

**ANGELISH WILSON**  
**Wilson's Soul Food – Athens, GA**

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Date: November 21, 2006  
Location: Wilson's Soul Food – Athens, GA  
Interviewer: Amy Evans  
Length: 56 minutes  
Project: Athens Eats/Guardians of the Tradition

**[Begin Angelish Wilson Interview]**

00:00:00

**Amy Evans:** This is Amy Evans on Tuesday, November 21st, 2006 for the Southern Foodways Alliance in Athens, Georgia, at Wilson's Soul Food. I'm with Angelish Wilson. Would you please state your name and your birth date for the record, please ma'am?

00:00:16

**Angelish Wilson:** My name is Angelish Kay Wilson. My age is 54.

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**AE:** And your—what's your birth date, if we can get that?

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**AW:** It's April 16<sup>th</sup> [1952].

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**AE:** And your family has had Wilson's Soul Food for how long now?

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**AW:** We opened up in March 31st in 1981.

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**AE:** How far back does your family go here in Athens—in the Athens area? [*Laughs*] How far back your family goes in the Athens area?

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**AW:** We moved to Athens back in 1964 from Madison County right after my mom passed, and my dad wanted to keep a close knit on us while he was working, so he moved to town in 1964.

00:01:09

**AE:** And what was your—what part of Madison County? Were you in a country area?

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**AW:** Yes, it's a town called Colbert, Georgia. That's the famous hometown of Kenny Rogers, right after he married Marianne, so my church sat right back in the corner of their lane, uh-hmm.

00:01:31

**AE:** So what was your father doing, when you lived in Madison County, before you moved up to town here?

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**AW:** My father used to work on the railroad during the day, and then at night he would come to cut hair here at the barbershop and he had been—had the barbershop for fifty years so, uh-hmm.

00:01:50

**AE:** And your parents' names?

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**AW:** My dad's name is M. C. Wilson, and my mom's name is Rosalie Wilson; but I also have a fantastic step-mom, and her name is Elizabeth Wilson, uh-hmm.

00:02:07

**AE:** What year did your mom pass, if I may ask?

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**AW:** My mom passed away in 1962. She gave birth—my sister, her name was Lillian—her name is Lillian Rosanna O’Neil, and she died at childbirth. I don’t want to talk about that.

00:02:27

**AE:** Can you tell me a little bit about your father?

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**AW:** He’s a man that you think that stands tall. He stands about five-two; has a fantastic smile; always greeting people with a hello; always giving good encouragement. If you would meet him, you would always remember him; he’s just that type of person, uh-hmm.

00:03:01

**AE:** Now when he started the styling shop next door here [at 343 North Hull Street], did he start out working there or did he purchase the business and—and start it himself?

00:03:11

**AW:** Well the—he started cutting hair—I guess it was about in 1954, and he was doing it at home. So right after he retired from the railroad, he decided to go full time in the hair business, so he came to work with a man named—oh, I can't think of his name now, but he came to work here with a man and the man retired, and he decided to buy the place and he bought the place in—I don’t know what year. I know it’s been—been over fifty years, uh-hmm.

00:03:47

**AE:** Now I heard something somewhere about there being a black-owned newspaper in that building or this building where the soul food restaurant is. Do you know anything about that?

00:03:55

**AW:** It wasn't in this building. It was in the building next door [on the corner], but that was way before my time. I think right after the newspaper place—I think that burnt down, and then they rebuilt it and then it used to be a Laundromat, and from the Laundromat it became the police department uniform shop. And right now it's a nightclub so—. I don't know too much about the corner because when we was coming up my dad always tried to protect us from a whole lot of stuff, and we never could come to town because it's considered—it was a real active place and that's a place where we couldn't come as a kid.

00:04:47

**AE:** So when you say active place, you mean lots of kind of nightlife or are you speaking in general about something else?

00:04:55

**AW:** I'm thinking of nightlife. They used to have clubs, bars, anything you can name was down here, so we just couldn't come in this area as a kid.

00:05:08

**AE:** And this area, too, is still known as Hot Corner, where there were a lot of black-owned businesses in the day. Do you remember or know about some of the other businesses that were around?

00:05:18

**AW:** No, not too many. I can remember one funeral home. That's right after I came on the scene. And then I remember one nightclub. The funeral home was named Mack and Payne, as I can remember and nightclub was Manhattan Café. And then there was also two barbershops, and they still stand, which is Wilson Style Shop and Brown Barbershop. And I can remember that scene.

00:05:52

**AE:** Was the Manhattan Café pretty different than the Manhattan Café that's down there now?

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**AW:** Most different; that was the hot place. It's still kind of hot now, but not as hot as it used to be.

00:06:07

**AE:** Are the soul food place and the styling salon, are they the only two remaining black-owned businesses in the area?

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**AW:** No, it's still three. That's the Brown Barbershop and Wilson's Soul Food and Wilson's Style Shop, uh-hmm.

00:06:21

**AE:** So your father was in the hair business for a while; what made him want to get into the restaurant business?

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**AW:** Well my dad always liked to cook, and right after my mom died he just took over cooking and—and he liked to make pies and cakes. I think he specialized in hamburgers, and the building just came open, and he just decided to buy it, uh-hmm.

00:06:50

**AE:** So when he—when he bought the building and started the restaurant, was he doing the cooking?

00:06:55

**AW:** No, my step-mom and I came in and did the cooking. I can remember times when my dad used to try to teach me how to cook; he told me to go in there and make a burger. He wouldn't tell me how and what to do, so I put the skillet on the stove, and I noticed that he put black pepper in the—in the meat, but I decided to put mine in the skillet. And I turned the stove on, and about the time I got the burger to the frying pan, the house was smelling so hot that we couldn't stay in it because the pepper was cooking and everybody had to run out the house so—. I kind of learned. But my dad—anything that I would cook he would always say it was good in order to encourage me, so I can keep on. So I learned from that.

00:07:44

**AE:** So you weren't a big cook at all, then, before you got into the restaurant business?

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**AW:** No, I was a great cook then, you know. I started—I guess I was about fifteen—maybe about fifteen years old when I started cooking really for the house, uh-hmm. But by the time I got to the restaurant, I was an excellent cook. *[Laughs]*

00:08:05

**AE:** So were there any things at home that you were cooking that are different from what's in—what was in the restaurant when you started here?

00:08:12

**AW:** I didn't understand.

00:08:12

**AE:** Was the food that you were making at home when you were fifteen—was it the same kind of food that you started making once you came to the restaurant?

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**AW:** I believe so, yeah, uh-hmm—home cooking, uh-huh, home cooked meal, uh-hmm.

00:08:29

**AE:** So what about cooking in—in different quantities for folks. Was that a thing to kind of get used to?

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**AW:** No, because I guess sometimes God have a plan for you and—and right after I finished high school, I went to work at this place called Snelling Hall [a dining hall at the University of Georgia], and you cook in big quantities there. And then I left there and went to nursing school and did a little nursing, but I didn't like that. So my dad decided to open this restaurant up again so I—I kind of like knew how to do it because we all—we have a big family anyway. My dad have fifteen kids but twelve living, so about the time twelve kids get there and their kids get there and then neighbors get there, so you're cooking—cooking for a big quantity, uh-hmm.

00:09:23

**AE:** So when you say that you didn't really take to nursing and you wanted to do something else, was the restaurant something that your father kind of saw would be a good business for family members to be in, or was it just something that happened conveniently that you didn't take to nursing and this was something that you could do?

00:09:39

**AW:** Well I guess I'm considered as being the mama of the family. When we have different outings, I'm the one that gets everybody together. And I just like family life, and I guess it's more happiness for me to see somebody just sit down and enjoy themselves. And—and about the—I—when I got my license to—you know, to be a nurse, I was at a nursing home, and it looked like every time I would get a patient and you fall in love with them and then they die. See, that's a hurting feeling, so I just didn't—I couldn't go along with that, uh-hmm, yeah.

00:10:27

**AE:** So what's it been like all these years to be responsible for feeding all these folks and all these young people who come in from the university and all that all these years?

00:10:36

**AW:** Happiness. Joy. I get a joy out of it, and I think the students get a joy of coming in here and just seeing what's going on and also going along with the attitude. If your attitude is not right, no matter how good you cook, it's still not going to be right. It have to be homey-based, and that's the way we're trying to keep it. If you've got a problem—a problem and you come in here and about time you leave here see, I want you happy by the time you leave here—forget all about your problems and cares and—and that is how we are, uh-hmm.

00:11:09

**AE:** So how much of that you do you think is the food and how much is you and the other folks who work here?

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**AW:** [*Sighs*] I'd say about forty-five-percent food and the other is—have to be caring, uh-hmm.

00:11:28

**AE:** So you really build the relationship with the people that—that come in here?

00:11:32

**AW:** Oh, yeah. That's important with that relationship. I mean you can't go too far without a relationship, you know. People will stop in and just eat, but you want them to come back, see—

that's the key—coming back and—and making sure that they feel safe here and then they—if they're safe here, that means they're going to come back to eat. So that's the way I like it.

00:11:55

**AE:** So you have a lot of folks who have been coming since the day you opened?

00:11:59

**AW:** Oh, yeah. We have different people come in. We have the—whenever the President of—the University wants a pork chop, he know to come here. Whenever we have like pro-footballs that left—the University of Georgia, when they come back to games, they come here and it's just a homey atmosphere. And I think about—it wasn't this year. A couple years back we had a guest call from Tennessee. They was playing the University of Georgia. They parked the bus, and I just thought they were just going to, you know, come in and use the bathroom or get something to drink. But they said they—they heard about Wilson's Soul Food, and they wanted to sit here and listen to the radio on the game. So we had fun. I mean stuff like that kind of motivates you—that, you know you're doing something right.

00:12:56

**AE:** Do you hear a lot of stories of folks from far away that they heard about Wilson's Soul Food and—and what they heard about you?

00:13:02

**AW:** Yes. We had this—also we had this retiree group from Detroit, Michigan. They called and said that they was coming down to the see the Historic Athens, and they said that make sure that Wilson's Soul Food was on their list. So they called and made reservations. It just—stuff like

that just happens, uh-hmm. I can tell you a whole lot but, you know, just some things that stays in your mind, especially when you have a good time with them and you know they have a good time, uh-hmm.

00:13:45

**AE:** What are some other stories like that—that are highlights just quickly off the top of your head?

00:13:50

**AW:** Well we had this football team from out of South Carolina. They just passed through and had heard about Wilson's Soul Food, and every time they pass through they will stop at Wilson's Soul Food. And it was just a joy to see a lot of men, young men and you know just be down to earth and having a good time and like they was enjoying themselves. And also we had the Boys of New York City—the Boys' Choir of New York City; we had them to stop in one night for reservations. So I mean it can go on down the line I can think of—out of all the many years and—and to me it's a blessing that a little small place like this that if you show love to somebody, somebody going to go off and tell somebody else so that's—I just get a joy out of it.

00:14:56

**AE:** Do y'all work primarily by word of mouth? Do you advertise at all?

00:15:01

**AW:** Oh yes, we advertise in the newspaper, do free advertising like the last one that I did was over at the University of Georgia. They had a dinner and—behind the library, and I donate food

there to feed the peoples, and so you can see results, you know. They will come back and see where Wilson's Soul Food is. I do stuff like that, uh-hmm.

00:15:29

**AE:** Now say again the year that you opened, eighty—?

00:15:33

**AW:** Nineteen eighty-one, uh-hmm.

00:15:34

**AE:** Do you remember the first day of business and what that was like?

00:15:36

**AW:** Oh yeah, I can remember the first day of business. I was scared because I always had been a quiet person. I'm comfortable around family, and I sang in the choir but yet still—I just wasn't ready for that kind of rush. But we made it through but then it seemed like that—I mean it seemed like that helped me to grow that first day. People were asking me—said, "What's your name?" And I was scared to say my name; you know, I just was that scared.

00:16:23

**AE:** Do you remember what was on the menu the first day you were open?

00:16:25

**AW:** Well I know we had pork chops, our daily menu; we always have pork chops every day, fried chicken every day, green beans and macaroni. I know that—that been on the menu since '81 but the rest of it I can't—I can't remember.

00:16:41

**AE:** How about the prices of a meat with three vegetables?

00:16:46

**AW:** It have changed but it hasn't changed that much. I think within those years we have get our prices up at least about three times since we've been here, and we try to keep it basically for the university because we know that students, sometimes they have a hard time. You know, they have a problem with studying and they have a problem with girlfriends and boyfriends, and I mean different things can happen. But we want them to feel as though they can come home and eat, and I think we have did that well by keeping the price down. And just this year I did go up ten cents and you didn't—I think out of all the students, probably heard about three complaints but they—they still coming. But you know they—I tell them that you have to realize gas go up, product go up, so that mean I have to go up, so I try to keep it—I mean it's not a competition. It's just what I feel as though that they can afford.

00:18:03

**AE:** I know you look out for them, too, like making sure they have their vegetables and all that. Can—

00:18:07

**AW:** I do. Sometimes I can—I'll tell a student they might get macaroni and cheese, buttered potatoes, and some fried okra, and then I say, "Where are you're veggies? You need to put one of those back." And they say, "Yes, ma'am. You just like my mama." So it just—uh-hmm.

00:18:26

**AE:** You make people feel at home.

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**AW:** Yeah, that's the key of making them feel at home, uh-hmm, making them feel loved.

00:18:34

**AE:** So let's talk about the food. Where did all those recipes and everything come from?

00:18:39

**AW:** Well my auntie—I have an auntie—I had an auntie; her name was Lillian Dye, and I used to go down her house all the time right after my mom died. She kind of like would cook, and I was always fascinated with the kitchen, and I wanted to peep over and see what she was doing. And so I got cooking skill from her, also from my step-mama and my aunties on my mama's side. They loved to cook, and they cooked real good, uh-hmm.

00:19:10

**AE:** Are there things that you make that you especially like to make or like to eat?

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**AW:** No, we're just making the people happy, that's my key. If I could—you know, if I could satisfy somebody else before I satisfy myself, see, I'm happy.

00:19:32

**AE:** Do you ever get requests for anything that you don't usually have on the menu that you make special for folks?

00:19:36

**AW:** Oh yeah, I do. You can have—I can have people that are coming in or I know they're coming in a day before time, and I'll tell them to let me know and then I go out and get it and then I prepare it for them, so that's the way we operate around here. It's not that I make the menu all the time; I want them to make the menu sometimes.

00:19:57

**AE:** So what are those—some of those different things that you make special?

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**AW:** Well eggplant casserole, tuna salad, it's a tuna casserole—not a salad—tuna casserole; I can basically make any kind of casserole that they ask me to. Homemade like chicken noodle soup; they like that on the cold days. And I have this ground beef soup that I make also. It's a whole lot of different things, uh-hmm.

00:20:34

**AE:** When you cook do you cook by recipe or by taste and by feel?



00:20:39

**AW:** Taste. I start off with a small amount of season, and then I go back and put a pinch or two more and then—about the time it's halfway cooking and then I taste it again. Needs more seasoning, I add a little pinch more. About time it gets done I want to see if it tastes right and then if it needs something, I add it; if it don't, I don't add it. It's not a measurement that I do. Soul food is basically cooking from your heart; it's not a—a book recipe.

00:21:07

**AE:** Do you ever have anybody ask for a recipe?

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**AW:** Ask for my recipe? Yes, I do. But I would kind of like give it to them but not all the way.

**[Laughs]**

00:21:25

**AE:** Save some secrets for yourself, huh?

00:21:25

**AW:** Yeah, it's coming soon, uh-huh.

00:21:29

**AE:** You're going to—are you going to make a cookbook?

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**AW:** Yes, I'm—I'm working on it now, uh-hmm—working.

00:21:35

**AE:** Congratulations.

00:21:37

**AW:** Thank you. Thank you.

00:21:39

**AE:** Are there going to be some secrets that you hold back from the cookbook too?

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**AW:** Well I'm going to add a little more, but on down the line I'm looking at something else bigger, uh-huh.

00:21:51

**AE:** So what do you think that will mean for you to have your recipes out there?

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**AW:** Just spreading love that's all, uh-hmm.

00:22:00

**AE:** Do you think—have an opinion about cooking as to like, you know, if my grandmother made fried chicken but it was my grandmother and it was her skillet that made the fried chicken and how—how the person that you are goes into the food that you make?

00:22:15

**AW:** No, you can—I can have a recipe—I can have a recipe and I can follow that guideline of the recipe, but I’m not in your heart. It’s still not going to be just like mine. I mean it just goes that way, uh-hmm. See where—where you might follow the recipe, I might put a little more beat to it, uh-hmm. It’s—it’s a certain technique.

00:22:42

**AE:** So tell me about your day here and when you get here and what—what you do to plan for—and get ready for lunch and cook.

00:22:50

**AW:** Well my job is easy because I have a—a staff. They have been here for a long time. I guess one have been here about—maybe about thirteen, fourteen years, and she make my job real easy. And then I have another one and she been here about eight years, and I just hired another one, and she’s good. So they make my job easy; all I have to do is just come—almost just supervise or just—they tell me to sit down so—uh-hmm.

00:23:20

**AE:** What are their—each of their names—naming maybe the—the one who has been here longest first?

00:23:25

**AW:** Theresa Lumpkin, she’s been here the longest. And then I have Surriendier Curruth; she been here next longest. And then Helen Ellison; I just hired her, uh-hmm.

00:23:45

**AE:** And do you train them at all, or they come in pretty much knowing what needs to be done?

00:23:51

**AW:** Well I make sure that they know how to cook, but also I try to make sure they know how to follow my directions, and so that's important because I don't want to change my way. I want to try to keep the home base from scratch. I had one employee came in and told me—said, “You can take the okra and—and buy it already prepared.” But see, that's not me. I want mine to come from scratch, like my turnip greens, they come in fresh. I don't want them frozen, and I don't want them canned; I want to cook them myself. I just like to do stuff from scratch; I'm going to just end it up just like that.

00:24:45

**AE:** How is it that you make sure the—the people that you hire that they know how to cook?

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**AW:** Well, if they said they know how to cook first of all when I hired them, I let them know that, you know, you was hired temporary; and if I like what you're doing and if it's for me, see I can catch it right off. And some would listen and some would not, and you just have to move with the flow, uh-hmm. And it also goes with not only can you cook, it have to be attitude—you have to be attitude-wise, uh-hmm.

00:25:26

**AE:** So they're here on like a trial basis until you know for sure?

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**AW:** I let them know that this is the way I do it: trial basis. And—and you have to—and I’m a greeter. I mean if you open that door—if I—if I see you I’m—I want to greet you before you get up to me, I mean that’s just me, and that’s the way I like to be treated when I go into a place; so I want them to feel the same way when they come in here. Did they greet you when you came in?

00:25:55

**AE:** Yes.

00:25:56

**AW:** Okay, that’s all I want to know. [*Laughs*]

00:25:59

**AE:** And I ate well, too, I can guarantee you that. So let’s talk a little bit more about the food and maybe like what was on the menu today and how that changes from day-to-day or time-to-time.

00:26:10

**AW:** Okay, as I said I do have pork chops, chicken, macaroni, green beans every day, but then I rotate it. For greens today I had collard greens. Like tomorrow I have turnip greens. The next day I might have cabbage. It’s always rotated. And then it might be a day that I come in, and I might have turnip greens and collards. It kind of like rotates. Most of my customers know that I have steak and gravy on Monday, and I might have another kind of meat with it. Like on Wednesday they know I have barbecued chicken, they know I’m going to have fried chicken; I’m going to have pork chops, and probably another meat with that. And then on Thursday they know I got

meatloaf—that is meatloaf day, but I’m going to have fried chicken, pork chops, and another meat with it, so they know about what days that I have—. Then on Friday I have barbecued ribs, and I have fish, and then I also have fried chicken, fried pork chops, uh-hmm.

00:27:14

**AE:** Now the meats, then, have specific days the people know they can come and get them but then the vegetables, do they just change according to what’s available or what you feel like adding to the steam table that day?

00:27:25

**AW:** Well I know that if I have corn today, I have squash tomorrow—either I have broccoli and rice casserole—I try to change it up. I try not to have the same thing on there every day, and if I have potatoes today, I’m going to have rice the next day—try to—because I do have regular customers that come in every day, and you have a lot of men that stay by themselves or the wife don’t cook because they’re doing other things. See, I’m wanting them to feel at—at home and letting them know that they getting something fresh.

00:28:01

**AE:** Do you ever run out of food in a day?

00:28:03

**AW:** Oh yeah, I do and I like to run out. I’d rather run out and then have it to sit back in the refrigerator. But I—I have had times—plenty times that I know where the homeless be, and I go give the chicken to them either—it used to be a center next door. They closed that down, I think,

last month; the Pastor would come over and get my little stuff that I have left and carry it back over there and feed the homeless, and I used that for a [tax] write-off. **[Laughs]**

00:28:42

**AE:** Is there a day or a time of year that you're busier than usual?

00:28:46

**AW:** Yeah, just like this time now, school getting ready to end, so I know it's a slow time but it's a good time but it's a slower time. Now just like Thanksgiving, we're going to be closing what that Friday. I'm going to be open—see, I'll be busy Friday because everybody is out shopping and Saturday I'll be all right because of the game, so and I got orders coming in already for the games. Some days are slower than others, but it kind of varies, uh-huh.

00:29:26

**AE:** Give you some time to rest and catch up for when it's busy, huh?

00:29:29

**AW:** Well no, it's no time to rest because it's always something to do. **[Laughs]** When—when it's not cooking time, see it's cleaning time. Either, you know—always something to do, uh-hmm.

00:29:43

**AE:** Do you do any catering for the holidays or special events? You talked about football with games, people calling in.

00:29:49

**AW:** Oh yeah, uh-huh, I do. Basically, they want dressing, macaroni cheese—mostly veggies. I don't bother too much about the turkey and the ham but mostly the veggies. I do a lot of that. I have—I think it's fifteen on the list for tomorrow and then Saturday I have three—four dinners going out tomorrow—I mean Saturday, so I'm constantly busy, uh-hmm. I'm thankful. **[Laughs]**

00:30:21

**AE:** Now tell me about your desserts. Today you had cherry pie and potato pie, I know, and an apple, I think.

00:30:27

**AW:** Uh-hmm. Well basically, I always have apple pie, cherry pie, sweet potato, but also I add my coconut pie and I add my lemon meringue and I do pound cakes, cobblers—any kind of cobbler, and I have a fantastic blackberry pie. It has to be fresh strawberries and about—you know, this time of a year you can't find fresh strawberries, so I have to use frozen, and I don't care too much about using frozen because of the seeds in the strawberries; you can taste to those more. But during the summertime it's a fantastic blackberry pie. It's awesome.

00:31:15

**AE:** Now is that something that you do mostly is the baking, or do you share those responsibilities also?

00:31:17

**AW:** I share it, uh-hmm. I share it. My desserts, I only want somebody here that know it, and that's the one that been here the longest, uh-huh.



00:31:31

**AE:** Those aren't recipes other than they're just things that you've always made and—and like to make?

00:31:38

**AW:** Well it's kind of a recipe. It have to be fresh veggies but the peach cobbler, I use that in a can. But the rest of it is fresh, uh-hmm.

00:31:53

**AE:** Has anything been kind of added or taken away to the menu as the restaurant has evolved, and either tastes have changed or you've decided to add something new and different?

00:32:06

**AW:** Well when first started opening up, that was back in '81, we used to use fatback in our veggies. We used to use ham hocks in our veggies. But I guess I want to say about eight years ago I decided to eliminate the fat in my veggies, and I thought it was going to be a problem with my customers saying that they wanted the fat out of the boiler. Well I went to this seminar at Athens General Hospital, and they was telling about your heart and what is good for you and the grease and your arteries, so I decided—I say, “Oh, I want to live because I got three grandkids.” I said, “I want to see them get, you know, graduate from college and go and get them homes.” So I decided I was going to eliminate the fat in my boiler. So I just did it and I could—I found out that you can get the same taste without the fat as you do with the fat; it's just not greasy and—and I think I like that better. And I don't have no complaints because now days—now—now a

whole lot of young people they going over to vegetarian, and they don't want the fat in the veggies. Well I don't either, so I like it better.

00:33:39

**AE:** So what's the secret to keeping that same taste as when you had the fatback to—to when you don't have the fat?

00:33:45

**AW:** Awe, now listen at you—listen at you! *[Laughs]* I'm going to say love. *[Laughs]*

00:33:52

**AE:** I had to ask, now. I had to ask. *[Laughs]* So are you open for breakfast? Do I remember hearing people come here for breakfast?

00:34:02

**AW:** Yeah, we open up at eight-thirty [a. m.]. A while back we usually opened at seven o'clock but—but with me being a grandmother and I love to participate in my grandkids—and I want to make sure they—they—I want to make sure they is in their position before I get to work. But we open up at eight-thirty in the morning, and we serve breakfast from 8:30 to 10:30, and it's all country breakfast like homemade sausage, smoked links, bacon. We also have the chicken patty. If you want fish and grits, I have that—just about any kind of meat that I can—fried chicken, pork chop, and we also have grits and eggs. It can be cheese eggs, homemade biscuits, uh-hmm.

00:35:01

**AE:** Do you have a pretty big breakfast business, being here downtown?

00:35:06

**AW:** Well it kind of like cut it in half when I started opening up a little later. You can see that it cut the breakfast in half, which I don't mind because I'd rather spend that time with my grandkids. Some things you can get back, and some you can't and I figure that—that time with my grandkids them being that small, see, I can't get that back.

00:35:32

**AE:** How old are they right now?

00:35:33

**AW:** Almanda is—she is fourteen; she's in high school. And Nidya, she's eleven; she's in middle school and Tiara, she's in the fifth grade, uh-hmm.

00:35:51

**AE:** All girls, huh?

00:35:53

**AW:** All girls—all girls—they awesome, too.

00:35:56

**AE:** Do they ever come over here and help you out in the kitchen or anything?

00:36:01

**AW:** They don't help in the kitchen, but I like for them to learn to wait on people and let them know how to treat people—courtesy—so I have them out in the dining room, if they come, uh-huh.

00:36:12

**AE:** And how late are you open?

00:36:13

**AW:** Oh, that's another thing; I close at four because I want to be at home when my grandkids get there.

00:36:22

**AE:** Has there been a time when you were open later or open for supper?

00:36:25

**AW:** Oh yeah, we used to open up at seven o'clock in the morning, and sometimes I wouldn't get home 'til about 11:30—twelve o'clock at night.

00:36:37

**AE:** Were you closing that late, or you just were working that late closing up?

00:36:41

**AW:** Closed that late. We closed that late and then—and then if we had a—if we hadn't locked the doors, then people would still come in, so we gave ourselves to eleven o'clock.

00:36:55

**AE:** So were people eating them and having like, you know, late-night snacks, or were they hanging out here? What was going on?

00:37:02

**AW:** They was hanging out; I told you it was hot. **[Laughs]** See it was hot down here on this corner when we first opened up, and they would hang out all time of night. And when they're doing their thing and then they want to come in here and get something to eat, see we was here, uh-hmm.

00:37:19

**AE:** About what time did that stop?

00:37:22

**AW:** Oh, I want to say about—maybe about nine years ago. Uh-hmm about nine years ago [in 1997]. You can see the shift in town. It's where I think the lady that owned the place kind of like died, and then the kids sold it after somebody else, and you could see that change, you know. So we kind of like shifted, too. And then my step-mom, she retired and I didn't want it [the restaurant]. I didn't want no long hours, so I cut it when I took over, uh-hmm.

00:38:04

**AE:** So you and your stepmother were both here working and managing the place?

00:38:07

**AW:** Uh-huh, we was here all the time. Started off at eight in the morning an—about ten years ago, you know, when she retired [in 1996].

00:38:17

**AE:** What about your children? When you talked about your grandchildren, how many children of your own do you have?

00:38:23

**AW:** I have two kids. My daughter, she's the oldest. Her name is Felicia—well she's a good mom, fantastic mom, single mom. And then I have a son. His name is Joey. He's the hair business next door, uh-huh.

00:38:47

**AE:** Has your daughter ever had any interest in this business—in the café?

00:38:51

**AW:** No, she haven't—she's always been a bookworm. She have her degree in computer and right now she's in college to get her Masters in Business Management, uh-hmm, so—.

00:39:11

**AE:** And your brother, has he always worked over in the styling salon?

00:39:16

**AW:** Homer [Wilson]—but that's my partner in crime. That's my partner. Okay now yes, he always been over there next door. I think the only job I ever knew that he had right after he finished high school—or I don't know what year it was. But he's older than I am, so it's been a

good while. The only job that I knew that he had was he went to one of the poultries, and I think he worked two days and he told daddy he didn't want to do that.

00:39:48

**AE:** A poultry farm?

00:39:49

**AW:** Uh-huh. So he told dad that he didn't want to do that, so he been over there ever since, uh-hmm.

00:39:57

**AE:** So what—what do you think your father would have to say about his children running these businesses still that he's been—that have been established for so long that he started?

00:40:08

**AW:** He talks about it all the time. He talks about how proud of his—how proud he is of his kids, carrying on the job that he did and I—I mean, he just talks about it all the time. It's not nothing that he regrets that he started. It just—he just happy that he did something for his kids.

00:40:38

**AE:** Pleased and proud?

00:40:40

**AW:** Uh-hmm.

00:40:41

**AE:** Well how old is your father today?

00:40:44

**AW:** My father is seventy-three years old—young. And he thinks he’s young, uh-huh.

00:40:50

**AE:** Does he come down here much? Does he get his hair cut next door and come have a meal with you over here?

00:40:54

**AW:** Well, yeah, he still comes down and gets his hair cut and—and come to eat. He still is considered as the CEO of the family, so—in business, so—.

00:41:10

**AE:** And tell me about that—the name of Wilson’s Soul Food, Incorporated. Tell me about that.

00:41:15

**AW:** Well we decided to go incorporate it about ten years ago so we can do different things besides a restaurant, besides a styling shop. So it’s another styling—I mean it’s another hair salon on Hawthorn. Later, you will hear about a small shopping center coming, and I don’t want to talk too much—different things that we’re trying to get up at and at ‘em, so it takes a little while and—and a little doing but some things is coming.

00:42:00

**AE:** And people obviously know the Wilson’s name?



00:42:02

**AW:** Uh-huh, yeah, they do. Uh-huh, they do.

00:42:06

**AE:** So what do you think—what do you think the Wilson's name means to people in Athens?

00:42:12

**AW:** Well for one thing, they know they're good people, and that means a whole lot. You can be in business for years and years, but if you're not good people, people are not going to want to come around. So they know that we mean business, they know that we going to do our best, and they know that we're Christian people.

00:42:36

**AE:** And speaking of that, the way your restaurant here is decorated, did you have a hand in all that—all the angels and all around?

00:42:42

**AW:** Oh yeah, you should see my house. The reason why I love angels is because my name is Angela—Angelish—and my daddy—my dad calls me Angel. And see, I'm the seventh—seventh kid, so that means complete. So if I'm the seventh kid—and see, I'm in the middle of everything and I—I just like angels because I—I know they always around me and I know if I need—need something I know they going to be right there spiritual-wise. Sometimes I can go home and—well, let me back up. Many years ago I wanted a house, and I knew that I couldn't afford a house. But yet still, you know, with prayer we got this special angel to go to this bank and tell

this man at the bank let her have that house. So I knew it had to be that. But I mean angels go way back in my life—a long time ago. I was in a bad accident, but I know the angels was there because I should have been dead and—and I know that something had to drag me out of it, and I know it wasn't no person—it had to be angels. Angels—I don't know. I don't want to start talking about that because it—it's—it's a personal thing that, you know, you have to have. And everywhere that I go—if you go—if you come—if you come in my house, you going to see angels. You go to my car, you going to see angels. And—and the angels are going to represent God and the *Word* says, if you be ashamed of me, see He—He going to be ashamed of me when I get there. So that's just me. I mean just because you have a business, either it don't have to be a business—just anything—just having anything, if you be ashamed to show who you really are, you know, the real you won't come out. So I mean that just mean I better know who I am around here so, uh-huh.

00:45:28

**AE:** And so surrounding your restaurant with angels, is that for you personally or to share the angels with everyone?

00:45:32

**AW:** For me personally and for—for my prayers. You won't believe people that come in that have problems and want to give up in school, done lost their house, done lost their spouse, don't have any money—I take them right back to their faith, and then by the time they leave out of here they got a—a great up-look, so—.

00:46:00

**AE:** So how would you describe yourself and what you do here because you're not just a cook or a restaurant owner? Can you put that into words?

00:46:10

**AW:** Well yeah, I am a person that shows love. I'm a person that is here when you need to talk. I'm a person that when you have rejoice I'm going with you. If you down, I'm going to try to help lift you up. And I know I was planted here for a reason. And in my church I—I'm considered as being one of the people that the single mom, teen mom, high school girls—they look up to. I don't know **[Laughs]** but—but—but I'm thankful that God placed me in that field because I think I'm good at it. And the reason why I believe I'm good at it because, see, you have to been there yourself. And I knew how he brought me out, and if I know that he brought me out and if he's the same God, see he can still do it again. So I don't know. So—.

00:47:41

**AE:** Well I know you're good at what you do—all of that.

00:47:43

**AW:** **[Laughs]** Well I try to.

00:47:48

**AE:** So what might you say is the future of Wilson's Soul Food, Inc.?

00:47:53

**AW:** We will still be in the making, uh-hmm. I don't want to say too much now, but we'll still be in the making, uh-hmm. There's more to come.

00:48:07

**AE:** Do you plan on retiring any time in the future or near or distant?

00:48:13

**AW:** Of cooking, yeah. To do bigger and better things, uh-huh, in this field, uh-huh.

00:48:21

**AE:** Do you have people that—I know you have loyal employees who have been here for a long time—but people that you’d like to see or is there anyone in the family who will carry on through tradition of the family business maybe when you’re not available?

00:48:34

**AW:** No, not family members. But you can always train people to do something for you, and there’s always somebody out there. Piccadilly [Cafeteria] do it all the time, big companies do it all the time, and—and the boss is not there all the time, so I said, “If they can do it, we can do it.” Uh-hmm.

00:49:03

**AE:** But so maybe without—when a day does come that you’re not here and not a part of Wilson’s will you—do you think it will be the same? Do you think it is about the food and the name? Because we’ve just been talking about how important you are.

00:49:17

**AW:** Yeah, you're right about that. *[Laughs]* But—but yeah, and still things change. I mean you have to look at things change. You can't always hold things the same. I know there will never be another Angelish, and I know there will never be another you, so we have to realize that. We have to make the best of why is we here. But we can also go out to try to seek—seek for something that might be almost in the same mold. So you know I—I have to realize there will never be another me, and I won't be here always.

00:50:07

**AE:** But what you leave behind can go on?

00:50:10

**AW:** Uh-huh, that's right.

00:50:13

**AE:** Well, do you cook at home?

00:50:17

**AW:** Well, hardly ever. My biggest cooking is when we have family gatherings, and that's all the time. We have—I have twelve brothers and sisters. My daddy had fifteen kids but twelve living and just like this Thanksgiving all of them coming home, so I have a big hand in that. But I don't cook too often but just whenever we can get together. We—we—we don't cook a whole lot, but at least you will have one meat and about two or three veggies and maybe a dessert, uh-huh.

00:50:56

**AE:** And with all those folks coming in for the holiday do you—will you cook at home, or will you bring them here and cook here?

00:51:02

**AW:** No, we want to stay home and like my dad have a—a large house and all of us will fit in that. But I will have a big hand in it. We have a menu. We have the—we having fried turkey, we're having a roast turkey, and then we're having ham and we having barbecue ribs—that's the meat order. You can stop it.

*[Recording is paused for approximately three minutes, while Angelish talks to an employee.]*

00:51:36

**AE:** All right. We're back and we were talking about your family and cooking for your Thanksgiving I think—maybe not. **[Laughs]** I don't—I don't remember. Well what do you think—what would you like for folks to know about Wilson's Soul Food, Inc. who haven't been here before?

00:51:59

**AW:** That this is a place that you can feel at home, can come in and be yourself, where we share love and that's about it, uh-huh.

00:52:15

**AE:** Do you eat your own food here every day? Do you eat lunch here?

00:52:19

**AW:** Yeah.

00:52:20

**AE:** Eat here every day?

00:52:22

**AW:** Not unless I have to go off to like different events with my grandkids like a dinner date or stuff like that, uh-huh.

00:52:34

**AE:** Is there something on the menu that's your favorite—a lunch plate or a dessert or anything like that?

00:52:40

**AW:** I'm not a big dessert person; I'm a more veggie person. I—I never been too fond of sweets unless it's chocolate, but mine is like veggies, uh-huh.

00:52:54

**AE:** Do you ever get much of a vacation from here, or are you always in town and you get to leave and go somewhere from time to time?

00:53:00

**AW:** Oh yes, I—I make sure of that. We have on my dad's side—we have a big family reunion, and I participate in that. And on my mom's side we, you know, do it also. Like this year on my mom's side we just came from the Bahamas and went on a cruise on—on a four-day cruise. And

like in, I think in June on my dad's side we're going to Detroit, Michigan. But I leave and go certain places by myself, uh-hmm.

00:53:35

**AE:** And then is the restaurant closed or you leave it in Theresa's hands?

00:53:41

**AW:** Leave it in Theresa's hands. *[Laughs]* She do a good job—fantastic job. She know my dos and don'ts. She knows about what I—I want to put in different recipes, uh-huh.

00:53:58

**AE:** Well is there anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to make sure and mention about where we are and what you do?

00:54:06

**AW:** No, I think we talked about everything. But my base is mostly based on love. You have to love what you do and love the people that you surrounding yourself with, and that way it makes your day easy. You have—you can have a job that you like the pay, but if you don't got love to go there, see, you're still miserable. See I love mine. I love in the morning when I get up, and I know I'm coming here because I'm—I'm surrounding myself with good peoples, and I know good peoples is coming through that door so—.

00:54:41

**AE:** And tell me real quick about that painting [a portrait] that's up there on the wall behind the counter.



00:54:46

**AW:** Oh, that painting on the wall—this guy had been coming in here since he was four years old with his mom and dad. So when he graduated from high school, he said, “I’m going to do something for you.” I just gave him a hug and said, “Okay.” And he came and took a picture—didn’t know what he was going to do. So about—about a month later he brought that in, and then he said, “This is what I got to give to you for being so nice and kind to me.” So—so that was a gift from him because he be coming here since he was four years old with his parents, and he just thought that, you know, he wanted to do something nice for me.

00:55:29

**AE:** It’s a beautiful painting.

00:55:29

**AW:** I get stuff like that every once in a while. Somebody might come in and give me—they know I’m going off somewhere and they say, “Here. Well I want to help you with your plane ticket for being so nice.” I mean—I mean people will help you if you see that—if they see that you mean what you do, uh-hmm.

00:55:50

**AE:** And well, I believe you get what you give, so that’s—that’s a definite illustration of that.

00:55:56

**AW:** Yeah, it is. Yeah, it is. In order to get love, you got to show love, uh-hmm.

00:56:01

**AE:** Well I think that's a perfect note to end on. How about that?

00:56:03

**AW:** Yeah, I think so. [*Laughs*]

00:56:07

**AE:** All right. Well I sure thank you for sitting here with me.

00:56:08

**AW:** Thank you. I thank you so much.

00:56:11

**[End Angelish Wilson Interview]**