

**AILEEN FOREMAN**  
**Babycakes Bakery – Mountain Home, Arkansas**

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Location: Babycakes Bakery  
Interviewer: Sherri Sheu  
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs  
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Project: Arkansas Pie

**[Begin Aileen Forman-Babycakes Bakery]**

**00:00:00**

**Sherri Sheu:** I can hear myself, which is good. What did you have for breakfast?

**00:00:05**

**Aileen Forman:** I don't eat breakfast.

**00:00:07**

**SS:** You don't eat breakfast?

**00:00:11**

**AF:** I just—I never do. *[Laughs]*

**00:00:12**

**SS:** But there's so many good breakfasts in Arkansas.

**00:00:14**

**AF:** Yes; there are. There's some lovely breakfasts but I'm always busy in the morning. I'm baking.

**00:00:19**

**SS:** Okay; can you—? Okay; so good afternoon. It is roughly I would say 1:10 in the afternoon of August 6, 2013. Was I pretty close?

00:00:35

**AF:** Seventh.

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**SS:** Oh, 1:07—

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**AF:** No, no; it's the 7<sup>th</sup>.

00:00:39

**SS:** August 7<sup>th</sup>, oops; August 7, 2013. My name is Sherri Sheu. I am with the Southern Foodways Alliance and I am outside of the Babycakes Bakery trailer here in Mountain View, Arkansas and it is a lovely day today—Mountain Home, Arkansas, excuse me, and it is a lovely day today. And Aileen can you introduce yourself?

00:01:00

**AF:** My name is Aileen Forman and I'm the sole proprietor of Babycakes Bakery. We specialize in fried pies and cookies and éclairs and cupcakes and other things of that sort.

00:01:12

**SS:** And when did—can you tell me about the background of your business? When did you get started?

00:01:17

**AF:** I began about six years ago. When we moved here, my previous careers were in the airline industry. I was a blackjack dealer in Vegas and I was a reporter and editor for a newspaper. And when I got here there really wasn't a job available in any of those three careers. We're kind of in the back of beyond here, in the middle of the Ozarks, and I decided I needed to do something with my time. So I went to the Health Department and told them that I was interested in opening a bakery. And their recommendation was that I open it in a trailer. And that sort of surprised me, but I decided that I would give it a shot.

00:01:56

**SS:** And why did they suggest that you opened it in a trailer?

00:02:00

**AF:** Well there are a lot of restaurants here that open and then they find that they don't have enough business or that the owners decided that it's just too much work and they close down. And if you've signed a lease you're—you know you're—you have to finish that lease or if you've bought a building you have to have the building and sell it. And they said that if I decided that I didn't want to become a baker in a few months I could sell the trailer anywhere in the United States. But if I had bought a building that, you know, I would have to renovate the building and then I'd be, you know, tied into the lease or I'd have to sell the building.

00:02:34

So they thought that—that would be a good out for me, although that's been like—I say about six years now, so **[Laughs]** obviously I could have bought a building.

00:02:44

**SS:** And there's—there's a lot of—there's a lot of media interest in food trailers right now that seems like there's an explosion of food trailers all over the place. Northwest Arkansas or Northern Arkansas, not necessarily the place that we typically associate with food trailers, are there—

**00:03:03**

**AF:** No. **[Laughs]** Actually I think I'm it. There have been a few hotdog places here and unfortunately a lot of the city ordinances prohibit food trailers. And I believe they were originally designed so that people couldn't just have trucks—well, fruit trucks but you know they—I guess they decided either those were tacky or they didn't want people coming up from the South and you know taking all their money away, or I don't know what exactly it was. But when I—I guess I was cool before it was cool. The—the trailer is regulated the same as every other restaurant by the health department and that was one of the things they assured me, you know. “No; we're going to be there. We'll help you; you know we'll have everything set up and all that,” so that was nice.

**00:03:48**

And in fact they're very nice people here at the Health Department. And I get sort of a dual health department—trailers in Baxter County and I live in Marion County; my larder as it were, you know, where I keep all the dry goods and all that is in my property, so they had to inspect that as well. And of course, I get inspected by Baxter County, so—. But it's been kind of neat. It's—it's fun; I didn't expect to start off you know—or I should say I didn't start off just having fried pies. I started off with a whole lot of other baked goods. But I'm not proud. I'll sell what people want to buy and **[Laughs]** they wanted the fried pies. So I found a different trailer that allowed me to fry inside so that I could just make them hot and fresh. When people come up

I—they tell me what they want and I make it when they order it, so I’m not just you know—there’s nothing frozen or sitting around, so—.

**00:04:37**

**SS:** And so this is the second trailer that you’ve had?

**00:04:40**

**AF:** Yes; yes the first trailer committed suicide on Highway 62. The axle, I didn’t know lug bolts could shear and I heard a “click-click” when I was driving it away and I thought, “hmm that’s weird.” But then I kept on pulling it and pretty soon in the middle of the highway it threw the axle through the interior of the trailer. So it’s now somebody’s hunting trailer or actually more appropriately huntin’ trailer. So they dragged it out somewhere in the woods. And I bought this little one up in Wisconsin, so yeah; actually people do buy them all over the place, so—. And this was already set up as a concession trailer so it worked out really well. We are a little stricter here as far as the health department rules so I had to renovate it a little bit, but once I got it done it was just fine and people were thrilled that Babycakes was back in business.

**00:05:27**

**SS:** And what year was this—would this have been?

**00:05:30**

**AF:** I think it’s been three years ago that I got this trailer.

**00:05:34**

**SS:** And I noticed that it has a very bright pink and white color scheme that I could see from the highway, which caused me to realize where it was. How did you come up with the color scheme?

**00:05:43**

**AF:** Well, actually the first trailer was a square trailer and I thought I'd paint it pink like a bakery box. And what I didn't realize is people around here had never seen a pink bakery box. All they knew was the pink trailer. Pink is not my favorite color so I really was not planning on painting the second trailer pink but by that point it had become my signature color. So it's now pink and white so at least I get a little bit of relief from the pink. And it's a hot bubble gum pink too; you know a bakery box color. So and unfortunately when I got my bakery boxes it turns out that the pink ones are really a lot more expensive and they're worse for the environment so I decided not to **[Laughs]**—not to actually use the pink bakery boxes. So oh well; that's okay.

**00:06:27**

**SS:** And how did you come up with the name Babycakes for the business?

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**AF:** **[Laughs]** Well actually it's because I—I have a hard time making decisions so I had made a list of about twenty-five different names and I asked my husband, “Well, what about this one? How about this one? How about this one?” And finally he said, “Babycakes I don't care what you—what you name it. You just name it whatever you like.” And I said, “You know that's not bad; I'll call it Babycakes.” So it's no longer our pet name for each other but it does make me feel a little weird when people shout across the aisles at the Wal-Mart, “Hey, Babycakes.” So you know but that's okay. **[Laughs]** Now I'm everybody's Babycakes.

00:07:04

**SS:** And going back a couple years when you started the business what you drew you to Arkansas? Are you originally from this area?

00:07:12

**AF:** I have a lot of cousins here, but no. I'm originally from Des Moines and I kind of have an itchy foot. I like to move around a lot of places. I met my husband in Arizona. We've lived in Arizona and in Nevada and California and then when we—when my husband's job was over in California we decided to move closer to Iowa so I could take care of my parents and it's still an eight-hour drive but it's a lot closer than we were, so—and I wasn't willing to move back to Iowa frankly. If you've ever lived in Iowa you'd understand why. **[Laughs]** But I like Arkansas. My dad's old Marine buddy used to live in—well I guess he still does, like in Eureka Springs and so when we were looking for a new place to live I said, “Well, let's look at Arkansas. I think you'd really enjoy it.” And he's a naturalist; he's—his degree is in environmental studies. So he works now for Game and Fish, Arkansas Game and Fish. And you know this is just—he loves it here; he gets to hike, he gets to see all sorts of critters, you know we see a bug and I scream “Step on it, step on it, kill it!” and he's doing “Oh no, wait; it could be something interesting.” It's like, oh no, kill it; kill it. So he's now learning slash and burn though; that's the big Arkansas thing. You know you can't just mow something and expect it to you know treat you as nice as you treat it. You really have to just hack and slash at everything trying to get into your house, so—.

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But I really enjoy Arkansas. This is—like I say, I’ve got a lot of cousins here. We used to come down and visit. My grandmother is from about 20 miles from here, so—and in fact, she’s one of the ones who made fried pies, so—.

**00:08:52**

**SS:** And so tell me about how you got into baking and into making fried pies and making all these different desserts.

**00:09:02**

**AF:** Well I’ve always liked to bake. My mother didn’t bake. So if I wanted to make something you know it was kind of up to me if I wanted homemade goods. And I don’t know. I’ve always just kind of thought gee, that sounds like an interesting idea. When I was young I thought, “Gee, I’d like to travel,” and so I’ve gone into the airline industry and I traveled to South America and Australia and Alaska and you know just all sorts of places that I wanted to go. And then I ended up in Las Vegas and I thought, “You know, I always liked card games. I think I’ll become a blackjack dealer,” so I did. And then I thought, “Well I’d like to write,” and a friend of mine said “I’ve read what you’ve written and I really like it,” so he gave me a job writing online about antiques which I knew nothing about at all. And I had to research everything. And then when I ended up in California based on that writing I was able to get a job as a reporter. And I really enjoyed that.

**00:09:58**

Well when I got here, I thought, “I can’t do any of those things.” So the other thing I’ve always liked was baking. And I thought, “Well, you know that would be worthwhile.” [**Phone Rings**] So anyway, we have a—a building on our property that I thought would make a nice

bakery but after looking at it I decided that you know it just wasn't—it wasn't in a good area. You'd have to drive off the interstate and I didn't know that anyone would be willing to do that. So I thought well, you know, I'll—I'll buy a business and that obviously didn't happen; that's why I ended up with a trailer.

**00:10:37**

Well the fried pies part of it came because I was thinking of all the different things I could possibly make and I am no good at decorating at all—I mean really bad. It looks like a five-year-old did it; it's terrible. I wish you could have seen the cupcakes that—they're sold out today but you know I just—all I can do is just kind of like make a swirly thing with a tip. You know I'm really not very good at it. So I thought, "Okay; I can't make cakes. I'm very good at pies." But you know you can only sell so many pies. People don't want to buy a whole pie, but what they do like is slices of pie. Well if you're going to make a slice of pie you might as well make a fried pie because they're better. You know I—I even saw something on the *New York Times* thing that said the guy who was a really good baker, he decided he'd make an apple pie and he'd bake it and he'd make a fried pie using the same ingredients and he said, "Oh yeah, hands down; the fried pie is better."

**00:11:33**

So I thought well, hey, you know; I could do that. And so I started with recipes. I became the lunch wagon for Micro-Plastics, a factory real close to here near Ranger Boats and that way I could experiment on essentially a captive audience, you know. **[Laughs]** They—they had to tell me day-to-day whether something was better than the last time they tried it. Otherwise I wouldn't give them their change back. **[Laughs]** But anyway, they were very helpful in making all of the recipes as good as I possibly could get them. You know I'd try a little more meringue or you know a little less whipped cream or something like that. And they said no; we like it

better this way or that way. And so that way I was able to kind of get everything as perfect as I could before going out into the world and then leaving them—dropping them like a hot potato essentially. They've never forgiven me for that. They keep asking when I'm going to come back, which I'm not.

**00:12:27**

But I wanted to perfect the crust and the crust is a lot of the pie. Well they didn't want fruit pies and they didn't want cream pies. What they wanted were meat pies, so I made taco meat and cheese. And—or I made my own meatballs in marinara sauce and chicken bacon ranch and things like that and I put those in the crust. That way I could perfect the crust recipe and they could have what they wanted. Well, when I got done with that I'd go to Flippin and set up there and I did; well, then the bypass went through and Flippin just died. And it's really sad. I think there have been many businesses that have closed there because of the bypass. So I thought, "Well hey, I'm in a trailer; I can move." So I moved to—I believe I traveled to Mountain Home and they have—they just have a weird ordinance right now and they had some difficulty there that I won't go into. And I decided that I'd go to Yellville and I set up in Yellville. Well the property I was set up on, he sold it. And I said, "Okay; you know what? I need to find a better place." So that's how I ended up here. It's between Gassville and Mountain Home and it's the Friends Orchard Parking Lot. It's right next to Plumlee Tires and that way there's kind of a little group of businesses that gives me a little bit of traffic. And if people want to stop and look at the sign they don't feel obliged to you know buy something. They can just look at it and say, "Oh, okay. Now that I know what you've got I can come back later or something." And I never want to pressure somebody into buying something. I never like having that happen to me.

**00:13:59**

So that's how the fried pie started was because they wanted meat pies and I thought, well, okay; I can make fried pies and that way it will kind of fulfill their thing. They wanted sandwiches and I would just—that was not my thing. I didn't want to just open a restaurant. I wanted to actually have a bakery, so—.

**00:14:17**

And let's see; my grandmother made fried pies, but she made them out of biscuit dough and she made three kinds. She made chocolate and apricot and I'm trying to think of what the third one was. Nope; I can't think of it. Those—the chocolate and the apricot were the ones we always had. And I didn't think that—that was really commercially viable. If you're making a lot of them and trying to make a biscuit dough and frying them in a skillet it's not a very good idea. So instead I do actually have a cast iron—a big cast iron Dutch oven that I heat up peanut oil in and then I made a—I experimented with like I say, with the pie dough until I got it perfect. It had to have three elements. I wanted it to be light and fluffy. I wanted it to taste really good. And it had to hold together all the way to the end because otherwise you know people are eating them while they're walking and it was in a little bag and I didn't want them trying to, you know, like suck something out of the bottom of the bag. And I could get two of the three but not all three.

**00:15:15**

So my husband helped me a lot with that recipe as well. And the trick to a fried pie dough is it has to have some kind of protein. Well, you can use egg and vinegar. You can use buttermilk. Or, you can use—what I use which is evaporated milk. And what that does is it allows—it keeps it—it holds it together. And as you know the history of fried pies is you put them in your pocket. They were pocket pies. And they weren't called that because, you know, you put your filling in the pocket. It was called that because you put it in your pocket. And that way you only had enough pie for you. You didn't have to share it with anyone. And the—I

finally got it to where I liked it. I didn't use the egg and vinegar because each egg has an individual different kind of protein count and I wanted it to be standard. I didn't use buttermilk because I think it leaves kind of flavor and not everybody likes that including me. So the evaporated doesn't leave that flavor. And the—so a lot of the recipes, I just kind of worked at to get it where I liked it. The apple is just my apple pie recipe. Instead of baking it I cook it—on the oven, you know on the stovetop. And the lemon is what I make for a lemon meringue pie. The apricot is my grandma's recipe but she didn't use fresh lemon and I do and she didn't grind her own nutmeg and I do. And honestly it's not like it's a really profitable thing but it's a really enjoyable thing. You know I know that what I make is the best. You know I know that every pie that goes out of here is really good and I get a lot of people who are in chemotherapy. I get a lot of people who are ill. And they will—the only thing that they really crave are fried pies. And I think it's because of the nostalgia; you know their mother made it or their grandmother made it. But that alone tells me that every pie has to be really wholesome, you know, really good.

**00:17:09**

And you know just the thought of making somebody more ill you know than they already are, they're on death's door, you know, and this is the only thing that they're going to eat, so you know anyway—. So the—everything that comes out of here has to be excellent. It's also—we live in a small town. And if you get something you really like you might tell a couple of friends, but if you get something you don't like you're going to be telling everybody that you don't like that. So you always have to make sure that you know everything that you make is really good. And people ask me that all the time. They come up to the thing and say, “So what's good?” And it's like everything that I make—that I'm selling is good. If it's not good I feed it to my husband, so—. That's—that's just how it all started. And I've been here in this one location now, like I say for about four years. We haven't gotten sick of one another. The peaches, I know they just

came off the tree because I just saw them unloaded. The apples, the same; you know the blackberries and the blueberries and all that, I try to use local fruit as much as I can, and a big part of that is because I—you remember what I was saying about you know people being ill. If I use fruit from Mexico or something I don't know that that's not okay—that it's okay. I don't know that their water that they used was wholesome. And I do know that ours is. So you know even though it's cooked I don't—I don't want to risk anything, so—.

**00:18:31**

**SS:** So with your fried pies, the ingredients, they aren't made from dried apples or whatnot? They're—they are coming from—

**00:18:40**

**AF:** They're fresh.

**00:18:40**

**SS:** Yeah; they're basically coming from the same produce stand that we're right next to?

**00:18:45**

**AF:** Yes; that's exactly right. When she has the apples in. Right now I'm having to buy apples from Washington for my apple filling and I make it fresh so I don't—the only thing I used dried fruit with is the apricot. And that's—my grandmother as I say, used to make the apricot and she always used to make it out of dried apricots. And even though she had fresh apricots she wouldn't make it out of that. And I thought that was a little strange. And so one time I tried it

and when you use fresh apricots it goes to jam. So you have to use the dried to give it that—that tooth appeal, to have something to chew on.

**00:19:22**

And I just have always thought that fresh fruit was better for you and it's just better as far as it goes with the peaches and in the winter and early spring I have to use canned peaches. Otherwise it's fresh. And I do get very, very tired of blanching peaches and cutting them up. Peaches—the peaches are a pain but that's okay. They're worth it—if you've ever had a really good fresh peach pie. But a lot of the things I had to do trial and error. As an example I don't use—I don't put the peaches and the sugared gel together because peaches have a very thin cell wall and they constantly leach juice. Well, that's going to make the gel watery. And so I keep the fresh peaches in a sieve over a—over a bowl and I put the gel in a squeeze bottle and so when people ask for a fresh peach pie I put a little bit of gel in and then I put the fresh peaches in, and if you guys want to let it sit on the counter for three days that's fine. **[Laughs]** Otherwise, you know everything is—I just make it as quickly as I can and make it as good as I can, so—. Just you know I suppose I could just make them and sell them in the morning; you know, make them in the morning and sell them all by evening but I see a lot of places that do that.

**00:20:34**

I'm willing to work a little harder just because I think that it should be good. You know every job I've ever had I've done the best I could possibly do. I take pride in that. I was the best blackjack dealer ever, I swear. And in fact I was in the record books for having the biggest tip for a while. But so when it's my own business I'm really going to be doubly sure that everything is as good as it can be. The only thing I use as commercial filling is cherry and I actually don't have the cherry filling right now. They're sold out. I only found one that was up to my standards and they apparently sold out early this year, so nobody is going to get cherry.

00:21:13

**SS:** And what else is going to come on and off the menu throughout the year?

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**AF:** Well let's see; as far as the fried pies go we get mincemeat and pumpkin as the fall starts. And I've got right now—I've got sweet potato and cheesecake and apple and cherry—oh no, I'm sorry not cherry; apple, peach, apricot, chocolate, and as far as other things that I make, I make éclairs, although—and like I say everything is made from scratch. And the thing about the éclairs, do you remember what I was saying about not being very good at decorating? I'm not very good at drawing a straight line either. And so my éclairs are round. They look somewhat like cream puffs. But they're very, very good and quite addictive. And I also make everything from—oh gosh, brownies, to I had carrot cupcakes earlier, lemon blueberry cupcakes, sour cream raisin muffins, just whatever—whatever the people around here enjoy. And if it doesn't sell it doesn't go back on the menu again. I tried funnel cakes for a while. Everyone kept asking me, "Oh, you've got the perfect setup for funnel cakes," and I thought well, okay; it's not like there's a whole lot of you know talent involved in a funnel cake. And that's really why I'm doing it. I don't actually do this for the money. I do this so that people go, "That was the best fried pie I ever had." I do it for the accolades really. **[Laughs]** So it's an ego thing.

00:22:42

So I thought, "Okay I'm going to try to make the best funnel cake possible." And I experimented with the recipe. I made the best funnel cake possible. The problem is like three people tried it. They just weren't interested. So I stopped selling funnel cakes. I thought, "Well you know what; if there is not a demand for it I'm not going to sell it." That's silly. Why do I

keep throwing you know ingredients down the drain? So someday maybe funnel cakes will come back but until then no.

**00:23:14**

What else do I make? I make a lot of cupcakes; I really do, everything from spice to—oh, oh the best cupcake is—do you remember how I said my mother didn't bake? Okay; she used to buy us Hostess cupcakes. I got addicted to them. **[Laughs]** So I had to learn how to make a real Hostess cupcake. So I had to find the perfect chocolate cake that you could insert filling into and it wouldn't just you know **[Gestures]** break into a million pieces, which means you can't use the sponge method. That's a long story.

**00:23:46**

Anyway and I wanted to make the right ganache topping—that little chocolate you know frosting that's on the top of them and of course the most important what is the cream made out of? You know and once you find out yeah; you're not that thrilled about it. So you have to find a different way of making the cream that has the taste like it without all those weird ingredients. So I found—finally figured that out. So I—that's my best selling cupcake; it's—I make a—it's king-sized. They're all king-sized because you know everyone can make a normal cupcake you know. You might as well sell something that's big, something that really satisfies you. So I make a king-sized cupcake and then I use chocolate and the secret I think is that there's a cup of coffee, hot coffee, in it and that brings out the chocolate really well. And then I make a cream filling and put it in a piping tube and then you pipe it into the cupcake and then a chocolate ganache; but I do not in fact do the little swirly thing on top, that little icing thing. Remember what I said about not being good at icing anything? **[Laughs]** So I just put a little button on the top of it. And that sells out almost every time, although you know most of my things sell out

every time and that's of course how I make it. I want it to sell out. I don't want to have to bring it home. Otherwise, I wouldn't fit in the trailer. You know it would be awful.

**00:25:05**

So and my husband, although he has a very good metabolism, seriously he would be 300 pounds if I over-made everything. So I usually make about six or eight cupcakes. I've got the recipes all pared down to that. I make about fifty fried pies every day and I generally—if I don't sell out then I store those—the pie shells away for—in the freezer. That way if I have a migraine one night or I just can't make the pie shells I'll have something. Now if I wanted, honestly there's no difference after you've frozen them. But I always felt like if I had like this big store of frozen pie shells that I would become quite lazy and just do it that way and never you know get involved. And I think that's a big thing when you're doing a job; you should be involved. You know have it every day; have it be part of your identity, so—.

**00:25:59**

**SS:** And what's your best seller right now?

**00:26:03**

**AF:** As far as fried—well, fried pies definitely are the best seller. And it's different every day. Some days it's peach; for some reason this whole week peaches have not gone—well, last week I should say—this is the beginning of this week—peaches didn't sell very well last week—instead apple did. And sometimes it's chocolate. But more often than not apple is the biggest seller. And I think that that's the standard you know—American is apple pie.

**00:26:32**

**SS:** And can you walk me through your typical work day? It sounds like you get up pretty early and you're still working hard pretty late at night.

**00:26:42**

**AF:** Yeah; I've got—in the morning, I get up. I—when I make cookies I make a whole bunch of cookie dough and portion out the dough and then I freeze it so that in the morning I can just get up and pop those frozen, you know about a dozen—a dozen is about what I see every day, so a dozen is what I bake every morning. But of course you don't make cookie dough in batches of a dozen. You make it in batches of five dozen and then you know use it from the frozen things. So I bake the cookies. I make whatever it is that is going to be the special that day. Like I say, today was carrot cupcakes. And then I turn on the oil and let that heat up to about 375. Once it's heated, I—I always time it so that it's you know around 375, about 10:30 in the morning and that's when I open up and put the sign out and write down on the menu. And then I just wait. And I write and I—sometimes the—the sideline that I have is I'm a copy editor so people with novels you know they—I do copy editing for them. So that's some of the—sometimes that's what I'm doing if I have a novel, although right now I don't. I got another one coming in at the middle of the month.

**00:27:56**

And I do crossword puzzles because seriously I think my mind is going and they say the crossword puzzles will help you. And I don't mean this as a joke but I could never remember to take ginkgo biloba, so I thought—I see a flaw in that plan. So anyway I do crossword puzzles. I don't have a—a television here because I don't think that it—you know this is like one of the few places I can get away from it. And but I do have a radio and I listen to the radio every now and then. I had Frank Sinatra's CD on the other day and somebody said, "Oh, well that's so

quaint. You have a 1950s trailer and you're playing Frank Sinatra." And I thought, "Uh, yeah that was deliberate; yeah." But not really; I mean I like Frank Sinatra. But anyway that's—that's about it. And then when I get done of course I clean up everything and start making things for the next day which could be usually about four or five different kinds of fillings and rolling out pie shells. And I'm usually done around 11 o'clock, 11:30. So that's why I'm only open four days a week. You know when you're working from 8:00 in the morning until close to midnight you really only want to work four days a week. **[Laughs]** But I could do things in a shorter fashion and if I had done something—you know if I decide to do something in a shorter fashion I just feel like I'd be kind of cheating. And that's why I don't.

**[Loud traffic noises from highway]**

**00:29:25**

**SS:** Waiting for some of this traffic to pass.

**00:29:30**

**AF:** Yeah; it is the bad thing about being here is that we do have the traffic noise.

**00:29:34**

**SS:** Although with—in terms of traffic, where do most of your customers come from? How do they find you?

**00:29:41**

**AF:** Well I think probably they came—they mostly come from Mountain Home because that's the largest of the towns that's going to be percentage wise most of the—my customers. Although I had a lady from Lake View; for some reason I had somebody stop by about a month ago and

said, “Did you know you’re famous in Jonesboro?” I said, “No; are you thinking of a different Babycakes Bakery maybe?” And she said, “No. When I said I was going to come up here at least three different times three different people told me that I had to stop at the fried pie place.” And I thought well, huh; I’m—obviously I get a lot of tourists. We’re a big tourist area. And so a lot of people stop by and they ask me what a fried pie is. And if they’re from California, I say, “Well it’s kind of like an empanada.” If they’re from Wisconsin or Michigan I say, “Well, it’s kind of like pasties.” And otherwise I just say it’s a fried pie shell and you know it’s a pie shell and then I fry it and it’s got fruit or cream or whatever filling in it. But I think that a lot of people found me by word of mouth. I don’t advertise mostly because the kind of people who live here, and I’m one of them—if you know someplace is opened you’re probably not likely to go there until you know somebody else who has gone there. And you might know that it’s there. I mean there is at least three restaurants in Mountain Home that I haven’t gone to yet because none of my friends have gone to it yet and they haven’t told me whether it’s worthwhile or not. **[Laughs]** And that’s a terrible thing to admit but it’s true.

**00:31:09**

And so if the neighbor—if your neighbor says “Oh, I had some fried pies and they were wonderful; that—that place over you know next to Plumlee Tires”—well, then they’re going to come and visit you know. But if they haven’t, they don’t know anyone who has ever eaten here they probably won’t. And they find me by seeing the sign out on the road. I’ve got—it just says *fried pies*. It’s up when I’m here and it’s down when I’m not and I was in several of the farmers’ markets so you know a couple of the farmers’ markets here and the people who used to buy them there they find me again. Other than that, I’m on Facebook but you know searching for anything on Facebook is kind of a frustrating thing. So I just put it up there so that the people who already know I’m here know what it is that I’m going to be selling that day. And so if there is something

that's their particular favorite they'll come that day or I torment the people from around the world who have come here. I mean I've got people from Italy and people from Portugal who have stopped by here while they were visiting, although why they were in the Ozarks is beyond me. But nevertheless they were here; they had the fried pies and then they—they liked my Facebook page which is Facebook.com/babycakesfriedpies and they then after having the fried pies and now they've gone back home they're completely frustrated by the fact that I have all the things that they really love to have but you know they're hundreds of thousands—well okay tens of thousands of miles away, so—. Gosh I hope they're not hundreds of thousands of miles away. That would be bad. That would be the moon.

**00:32:41**

**SS:** Fried pies on the moon does sound delicious.

**00:32:42**

**AF:** Yes; it does actually. But probably—probably not very appropriate, so the view would be incredible. Oh yes; absolutely.

**00:32:52**

**SS:** So how does social media help you interact with your customers? I know you're—having Facebook do you—you respond quite quickly and it seems like you're very active on—when—when people post on your wall and such.

**00:33:06**

**AF:** Well I don't have a smart phone so I don't see it in the daytime, but in the morning I always check it and then at night I'll check it again to make sure that nobody has placed an order or something. Again we—we're kind of unique to this area in that not very many people do have smart phones. And they aren't very—they're not hooked the way they are in the cities. And so I don't feel that I have to have a huge online presence, just enough of one that the few people who are you know technologically savvy can find me because all the others—so many people I've met don't even have computers. They wouldn't know how to sign onto a computer seriously. And because of that like I say, I didn't invest a lot of money in it.

**00:33:53**

But I think that I've had a lot of people who realize that I do special orders. I had somebody who just placed an order for 50 cupcakes for a wedding shower online and then I'll have somebody say, "Oh, are you going to have this or that tomorrow?" And if so because I'm going to come by tomorrow, I'll make sure that I have it. It's—it's kind of like when you make dinner every night—every night and you don't mind making dinner every night but you get tired of trying to figure out what to make every night and the times that your husband says "Hey, how about pork chops and mashed potatoes?" you're like, "thank God. All right; yes, we can have pork chops and mashed potatoes." Just tell me what you want because I hate the—"what do you want for dinner?" And they say "Oh, whatever you want to make"—oh, don't do that.

**00:34:37**

So that's sort of the same thing. When my customers say, "Are you going to have blueberry tomorrow?" I'll make sure I have blueberry tomorrow because that tells me one of those things I don't have to make a decision that night as to what it is I'm going to be making. And of course I have a freezer full of local blueberries and you know why not make blueberry tomorrow? So if it's something I can do I always do if I can catch it early enough. Occasionally

I'll have somebody who thinks I'll have a smart phone and so they'll place an order and I never get back to them and so they sort of figure it out and they'll just give me a call.

**00:35:07**

**SS:** And when you do your preparation late at night are you doing that here onsite or are you doing that back at—?

**00:35:14**

**AF:** It depends. It depends on what I'm making. I'm—like I say I've got the—the other kitchen on the other property—on our property that is also inspected. And so if it's really hot or really cold I would prefer to have it there because it's heated and air-conditioned. But if it's not and I just need to hang around here for some reason I would make it here. I used to have several stoves in the trailer and now I'm just down to you know the one, so you know I just realized that I'm a creature of comfort and I kind of like it. So I will more than likely or not make something there than at—here. But the whole you know rolling everything out and all that it's here. **[Laughs]**

**00:35:54**

**SS:** And you've alluded to this a little bit just in passing but can you tell a little bit more about the history of fried pies?

**00:36:01**

**AF:** Oh sure. I think that it all began quite some time back when they used to do the coal mines, so we're talking the beginning of the industrial era. And fried pies were very popular in the 1800s and I believe they go a little bit farther back than that. But almost all nationalities have

some sort of dough that you put something into and then you, you know crimp it and you cook it. The fried pies that I make are more like a Welsh fried pie and the Welsh were very big on mining. Well they put a fried pie into their—their pail and that's what they would take down into the mines with them.

**00:36:50**

The Appalachians also have an awful lot of them and we have an awful lot of them here. And again that was—I mean when we were kids I've had more people tell me that the schools here used to make—you know everyone would get together and they'd make a whole bunch of fried pies and sell them you know like a dozen for ten dollars. And they don't do that anymore but that's more along the lines—you know how they don't let them have any food as far as I can tell in schools anymore. They don't let them bring cupcakes or anything like that. And when they do sell something it's more likely not going to be that type of thing. Well fried pies are work intensive. And you do have to kind of have the setup for it. Most bakeries don't want to sell fried pies because they're more oriented to baking in an oven. Fried pies are messy. You have to have many different flavors. And so unless you're going to devote yourself to fried pies, which I finally did, it's just too much; it's too much of a hassle. There's too many other things that you could be doing that would sell better and that would have a better profit margin. So I think they're kind of disappearing now. But like I say when—back in the '60s and '70s they used to sell a lot of fried pies. Everyone's grandmothers made fried pies. Here in the Ozarks we made especially chocolate fried pies. That was the big thing in this area particularly. So when I started to make chocolate fried pies I knew I had to be very careful. It can't be a pudding. That's not right. **[Laughs]** And my grandmother's fried chocolate pies were a pat of butter, a teaspoon of cocoa and a tablespoon of sugar. So that's the basis I started with when I started developing the recipe. But instead of sugar I used powdered sugar because people didn't like the grittiness. You

heat up the—instead I—what I do is I have a pot and I heat up the butter and the sugar and the cocoa until it forms this enormous gelatinous mess and then I add in cream and vanilla so that it makes almost like a fudge but not quite. And that way it is similar to what they had when they were a kid and it's really very good.

**00:39:06**

But it's not as homemade; it's not quite as simple and so people who come here who have never had a chocolate fried pie they're not going to think, "Oh, this is it? This is the chocolate fried pie?" You know they're going to be a little happier with the product. So I please two people with both.

**00:39:28**

**SS:** Speaking of—

**00:39:30**

**AF:** Yes. *[Laughs]*

*[Customer at window]*

**00:39:33**

**SS:** And with that are a lot of—do you have a lot of people—I guess going back a little bit, how many of the people who come just have no idea what a fried pie is?

**00:39:44**

**AF:** Oh I would say only about ten percent. Most people in this area do know what a fried pie is even if they've never tried it before, but about ten percent of the people who come by here ask me what it is or they want to see me making it so that they make sure that it's good.

**00:39:59**

**SS:** We'll take a brief pause.

**00:40:02**

**AF:** You can watch me make a fried pie. [*Making Pie/Customer*]

**00:40:23**

**SS:** All right; and we are back with our oral history after some exciting moments there [*Laughs*] of selling fried—of selling fried pies. So let's talk a little bit about the craftsmanship that goes into the pies. We were talking a little bit about sort of the craft of making pies and sort of the satisfaction that gives. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

**00:40:46**

**AF:** Oh sure; one of the things that—that my husband taught me young was that visually it needs to look good for people to actually feel that it tastes good. And I'm sure that everyone has eaten stuff [*Laughs*] that didn't really look very good. But they did it on a dare or something. The fried pies, I wanted to make it so that they looked as pretty as they could possibly look. I have seen some fried pies in—you know gas stations and that kind of thing and they look pale and kind of like they've been sitting there for a long time and I really thought that—that was not what I wanted to do. What I wanted to do was make something that people would then look at

me and say, “Oh, that was the prettiest, the best fried pie that—you know what—that I ever had.” But of course everyone has their memories of fried pies around here. Remember what I was saying about grandmothers and mothers and I have a lot of people ask me is this pie as good as my grandma’s was? Well I have that—I always tell them the same thing which is, “Well no, probably not, because your mother or grandmother loved you and she made that with love. And you have all these memories associated with it, right. “

**00:42:03**

Well one time I had a guy come up and there were some people here who were kind of just Ozarkan men, you know kind of gruff and silent and they don’t really—they don’t talk. They don’t interact very much. And he came up and he said, “I’ll have an apple pie.” And it kind of intimidated me. And I said, “Okay;” and as I was making it he said, “Is this pie as good as my mama’s?” And I answered him the same way as I always did. And he didn’t say a word. He didn’t crack a smile—nothing. And I’m feeling more and more uncomfortable because everyone chats; everyone chats here. And he wasn’t. He just watched me make it. He gave me the money. Never said another word; turns around and as he is walking away he bites into it. And he turns back around and he comes back to the trailer. And I thought, “Oh no; what did I do?” I mean what could possibly have gone wrong? I made it the same way as I always make all the others. And I was you know putting away the apple pie filling. And he stuck his head into the window and he said, “Ma’am?” And I turned around and I said, “Yeah?” And he says, “You must love me too.” **[Laughs]** And I got such a kick out of that because you never know what’s underneath people’s surfaces. You know he obviously had quite a sense of humor and he was very sweet. He just didn’t look like it.

**00:43:25**

But I've had more than one person tell me, "These are good as my grandma's or gosh I—you know they're better," which is always wonderful, you know when you hear that because like I said, they remember this with such fondness. This is something that they did, you know the aunts and the grandmas and the mothers, they all got together and they made it as a group. It was a group effort. In my family my maiden name was Tunelli and we'd make tortellini, you know the little things that look like a filled diaper. And they make tortellini soup out of them. And so every year we've had these huge batches of tortellini soup and homemade vegetable meat broth and all of the aunts and my grandmother and everybody would get together and we'd do this as a group effort. Well that's how they made fried pies. It's kind of hard to make them alone. And I've kind of got the technique down to a science because you know if you're going to do it in a rush which I do get very busy you know you're—you need to have everything all laid out. Well if you don't have it laid out like that it—it's not going to work for you which is why a lot of places don't sell them.

00:44:29

And I don't remember what your original question was.

00:44:33

**SS:** Talking about the craftsmanship that goes into—.

00:44:36

**AF:** Well craftsmanship. [*Laughs*]

00:44:36

**SS:** That goes into your pies.

00:44:37

**AF:** Well I'm not sure exactly what is meant by craftsmanship. I do make everything the best that I can make it. There are some shortcuts I could take that I don't because I just—they may not know it but I always would. You know I don't use the commercial fillings and I think a lot of—almost all of the fried pies that you'll get at a restaurant are going to be made with commercial fillings. And that's okay; you know they have their place. It's not just in my pie shop. I had one of the restaurants ask me if they could buy my pies and sell them there, but they were going to have me freeze them and then they were going to fry them. And I have had their fried pies before. They had gotten them from another source. And they always burnt them because they're using frozen fried pies. In order to make it warm all the way through you have to overcook it and they didn't want to change the temperature on their oil where they fried their fish or whatever. And it tasted like fish.

00:45:32

And I—my husband said, “Well, just sell it to them. What do you care?” Well that's the thing; I do care. I didn't want fishy over-burnt you know fried pies being sold and if somebody says, “Where do you get your fried pies?” having them say “Babycakes Bakery” because that—I guess I do take too much pride in it. And I'm glad; I'm glad that there is a craftsmanship to it. I use a pierogi press to seal the edges so that they have that little lovely scalloped edge and although you know the biggest challenge on that was trying to spell *pierogi* when you're on Amazon. And I make them big so that they have a good-sized portion. They're seven inches and most of them are smaller than that. But I like having a big seven-inch fried pie. You know that way people don't feel cheated. They don't feel like, “Oh gosh you know I could have gone for

another three bites of that pie.” When they get done with it they feel like that was perfect. That’s a perfect size, you know.

**00:46:34**

Although around here people tend to buy more than one. They do usually buy two. You know for themselves—one for now and one for later if they’re hungry. And I get people who ask, “Is it big enough to sell you know for two people?” And the answer is well, it depends on how greedy that one of the people is. Don’t let the guy bite first—ever. That is the big thing right there. Don’t ever let your husband bite into the pie first; you’re going to end up with less than your half, so—. But that was one of those truisms you know. Never let a guy have a bite of anything that you really want and never believe a woman when she says she doesn’t want any dessert because she wants yours. **[Laughs]** So and I wish I could say that—that wasn’t true in my marriage but it’s true. **[Laughs]** I don’t think I’ve ever ordered a dessert in my life but I’ve eaten plenty of them. **[Laughs]**

**00:47:22**

And other than that craftsmanship, you know it’s—I guess it’s true. I do take a lot of pride in it and I make sure that each one of them is perfectly crimped and every one of them is brown all the way around and the same shade all the way around. And I don’t think people could care one way or the other, but I enjoy it.

**00:47:44**

**SS:** And we were talking a little bit earlier in between our recorded sessions here, a little bit about sort of the foodways that around—that’s around us and how your bakery is almost the—counteracts the mass food that’s you know up and down the highway on either side. Can you talk

a little bit more about how—how your bakery is a bit of an intervention against the dominant food industry—industrialization?

**00:48:12**

**AF:** Oh sure; the—I think most—for most people the only time they ever had a fried pie was from McDonalds. And that was filled with chemicals, not just the crust but also the filling. In order to stabilize things you have to add chemicals to it. And so for something to sit on a shelf it has to be stabilized. When you drive up and down [Highway] Sixty-Two you're going to hit all sorts of fast food restaurants. And each of those restaurants has their own little style of keeping things stable.

**00:48:48**

And I don't want them—that to be the only choice. I get a lot of kids here whose parents bring them here because they know that I don't have the weird chemicals. The cupcakes that I make aren't—you know they're delicious. I mean a 100-times better than a Hostess cupcake but it's—it satisfies that need for a Hostess cupcake without having to buy something that has about seven chemicals that you can't really pronounce. And the only thing in it is essentially what Bill Cosby said: “Well gosh, milk and there's flour, there's egg. Heck, why not have it for breakfast?” So the—the—having something like this and having something that has the traditions that we've always had in our kitchens I think does help counteract. They—the kids know—in fact, I have one little boy who comes up here at least twice a week. His name is Read, spelled like reading a book, and he is—he is just adorable and he'd hate hearing me say that because he's about I think thirteen, so he's that age. But he saves up every quarter. He begs his parents and his grandparents for quarters and then he walks all the way here, about four miles. And he comes about twice a week so that he can have one of my fried pies.

**00:50:07**

And he—this is going to be something that he is going to remember, I mean long after I'm gone; he's going to remember when he was thirteen he used to walk to the fried pie lady. And I have a lot of mothers who bring their daughters and their sons and they sit there and they watch me as I put together their pie. And they ask me questions. "How do you make the pie shells? Do you roll them out yourself?" You know yeah; "Yeah, every night I roll them out." "What do you—how do you keep them separated?" "Well I put wax paper between them." "Oh don't you get tired of making it?" "Yes; every night"—keep this in mind, every night I'm making these things. Yes; I get tired of it.

**00:50:42**

Well you know they watch as I put the chocolate pie filling in there and then they—the little ones get hoisted up so they can see through the windows and they watch as I make that. I remember when I was a kid, we used to watch Mama Lacuna in an Italian restaurant and she used to make pie dough or sorry; she used to make bread loaves. And she'd have this enormous mound of Italian bread dough. And she would—she only spoke Italian, so she'd be chattering in Italian with her husband who would then translate to everybody else and I could sit there as a little girl and I'd watch as this woman you know with these huge forearms because I mean you know this took a lot of work, she would pinch off just the right amount. She knew exactly in her hand what the right amount, what the weight should be of that pie dough and she'd talk and she would knead and she'd form it into—into a dough without ever looking at it and into a loaf and then slap it onto the—the cooking sheet and in it—into the oven it would go.

**00:51:42**

I could watch her for hours. And I remember that. You know well now there are people who—little girls and little boys who are watching me doing this and they're going to do the same

thing. They're going to say, "You know when I was a little kid they used to have a fried pie place and it was in this little trailer. It was really cheesy. I think it was like from the '50s. I think it was older than she was"—and it is by the way. The trailer is older than I am. And they're going to remember this. And I mean that is something that you're not going to get from your visits to McDonalds. It's not something you're going to even get from a visit to you know a national restaurant, a Chile's or something but it is something that you get from the little mom and pop cafes.

**00:52:19**

When I was a kid we used to go too you know and they—they would list something and we had biscuits and gravy every morning at whatever you know. But you don't have those memories from a chain. You don't have the—you may have the memories of the family that you went there with but you're not ever going to remember the food. But you will remember this and so—. Yeah; I—it is kind of a counter—counter-balance to the generic fast food or even the generic restaurants.

**00:52:52**

**SS:** And from our email exchanges you've talked a little bit about fried—excuse me, fried pies in the Ozarks in particular; in some ways are you trying to preserve the heritage of the Ozarks by having your bakery?

**00:53:08**

**AF:** Yes; that's a definite. There aren't—as you can tell it's kind of a struggle for people to have restaurants here. And a lot of people don't realize that when you own any business, not just—but especially a restaurant you're wedded to it. You really can never leave it. Even though you think

well I can go on a vacation or something you really can't. And it's a constant bother and so people do get into it when they don't know what's going on. So um, even the ones that had fried pies are now gone for the most part. And the people—I mean anymore if it's not something made in—comes in a bag and thrown into a microwave most people—most younger people don't really know how to cook.

**00:53:56**

And so every time somebody says “Well, how can I make these at home?” I tell them, because this is something special. I mean you should; you should know how to make a fried pie, even if you don't make it all the time. And there are a lot of women especially who used to make fried pies. They don't anymore. They come here and buy them. It's because you have to make twenty of them at a time. And if you don't have five kids at home you know well, how are you going to get rid of them? You'll be sick of them before you ever finish them.

**00:54:23**

So I do encourage it; you know if you want to make fried pies, please make fried pies. I mean this is something that was something really special when we were kids, when we were young and it's going out because it is kind of a pain in the neck. But you know there are a lot of things that are a pain in the neck that are so worth it. And if you can't make it yourself then stop by. I'll be happy; I have all sorts of ones, so—. *[Laughs]*

**00:54:47**

**SS:** And how does one make a fried pie?

**00:54:50**

**AF:** Well let's see; first you need to have a recipe for the fried pie or for the filling or the—I'm sorry. Let's start off with—first decide what kind of fried pie to make because you're going to want to make the filling first. If you like apple, just take whatever apple pie recipe pie you like; instead of baking it put it on low on the stove and then just keep stirring it and do remember to stir it by the way, you don't need to add any other water or anything, you know just put everything that you normally have in a recipe. Okay; now you're going to have a cooked pie filling. Set that aside. The—the pie shell—unfortunately I've got everything down to a weight so I'm going to tell you what the weight is and that way you can you know you can kind of translate it in your own head. You take forty-three ounces of a high protein flour and by that I mean like a bread flour. Now you can go with just a general AP [all-purpose] flour, but if you do that it's not going to hold together quite as well. Okay; you do—you want the protein strands to bind. Okay; so you got forty-three ounces of high protein bread flour and to that you cut in twelve ounces of a good quality vegetable shortening. And by that I mean not Crisco. Crisco used to be so good and it really isn't anymore. If you want to go old-style you can go with lard. So you cut that in until you've got it you know nicely, oh, I guess—what do they say, pea-sized clusters. I hate when English deserts me; anyway, okay, so you've got that. You also add in about a tablespoon and a teaspoon—nope, I lied—two tablespoons and two teaspoons so that's almost three tablespoons of sugar, two teaspoons of salt. I use kosher salt; two tablespoons of baking powder. Okay; so you've got all this mixed together and in two cans—once you've got that all mixed together and all cut up add in two large—twelve-ounces so that's twenty-four ounces of evaporated milk, okay.

**00:57:12**

Knead it; I mean really, really mix it up really well. You want it elastic and you can't overwork this. Unlike a regular pie crust where you will make it tough, you can't overwork this

one. Or at least if you can it's a lot more work than I'm ever willing to put into it because I'd be tired long before you could overwork it. Okay; pinch off about enough that would fill your palm in kind of a mound. Roll it out; you know put down flour, roll it out. And then when it's gotten big enough take something that you can cut it in a circle with. I use the top of a plastic pitcher. Okay; so if you have one of those plastic pitchers with a handle—with a top just use that and it will cut it into a nice circle.

**00:57:54**

Okay; put the pie filling into the—the shell and then a little bit of egg wash around the edges. Fold it over and then crimp it. Okay; you heat up your oil to about 375 degrees. I like peanut oil because you can heat it up nice and high and that way the oil will slough off and you don't have this oily pie. I also don't use vegetable shortening for frying because it leaves a coating on the roof of your mouth and I've never liked that and it's also bad for your heart—well it's bad for your arteries. So I try not to; you've already put vegetable shortening in there—why add to it?

**00:58:32**

I fry it in 375 until it goes golden brown. You'll probably have to hold it down. You know drown it; you know hold it under until it goes all the way golden. And then I drain it on like a paper bag or something like that. And then I dust it with powdered sugar. And if you do it when it's hot it almost forms like a glaze. And that's how you make a fried pie. So what that translates to there are five ounces in every cup of flour. Okay; so forty-three divided by five and that's how many cups of flour. So if that helps. There are seven ounces in every cup of shortening, so again seven into twelve. As you can see we're getting into fractions here. But this is a recipe that I—I worked up using a scale as opposed to like measuring cups and that's why

it's in such weird amounts is because I kept working at it until I got it perfect. And unless you have a scale you're going to have to learn long division.

00:59:45

**SS:** So it's probably best to buy a scale. *[Laughs]*

00:59:48

**AF:** Yes; it's best to buy a scale. It's far more accurate. I want everyone who comes up who is going to want the same apple pie that they had last week. And so the taste of the pie shell has to be consistent and over the last six years it has remained consistent. And that's one of the very few boring jobs I have with this trailer is that I have to roll out these pie shells every night. When I was—had gotten to the point where it was kind of—you know I wanted to find some kind of a machinery to help me with this, so I called down to New Orleans and I asked the big—they have a big fried pie place down there and I said, “What did you do between rolling out your pie shells and buying the \$50,000 piece of equipment that does it all you know for you?” And the lady goes, “Well we hired people to roll out pie shells.” Apparently there is like not really a good you know machine for doing that. So I'll be rolling these out it looks like for a long, long time. Fifty thousand dollars is a lot more than I'd be willing to pay.

01:00:49

But they—the upshot of it is that you just have to kind of tweak it. I just kept working with it until I got to the point where I really enjoyed the pie shell and I've never gotten tired of it. For six years, you know when you work in a restaurant you get sick of the food. And I've—I don't eat a whole lot of them but I certainly eat at least one—one a week *[Laughs]* even if it's just like, “Oops. I—she didn't ask for peach; she asked for something else.” And so you end up

with you know a fried peach pie and you know you're going to eat it because everyone wants a hot and fresh one.

**[Customer walks up to window]**

**01:01:25**

**SS:** And we'll take another short break.

**01:01:29**

All right; and we are back with our oral history. And one question that I should have asked when we started out is when is your birthday?

**01:01:36**

**AF:** Oh my birthday is August 22, 1962.

**01:01:41**

**SS:** Excellent; thank you.

**01:01:43**

**AF:** And there was nobody interesting born on that day. **[Laughs]**

**01:01:44**

**SS:** I take it you've already Googled it.

**01:01:47**

**AF:** Yeah; oh well. **[Laughs]**

**01:01:48**

**SS:** Maybe in the future.

**01:01:51**

**AF:** Yeah; who knows.

**01:01:52**

**SS:** You never know. All right; so can you—during one of our breaks we were talking about your mixture of apples that you’re using right now. Can you tell me a little bit more and kind of walk me through the process of how you balance those different flavors?

**01:02:08**

**AF:** Oh sure. Of course it depends on which apples are—are fresh. But I’ve always thought that a mixture of apples is the best because you’re—you need something that’s a little tart like a Granny Smith or—and something that’s sweet like a Jazz or Braeburn but you also want something that holds together and has those—you know I’ve got an apple peeler. And you stick it to your counter top and you try desperately to keep it—the apple from falling apart before it gets the peel all off; yeah. It’s sort of frustrating but on the other hand it beats having to do it with a paring knife. But so it makes these lovely little horseshoe shapes; you know because then you slice the apple in half.

**01:02:52**

Well you—those are so pretty and people love to see those and I like to have an apple that at least holds one of the types of—apples should hold together enough to—to show that beautiful color. And also of course as you’re cooking it on the stove all you’re really adding is flour and sugar and cinnamon and nutmeg and a little bit of salt if you’d like. So it’s forming this

caramelization, you know and it's got the typical apple pie beauty, you know of the—the dark caramel color and then you've got the—the white of the apples, you know. So if you have a nice mixture of apples you know you can try for yourself to—to figure out about how many tart and how many sweet and how many that are going to hold together well. A golden delicious as an example will hold together fairly well and in fact they dry for dried apples fairly well. The problem is that they don't have a lot of taste unless you just happen upon the—the perfect golden delicious apple. And of course each apple is individual like all the rest of us.

**01:04:00**

So sometimes you know you're going to end up with exactly the same mix that you used the week before but it's not going to taste the same because each apple is different. And that's fine; that's life. So I always put about four or five Granny Smith in to give it that little bit of a tang and all the—the rest of them it just kind of depends on what it is that's—that's in season. I've used golden—or no, just a regular red delicious apple but only the ones that I picked myself off of a tree because the ones that aren't—you know tend to be a lot more commercial—.

**01:04:42**

**SS:** And what do you—when a customer comes—comes up to your trailer what is that you want them to experience when they're here and what do you want them to walk away with?

**01:04:50**

**AF:** Well when a customer comes up to the trailer the first thing that I try to take note of is you know how are they feeling? You know do they look like they're having a good day or if they do then that's fine and then I get to tease and you know flirt and all the other things. “Oh so I—I see that you're coming back yet again;” you know well that's fun when they're in a good mood. If

somebody is not then it's my job to make sure that they do—they're in a better mood by the time that they leave—compliment their earrings or ask them how their day was. I mean I get a lot of customers, I—I've had one customer who always looked so happy, a little too happy. You know what I'm saying? And she was always there with her husband. Well, one day she came up and she said that she had left him. And I said, "I see; are you okay?" And she started to cry. And you know the nice thing is that I can turn down the oil and get out of the trailer and hug her. And that's okay. You know that's—I'm not working for somebody else. I've got my own business. If I want to turn everything off and help somebody I can. And I couldn't do that when I worked for other people. You know I'd be taking money away from them.

**01:06:08**

**[Laughs]** The lady who just came up just now was a little short and it's so nice to be able to say, "Oh, don't worry about it," because I'm not shorting a—my boss. I am my boss. And in fact I'm a terrible boss. I'm the worst boss I've ever had. I always know when I'm calling sick and I'm not really sick. It's awful. But anyway, I want them to come up. I want them—I—we always have a chat because it does take about four or five minutes to make the pie. And we chat about everything from oh the news to the weather—the weather is a big one, to who is out of jail and who is in jail, who is out of the hospital and who is in the hospital, who is out of the day—you know it's just everything. We talk about everything. And in some cases I found out that you know one—one of my customers, she—her grandchildren drowned, a horrible, horrible thing. And again, you know I—I can stop everything and just hold somebody because every one of us needs to be held every now and then or just reach out and touch their hand you know. We all need some kind of contact.

**01:07:20**

So I want them to go away thinking to themselves, “I’m going to treasure this;” you know it’s not—it’s not just something that you eat. You know you don’t shove—shove it down your throat and that’s it. That you should have a very pleasant experience; of course there are days when I don’t feel really good or I have a tickle in my throat [*Coughs*] like right now. But even then you know I should never have somebody leaving feeling worse than when they came up.

**01:07:56**

And it’s just fun. I want them to really have this be something they look forward to, not something that they think, “Oh, I suppose I could stop and get a fried pie. Oh maybe.” You know I want them to say, “Oh look. The fried pie lady is open.” And I hear that all the time [*Laughs*]. At least once a day I hear “Oh I was so excited. I drove by and I see your sign was up.” Now I feel like I’m here all the time. But I’m only here Wednesday through Saturday and just from 10:30 to 4:30 and so for a lot of people you know it’s really exciting when they finally come by and they see that the—I have an A—what do they call that—a leaning sign. You know it’s out by the road. And so if it’s—if I’m not there it’s leaning on its side and when I’m there it’s standing upright like a little teepee. And people get very excited when they see the little teepee up. So the—and of course I get a lot of kids who—this is their favorite place to come because they get to watch something being made. And maybe their mom and dad don’t really cook. You know they eat out a lot. And so this is the only time they actually see something being made by hand and it’s really kind of special for them.

**01:09:08**

I have one little girl who is just so excited every time she comes here to watch her pie. It’s her pie and only her pie being made. I mean it’s an individual. She asked me for it and I make it however she likes it and she likes—if I have the cheesecake she likes the cheesecake

with something in it. Sometimes it's chocolate or sometimes it's lemon or something like that. And so I'll make it—"Is this enough lemon? Do you want more lemon in it?" "Okay; yeah that's good, that's good, okay." "All right;" and then you know I fill up the—fill it up with cheesecake. And she goes, "Can you put more in it?" "No, because then I can't close it." She goes "Oh, okay, okay;" so you know she's just so cute. And she watches and—and she goes, "What's that you're putting around the edge?" I said "Well it's egg wash." And she goes "Eww, it's raw egg." I said "Well, it won't be raw when it's out of the fryer. It's going to be cooked egg." And she goes, "I don't taste the cooked egg." "Okay; that's—you know you're not supposed to taste the cooked egg. **[Laughs]** It's just it seals it." And she goes, "Oh okay."

01:10:01

So then I put it in and she gets all upset if it gets inflated you know and it's too high up and it's not cooking just right and she yells at her pie. It's really very cute. And I know that this is somebody who is going to remember this. I mean when she gets older, so that in itself—the fact that I've planted a memory in not just the kids but also you know the adults who go, "Oh, I remember that fried pie lady." And I've already been threatened if I ever close you know that they'll come find me and hunt me down. So apparently I'm—I'm going to be held hostage in this fried pie place. I've actually thought about making fortune cookies, Ozark fortune cookies, because they're—fortune cookies really aren't that tough to make and put something in there like "Help I'm being held captive in a fried pie—you know trailer," so—. One of these days I'll probably do that you know. Or, "Warning; you will hit a deer by day's end" you know and that's—honestly that's a pretty good odds right there, so—. **[Laughs]** An Ozark fortune cookie, you know; "Beware you will marry your cousin," you know, but that might go a little—cutting a little close to the bone around here, so maybe perhaps not that one. **[Laughs]**

01:11:11

But if I could think of all sorts of real fun ones I think I probably will. But they are kind of a pain to make but they're fun, so—.

**01:11:19**

**SS:** “Check the axles on your trailer.”

**01:11:21**

**AF:** Yes; “check the axles on your trailer.” That would be a good one right there. I had my—my husband had an accident with a circular saw and it cut off the—it almost cut off his hand. And of course he was in surgery and it was a fluke. You know there is a guard on those things and it just happened to flip up as he was falling and it caught the back of his hand. And I said to the surgeon, “Oh I bet this is the first time you've ever seen this happen.” And he said, “This is the third time this year—exactly that type of accident.” So apparently that's another thing that needs to go into the fortune cookies: “Do not cut off your hand; you will regret it.” You know so I don't know; there are some things that you just think to yourself gosh that seems like a very unusual thing to have happen but it happens all the time here.

**01:12:07**

I was actually—I heard an armadillo out behind—I don't know if you really want this recorded because it's not really food related but I heard an armadillo—we live out in the middle of the country and I thought, “Oh. I've been trying to get this little guy for a while. And so I brought out my .22 [caliber rifle] and I was barefoot wearing short shorts, little tank top in the middle of the summer. And while I was looking for the armadillo something stung my heel. And it was a scorpion and we do have those here. And it swelled—it swelled up a little bit and it was really, really painful. And my husband said, “Well let's go to the Emergency Room.” And I said,

“I just can't.” I can't; I can't face looking at somebody and saying, “Well, I was out shooting at an armadillo. And in my short shorts with my bare feet and my .22 and I happened to step on a scorpion.” I thought no; I just can't do that. I'm sorry; I—. **[Laughs]** There are some things that are a little too Ozarkian and I just can't bring myself to admit have happened to me, so—.

**01:13:10**

But it's—it's very beautiful here and I really enjoy it and I love the people. The people are the best part of this area. You can't buy a pack of gum without having the chat. You have to talk about your kids or the weather or heavens just that—how rude that person was in front of you who didn't chat, you know. **[Laughs]** The people around here make fun of Harrison because they don't chat in Harrison. And they go there and they start chatting with the clerks and the clerks just look at them and they say they're so stuck up over in Harrison. They just don't even chat. So that is one of the things that was—when people come up here they are going to get chatted at. Whether they like it or not they'll get chatted at. I'll talk about everything. I'll talk about when I was a blackjack dealer or I'll talk about being raised in Iowa. I'll talk about my grandmother and how she made fried pies or how she baked—she honestly baked ten loaves of bread a week by hand—you know no bread machines or anything like that. She had ten kids and her husband left her and moved in with a woman down the street. I'll tell you all these things, you know because it takes five to seven minutes for me to fry you a pie. And I like to entertain people and I don't like them staring at me. **[Laughs]**

**01:14:31**

**SS:** I'm just glad you didn't shoot your big toe off.

**01:14:32**

**AF:** I know and I thought that too. Heaven forbid I ever shoot myself because my husband is a safety instructor for—and I really thought that would be bad; that would be very bad. The last—I think only about three nights ago I did exactly that same thing with the armadillo and my husband left and I thought, “Well, where did he go?” And he said, “I didn’t want you to shoot me.” And I said “Oh honey, I’m not going to shoot at you.” And he goes, “I know; I know.” And I thought, “No; you don’t know. You don’t trust me.”

**01:15:03**

But you know I was raised hunting and fishing and he wasn’t, so of the two of us I think he’s the more likely to shoot me than I am to shoot him—accidentally anyway. You know if we’re talking on purpose well maybe not. **[Laughs]** He is after all a male and because of that—irritating, whereas we’re perfect angels.

**01:15:23**

**SS:** And if some medium-sized critter is in the woods and he can't make it out—

**01:15:27**

**AF:** Yes; if it doesn’t say hello back then you know—heavens it could be anything, something dangerous. I finally figured out what the weird sound was that sounded like a Pomeranian with a—with a sore throat. It turns out it was a vixen, a fox vixen and that’s their sound they make when they’re looking for a mate. And I thought, “Huh, what do you know?” We’ve got just all sorts of things. We have a bear tree where the bears have scratched on it in the past, although you know their territory has moved and they’re no longer in the area. But we have all sorts of things. And I was telling somebody about shooting a possum that was in with my chickens. And the guy looked at me and quite seriously said “What, no possum pie?” And I said, “Uh, no; no, you’re

not going to get possum pie, fried pies.” And he said “Why not? It’s pretty good.” It turns out this guy actually had a recipe. His grandmother used to make it; it was a meat pie.

**01:16:19**

And then I’ve—since then I’ve had somebody tell me how to make good—how to make possum taste good. And I thought to myself, “I’d have to be awfully hungry to eat a possum because they’re so greasy and nasty and they’re just like great big rats.” They’re scaly tales and all that, so I don’t think so. So you probably will never see possum pie unless it’s a euphemism for something else, you know make like marshmallow pie and call it possum pie or something. I don’t know, but whatever it is it’s not going to be possums.

**01:16:46**

**SS:** And I suspect the health department might have something to say about that at some point.

**01:16:49**

**AF:** You might be surprised. No; I’m just teasing. No; in fact they—the Health Department has been very good about telling me what can and can’t be done and one of the odd things was I asked them if I could use my own eggs. At the time we had chickens. We don’t actually have them anymore. And they said, “Oh please do.” And I said, “Okay; that was a weird response.” And he said, “You know they don’t track eggs in Arkansas.” I said, “What do you mean?” And they said—well, you know how they track beef? You can tell—you know where—which slaughterhouse it comes from? They don’t track eggs in Arkansas. It’s illegal. So if you have a bad egg—literally you know salmonella or something in it—he says we don’t know where it came from, whereas if you’re using your own eggs you know exactly where it came from.

**01:17:31**

And I said—and he goes, “And also I’ve seen your place and I know it’s nice and clean.” And yeah; I don’t want my chickens laying around in ickiness. So the—the eggs that I use for the bakery are always from a source that I know and they came from around here and their chickens run around have a pretty fun life and you know chase down bugs and eat mice and things like that.

**01:17:55**

**SS:** So you’ve actually met the chickens that lay your eggs?

**01:17:58**

**AF:** Yes actually in many cases, although I can't guarantee the chick—the eggs are coming from the same chickens I met. But you know they're sort of secretive about who laid what, but nevertheless yes, I know—I know the sources and I know the people who are raising them and you know they're all good, healthy eggs as opposed to some of the things you get at the store and the poor things are locked up in a cage and they can't turn around in. And that always struck me as just cruel, so—.

**01:18:25**

**SS:** And it sounds like your supply chain is as short as you can possibly make it.

**01:18:29**

**AF:** Oh yes; absolutely. [*Laughs*] If I know you grew it then I will likely buy it from you. But if I didn't—if you don't know where it came from I probably won't. Everything around here I know you know where the fruit came from, who owned the trees, what kind of spray if they used

any spray—they put on it, and you know all those other things. Everything gets washed; everything gets you know peeled or whatever needs to be done to make sure that the only thing that they're getting is something that's good for you. You know it's—I guess that's what it kind of comes down to. It's not like I'm a health freak, but on the other hand if I can get something that's really good, why not? You know if it's going to add some years to your life those might be the best years of your life. You know my grandmother lived to be ninety-seven and I—I asked her, you know, "How does it feel to be ninety-seven?" And she said, "Well, you only get about thirty good years," so a good long life is not necessarily a blessing. She said, "But I've enjoyed every year of it with you children." I mean like I said my grandmother left—my grandfather left my grandmother with 10 kids during the Depression and moved in with a woman down the street and had kids with her and then left her and moved in with another woman and had kids with her. So I've got half uncles and half aunts who are younger than I am.

**01:19:43**

Well I never saw her with a frown on her face. I never saw her with anything other than love in her eyes. She was the most fabulous woman in the world and if I could be a quarter of the person she was I'd be—I'd be somebody you'd like to know. But that's about it; that's—she was the one who did the fried pies and she's the one who taught me how to do all sorts of things—knit, crochet. I don't do either of those well. She taught me how to make potholders, you know. I can do the potholders. The potholders I can do. **[Laughs]** But I would like to have—people remember me the same way as I remember Mama Lacuna, I remember my grandmother—as people who could really do something that was great-tasting and really fun to be there.

**01:20:34**

**SS:** And somebody just pulled up so we'll pause again. Or, they just decided that was a parking spot.

**01:20:43**

**AF:** It could be either. Oh she'll come around. She knows where I'm at.

**01:20:56**

**SS:** Fair enough. And I just have I think just two more questions for you. The first one would be what do you think pie means to people in Arkansas and to the South more broadly?

**01:21:07**

**AF:** Well pie is a really big thing in the South. A pie was something you didn't need to refrigerate and you have to remember that for a lot of people they didn't have refrigeration. One of the pies that I get asked for a lot that I had never seen further north is a coconut meringue. Everything had meringue on it. And I couldn't figure that out. I—you know, "Don't you want whipped cream?" "No; I want meringue." Well when you think about it, not everybody had refrigerators. They kept it in the spring house or something like that and a meringue didn't need to be refrigerated as much as the whipped cream.

**01:21:38**

So pie was big; pie was how you showed you loved people. You know you'd make your neighbor a pie when they weren't feeling well or somebody died, you brought pie. And sweet potato pie with pecans sprinkled over the top of it—something that showed that you could—you cared enough about them to put that kind of effort into it. And of course it was competition. Everybody wanted their pie crust to be the lightest, the flakiest, the tastiest, the whatever, and to

have this presentation. I mean you know in the North you don't find pie pedestals the way we have here in the South. In the South we have like these ornate pedestaled displays of pies. It's like a shrine for pies. And I get a lot of people who order special orders. I do make special order pies for people and they are very specific. They tell me what size of the crust to have on the edge and what type of crimping to put along the edge and whether I should only use whole pecans when I make a pecan pie or whether I should use some whole ones and some crushed ones. I mean they're very, very specific.

**01:22:51**

And it makes me happy to make them that way because what they're doing is they're telling me: "I have this memory. I want to relive this memory." I have a man who actually he was dying. He had cancer. And he wanted—his wife called me up and said, "Can you make a coconut cake?" I said, "I can make several different kinds of coconut cake. You tell me exactly what kind of coconut cake his aunts who raised him made and I will make that kind of coconut cake." So it turns out that they had oh gosh, all sorts of things in this coconut cake. They had not just whipped cream in the interior of it, but they also had—they had some unsweetened coconut and some regular sweetened coconut and then you had a sweetened condensed milk that you poured into—I mean just really elaborate. But you know what, this is this guy's last year of life. I mean what can you say but "Absolutely; I can make that?" And I did and delivered it. Well actually they came to pick it up. And I said—afterwards I said, "Okay; so was it close? I didn't—I know it's not going to be dead on. Was it close?" And he said—she said, "I never saw him smile so much" and she said "I think you got it just right" or at least it was close enough that the memory was able to come all the way back.

**01:24:17**

And so I mean something like that who could—that’s—that’s worth more than anything. You know my Uncle Joe, he didn’t want to eat. He—I don’t think he wanted to live. His wife had died and he just was kind of starving himself to death. And about the only thing he’d eat was fried pies. And I felt like I should be slipping vitamins in or something, you know something—anything. But he just wanted a—a peach fried pie. And so you know my cousins would come over and they’d pick up some fried pies. And—and that’s all he ate until he died. You know so you—but he wouldn’t eat anything else. I said “Well, can’t you get him to eat like fried chicken or something”—anything that would be giving him more—more calories? And they said “He doesn’t want anything.” They said, “It’s all we can do just to get him to eat these.” And he would eat those.

**01:25:00**

So you know, you do what you can and when people are getting that close to the end, let them do whatever they want. You know give them what they need and if it can bring back memories of when they were little kids—yeah. You know when my brother was dying I—he died of something unusual and he was in a coma in the last few days. And so we took him off the resuscitator, the—the—well, we unplugged him, let’s put it that way. He had a lot of things attached to him. And as he was dying I was telling him all the things that we had done, you know playing on the swing sets and singing him songs that we sang when we were kids and talking about the things we ate. You know all the—the really awful food that my mother used to make for us and some of the good things; you know. “Do you remember that she used to make Spanish rice and pork chops? Do you remember what that tasted like, Matt?” And I think he was gone, but at least you know as he was dying he had that. And that’s all we can do. You know there’s— if you can do a kindness, do a kindness, I mean because why be mean. That’s just ridiculous—

unless of course you know it's required. If it's necessary I can be mean, but you know otherwise be kind.

**01:26:21**

**SS:** Literally with sweetness.

**01:26:21**

**AF:** Yes. *[Laughs]*

**01:26:25**

**SS:** One last question; is there anything else you would like to add or anything you would like in the record?

**01:26:32**

**AF:** Well I'm glad that I chose fried pies. There are a lot of different things I could have done when we moved here. And I chose fried pies because I—I don't know. It was a whim but I have touched more memories in people than I could have ever imagined. These little bitty pieces of fruit and you know pie shells seem to really connect with people and bring back memories of their lost relatives. And I would prefer them to be their living relatives but it doesn't seem to happen that way because if they're living they already have fried pies at home.

**01:27:09**

So no; I think that it's kind of—it's good. I'm glad I'm still making them. I hope I'm able to make them for some time longer but of course I'm getting older, too. And there is no air-

conditioning in my—my trailer, so—. **[Laughs]** Sooner or later I'm going to just die of heat stroke. So thank you—

**01:27:32**

**SS:** Thank you so much for sharing your stories and your knowledge of pies in Arkansas and for telling your stories for the Southern Foodways Association. We really appreciate it.

**01:27:43**

**AF:** You're very welcome; thank you.

**01:27:45**

**SS:** Thank you.

**01:27:48**

**AF:** Okie-dokie; I probably held you up because of all the customers and everything.

**01:27:52**

**[End Aileen Forman-Babycakes Bakery]**