

CHUCK ODOM
Elite Restaurant - Jackson, MS

Date: March 5, 2014
Location: Elite Restaurant - Jackson, MS
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 1 hour 11 minutes
Project: Jackson's Iconic Restaurants

[Begin Chuck Odom — Elite Restaurant]

00:00:01

Rien Fertel: We'll start right now. Okay, we're ready. It is March 5, 2014, just after 2:00 p.m. I'm in Jackson, Mississippi. This is Rien Fertel. And I'm here at the Elite Restaurant and I'm going to have Mr. Odom introduce himself, and your full name please.

00:00:20

Chuck Odom: Yes; hi, I'm Chuck Odom. I help out here at the restaurant and my wife's family founded the restaurant, and she's the managing partner, so I do whatever I'm told to do.

00:00:33

RF: And can I just for the record, we like this for the archives at Ole Miss: can I just get your full birth date?

00:00:37

CO: Yes; I was born February 2, 1947.

00:00:42

RF: Okay; so that was the same year that the restaurant was opened that we're sitting in, right?

00:00:46

CO: Oddly enough, yes; yes it was. What a coinkydink [coincidence].

00:00:49

RF: So tell me about 1947 and the Elite Restaurant: How did it get started and then maybe we'll work our way back.

00:01:00

CO: Sure.

00:00:59

RF: But let's talk about 1947 and why that year is important.

00:01:02

CO: Okay; it actually started a year before that when my father-in-law was here in Jackson in a visit from Waco, Texas. And he walked up from the train station and happened to see the restaurant, where we are today, and at that time it was more of a café and a place to get a beer while people waited for the trains.

00:01:23

And he said, "Well, that has a lot of potential." So he found out who owned it and oddly enough it was another Greek. And so, he takes this information back, talked to his brother in Waco, and his uncles, about the possibility and the difficulties of owning your own restaurant.

00:01:42

So he made the decision in early 1947 to buy the restaurant, which he did do, and from that point forth—sixty-seven years now, we've been in this same location.

00:01:57

RF: Do you know the name of the restaurant before he purchased it, or the owner's name before he came in?

00:02:01

CO: Yes; the owner was Mr. Theo Costas, I believe it was—Theo Costas and—Senior, Theo Costas, Sr. and it had gone through a lot of hands according to Mr. Pete—told me that it had been through five or six hands in a very short period of time. It couldn't make a go of it. And so he said, "What you'll have to do is you have to offer good food at a decent price and do it just a little bit better than the next fellow and you'll be successful," which was his map, if you will, to success.

00:02:38

RF: So, let's talk about your father-in-law; what was his full name?

00:02:42

CO: His name was Peter Zouboukos or Panagiotis Zouboukos.

00:02:47

RF: Panagiotis was his Greek name?

00:02:49

CO: Was his Greek name and that means Peter, so Peter Constantine Zouboukos.

00:02:57

RF: Can you spell his last name for us?

00:02:58

CO: Z-o-u-b-o-u-k-o-s. Oddly enough just as an aside here, in the Greek culture you pronounce Greek names exactly the way they're spelled. Generally they're three syllables. So if you can spell it you can pronounce it.

00:03:15

RF: Okay; so where and when was he born?

00:03:17

CO: He was born in the Peloponnese section of Greece and he was born in Kounoupiia. Kounoupiia is about forty kilometers east of Sparta. And they actually had two homes over there. One was at the beach in Poulithra and the other home was in the mountains, three miles away, which was Kounoupiia.

00:03:51

RF: **[Short Break.]** All right; so you're just telling us about your father-in-law's homeland—

00:03:56

CO: Yes; these two small villages are just beautiful, and I have pictures that I will provide you. Poulithra is on the Aegean, and three miles away was his home, where he was actually born in that home in Kounoupiia. And typically in Greece, particularly in Peloponnese, in the summertime they would go up in the mountains because it was cooler. Wintertime they'd go to

the beach. And of course these were all hand constructed homes, nothing fancy by our standards but certainly, you know, two-foot thick walls. And so he was born there and they had olive trees. And his—one of his favorite stories is—is how as a kid as six years old he had to walk for three miles up the mountain and carry water.; they had no water on top of the mountain at that house. So he would have to take two five-gallon buckets of water and walk up the mountain without spilling it to water the olive trees, so—.

00:04:57

RF: And what year was he born in?

00:04:58

CO: Oh, Lord; about 1908, I believe—1908 [**note: it was 1909**] would be a pretty good approximation but I can find out later for you.

00:05:14

RF: What—did he ever tell you what his parents did or what his family did, before him?

00:05:21

CO: Yes; Mr. Pete's father was kind of an entrepreneur by today's standards. He came to this country, his dad did—who, his name was flip-flopped: it was Constantine Panagiotis Zouboukos, which begs an aside at this point. Every child takes their father's first name as their middle name and then every generation it flops again, so, for example, Mr. Pete's father was Peter Constantine—was Constantine Peter Zouboukos. His name was Peter Constantine Zouboukos. His son is Constantine Peter Zouboukos. My nephew it flopped again. So that's kind of the

way—in Greece you can tell who someone is by just introducing yourself. “Oh, you’re Constantine, son of Peter Zouboukos.” And that’s the derivation of that. So anyway, his father came to this country and, with some cousins in Birmingham, Alabama, started a little vegetable stand. It grew into what we would consider sort of a grocery store today and they slept in the grocery store for ten years—eight to ten years they were—they had it.

00:06:35

He made his money, went back to Greece, where he functioned as an entrepreneur, so—and then his dad was also born in this house—same one Mr. Pete was.

00:06:50

RF: Is the family house still there? Have you been?

00:06:53

CO: Yes; my wife just got back and we’re going again in June. I had to stay at the restaurant.

Excuse me—

00:07:02

RF: So, Peter Zouboukos grows up—these two small towns and what happens there? He eventually goes on the water and he starts sailing right?

00:07:14

CO: Yeah.

00:07:15

RF: Can you say a bit about that?

00:07:17

CO: Mr. Pete because of the economic troubles in Greece around—shortly after the turn of the century and World War I, people were having a difficult time. And at twelve years old he had to support the family, which was not unheard of in that part of the country. So he went on a sailing freighter, signed onto a sailing freighter at twelve, and he would send his money home to his mom and dad to support the family. There were three other children at home besides himself—two sisters and a brother, who was also—excuse me, who was also his partner in this business—Jimmy.

00:07:53

RF: Later business?

00:07:53

CO: Yes; yeah in the—in the restaurant. So after several years he wanted to join the Greek Navy, but he wasn't old enough. So when he got old enough whether that was sixteen or seventeen, I couldn't tell you—when he got old enough, he joined the Greek Navy and stayed a couple of years. And at that time decided he wanted to immigrate to this country. And in 1929 he decided that if he had to swim it, jump off a ship, whatever he had to do, he'd sign onto a freighter and jump into the harbor, in the New York Harbor, if he had to. He was going to be a citizen of this country. But as luck would have it he had some uncles in Waco, Texas, who also had a restaurant called the Elite on the Circle in Waco, Texas. His Uncle George and his Uncle Mike Colias—C-o-l-i-a-s—and so he decided that he would ask them to sponsor him; you had to have a sponsor then. He didn't hear from them for quite a few months and then the day before he

was supposed to sail and he got a letter and they agreed to sponsor him. So then he didn't have to jump ship. So when he got here he processed through Ellis Island and of course he couldn't speak English or read English or write English. He had a sign hung around his neck that said **Waco, Texas**. And he would point to the sign after he got off at Ellis Island and they were pointing to the train station, to the proper train at the right time. And so, he went to Waco, Texas, where he worked for his uncle.

00:09:31

And then he also told his brother what he was going to do, so his brother came over several years later and worked at the same restaurant, Jimmy Zouboukos and so that's kind of the way he got to this country. And he learned the craft cooking and how to be a chef in Waco, Texas, working for his uncles.

00:09:58

RF: Did he ever share any stories that stick out to you about working for his uncles?

00:10:03

CO: Yes; yes, he had a lot of stories. **[Laughs]** One thing about a Greek, they're going to tell you a lot of stories. Most of them are true, but some of them may be well a little stretched.

[Laughs] But Mr. Pete I never knew to tell an untruth or a lie or anything else, the most honest man I've ever met.

00:10:19

For example, he—we're known and one of our signature dishes is the enchilada. And we sell probably forty-percent enchiladas in this business. And he said if you ever find the bean—he got the recipe from an old Mexican that worked for his uncles, and this Mexican gentleman gave

him the recipe and says, “But don’t put beans in it. The only people who eat beans in it are poor people and it’s a filler. So don’t ever serve it.” So he hasn’t, and to this day we make it and sell a ton of them every day—they have no beans in it.

00:10:56

He would do things in a fashion that most people probably wouldn’t today. By that I mean if he would try a recipe and it didn’t turn out, he would dump it—even though it tasted okay; it wasn’t the way he thought it should be. And that carried over into his military life, as well as into his personal life, and consequently the business. And I can tell you that after he—after the War broke out in 1941, he joined the US Army. He was not—he wasn’t drafted because he wasn’t a US citizen but he volunteered. And so he and his brother both volunteered. And they went off to serve where they served a little over four years and got out in 1945. But during his time in the Service he was a litter bearer, in other words, a battlefield medic and his job was to pick up the wounded and bring them back to a safe haven. The odd thing about that was Mr. Pete was only 5’ 5”, which is very, very small for a medic particularly a litter bearer.

00:12:06

RF: He has to carry men or—

00:12:07

CO: Yeah; because he has to carry you know a 200-pound guy and so he was very, very strong for a slight man who weighs 128 pounds. But he was very strong for his size, but more importantly, when he was in Advanced Infantry Training, I think they called it, he didn’t like the food in the Mess Hall and made a comment to that effect, that it could be a lot better. So the

Mess Sergeant says, w”Why don’t you do better?” And so, he says, “Okay; I can—I can do that but this roast beef is horrible. It’s dry.” So he goes into the kitchen and he makes up a roux and then he makes up a gravy and a au jus and he cooks new roast beef. Served it to the Officers Mess and from that point on they would come in any time Mr. Pete was cooking because they changed his MOS, or Military Occupational Specialty, to cook. And then this—the story continues.

00:13:11

And he did very well at that and he was in Camp Stoneman, California. I have no idea where Camp Stoneman is but he was at Camp Stoneman.

00:13:20

One day they had the IG, the Inspector General, visit Camp Stoneman and their Company had to fall out and come to attention. And so they went down the ranks inspecting everyone. They got to Mr. Pete and the Inspector General says, “Let me see your hands.” And he showed him his hands. And he says, “Now turn them over.” And he turned his hands over. He says, “Well, Mr. Pete, you’re a walking miracle.” He didn’t call him Mr. Pete; that was me. He said, “Private, you’re a walking miracle.” He said, “What do you mean?” He says, “According to the paperwork we received from your Commander, you don’t have a trigger finger. It’s missing.” And so ultimately what they did was they told the Department of the Army he was missing his trigger finger so they could keep him as a chef.

00:14:05

RF: They liked his food.

00:14:06

CO: So within six weeks he was on the way to Italy in the campaign and doing what he was designed to do, so for about two and a half years he was in the Italian campaign and then later in the Pacific working as a litter bearer medic on the battlefields. So he got out of the service, he and his brother, and when Mr. Pete came to Jackson for a visit, he saw this restaurant and decided it would make a—a good restaurant for him. And then he could clean it up and make it a first-class facility, which he did do. It took him as he says, “Six months to throw all the beer drinkers out,” but after that people have been standing in line ever since. And so, but I don’t mean to—I know more about Mr. Pete, but his brother was also very instrumental; he was the—the front of the house. Mr. Pete was the back of the house. By that I mean, Jimmy was a well-met gentleman; in other words, he met people very, very well. He was very personable. And his name was Jimmy.

00:15:22

And so it was Jimmy Zouboukos and—or James and it seemed like every Greek is either Jimmy or—or Pete. And so at that point they came into the business and made a go of it and in 1951 they paid the business off. And so it’s—it’s a success story.

00:15:45

RF: What was their age difference, the two brothers?

00:15:46

CO: The age difference, there was twelve years; I believe there was twelve years difference in age. It may have been less than that but don’t hold me to—to that but although this is for history so you probably should hold me to it, but I’ll—I’ll find out and get back to you [**note: James Zouboukos was born in 1916**]. I do know that Jimmy passed away ten years before Mr. Pete.

And he was much younger. But he had a heart attack and Mr. Pete lived to be almost ninety-nine years old.

00:16:15

RF: And when did he pass away?

00:16:18

CO: Five years ago.

00:16:19

RF: Okay.

00:16:21

CO: Five years ago. The day before his ninety-ninth birthday—

00:16:24

RF: That's 2009? [**Note: it was 2007.**]

00:16:25

CO: Yeah; that would be about right, yeah, yeah.

00:16:29

RF: So did—how much of this—I want you to describe the restaurant kind of—we're sitting in the dining room in the front of the restaurant, but how much did they change? You said that there

was a kind of—it was a bar room—. Okay; so you have an old sign you pulled down from the wall, the old neon sign. This is before?

00:16:52

CO: Yes; this was—in 1974 we had a fire and it gutted the interior of the building, what you would call a galley style restaurant, in other words, it's long and narrow. It seats about 180 people. Typical configuration with the pantries and the kitchen on the backside and then on the front side was the part that burned. The Heidelberg Hotel, which was semi-attached to us, like many buildings were years ago, caught on fire, it caught us on fire. Gutted the interior and we had to do a massive remodeling job. The wall still stood—they're about two-foot thick concrete, I mean brick walls. The footers go down to five-foot thick brick, about eight-foot under the ground. So this building doesn't move.

00:17:49

RF: Do you know how old the building is, to when it dates to?

00:17:51

CO: The best we can find out, record keeping was kind of sloppy in the 1800s but they think around 1880, 1885 it—it was built, so it's very, very old.

00:18:02

RF: Okay; so do the turquoise booths—the color is beautiful—do they date to right after the fire, to the rebuilding?

00:18:09

CO: Yes; yes, they were—they were installed I guess in 1974. Now we think the crowning touch to the turquoise is the blue duct tape we have covering rips and tears. And I can tell you this, that we had a—a floor collapse in the kitchen in 2005. One of our Governors called the restaurant here and said that he heard that we were remodeling the restaurant. And he said there were three constants in his life: one was growing up in Yazoo City and coming to Jackson on Saturdays. And those constants that he found in—in the Jackson area was Woodie Assaf, who was a weathercaster for over fifty years in the Jackson area that they picked up in Yazoo City. The other one was Seale-Lily Ice Cream which is no longer around, and neither is Mr. Assaf. And the third was the Elite Restaurant. “Please don’t change anything; please leave the duct tape.” *[Laughs]* So, it is very well known.

00:19:19

RF: So the duct tape has been here a while?

00:19:21

CO: Yeah; the duct tape has been here a while, and just as an aside, we found part of the—
Coming on Up [note: sic, Get on Up] with Dan Aykroyd and James Brown, the James Brown biopic—

00:19:35

RF: That they’re filming now?

00:19:36

CO: Yeah; they're filming. We just finished filming here about a month ago and for a day and a half inside. And I asked the Director; I said, "You want us to do something about the tape?" He says "No; we'll color over it. We kind of like the tape." And so, I don't know whether it was a compliment or not but they—this time period for the movie is the mid-'60s and he said, "We didn't have to bring a whole lot." **[Laughs]** So our décor kind of fit the mid-'60s, although it was refinished in 1974, and one of our hallmarks, at that time, we tell people, "Find the fish jumping into the frying pan and you're at the Elite." And that's what this neon sign is. It's—they're coming out of the water—the fish and they're jumping into a frying pan.

00:20:23

Now following the fire we were not allowed to rebuild or to install neon signs again. The City Council had decided that neon was ugly. And so they wouldn't allow anymore neon downtown. So we're kind of disappointed about it, but to show you how sentimental Mr. Pete is, on the front entrance there was some wrought iron little squares, on either side of the front door. Well, he saves everything he could, and if you'll look back here at the pie safe there they are back there, those wrought iron things. He had those made as a support. So, and that's his jacket hanging at the back, the gray jacket you see in that picture.

00:21:03

RF: That's on the coat rack there?

00:21:04

CO: That's on the coat rack. I just couldn't bring myself nor my wife to get rid of it and to take it off, so it's still hanging where he hung it when he **retired**, with quotations around it, at ninety-four.

00:21:23

RF: And does that mean he stopped working but still kept coming in?

00:21:26

CO: Yes; he kept coming in. At ninety-four he—he didn't come in at 6:00. He was working sixteen hours a day at ninety-four years old. He'd come in—in the mornings, stay until about 2:00; go home and take a nap and come back at 4:00 and leave about 8:30.

00:21:43

RF: And was he still working in the back then or—?

00:21:46

CO: No; he was in the front by then. He stayed at the back for about twenty-five years.

00:21:53

RF: And that was doing—he was the cook, the head cook?

00:21:54

CO: Yeah; he was the chef, yeah he was the chef. He'd teach people how to cook. We're very blessed in that we have staff here that—these ladies have been with us an average of twenty-eight years. We have one lady back there now, Miss Hattie, and she's been with us fifty years and—as the lead chef.

00:22:13

RF: In the kitchen; okay.

00:22:15

CO: In the kitchen; longevity is the name of the game in providing a consistent service, consistent food at a very attractive price. And so we—it hasn't all been easy but particularly in this day in age, you know so—. Mr. Pete instilled in his children, my wife in particular, a work ethic that these—our help here always refers to her as—she's Mr. Pete all over again because she goes from can to can't, and she is general manager of the engineering firm as well as managing partner in the restaurant here. There's Mr. Jimmy's children and Mr. Pete's children are the true owners of the restaurant. I'm retired therefore I have the time to devote to it and do whatever it is that she wants me to do because (a.) I love her dearly and (b.) I'm scared of her. **[Laughs]**

00:23:17

RF: So what did you do before—before coming into the restaurant?

00:23:20

CO: I was in the pharmaceutical business working for large manufacturers like Merck, DuPont, and sold Capital Equipment to hospitals and clinics.

00:23:32

RF: Are you originally from Jackson?

00:23:34

CO: I'm originally from Columbus, Mississippi, northeast Mississippi. Well if you want to make a telephone call to a guy, it's a local call; it's not long distance like it is here in Jackson.

00:23:47

RF: [*Laughs*] What did—that's in the Delta, Columbus?

00:23:53

CO: No; Columbus is northeast Mississippi. It's right outside of Starkville.

00:23:55

RF: Oh I see; okay I know where it is.

00:23:57

CO: Yeah; it's eighteen miles from Starkville and so it was predestined that I go to Mississippi State.

00:24:02

RF: Were there any Greek restaurants that far east or that far north, in Mississippi?

00:24:05

CO: Yeah; we did have—there were several up there. One, Johnny and Helen Garofas, who later moved here to Jackson, they were there for many, many years with the J&H Restaurant it was *the* place to eat up there. And so we had them. We had Steve's Café, who is still there, and is someone—maybe you would like to talk to. Steve and Gus Castanis and they're just absolutely most like us. They've been there forever. As a matter of fact, when Steve went and found his wife in Greece, which is another custom, you become successful in the Greek community before

you consider marriage. And then go back to Greece to find an eligible young lady; sometimes it took a day, sometimes it took a little bit longer.

00:25:00

But you—given the times and the hard time that they were having in Greece it wasn't too hard to find somebody who was willing to come to this country. But at any rate, when Steve went and found his wife up there she was so beautiful that even as eight, nine, ten year olds, we'd find an excuse to go to the restaurant to get a Coke just to look at her, because she was so beautiful. And then we had in Tupelo we had Mr. Pappas, Jimmy Pappas had a restaurant up there. Oddly enough, it just seems like every Greek gentleman can cook. And because it seems to have been an awful lot of Greek restaurants and then there was a—in the Delta you've got Mr. Ballas in Greenwood with the Crystal Restaurant, and then you've got Yianni's up there, so there's quite a few restaurants up there. Oxford also has a Greek restaurant.

00:25:57

RF: Did Mr. Pete ever say why that was, about why Greek men seem to gravitate towards the kitchen or cooking?

00:26:09

CO: He really didn't. I asked him that one time. He says the only thing he can figure out is they shared cooking duties. Everybody shared the cooking duties—

00:26:17

RF: So, men and women?

00:26:18

CO: Men and women in Greece, out of necessity more than anything else so—. To each his own; they each have their own talents. Mr. Pete realized early on that when he and his brother started this restaurant that his brother was better up front than he was, so he elected to stay in the kitchen. He loved to create food. He loved to turn out good food.

00:26:44

To give you a little bit of story; about three weeks ago we had a couple come in. They were in their eighties and they sat on the wall over there. And I of course spoke to them and they said they were celebrating their sixtieth—sixty-fifth anniversary. They were married and they spent the night at the Heidelberg Hotel next door. And they came over here to eat and they each had a steak and all the trimmings. And the bill came out to about \$1.80 a piece. And so they got ready to pay and she didn't have her purse. Her new husband didn't have his wallet. So she explained to Mr. Pete that they didn't have their wallet but she would stay here while he went back next door to get his wallet. Well Mr. Pete says, "Oh, you just get married?" She said, "Yes; we just got married." He said, "Well that's wonderful. I've been married quite a while, three years," or whatever it was at that time, and he says, "I'll tell you what. I'll buy your dinner but don't tell nobody; it's bad for business." *[Laughs]*

00:27:43

So I don't really—he didn't mean it; he was a very blunt man but he didn't mean it that way. He just meant that he didn't want everybody else wanting something.

00:27:53

RF: Right; did he meet his wife in Greece, him and his brother? Did they both—?

00:27:58

CO: Yes; it's kind of romantic. He and his brother both go to Greece and they were determined to find a wife. Well Jimmy found one very, very quickly in a couple days in a small village.

00:28:09

RF: Did they go together at the same time?

00:28:10

CO: They went together. And of course you get together with your family and who do you know who's eligible, so on and so forth. Jimmy found one and Pete couldn't. He was a little bit—he was very picky, not that Jimmy wasn't, but he happened to find the right one right away in his wife Voula, but Pete not so much. Well they got ready to come back on the ship. Pete went by his aunt's house and to tell her good-bye, and while he was there he noticed a picture of this young lady and an older lady. He said, "Well who is that?" She—she said, "Well, that's my friend and her daughter," who was eighteen. And he says, "Well, where do they live?" She said, "She lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan." And so he said, "Oh, okay." He says, "I'll be right back." So he—Mr. Pete goes down to the *plaka*, or the store, buys a vase, brings it back and says, "Would you wrap that and sign it to the young lady," who was Grace—Leitza. And he says, "Okay." She says, "Okay; you will like her. She's a beautiful girl." She lived here. She was born in the USA but when they were six months old they came back to Greece and stayed until World War II broke out and then she couldn't leave. And of course the Nazis at that time thought that she was a spy because she had a US passport. And she was eighteen. She was like, "I can't speak English; I'm not a spy." So it was very, very tough times on Leitza because of that.

00:29:44

But to make a long story short; he gets on the ship and goes to New York and gets off, gets on a train, goes to Grand Rapids, and knocks on the door and says, “Hi, I’m Pete Zouboukos, and you’re aunt’s friend sent this vase to you.” So he gives her the vase and they ensue—or a relationship ensues over the course of a year. And so after a little over a year they get married. And she moved down here with him.

00:30:14

RF: That is an amazing story. How do you spell her name, Leitza?

00:30:19

CO: Leitza—L-e-i-t-z-a—Leitza. But she also has another name that’s her baptismal name, Chrissoula—C-h-r-i-s-s-o-u-l-a—Chrissoula which means *Christ* in the feminine. *Christos* is in the masculine. So I never knew what to call her. I called her “Leitza Pizza” half the time, so but truly loved my mother-in-law; I sure did.

00:30:48

RF: Did she have any role in the restaurant ever?

00:30:49

CO: No; Pete was kind of old-school. Her role was to support him emotionally and to provide a home for him, which was not—I’m not downplaying it because that was a very, very important role, *the* most important role that back in the ’40s and ’50s that a woman could play, particularly for an immigrant, kind of the glue that binds—that and the Greek Church, which we were

blessed to have one, him and Jimmy both. But they—they certainly provide a stable home environment, so—.

00:31:26

RF: Yeah; and how many children did they have?

00:31:27

CO: Okay; Mr. Pete had four—Toula, who is the oldest; her Greek name is Athamandia Panagiotis Zouboukos. **[Laughs]** And then there was Mena and then there was Tina and then there was Constantine. Jimmy on the other hand had six and they had Constantine **[Laughs]** and Niko, or Nick, and Anthony and Pat and Dianne and Evangeline. So it was six; it was ten between the two of them.

00:32:11

RF: So ten children; were they working here when they were young or in their teenage years?

00:32:15

CO: Anthony did. And then he left and started his own restaurant. And so **[Laughs]** his was up in Ridgeland and so and then once—several of them are with Sysco. Nick is President of Sysco New Orleans. Yeah; so he's the *numero uno*, which is their—I believe their largest facility in the country is the New Orleans, because they serve so much of the coast. They have so—yeah; and he has been very, very successful. His brother Pat he's been with them thirty years, I guess, here in the Jackson Metro area and then let's see. Anthony was in the restaurant business. And then Costa started about 35 years ago with a restaurant chain; it's Chick-fil-A and he's got two drive-thru Chick-fil-As which is unheard of.

00:33:22

RF: Some franchises?

00:33:24

CO: Yeah; well oddly enough Chick-fil-A does not franchise their restaurants. They're all company-owned, and what they do is you went into a partnership with them. And you—the longer you're with them the more you get to keep, so to speak, and he's been very—very successful; and just a delightful man. They all have an extremely high work ethic, every one of them, so that's—that's something they inherited from their dads, because this is not an easy business. The restaurant business is very demanding. My wife has been more or less the managing partner for almost fifteen years now, and I think we've had maybe two nights out of town *together* in that fifteen years, because one of us has to be here. Even when she went to Greece, it—she ended up having to go by herself because I had to be here.

00:34:18

RF: So you can't go to Greece together?

00:34:20

CO: No; we're going to try this—this spring. We're going to try but I think you'll find a common thread among any ethnically oriented restaurant that is family run, you'll always find somebody that is family that has to stay behind.

00:34:40

RF: So before I ask questions about the menu and kind of the recipes that Pete developed, what—who is the next generation and what happens next?

00:34:48

CO: That’s a very—that’s a very good question. We don’t see anybody on the horizon that really has shown an interest. It’s, as I said earlier, a very demanding time that we live in. It’s very hard right now to make a living in the restaurant business. Even when you do something bigger and better than the next guy, but other outside influences—for example, the economy that tanked five years ago is still kind of in the tank, particularly in a downtown urban environment. And then when they tear your street up for four or five and six months at a time, where you have absolutely no parking other than our own parking lot out here, it’s very, very hard—very, very hard. So as far as somebody on the horizon, maybe eventually there will be someone who will show an interest in it. But out of the ten children none of their children seem to—at this point indicate a desire to step into the business.

00:35:49

For example, Constantine, Toula’s brother is a physician. So he certainly is not going to get into it. One of the sisters lives in Atlanta and is married to a physician there; she’s not going to come into the business. The other one is married to a dentist here in town; she’s not coming into the business. And then, as a labor of love, Tula is running the restaurant to perpetuate the legacy that her dad and her uncle started, and so that sense of obligation goes very, very deep. And she takes things very, very personal that it’s her fault because the economy tanked. I said, “It’s not your fault; come on. You just have to get over that and understand that things happen for a reason and you managed to keep it open ten years longer than—than perhaps it should have.” And so as long as we can—we have an obligation to people like Gail here that has been

with us twenty-eight years and raising her grandchildren now and—raised her children and now her grandchildren—so we have an obligation to these people.

00:36:58

And we don't take a nickel out of the business. It's nothing. We've been blessed and so we don't have to take money out of the business, so—

00:37:09

RF: Is it—you're talking about you and your wife seeing it as an obligation of familial—family obligation. Is it fun? Is it—

00:37:20

CO: It has its moments. Here's—and here's what I mean by it has its moments. I don't know—we enjoy the restaurant business, now you can interpret that as fun, but we really enjoy it. And the reason why we enjoy it is one, working with people who are so loyal to us they've been here an average of twenty-eight years each. And our customer base; when we lose a customer, due to death, we take it very, very personal, because we've known them for so long. And all of the help gets to know them. And then if they don't—if a family member of that person who passes away doesn't let us know then all of the sudden they spring it on us it's such a shock to us. But we get to know these people intimately. We get to know their children.

00:38:01

And I'll give you another example. This Friday I am conducting a marriage—I am a minister on the side—in New Orleans at Jackson Square and this is friends of ours who—we were at their wedding. Now their children are grown. He's twenty-five years old and he asked me to conduct his wedding down in New Orleans, which I will do. I'll officiate at it. So those are the kinds of relationships that you build through a restaurant. And what an honor it is for me to

be asked to do his wedding so to speak and so and I'll gladly do it. It's a—I love those kids; I've been knowing them since they were born. *[Laughs]*

00:38:44

RF: And speaking about—just a while back you mentioned the average employee has been here—employees have been—average employee has been here for twenty-eight years on average. And you said one employee has been here for fifty years?

00:38:56

CO: Fifty years.

00:38:57

RF: Tell—

00:38:57

CO: Miss Hattie came to work when she was sixteen years old here. And as she says, “I was a hot mess.” And she says Mr. Pete kind of took her under his wing and taught her what he knew about cooking and she's been our lead cook since she was about twenty, I guess. So she's in her mid-60s now, so she's been with us fifty years.

00:39:21

RF: And what's her last name?

00:39:23

CO: You know what: Miss Hattie. *[Laughs]* But you put me on the spot here but I will look. I mean I hate to say that; we talk about how we love them and then I can't even remember their last names. But we just never call her by anything except Miss Hattie. And we've got, I don't know—so many employees that have been with us for so long that we even had sets of brothers that worked here in the kitchen. We've had six—or five or six different brothers who at various times have worked in the kitchen, three of them together. Now a gentleman just came in a while ago was a cook; that's one of them sitting down back there. That was his brother that came in a while ago was our lead chef for forty-two years and he's retired now. Carl, back there, has been with us thirty-three years. So I mean there's just so much longevity here and I think that if you give the time period in which they started here, it was a tumultuous time for minorities back in the '50s. And yet they're still with us in the '60s.

00:40:39

RF: Well that was my next question; Jackson has a rich Greek heritage and it has a rich African American—black heritage and culture. Were there connections there? I mean he—it sounds like he was hiring black employees from, you know, well before—?

00:40:57

CO: Oh, from the jump. He—he hired them because he saw value, obviously. He didn't see the color of your skin as much as he saw the value of the work ethic and he could read you like a book. It was spooky. It was very spooky how he could read people. And so that didn't bother him. We never had a problem back in the '50s when right across the street they were having sit-ins at the Walgreen's and places like that—at the Dime Store, but we never had those problems. And now maybe we were just lucky, but I like to attribute that to the fact that Mr. Pete was very

well known and very well respected and he treated people as he would expect to be treated. He's the most honest man, again, that I have ever met in my life. I've never in thirty-some odd years known him to say something disparaging, make a disparaging remark, or say something rude about anybody—never. And, like I said, it's just—it's very rare. He was a father figure to me. And he was a little guy but he cast a giant, *giant* shadow. And there isn't a single person that comes in here on a regular basis that doesn't mention him, or you mention his name, just like earlier, his little peccadillos, people understood why. It wasn't about the money; it's about getting people in here.

00:42:21

Back in the '50s, '60s, '70s, and even into the '80s and part of the '90s, downtown was vibrant. Ninety-six percent occupancy rate; we had a building right next door with Bell South employees. They got an hour off. The bank employees got an hour off, and he had to feed them. Now there's other restaurants obviously, but he had to feed them. And so he—his goal was to get them in, fed, and out again. And a lot of times, you know, he would welcome people but he didn't really want, during that period of time, people sitting around and chatting and smoking cigarettes and reading the newspaper. And so he would ask them; he said, "Do you mind if I put somebody in the same booth with you?" [*Laughs*] And they got the message and they would leave.

00:43:06

RF: He had to fill seats?

00:43:08

CO: He had to fill seats because—and it wasn't about the money. It was all about getting people fed and he also—and this isn't about Pete. This is about Pete and his brother Jimmy but I know more about Pete. And Jimmy was the same way. He had an extremely strong work ethic. Pete would cook at the church for example, for over fifty years every month he would cook a meal at the church, at the Greek Orthodox Church here. But he was so honest and scrupulous he would bring all the fixings including the salt and pepper and condiments. He wouldn't use the church's and so he would cook for us. And he was just a marvelous, marvelous man.

00:43:52

RF: So just a question about downtown. You've really seen massive changes in the past two decades in Downtown Jackson?

00:44:00

CO: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. We go from ninety-six-percent occupancy rate and the—it started changing about ten years ago a little bit, and by that I mean the suburbs started growing. And so Rankin County to the east of us and to the north of us, Madison County, and they put large retail developments in both of those areas. Well, concomitant to the rise of the retail environment they had commercial growth and they'd build buildings. And so many of the services industry that was downtown, by that I mean banks, CPA firms, some of them decided they could move out there where their employees lived and get a pretty good deal down there without fighting downtown.

00:44:51

And then those developers, for example in Madison County, we have one developer who bought out several of the leases downtown, one of them right next door, goes in and says, "How

much do you have left on your lease?” “Oh, eight years.” Well, he paid it off. And then they moved to Madison County. So you see that. And then all of the sudden here comes the economy collapsing. Well that caused the smaller businesses to just go out of business and to retrench where they may have had a branch bank left downtown and then they kind of retreated a little bit and said, “We don’t need that one downtown, there’s those in the suburbs.”

00:45:32

And then I guess the thing is that they built the multimodal center and that—by multimodal I mean they combined the train station, the taxi stand, and the bus service, just about two blocks down. That was going to help but then again the economy; people didn’t travel like they did particularly by bus and so that created a problem for us. And then here lately it’s been tearing up the road out front where they—in November they tore the road up and haven’t done a *thing* and they’re still working on it. They went six weeks and didn’t do anything. And so I think that shows in some instances: maybe not the best planning by the city fathers. And so—but there are very few retail establishments downtown now—us, the Mayflower Restaurant, the Parlor Market, several others. Parlor Market is the new kid on the block. And so all the restaurant businesses are hurting. The attention was diverted to the King Edward Hotel, to the Standard Light Building, which both were redone, if you will, rebuilt in the case of the King Edward in the interior after being vacant for fifty years and spending over ninety million dollars on it. We thought that would help.

00:47:01

There are condos. We have over 300-some odd condos downtown now. The problem with that is the condos are built with a particular room in them called a kitchen. And most of them don’t eat out any more often than they would if they lived away from downtown. So that hasn’t been the boom we thought it would and maybe it will into the future as they build more.

Then there's a focus on Farish Street Historic District. Beale Street developers came in and they were going to develop and everything has kind of fallen on its faces; nothing down there now, so meanwhile here we sit and we need some vitality. We need retail downtown. The answer is not bars and restaurants, because you're going to take the same dollar and spread it even thinner. And so I'm very outspoken on this. We've got to have the place where the businessman that works at the bank or the businesswoman can drop off laundry, can get a pair of shoes, socks, or haberdashery for a shirt and tie for the guy who spills coffee on it. So there's a multitude of urban problems that we in the small business, particularly in a restaurant that's been around a long time have to deal with.

00:48:16

And to be perfectly honest, if we had rent here we probably wouldn't be in business. So that's—but that's a challenge and a challenge is just an obstacle you have to get over or around and we're doing the best we can at that.

00:48:33

RF: Have you seen other restaurants come and go?

00:48:34

CO: Yes; there's been zillions of them come and go. Yeah; they'll—there's been I don't know how many next door to us and they'll come in and stay a month or two and then it's not what they thought it was. Everybody thinks the answer in the restaurant business, "Oh, what a way to make money." You go in and you shake hands and you glad-hand people and you clap them on the back. Yes; there's some of that. But there's the practical side of it. You got to pay bills.

00:48:59

And I'll give you a prime example. Last year, twelve months ago, we were paying \$16.25 for a case of eggs. That same case of eggs today is \$32.50. So it's doubled in one year. Beef has gone up almost sixty-five-percent in two years. Our prices haven't gone up but twelve-percent in five years, because you know there's a rule, if you will, or two axioms in business. One is called the elasticity of demand. And what we found was as we raised prices it became extremely in-elastic. In other words, we got to a point they just wouldn't buy it anymore. It's not like other businesses. Yes; they want it, they loved it, but the perception is either (a.) it's not worth it, or I don't have the money to pay twelve dollars for what I've been paying \$9.95 for, and so these are business issues that come up in many places particularly with a small business that maybe the people aren't equipped. I think we are but have we solved it? No; we haven't solved it. I mean it's a question of warm seats. We've got the warm seats. I got to get other warm seats to occupy them and keep them warm. And how do you do that? You do it by building your core business downtown both commercially and retail. And by that I—as I explained, there is not a place downtown to buy a jug of milk for these condos, 350 condos. There isn't a place to drop off your laundry. There really isn't. There is no infrastructure, retail infrastructure downtown. And if you go to any downtown area, Baton Rouge for example has the same problem we had but they encouraged retail to build downtown through various means. One was, of course, tax abatement programs. One is direct loans. Others—urban renewal funds; you've got to be creative.

00:51:09

So, and that's something that my father-in-law and his brother didn't have to deal with because it was blowing and going at that time.

00:51:19

RF: Well I mean talking about that time of what—this is what I'm really interested in but talking about like times of just great change and flux and economic uncertainty in America, did either of the brothers ever say anything about—I mean we're—right now we're hitting the fifty-year mark on the Civil Rights era and downtown was this kind of area of protest and, you know, happening parts of the city but you're across the street from the old Woolworth's. Did it hurt business then? Did people stop visiting downtown? Did businessmen—did—were there any—did he ever tell any stories about how that affected his business?

00:51:52

CO: Yeah; he did. He did mention it. He said it really didn't affect us or his business like it would others. Although whenever they would have a disturbance, if you will, and there weren't that many disturbances, to be perfectly honest, but that there were some, and of course everybody sees the pictures of the drugstore and they're sitting at the counter and whatnot. And that disrupted a little bit, at that time that it occurred but there was no lingering after effects, because at that time all the banks were downtown and major law firms were downtown and businessmen. They came to eat.

00:52:27

RF: Right; and this was a higher-end restaurant.

00:52:29

CO: This was a higher-end restaurant at that time. And once again, I don't know that high-end would really describe it as much as it was a very solid comfortable restaurant with good food that we had been consistent over the years. And that's one thing that you had mentioned earlier about the menus. And the menu hasn't really changed. I added rainbow trout and that was the first item that has been added to the menu in over fifty-some odd years. And I only did that because I couldn't get speckled trout, because that's a seasonal fish out of the Gulf. And it also happens to be great and I said, well as good as the speckled trout is, rainbow is really good too. So now rainbow is our number two seller in fresh fish, behind snapper.

00:53:22

RF: Okay.

00:53:22

CO: Yeah; snapper and then you've got rainbow trout, red fish, and catfish. And then in season, flounder, and in that order.

00:53:30

RF: So snapper is the number one seller after enchiladas?

00:53:32

CO: Yeah; no. Veal cutlets—

00:53:36

RF: Oh okay; so tell—

00:53:37

CO: Veal cutlets and cream sauce. What we do is we use the loin section of the veal and we, of course, pound it out and we cook it on top of the grill and it's served almost a half-pound to an order. And in a white cream sauce and—which we make here, and then if you wanted it with brown gravy we change the name and you can order "Chicken Fry." Don't ask me why; it's the same thing. One is with white and it's a veal cutlet. Chicken Fry if it's got brown gravy.

00:54:10

RF: And it's chicken fried veal?

00:54:12

CO: Yeah; yeah.

00:54:15

RF: Or chicken fried steak?

00:54:15

CO: Yeah; same difference. It's the same thing just the only difference is the gravy that's poured over it. And it's served with French fries, salad, rolls—fresh rolls, yeast rolls—we are—that's signature. We make I don't know how many hundreds of dozens every day of fresh yeast rolls. And that's a signature dish also. That's our best seller is the veal cutlets and then the enchiladas and then everything else comes after that. Dinner service is different than lunch

service. We have specials at lunch; we don't have specials at night. And by specials, I mean put together certain items for today. Every Tuesday you can get your choice of—well, it's pork chops on Wednesdays. Tuesdays is fried chicken or baked chicken. And then Fridays is, for example, turkey and dressing and I forget what's on Thursday but nevertheless, I'm doing good to remember those three days.

00:55:12

So those signature dishes have not changed in sixty-seven years. We're still doing it. We do things the old fashioned way. Somebody says, "Well, can you warm this up and nuke it in the microwave?" I said, "We don't own a microwave." People call on the telephone and say, "Can I fax you something?" "Fax, hell, I'm lucky to have a phone," you know. **[Laughs]** So, they say, "Well, we'll email something to you." I say, "We don't have a computer. The only computer we got runs the security system." And so no; we're very low-key. The cash register quick working in 1949 and it only goes to \$9.99. We use the drawer as a cash drawer because it won't close, so and everything is done by hand, hand tickets, and that's it. And we scream them to the cook, or the girls do, and the cook supposedly screams them back so that way they know what's been ordered. And what's amazing to me is these girls can turn in thirty or forty orders and they're out within five—ten minutes. These cooks can hear them and they get them out. I don't know how they do it; it's spooky to me. But they get it done, so we do a lot of things well. We do a lot of things. Can it be done better? Yeah. But the technology is for a different type of restaurant and a different type of employee.

00:56:37

Our employees would not be comfortable with a computer driven ordering system because then they'd pop out in the kitchen and you know pandemonium would break out. So we've got—we do a lot of things well. I added Wi-Fi about five years ago so we do have Wi-Fi, so—.

00:57:00

RF: Besides—you mentioned enchiladas. Do any other of the recipes have a direct connection to the Elite in Waco?

00:57:06

CO: Oh, yes; all of these actually every item on the menu was developed by Mr. Pete or he brought them with him from Waco, Texas. So these are—they're basic menus. They're good menus. They're filling. They're not necessarily heart-healthy but Pete lived to be ninety-nine years old and ate here every day of his life, so—. **[Laughs]** We have probably eighty different items on the menu. I think it's too much, but then again, on the off chance that somebody will come in we do offer it. We make our own pies. Another signature is our egg custard pie. Many people don't make egg custard pie anymore and the reason why is it's made with whole eggs and uncooked eggs. So, you eat it pretty much the day it's cooked and we make some more the next day. Other pies: chocolate and lemon meringue pie, pecan, you can keep it several days.

00:58:15

RF: And the pies are all—they're all your father—were your father-in-law's recipes also?

00:58:19

CO: Yes.

00:58:20

RF: Is there a specific pie maker in the kitchen? Is someone in charge of the pies?

00:58:23

CO: Miss Hattie is kind of in charge but we have other people that can make them, and as they get the time they go back and start making the pies. It's a—give you another example; we have a floor mixer back there made by Hobart. And it—**[aside to a waitress]** what are you laughing at—? And then it kind of went bad. **[Laughs]** So I embarked on a process to buy a new one. And the more I checked the more it—I said there's no way we can afford to spend \$40,000 for a floor mixer.

00:59:00

So I finally found one and I upgraded from a 1929 Hobart to a 1942 model, back last year. **[Laughs]** And it's been working well ever since. And I found it in a barn. A lady that owned a bakery in a little small town south of here and she's been retired for twenty years and she had two of them in there and I bought it from her. And, of course, getting it in was a major job. They weigh 800 pounds. And the reason why they weigh so much is you get a fifty-quart pot and you're mixing dough in it that's a lot of weight. That's almost 250 pounds.

00:59:41

RF: This is for the rolls?

00:59:43

CO: This is for rolls. And it'll just walk across the room if it didn't weigh a lot so that's the reason why it just—horrible, high weight and it was just horrible getting it in here. I'm old as dirt and, you know, I just decided that I had to go to Lowe's and buy round wooden dowels and did it the way they built the pyramids. I'd lay one roller down [*Laughs*] and we'd roll it from the back into the kitchen. So there's nothing that you could do. I mean there's no way you're going to pick it up.

01:00:13

RF: Yeah.

01:00:14

CO: And if you did pick it up how are you going to get it off of something? So but we do things the old-fashioned way. And they're respectful of that. We had for example—we had a chef come in and he was a *chef*, with quotes around it, fresh graduate from one of the junior colleges, and I interviewed him. And I said, "Well, here's where I think that we would love to have somebody like you, but understand that we don't want you to be creative. We don't want you to suggest a better way to do things. We want you to do it exactly the way we tell you to do it. And we're not going to pay you a whole lot of money. So [*Laughs*] if you want to come to work for us you're welcome to do so." [*Aside.*] Can I help you?

01:01:03

Now that was interesting. So it's not a creative restaurant where we do things on the fly. For example, you can go to Bobby Flay's restaurant and each day he's going to do something a little different and he's in there with his little fry pan flipping and whatnot and creating something every day. We're not that way, so—.

01:01:23

RF: What does that mean for the customer from the customer's perspective?

01:01:26

CO: From the importance I think to the customer is consistency. They've been eating here fifty, sixty, seventy years. They want to come back—or soon to be seventy years—and they want to be able to know that if they come in tomorrow, the next day, the next month, the next year that it's going to taste exactly the way it did twenty-five years ago. And that's what we insure. There's any number of ways to be successful in this business, but once you hit that combination—that sweet spot that your time, your talents are geared towards that particular set of recipes and you've been successful at it, don't change nothing. Just like you don't move your business when times get tough. How often have we seen where people will build their business up over the years and then decide to move to another municipality? And they don't make it. So consistency is the name of the game. Consistency and loving what you do—and obviously my wife loves what she does in running this restaurant. She spends a lot of time here. She gets here and comes in at noon and she leaves again; she comes back at about 5:30 and she stays until closing, does the books; she does everything. She does the payroll. She even vacuums, because she doesn't like the way that maybe somebody else vacuums. She'll go in the kitchen and she'll clean the kitchen. She does all of these things. Most of the time it drives me nuts but that's the nature of the beast with her.

01:02:59

And I'll be happy to provide you some photographs and whatnot. I can send this one to you. I can send you a picture of what it looked like out front.

01:03:10

RF: Yeah; I'll snap some pictures. I just have one more question and that's about the—I have to ask about—it's very foreign to me, but the comeback dressing.

01:03:17

CO: Oh, yeah; the comeback dressing. What is very unusual, and I don't know that it's unusual,—maybe unusual to other people. But Americans think, “Well that's unusual: it's the same comeback dressing down the street.” Well, every Greek restaurant—restaurateur has their own dressing—salad dressing and they put unique ingredients in it to give a flavor and a taste that's unique only to this particular restaurant, wherever it may be.

01:03:45

And it's called “comeback dressing.” Once you try it you'll come back. And that's the derivation of the name comeback dressing. In our case we've been asked for the recipe many, many times. But there's over fifty different ingredients in it. And we're not telling it. As a matter of fact, we had an Iron Chef who grew up eating here in the restaurant and her dad had a restaurant. And that's Cat Cora—

01:04:11

RF: Oh she's—?

01:04:12

CO: Yeah; yeah she goes to our church. Her mother Virginia Cora, Dr. Virginia Cora still goes there and Cat was filming an episode called “My Favorite Foods” on the *Food Channel*. Well

she wanted to feature our comeback dressing. We had to tell her no, because you have to give them the recipe and they'll cook it on the air. And there's no way in hell we were going to do that even though it's not rocket science but it's ours. It's our thing, so—

01:04:42

RF: And what do you call it here? Do you call it—?

01:04:43

CO: Comeback dressing.

01:04:44

RF: You call it comeback dressing?

01:04:45

CO: Yeah; yeah, comeback dressing and it's—it's very, very good. We have young kids, when I say young—a year old, year and a half, they'll put it on crackers and eat it. They'll put it on the rolls and eat it. It just delicious. It's got a little bite to it. But you get them acclimated at a young age to anything with a bite and from then on they're good to go with things that taste different—that have *bites* to it. There might be a little garlic taste to it where you say, “What's that? Hmm maybe a little Worcestershire there.” So you can begin to identify certain flavors. And for someone that is a real food aficionado it probably wrecks their food palate, their taste palate is going to be assaulted. We got a lot going for us. We got a lot of things that we need to change but change comes over time and we don't handle change well here. But we try. We do try.

01:05:48

Just like getting a credit card machine, for sixty years we didn't take credit cards. We just didn't. And it's a cash business, but we'd take checks from anybody. But nobody ever stiffed us. You know, people just didn't want to give us bad checks. So there's a lot going on. So Jimmy—once again, just to kind of recap a moment, Jimmy Zouboukos was also in the business and I can only talk a great deal about Mr. Pete because he was my father-in-law and we spent hours upon hours talking. Pete was quite a philosopher. And he would say that any man who by his nature is another man's, is by nature a slave. And he only had an eighth grade education by the way. Jimmy I think had some college. But Pete was a good investor of his money in real estate and whatnot, and so he was the smartest eighth grade education man I ever met. And for example **[Laughs]**, he would do anything. He's fallen off this roof twice. Broken his back once, by falling off the back, doing his maintenance work, and the other time he fell off the roof he fell from the top and he fell into the slop bucket out back. It's a fifty-five-gallon drum you put your wet garbage in and when you scrape the plates—and he fell into it and of course it was a perfect shot. I mean it was all but net.

01:07:25

And so but he had—he was so mad because he had to come inside and get his coat off that hall tree and go to the house to change clothes. And that's what embarrassed him more was having to walk through here covered in slime and food crap rather than focusing on the fact that he just fell two stories down and could have broken his neck again; he focused on the fact that, “Uh, man, I'm nasty and my customers are going to see me.”

01:07:51

So he was a different breed of cat and if you were to ever interview businesspeople who have been here for any time—his funeral, for example, they don't route through downtown. But we had highway patrol, sheriffs, escorting us downtown. All of our employees, and many people

in businesses, were standing out front with their hand over their hearts, which to me was just amazing. We got on the interstate up here; the highway patrol had blocked the entrances as we were coming. They would block the entrances there before we got to it, all the way into Madison County, out of respect for him. And so that tells me a lot about how people view you when you go and it's very important that the legacy you leave behind has many facets.

01:08:39

And that's what he did; he loved and I told him—or he told me on—when he passed away, shortly before he passed away, I think it was a day or two before, he said, you know, “I wouldn't change a thing.” He had just worn out. He had no real overriding issues, health issues, but he was ninety-nine almost. And he says, “I wouldn't change a thing except I'd spend more time with my family.” And he says, the things he valued most was first his God, second his family, and third his business. And I thought what a legacy to leave. And all of his children are successful and good people, *good people*. And what more can you ask for than to leave that kind of a legacy, so—?

01:09:31

RF: I think that's a good place to close. I want to thank you.

01:09:35

CO: I appreciate you talking the time with us. I hope this has been helpful. It's been helpful for me to kind of recount it and to be able to remember some of these things. So I'm not the best interviewer—or interviewee but I do appreciate you making it easy.

01:09:50

RF: Yeah; no, I think we—you know, we—you really shared who these two men were, who started this business, and I think it was really great. Thank you.

01:10:00

CO: Good; thank you.

01:10:02

[End Chuck Odom — Elite Restaurant]