hard once again because that's all she knows and she has a little bit of martyr in her but you know that's okay. I've – I keep saying I don't want to have that in me, but I think I do a little bit. But I couldn't get her to slow down. Her hands were getting bad. I couldn't – couldn't get her to slow down and – but she had decided it was a good idea back when my father had gotten sick. We sold it to great people who are there now, who are dear friends of ours, and so this particular space I think – . My husband and I spoke to her for a whole year before we decided to do this about how we weren't going to watch her kill herself; we weren't going to watch her disintegrate. We weren't – towards the – towards the end of this restaurant being built my father out of the blue – my father had done very well the last few years. And he was so looking forward to this. He had gotten sick all of the sudden, so – my sweet daddy died three weeks before we opened. So he never got to see it open which was heartbreaking for me, very heartbreaking.

00:33:43

But I think that you know – I mean he's with us because it's so successful, but she's a different person now you know. She leaves; before she would never leave. She would be here all night watching over people. She's done prepping, she leaves; she needs to have a life. You know life is too short, so she's a different person and so we do a lot with her outside of Stella's which is – which is nice. And she is an amazing woman – amazing. Sometimes she feels that I – you

know I tell her I don't want her to worry about anything in here because I've – "I've got this and I know what I'm doing you know like you taught me well, like I know what I'm doing." And so sometimes she thinks I'm stepping on her toes, but she's – I do it because I don't want her to worry about anything. I want her to come in and prep what she likes to do and go get in her garden or go thrift shopping which she loves to do, so – .

00:34:47

SW: Is it sort of that she's had – I mean now that she you know – she only works a certain amount of time during the day as opposed to working a 15-hour day how – you know and you just mentioned that but in what ways – I mean are these things that she never really got to do before because she had always been working, so now it's sort of like a second reinvention of herself?

00:35:07

KG: Yes; and I wish she would actually do more. But I don't – she never knew how to have outside hobbies except for gardening and you know – . And it's hard to sort of teach her how to do you know – how to find new things to do since this has always been her passion. But I think my mom over the years, I think she – I think she put herself in a position where you know she didn't want to disappoint, she didn't want to disappoint my dad, she didn't want to disappoint people, she didn't want to disappoint – you know my parents said to me when I was a little girl, you know, "People like to see you in your own place. People like to see you there you know." And so they instilled that in me, you know because I – I work a lot of hours here but it's important for me and it's important for people to see me here.

00:36:07

But I've decided now that this is what she loves to do and I can't change that. You know I'm sending her to Greece for three weeks over Orthodox Easter which she's extremely happy about and very excited which will be great because she has taught us everything like we know how to do this. You know we can do this, so – .

00:36:31

SW: It must be hard to – to sort of step away though after all that time for her like working so hard.

00:36:36

KG: I think that's – I think that's what it is you know. She can't just say oh, "Okay I'm going to do this now," you know in the morning. She can't; it – it is. It's instilled in her and it's – it's part of her life and I won't be able to change that. I do, however, worry about her health. I worry about her hands. Finally sent her to a specialist the other day who said to her, "You need to slow down or you need to delegate authority." She's never learned to delegate authority and it always had to be her. If the dishes were piling up and she was cooking she'd go out and get the tub of dishes – things she didn't have to do. You know things that I have learned to say, "Hey, so and so; can you help me out? Hey so and so," – because that's their job; she's never learned to do that, so – yeah.

00:37:26

It's hard and it's hard – it's – it's hard working with your family sometimes, but like I said, the year while this place was being built or the year before you know we had multiple discussions about this – we're not – you know we're not going to have – this is not back you know 15 years ago. This is – this – in order for this to work and in order for all of us to be happy

this is how we have to work together and that means I'm young enough to keep on. You know my kids are older and now they're gone, so I'm working even more which is okay you know.

00:38:06

But this is – she always said, “It's my name out there”; you know which is true, however you can't kill yourself. You can't – you're not going to die in the restaurant. I need you to have a little bit of a life, so – . It's hard, but I've gotten through to her I think. I think we have.

00:38:22

SW: So I have a couple just follow-up questions and then I want to ask you about your restaurants and so – so your uncle, Stella's brother, what's his full name?

00:38:33

KG: Nicholas Kafanteris

00:38:35

SW: And is he younger than her or older?

00:38:37

KG: Just two years younger; yeah.

00:38:39

SW: Okay; and so he came – he came over to Richmond when she came to Richmond or he came after – ?

00:38:43

KG: No, no, right after; yeah like two years after, yeah, so in '63 – '64.

00:38:52

SW: And now you – you grew up you know working for your parents but – and then you said you met Johnny and you didn't intend on you know doing restaurants but you have. Can you talk about you know the first – can you, like the first restaurant you guys opened together or started working?

00:39:12

KG: Yes; so Stella's opened – at first Stella's opened in '83. We – Johnny and I – Johnny would go back and forth. He would work with me, wait tables at Stella's; he was also a cook. And he would go back and forth and work for his parents and then work for us. We were married in '86 and we continued working for Stella's. We had one small restaurant in Carytown which his father was involved in that we left to run and that was in – between '86 to '88. And then we went back to work; my father-in-law sold the restaurant and we went back to work for Stella's and went back to work for my parents.

00:39:58

And then in '91 – in '90 our son was born and in '91 we opened up our first restaurant together called the Sidewalk Café, which is in the Fan. So that was the first one we opened. And then about five – five or – maybe five years later we decided to open up with two partners, friends, one works for me; another guy was a friend of my husband's. We opened up Bandito's and had that for a few years and so meanwhile while that was still opened, my childhood friend who was Cuban, who is good friends with my husband as well opened up Cuba Cuba which is

our Cuban diner together. And then from there about eight more places; most we still have, a couple of them are gone – we've sold, so – .

00:40:58

SW: How do you do that?

00:41:01

KG: I don't know; I don't know. I think for me – I think that Johnny and I just it – I think it just happened. You know it's just one day after another. My husband is a brilliant businessman. He's a hard worker. He has you know – he learned from his parents. He never wanted to disappoint them and he worked in their restaurant nonstop day and night while in high school. He really wanted to go away to college to play soccer but they really needed him and he didn't go. And so he's very dedicated and like I said, just – on the business end, brilliant.

00:41:47

He just has learned how to maneuver between all of them and I did that for a while. I'm sort of the – the person that I like to be in one place where I see the same customers, I'm able to – so I was at – . So after Sidewalk opened and then Stella's closed I went into work at Stella's on Main and I was there full-time and then while I was there full-time towards the end we had opened up 3 Monkeys and so I was in between both. And then we finally sold Stella's and then I was kind of oh, "What am I going to do? It's a Friday night." It was very strange for me not to have one place to be at.

00:42:26

And then we opened up a monster of a place called Kitchen 64 which was my next baby and that's where I was for five years full-time until this came to be. But I had still – I was going

between all of them still but I don't know how we did it. I don't know how we did it raising children, but we did and they're great kids. And just like mom said, she feels bad that she was always working. I have the same sort of guilt. You know I was always working. But they always understood.

00:43:00

But yeah; I don't – I don't know. I think – I think when it's happening you just learn to do it. You just learn to do it. And here we are; we're still doing it. *[Laughs]*

00:43:15

SW: What do you love about it? I mean there's – you know you've been doing this for so long and you've – you've created so many places in Richmond; you – you guys are very legendary in Richmond. And I – I you know I'm not from here but just from doing these interviews your names get brought up all the time in terms of the changing restaurant landscape here.

00:43:37

KG: Right; right. Well I think – for me especially and for – and for us, my – Johnny and I are a lot alike. You know we have similar personalities. We love all of our staff. We have created so many jobs for so many people and that's important for us. I think – I always tell my staff, you know, "I'm closer to you all than I am some of my family members that I hardly ever see." It's a day-to-day; you know it's – it's not just a business relationship but it's – it – sometimes it becomes personal relationships but they're – they're good friendships.

00:44:21

And I often think especially when my father passed away and my father was – there's an article written about him, but he's – numerous articles written about him when he passed away –

his funeral, the people that came from all over the country, people that I remember when I was a little girl sitting in the booth at The Village, they were – they were so good to people and I think that Johnny and I are so good to people and not just our employees, but customers you know. Starting Sidewalk Café that reminded me because it was a restaurant and a bar just like The Village was; I had the same thing my parents had but in a different generation you know – kids that didn't have money, you know – "Oh we'll just run a tab for you or whatever." So those things are important to me. People still call that used to work for me 15 years ago to see how I'm doing or came to my father's funeral or – . Those – the relationships, just like mom was talking about, I have the same thing in a different generation.

00:45:29

SW: Uh-hm.

00:45:30

KG: And now as I'm getting older I forget – people say to me, "Hi Katrina!" and I turn around and I'm like – I can't remember the name, I can't – you know 'cause there's so many people. But I don't – to me it's not a status thing, it's not, "oh, you know you're a celebrity in Richmond"; I don't look at myself as a celebrity. I just do what I know how to do. And I realized after a while that it was my passion all along. It was my passion and I – I'm not good at everything but I'm pretty good at what I do as far as you know knowing what's right and making sure my customers feel satisfied and happy and training my staff. You know people that come in here are in love with my staff. I – I couldn't be prouder. So these are important –

00:46:26

SW: I'm wondering, and you've sort of touched on this a little bit throughout the interview but in terms of your mother's influence and – and how do you like how did you decide what to take with you or to – to keep with you as you're on your trajectory here, but also the things that you see that you don't want to do because she's such a – you know she's – ?

00:46:48

KG: Uh-hm; I think about those things every day because if I find her doing something now I – I literally will walk out of the kitchen and I'll say to myself it's not – "You don't want to – you don't want to do that. You don't want to be that way." And they're not bad things, you know. A few – a few years ago at the Main Street location I came to work; it was lunchtime. And on the bar sat a dish of about eight coffee creamers in the little containers, and so I – mom would walk out of the kitchen and she would say, "This is what I found in the trashcan this morning." And I said, "Did you dive through the trashcan to find all those creamers?" [*Laughs*] She said "Yes; I did. This is money down the drain," you know things like that which I now find myself doing. I don't want to do it but it's true; it's the only way to stay on top of things.

00:47:45

The other thing is aside from not being able to delegate authority she never really liked confrontation even though she'll confront delivery drivers or people that send the wrong product or a bad product. But when it comes to staff, she doesn't really like the confrontation so she'll come to me and she'll say, and – and I just – sometimes I just turn her around and I say "All right, let's go. Now I need you to stay what you want to say." [*Laughs*] So things like that; I often – my staff hears me every day say, I just – I can't be – I know that I'm – I'm a little bit of the martyr but I don't want to be this – I have to do everything myself. And so I've – I've decided that I know how to delegate authority you know. If the recycling is getting to high it's

like somebody quick; I'm not going to pick it up to prove a point. You know my mother's mentality was always, do it yourself, do it yourself, do it yourself. That's how you teach. Well no; you – you can teach – you can – you can lead by example which I tell my managers and my staff. You have to lead by example. And I'm hoping that I do that when I'm in here but they see how hard I work also and they try hard to cover my shift. And it's not just a walking around. It's an actual shift. It's expediting in the kitchen or it's salads or it's you know – and they recognize that. So they try to – to really help me.

00:49:20

But yeah; there are a couple things that I – I don't wish to take from that part of my mom's experience and her – the way she does things. But on the other hand – other stick, she makes so much sense when she you know – listening to her you know talk about product and – and waste and – . So those things I've learned and those things are what makes you successful, so – .

00:49:50

SW: I have one more question for you and because this whole project is focused on you know Richmond and female restaurant entrepreneurship I'm wondering between you know the time that your mom started and now and – and in your experience, I mean some people have said along the way that this industry can tend to sort of be a boys' club. And I'm wondering if you've run into that and – and what your thoughts are on that and if that's ever presented any challenges for you or your mother and – and her own – ?

00:50:17

KG: You know I haven't and I hadn't – I hadn't really thought of that. I think there was a time that the word *chef* always associated with a male. You know that sort of – and that's another thing; I think when – when you want to have that title *chef* that's – you should be very proud of that title. I don't think a degree makes you a chef. I don't think – I think that – my mother often says to me, "Oh I should really be professionally trained. I'm not professionally trained." You know it's like, "Mom you don't need to be professionally trained."

00:50:52

But I think you do associate chef with male and then restaurants but I've never really – it's never even crossed my mind about gender and – and – and restaurants. I think like in my – from my experience, Johnny and I both came from the exact same sort of background and so we were equally balanced. I've never lived in his shadow which is great. I'm – I'm a very strong – I'm a stronger woman than my mother was, sort of growing up 'cause she was just a teenager when she came and even starting at The Village in her early 20s – I'm a much stronger woman than she was in that sense that I – yeah. Like I think my friend Michelle Williams who owns – I think she is just the queen of it all. You know I really respect her. And people say to me, oh, you're – you're a strong woman. You do this too. But I have a little bit of her. I get a little bit shy. I'm not so – like I think that she – you know my husband as far as the business end I – like I said, he's so brilliant at it and there are other things that I do that are – so we balance each other.

00:52:19

I don't – I don't feel – and I don't – I'm not the person to – I think that everyone should do what they can to – to be happy. And if they – if they're afraid they should really try. You know I think women especially – especially now with you know *Food Network* and all of these things that we have access to and seeing women cook, I think it's really made a big difference. And I think you're going to find a lot more women going to open places and do it – what makes them

happy – as they should, as they should. I don't think it's a – I don't think it's man's world when it comes to just restaurants, so – .

00:53:03

SW: Well and I just – just two quick things; so The Village – just to be clear, The Village was the – it was an institution in Richmond?

00:53:12

KG: Yes; so The Village, the name which is still there today – my father named it The Village. The Village means chorio in Greek, which is everyone's sort of summer homes or summer – up in the mountains and so he named it The Village and yes, the only place down there when RPI was – was there and just all of it – all of the customers that – that hung out there in the '70s all became my art professors when I went to VCU, which was really interesting, but yes – yes, an institution, yeah.

00:53:53

SW: And I also wanted to ask you – I mean in terms of the Greek community in Richmond is it prevalent here or at the time, was this a place where a lot of people moved from Greece?

00:54:05

KG: Yes; as a matter of fact. When my father first came from Greece his oldest sister was already here and had been here for about eight years and had a restaurant with her husband in Waynesboro – came to New York of course first and moved to Waynesboro. Well my father went straight to Waynesboro and helped there, but all of Charlottesville, all the small towns outside of

Richmond had small communities but they all came to Richmond. If there was a dance – our community started off very strong here back in the early '50s and the '40s – late '40s, early '50s and from then on our community is huge now – huge Greek community. We have a huge Greek Festival which is the biggest on the East Coast every June.

00:54:58

So yeah; so even from back then to now it's blown up, yeah.

00:55:05

SW: Katrina is there anything else you want to add to this that you think is important before I turn the tape off?

00:55:12

KG: I think I've said everything I wanted to say. We are very proud to – who we are and – and what we've done and I'm very, very proud of my mother. Like you said she's a legacy and – and I feel very lucky to have learned from her. And I hope that other people can – and start things and do what makes them happy when it comes to food or restaurants or anything.

00:55:48

SW: Thank you for doing this. I appreciate it.

00:55:49

KG: Thank you.

00:55:49

[End Stella Dikos/Katrina Giavos]