

BOB & CILE BARBER

Son & Daughter-in-law of May Bowen – Parents of Robert Barber

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Date: January 19, 2007

Location: Robert Barber's home – Bowen's Island, SC

Interviewer: Amy Evans

Length: 54 minutes

Project: Bowen's Island Restaurant

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[Begin Cile & Bob Barber Interview]

00:00:02

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans on Friday, January 19, 2007, and I'm on Bowen's Island at the home of Robert Barber with his parents [Cile and Bob Barber]. And I wonder if each of you could please state your name and your birth dates for the record?

00:00:15

Cile Barber: Uh-hmm. My name is Cile Kelly Barber, and I was born the 11th of May 1931.

00:00:24

Bob Barber: My name is Bob Barber, and I was born April 11, 1925.

00:00:34

AE: We're going to have fun passing this microphone around. [*Laughs*] Mr. Barber, I wonder if we could start with you and you could talk a little bit about your mother and your step-grandfather and—and growing up in this area?

00:00:48

BB: Well I hadn't thought much about it and—and I'm getting old and my memory is not too good. But I don't know where to start.

00:01:09

AE: Were—were you born here in Charleston?

00:01:12

BB: I was born in Charleston, yeah. And my mother and father divorced when I was—I guess I was about a year old—two years old. And—and my stepfather and mother were married [Laughs] gosh, I guess when I was about thirteen years old. And we lived in Savannah at that time, and a little later on we moved back to Charleston. We lived in several places in Charleston. I went to a grammar school at St. Andrew's and—I mean St. Andrew's School in Charleston and—and then later on to Mitchell School on Rutledge Avenue in Charleston. I went to Charleston High School. I left Charleston High School about a year before I graduated to go into—to go work at the Navy Yard in Charleston. Of course that was back during wartime [World War II]. And—and then I—my mother and aunt worked on me a little bit about not going—not finishing high school, so I moved to Ludowici, Georgia, for a while and went to high school there and—and graduated from there and went directly from there into the service in 1943. And I went to Boot Camp in San Diego, California, and from there to the Navy Pier in Chicago for Diesel School and from there to New London, Connecticut, for Submarine School and from there back to San Francisco and—and then overseas. And then I spent oh, about three-and-a-half years in the Navy, got out and came back to Charleston. Actually my mother had bought—mother and stepfather had bought a restaurant or bought a building on Folly Beach and opened a restaurant and—which they later turned over to me. And—and they in the meantime had bought—had bought this Bowen's—Bowen's Island and—.

00:04:36

AE: Now can I ask you about this first restaurant that they opened? I wonder—because your son [Robert Barber] was telling me that your step-grandfather was a printer and that your mother was a hairdresser, so how is it that they had the wild hair to get into the restaurant business?

00:04:51

BB: I don't know. I think she was—she was always into little businesses on the side, you know, and—and like she—when she had—she did—did some beauty parlor work but she also had a—what was it—what do you call it when you serve meals—?

00:05:26

CB: Oh, a boarding house.

00:05:26

BB: Boarding house, yeah. She had a boarding house for a while in Charleston. And how they got started on Folly Beach I don't know. But there wasn't—wasn't that much money [*Laughs*] but anyhow they—they did start this serving—she's always liked to cook and serve food and the—when I got out of the service, I started running the restaurant and I was trying to—I guess I ran that restaurant for about four years, wasn't it?

00:06:20

CB: Uh-hmm.

00:06:22

BB: We went to—I finally decided to go back to school, and I went to the Citadel and spent four years going back—of course I was a veteran student, so I didn't stay at the Citadel. I—I lived on Folly Beach and ran the restaurant in the summertime and a good bit of the winter also and—.

00:06:46

AE: Can you describe the restaurant? They named it after you, did they not?

00:06:50

BB: Uh-hmm. It was Bob's Restaurant and it was—I guess we could seat about 25 people—30 people, something like that. *[Looks at wife for confirmation]* More than that? Oh, okay.

[Laughs] But it had the main dining room and then on the—on the right side of the building was a porch that ran all the way down the—and we had four or five tables out there, too, didn't we? So we had—I guess maybe and I don't—what do you say?

00:07:29

CB: It would seat at least 75 people.

00:07:31

BB: Really?

00:07:31

CB: Yeah, because we've had as many as 125 there before, you know, a long time ago and it was a family restaurant. It—we served vegetables and fried chicken and seafood and roasts and things like that, and we were the only restaurant on the beach that served vegetables, so we stayed pretty busy. But we just didn't like it, so that's why he—.

00:07:57

AE: And when you say *we*, y'all must have already been married by this time?

00:08:00

CB: Yes, we were. Uh-hmm.

00:08:03

AE: What year did you get married?

00:08:03

CB: We got married in 1947, and Robert was born in 1949. It was a—a fun time but it—it was the thing that you knew you didn't want to have to be in it the rest of your life, if you're going to raise a family. And we had several of my sisters that lived with us that helped us, and we had our own children. And we have five natural born children and one adopted son. But when Bobby finished the Citadel in June, he went to the bank to C&S—old C&S Bank right away and that's where he stayed until he retired. He loved that. And—and we—we loved it. We lived on the beach for twelve years and then they transferred us to Columbia, which we loved living there, too, and we were there almost 28 years. And then we found this house in Newberry [South Carolina] that we both sort of fell in love with.

But we used to come here on Bowen's Island in a boat because it was no road here—before we got married. And we would come from around at Folly Beach and come around through these rivers and come around here. And the only thing on the island—and I don't know if Robert told you about this or not—but was stills that people made liquor and there were wild goats on the island and wild pigs. And we would come over and turn the stills over, and then the next time we would come the stills would be back in operation again. But it was a beautiful—beautiful little island. It really was pretty. And we lived here for—yeah, it still is pretty but we lived here for several years and loved it. And we probably will come back here one of these times. Yeah. Uh-hmm. When we get old, we'll come back.

00:10:08

AE: So the—the restaurant on Folly Beach, how long would you say all told that—that was opened?

00:10:16

CB: I would say probably about six years because your mother ran it [*speaking to her husband, Bob*]. He was at sea in the submarine service so he didn't—he couldn't spend his money, so he sent it home and she invested it in that [restaurant]. And she ran it for several years before he got back. And then you had it one summer and then we got married the late—in late December of that same year and—. But it was—it was—

00:10:46

BB: Not late December.

00:10:45

CB: Well I mean in December—not late. Excuse me, not late December, early December, but late in the year is what I meant to say. But—and Robert had his first few years there, and our second son, Mike, was born when we lived there. And then of course after that we closed it, and we were delighted to be able to do things on the weekends and everything when we didn't have to work on Sundays anymore.

00:11:16

AE: So even when y'all say you had the restaurant and were running it, basically, was Mrs. Bowen still cooking?

CB: Only part of the time. She cooked—she actually didn't do the cooking anyway then. Our family friend John [Sanka] did the cooking. And my husband and his—his mother, Bobby's mother and I—and friends and all like that—that would come in and help us did—serving the tables and—and we had people in the kitchen that—that you know, washed the dishes and things like that. But she didn't really do any cooking. She baked pie, and on the days that she baked pies, especially the winters that we stayed open, people would come to the restaurant and sit and wait for the pies to come out of the oven. She baked apple, cherry, chocolate pie, and lemon meringue. And everybody from Folly Beach would come because back in those days, you see, beaches were not open in the same manner they are today. Today they're year-round; they may be busier in the summer but they don't close up hard—much. But we—we did after the first year because he was in school and things like that, and he just couldn't study. He worked extra.

And then by that time, Ma May had started over here [on Bowen's Island]. They built her house and then they built the restaurant in 1949 and it was just a little cinderblock building right on the ground, which you can't do today, as you well know, and she—it was just an accidental way. She really didn't intend to go into the restaurant business. She was going to just come over here and live and people would—she built her dock and people would come and want to fish, so she said all right. She'd let them fish, and she started charging for them to fish. And then they'd come in with their boats and all, and they would say, "Mrs. Bowen, would you fry these fish for me?" That's really the way that restaurant got started. So she—one thing led to another and then, of course, she had all the medical students. She had the Citadel Cadets coming out here. And my husband roasted oysters when he was going to the Citadel and—and at night he would work here and then go to school in the daytime. But it—it certainly wasn't meant to be that when they started out at all.

00:13:51

AE: Do you think when people would fish from the dock and then come back and ask her to cook, were those folks familiar with the restaurant and Folly Beach, and so they knew that—that Mrs. Bowen was a cook?

00:14:01

CB: No, I don't think so do you? *[To her husband]* I really don't. I don't know—you know, I don't know that that's the way it was but she—she thought that the son rose and set on this spot, and once she got here she did not want to leave. And that was just the way it was. And we tried to get her to go on vacations with us, and she would say, “Why do I want to go anywhere else? I got the best place in the world right here.” Until she died, that's the way she—and when she died it was right down there on the porch by her restaurant is where it was. She worked right up until the day before she died. She was working.

00:14:42

AE: Did she just—did she have a heart attack or how did she pass?

00:14:43

CB: Uh-hmm, yeah. She had a heart attack, yeah.

00:14:49

AE: So how is it—how is it then that they were able to purchase this land and how—any idea how that came about?

00:14:56

BB: Well I don't know exactly how they—I know who they bought it from. They bought it from Mike McCarthy. And I think they paid about \$3,500 for the island, and it cost just about that much to build a road over [from the mainland]. And they—she got somebody to dig the dirt off the next island up there and sort of a canal like from the water and—and put the dirt in the marsh and kept, you know, and kept on putting it in until they got over here. And it's just—of course is the same road is still in existence, and I think the County maintains it now, but for a good while she did, which wasn't much maintenance but [*Laughs*]—.

00:15:53

AE: How long did they live here when the island was still only accessible by boat? How long was that—until that transition?

00:16:00

CB: She actually built the road before they moved onto the island. But you know, one—I think—funny story about her was she never left this island during a hurricane except Hugo [in 1989]. I don't know if Robert told you that or not. That's the only time she ever left. She would say right here and never really had any problem. But one time she did go so far as to go across the causeway, you know, to Folly Road, park the truck down there with John [Sanka], our family friend, who was the cook, and Bobby's stepfather [Jimmy Bowen], and they had a jug of water, a loaf of bread, and a package of bologna. And they sat down there in the truck through the hurricane. And that's—then the next time was Hugo, and you know how horrible that was, and she wasn't going to leave. She was determined she wasn't going to leave. And LaNelle [Barber, Robert's wife] took Robert's children and went onto Columbia, and he was trying to get her [his

mother] to go, and she didn't want to go. And finally he said, "Grandmamma, I'm just going to have to pick you up"—she wasn't—didn't weigh 100-pounds—"and put you in this car. You're not going to stay on this island." So she finally, begrudgingly, got in the car, and they went on to Columbia, and she stayed with one of our sons there. But the next morning before daybreak she told Mike that—"Go and call Robert, and tell him I'm ready to go home." And, of course, he was in the State House at the time. I'm not even really sure he would have been able to get back over here, if it wasn't for that, but they did allow him to come through. And there was no electricity here for probably three weeks. But she didn't care; she wanted to come back.

00:17:50

AE: Hmm, a definite attachment to a place. *[Laughs]*

00:17:53

CB: That's right.

00:17:55

AE: So when she—when they first moved here on the island, you were talking about the wild goats and—and the still and everything. How—how long were those things around and what happened to them, and what has been kind of the evolution of the island here?

00:18:07

CB: Well I don't think that lasted long at all, once people got here. Then, of course, they—she—she walked this island all the time looking for things, you know, and—and her house was the only house on the island at first. And then they built one that would have been right next door that's no longer—this is not it, and that one over there is not the one that was here before either.

But Bobby helped his mother and dad and those—build those houses and then she built the restaurant and then gradually these others—. Of course, our daughter lives on that first house on the left as you come in. And a niece lives across the way, and a nephew lives over here, so the only people on the island except for two little spots are all family members and everybody in the family—grandchildren—.

00:18:58

BB: There's no ownership of the island outside of the family. It's all family.

00:19:04

AE: And can you name all your children for me? Robert is the oldest, is he not?

00:19:07

CB: Robert is the oldest and then Mike and then Steve and then Karen and Pat. But Karen was nine months old when we moved to Columbia. And Jimmy, our adopted, son is the same age as Robert, and they met in school. And Jimmy's father died about two weeks after we moved to Columbia, and he just began to come over every day and, you know, spend the weekends and all the time. And then some unfortunate things happened in his family, and so the courts awarded him to us. We never legally adopted him, but we had legal papers and everything that we could do everything for him. And of course he's 57 years old now, and we've had him since he was 10. And Pat doesn't even—I mean he wasn't born so—and Karen was so little she had never known any time when he wasn't there either, yeah.

00:20:03

AE: So when did your children start living here? Was Mrs. Bowen still alive when—when her grandchildren were living here?

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CB: Robert—when Robert—he’s the one that came first from Texas, and then the other children have been back here about ten years now, I think. And so four live here. One lives on Daniel Island, one over at Stono Ferry, Karen and Cas live here [on Bowen’s Island], and Robert and LaNelle live here. And then Mike and Susan live in Columbia, and Jimmy and Irene live in Columbia.

00:20:42

AE: How would you spell Karen’s husband’s name?

00:20:46

CB: Oh, Cas—C-a-s—Danielowski.

00:20:51

AE: So I wonder, Mr. Barber, if you could kind of tell me about the person that your mother was and—and her personality?

00:21:01

BB: [*Laughs*] Well she was kind of feisty and—but very kind and I think almost everybody liked her. But she would be, you know, when somebody came in the restaurant and they might say this, “Are you open?” And she’d say, “Well you got in, didn’t you?” And—and she had a menu up on the wall and that said shrimp so much and seafood platter this much and—and

you'd—they might say, "Do you have a menu?" She said, "You—can't you see?" You know, she was—**[Laughs]**—yeah. But she was thrifty and I think for—I think she did very well for her education and so forth. And she was—she was a hard worker and she liked her—liked her daughter-in-law [Cile Barber], and they got along real well, and she would do just about anything for us. And we loved her and almost everybody else did too.

00:22:33

AE: Do you, Mrs. Bowen, have some—or I'm sorry, Mrs. Barber, have some memories to share about Mrs. Bowen?

00:22:38

CB: Oh, she was great. We—I honestly don't know of any two people, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, that got along much better than we did. We did lots of things together, until we moved away from here. And of course she didn't like to leave Charleston, and we'd come in the summers. And she had a beach house, and she let us have it, and we would come with all the children and their friends and—. But she just was a good, good person. And I knew that I could have gone to her for anything. Now we didn't do that because, you know, you wouldn't want to take advantage of somebody, but she just was so good, and she did so many kind things that a lot of people didn't know because she wasn't one to talk about what she did. She just very quietly you know—was a little gruff sometimes but you—you just knew she was good.

00:23:38

AE: Can you give some examples of some kinds of generous things that she would do for people?

00:23:41

CB: Oh, if she knew somebody—tenants that she had in their house—in her houses that were having a hard time, she—she wouldn't—she would never think of putting—putting anybody out. Or she—if she knew of some older person that was in need, she'd take food to them, you know. And of course with us when we were in school—when my husband was in school, she was always just bringing by a little something; she didn't make a big thing out of it, you know. She would just bring things to you and was very, very good to our children. And she was the kind of person that as—having six children and of course we had already had my sisters and my brother that lived with us, but she would buy their bicycles for Christmas. But they didn't have to be from her; Santa Claus could bring the bicycles. And they all know now that she gave it to them, but they didn't know at the time. They thought Santa Claus brought it, and that was perfectly fine with her. She didn't mind that one bit.

00:24:43

AE: Well when the restaurant really started taking off and people wanted their fish fried and whatnot, were oysters always part of the—the menu and what was served here, or when did that become a thing?

00:24:56

BB: Yeah, it was. You know I really can't remember when we started oysters and not fish. I think the—it might have been maybe six months or a year of her fooling around with cooking for somebody who caught some fish and then actually kind of going into business with it. And after she—after we built that cinderblock building, which was the original restaurant, we started

serving oysters and—but we cooked the oysters outside at that time and this—the part that—well the part that we—he cooked oysters in just before the fire was built on a little later. We built—I think the original building was about 20 by 40 [feet]—something like that. And we actually—I said we built it, but we did—we had a gentleman that knew something about laying cinderblocks and—and John [Sanka] and I would mix the cement and hand him the blocks and things like that. We—we weren't actually builders but we were—we helped him work and—.

00:26:29

CB: You were the gophers.

00:26:28

BB: Yeah, we were the gophers.

00:26:30

AE: Can y'all tell me a little bit about John [Sanka], your family friend that was part of the restaurant for so long?

00:26:35

BB: Well John was also in the Navy and he was—what Pennsylvania—?

00:26:43

CB: Allentown.

00:26:45

BB: Allentown—no it wasn't—any—yeah, he's from Pennsylvania. And Mama and Daddy used to, during the War, invite some servicemen from the Navy Yard and places like—I guess just the Navy Yard because that was the only one close to them. But they'd have them—some of them for Sunday dinner and things like that and John just sort of—I don't think he had much of a family—at least he never talked about too many of them. But he just sort of took up with our family and—.

00:27:27

CB: And he came for dinner and never went home, you know?

00:27:28

BB: And he—he didn't want to go home, that's for sure. *[Laughs]*

00:27:30

CB: No, he loved it here.

00:27:31

BB: But—and—and when he got out of the service, he just sort of moved into the restaurant with them and—and he was the cook. And actually, he—but he's more like family because he—he played—they played Bridge and things like that and—and ate together and—. So he was just one of the family.

00:28:01

AE: Hmm. And what was his last name?

00:28:04

BB: Sanka—S-a-n-k-a—I think it was, uh-hmm.

00:28:09

AE: So and you had some time roasting oysters yourself. Can you talk about that process?

00:28:15

BB: I beg your pardon?

00:28:18

AE: Can you talk about the oyster roasting process and how y'all did it at the restaurant?

00:28:21

BB: Well we used to—when they had—we had tin on blocks out on—and build a wood fire under it and you put the oysters on the—on the tin and then covered them with croaker sacks and—

00:28:41

CB: Burlap sacks.

00:28:42

BB: Well burlap, okay, *[Laughs]* and poured a little water on them or, you know, wet them down and they would steam open and we could steam—we could serve oh, 50 to 60 people at one time. And we had not a lot of them, but I guess we had a fairly good oyster roast every week and if—if anybody wanted to have a party we—we'd cater it.

00:29:18

AE: And in the early days of the restaurant was there ever a sign out on the road or anything or people just came here by word of mouth?

00:29:24

BB: You had to know where it was. Yeah, we didn't have a sign and—.

00:29:27

AE: Did Robert put that sign out there that's there now?

00:29:31

BB: Yeah, Robert did.

00:29:33

AE: And then the oyster pickers, in the early days—was—was Ben Richardson, was he one of the first?

00:29:38

CB: Uh-hmm.

00:29:40

BB: Who was that—okay? Yeah, I don't—I don't remember. I don't remember his name but I—we had several of them really and—.

00:29:55

AE: How did they become attached to the restaurant and to your family to be the oyster pickers for the restaurant?

00:30:02

BB: I don't think they actually, as far as the ones that picked oysters, I think they just got word. I mean it's already over at Sol Legare [an island just across the inlet from Bowen's Island], which—and they got word that—that my mother might be buying oysters, so they did that. Of course they were businessmen themselves; they'd go out and pick oysters and—and sell them to us and—.

00:30:29

CB: Well, you know, I don't know whether Robert told you this but something else they did, they—she had these things out in the water and—she had floats and she shed crabs for soft-shell crabs and the little boys, they would go out there and find them in the water. The little boys from over there at Sol Legare. And they would bring them to her, and she paid them so much for the paper shell; and if they had any soft-shells, she'd pay them more for those. And—and then she had those floats and they'd put them in, and you'd have to watch them and get them out so the other crabs don't eat them. But, of course, you don't get that anymore; they send all that kind of thing away. It's not that many left but—but she used to fix soft-shell crab sandwiches for us all the time and—just like you eat a hamburger, you know and we would have soft-shell crab sandwiches. We didn't know that—what a great thing that was. *[Laughs]*

00:31:25

AE: Was she still making her famous pies over here at—?

00:31:28

CB: No, she never did make any pies over here. She—they just did the seafood, and she'd make clam chowder and—.

00:31:38

BB: She would cook chicken sometimes.

00:31:39

CB: Yeah, she'll cook chicken for people.

00:31:42

BB: That's the only choice you had; you had seafood or chicken.

00:31:45

CB: Fried chicken or seafood—but she—she was a very good cook, and she still could bake. She baked a cake once in a while but she didn't make—make any desserts or anything for—to sell anymore.

00:32:04

AE: Do you happen to know anything else about her boarding house that you mentioned and when she had that and what it was like?

00:32:09

BB: No. Actually, she was doing that when I was in the service and—and she left—you know I—I remember her talking about it and I—but I don't—I'm not aware of the—how she—what happened or how she did it.

00:32:37

CB: That was before my time, too, because we got married in—in '47 and you *[to her husband]*, of course, were back here then. But I remember hearing her talk about it, too. She was running the beauty shop when I—when you and I met. She had the beauty shop. But we'll be married this year 60 years, uh-hmm.

00:33:04

AE: Congratulations.

00:33:05

CB: Thank you.

00:33:08

AE: Well and mentioning the beauty shop again reminds of the—the old-fashioned curlers and everything that people were talking about in the restaurant. Can you talk—no, I didn't get to see it.

00:33:18

BB: It looked like something from outer space.

00:33:20

AE: Can you talk about the—

00:33:22

BB: All the wires hanging down. [*Laughs*]

00:33:25

AE: —the—can you talk about the physical space and—and what things of hers were in there and where they came from and—and things like that?

00:33:30

BB: Physical space of where—in the restaurant?

00:33:32

AE: Of the restaurant, uh-hmm.

00:33:35

BB: Well I think Robert kept it much like—like it was when Mother had it. And they—she did have that old curling machine, a—a permanent machine, whatever it was, yeah. And they also had a jukebox, which was dated back to the early jukeboxes. And I think when they'd get a television set, when—if the television set broke, they didn't throw it away; they just got another television set and put it on top of that one, you know. And they had a bunch of television sets at one end of the room. And we told Robert if he'd get—if he opens the restaurant again that we'd—we had a couple of TVs we were saving for him.

00:34:28

AE: Well and that's something I've been hearing a lot of since I've been down here is that there are a lot of folks who intend to bring stuff to the restaurant.

00:34:36

BB: Bring your pen and write on the wall because you know the walls were almost solid with writings from different people.

00:34:45

CB: Well you know when Robert—I believe it was his second race in—the House race and we came down and this was after your mother died, third—it was his third House race—and we were down there getting things straightened up and ready for the party that night, and I was in there working away. And of course they didn't open 'til 5 o'clock, anyway. But somebody knocked on the door, and I went and there was this man and some other people. And he said, "I am Dr. so-and-so and so," and he said, "I went to medical school down here, and I used to come out all the time." "And," he said, "I've enrolled my son. We just enrolled my son and—and I would like to know if you'd let him come in and let me show him around and let me show him where I signed the wall." So he did, and the son signed right by the father. And so I'm hoping that we can kind of put out the word whenever they have an opening and maybe some of those same people will come back and—and sign, you know. But the clippings and all the books, they had stacks of books that people wrote in marks about the restaurant. Some wonderful, some not so good once in a while—took too long or whatever, you know. But there was—they were great, anyway, and of course that's the thing that you can't replace. You can't replace the old Coca-Cola machine and—and the memories. You can—and of course I think Robert is going to try his best to not make it modern because I think he wants to try to make it like it was because every place

you go—. We were on the subway or the train in London one time a few years ago, and Robert had a Bowen's Island shirt on. And this tall girl—attractive looking woman got on, and it was packed. It was at 5 o'clock and she looked around, and she looked at me and she said, "I've been there." And I said, "What?" She said, "I've been to Bowen's Island." I said, "You have?" She said, "Yeah." And we would go places when we had gone on trips, you know, since we've retired, and if you mention Charleston, most people always say very, very nice things. And then if you give them any indication of where—where you lived they've—they've been there. And I don't know if you've seen that [book] *1,000 Places to Go before You Die*. It's [listed] in there.

00:37:24

AE: And it's written up in quite a lot of things like that—guidebooks and whatnot. Well can we talk now about your son Robert's attachment to the place and his relationship with his grandmother because LaNelle [Robert's wife] was saying the other day that—that she [May Bowen] was particularly fond of Robert.

00:37:40

CB: Uh-hmm, she was. He—see we lived here when he was—started first grade, we lived here for about two or three years but even before that, when he was born, we were running the restaurant and she was over here. And it would be so busy, so she'd sometimes bring him over here and then she'd keep him a day or two and take him back and he would be asleep, and she'd bring him in and we would put him down. And she had a Jeep, and when she started the Jeep he would hear it and he'd wake up and start hollering—crying—and she'd come back in and get him and take him back. But then when we lived here, I mean he roamed this island as a little tiny boy and would go down to the store. Because in the afternoon, see, they opened it in the

morning. They didn't—they didn't wait 'til 5 o'clock; they opened it early in the morning. And he'd go down there, and they'd sit down and play cards together for hours on end. And so he always loved it. And while the other children loved to come, they didn't—they didn't have the same feeling for it that he did. And then when he [Robert] came back after he finished Law School and was with a very good law firm in Charleston, she wanted him to come out here and help her. So he got his little office in the back, and I'm sure he told you all that. But he has just loved this. And he would sit there and eat oysters with the best of them and could eat as many as a grown man. But he's the one that was the most interested in it, keeping it running and not changing it and things like that.

00:39:20

AE: Would you talk about his law practice being in the restaurant for a little while because he—it was mentioned but we didn't really go into it, and I wonder what that meant to folks to come to visit their lawyer out here on Bowen's Island. [*Laughs*]

00:39:31

CB: Well I don't think it bothered them too much. For one thing, a lot of his clients were from his church and people that knew him anyway. And they knew about Bowen's Island because if you grew up in this area—because since 1949 it was the oldest running restaurant in Charleston. And so I don't—it didn't seem to be bothering anybody too much to come out here to—to visit him, but then it got more and more with the business, you know, and then he was in—when he was in the State House and all of that, he would have to be gone some and he just decided that he—he has kept his license but he just decided that he was going to do that instead.

00:40:18

AE: So when Mrs. Bowen passed what was—what was that time like when there was—when Robert became really involved in—in—to the—like how did the feel of the restaurant change when she was no longer at the helm?

00:40:33

CB: I don't—I don't really think it changed too much because he was there for a period of time long enough to where people knew him. I think if he had not been there and then had come and taken it over it would have been much more difficult, but it wasn't because he had kind of gradually worked in it for a while and people knew him and—and people from Columbia would come and all like that. So I don't really think it was too—.

00:41:03

BB: Probably by the time Mama died he was probably doing most of the work anyhow so—. She—she was still pretty frisky right up until the time she died but she—.

00:41:18

CB: She didn't drive, so he did all of that.

00:41:21

BB: Yeah, he had to go to the grocery store and things like that and meat market. And he had to take care of getting the seafood in and the oysters and things like that which—which he really wasn't able to do.

00:41:42

AE: Did you say beet market?

00:41:44

CB: Meat.

00:41:45

AE: Meat market, okay.

00:41:45

BB: Meat market.

00:41:46

AE: [*Laughs*] I thought maybe you had a special vegetable purveyor that you used or something. Well if—I wonder if we can go back to the oystermen for a second—the oyster pickers—because I understand that now—I don’t think he’s going to give me an interview but he’s been here for quite a long time—.

00:42:06

CB: Goat?

00:42:07

AE: No, I hope to talk to Goat. But if you want to speak about Goat [Victor “Goat” Lafayette] or Nell [Walker], either one.

00:42:13

CB: Who is it that you don’t know is going to give you an interview?

00:42:16

AE: I just know him as Nell.

00:42:19

CB: Well I don't know him.

00:42:20

AE: No.

00:42:20

BB: Uh-uh.

00:42:22

AE: Okay, okay, well then let's talk about Goat. You know Goat.

00:42:25

CB: Oh, Goat is a character. Goat is a character. I'm sure Robert probably told you about Goat. People would come out here when he roasts oysters, and they would want to rub his head for good luck and all kinds of things like that, and he is quite a character. And that's not really his name; his name is Victor. And one time when Robert and Victor and some people that were interviewing him out in the—in the boat in the water Robert said the hardest—he didn't mind the interview but the hardest thing was to call Goat Victor. And it's Goat's choice to be called Goat, but he didn't want anybody to feel that he was demeaning him in any way by calling him Goat. But he said that was the hardest thing for me was calling him Victor.

00:43:09

BB: Calling him Victor.

00:43:11

AE: [*Laughs*] So how long has Goat been out there picking oysters for the restaurant?

00:43:15

CB: Oh, mercy. He's been here from way—way back. I don't know how far—a long way back. And he sent us a—what was it—the thing—a possum? He cooked us a possum and sweet potatoes and sent it to us for Christmas a couple of years ago, but I'm not a possum eater.

[*Laughs*]

00:43:42

AE: So how is it that—that—because I was talking to Robert the other day and asking about having oyster pickers that were specifically for the restaurant and how unusual that relationship might be, especially today with different restaurants and how—like Goat's allegiance to this place, does it—does it have to do with Mrs. Bowen or—and how she conducted her business or what is that connection?

00:44:04

CB: I'm sure that's—would have been the start of it, wouldn't you? And they seemed to—I mean he seems to really like Robert a lot, too, because he has come up to Newberry before with Robert when they've had fundraisers and Robert has done—he does an oyster roast fundraiser for the Opera House every year, and he did one for—I don't remember who else it was, but he

brought Goat. And I remember—Goat will go wherever with him. So I think that they have a pretty good relationship, too.

00:44:38

AE: Uh-hmm. What do you think Mrs. Bowen would think about Robert's tenure with the restaurant since she's gone and—?

00:44:49

CB: I don't—we've laughed about that. I think she would not believe what he has done, and I think she would be so thrilled. And we've talked about it when we've come out here how it's built up you know, coming this way, and now they're getting ready to build on that little island before you come on the causeway. I just don't think she would be able to believe it, do you? *[To her husband]* She would be so happy.

00:45:12

BB: No, she wouldn't believe the—the drive from here to Charleston, the way things have grown, you know. But like Cile said she—several years before she died she had to quit driving, and I think that kind of got her goat a little bit. She didn't like—didn't like having to rely on other people to—to do—to take her anywhere. So she—that's probably one of the hardest things for her—was to—was to quit driving but she almost had to because she couldn't see. *[Laughs]*

00:45:51

CB: Yeah, it makes a difference whether you can see or not.

00:45:53

BB: She hit a few cars and things like that. *[Laughs]*

00:45:56

AE: *[Laughs]* Well do y'all have some favorite stories or memories from being at the restaurant over the years that you'd like to share?

00:46:03

CB: Well we always—of course it's been wonderful for us. We have a family oyster roast down here. I don't know if Robert told you that. And last year was the first year we haven't had it and, of course, then it burned. But Robert was busy with the election *[Robert Barber ran for Lt. Governor of South Carolina in 2006]* and really, it was my responsibility, and it was a lot of other things going on, and I didn't get to do it. So we are going to have something Sunday out here. And our whole family gets together and brings all the goodies and—and we have oysters and fish stew and things like that and—but it just—it—it's always been a special place for us and our children love it here, and I think, eventually, every child will be here [living on Bowen's Island]. Right now one—I already told you where they are, but I think eventually they will probably be out on their own.

00:47:07

BB: We all have a lot of them. Yeah and probably we'll—eventually, we'll move.

00:47:16

CB: And when we get old, we're going to come here too. I will—we'll probably—we'll probably be right across the road over there. We have a lot when you first come in, but I would feel a little safer down in some. I don't want to be the first one, so that would be the better one to

be on because the water view is prettier of the water, but I think I'd rather be a little—it's just—it wouldn't be directly in front of Robert and LaNelle. It would be kind of like over that way on the other side of the road there.

00:47:51

AE: Do you have any favorite stories or memories of happenings at the restaurant?

00:47:58

BB: I can't think of any really.

00:48:03

AE: Well I know that Robert is committed to rebuilding and that's going on right now. What do you imagine or hope for the future for Bowen's Island Restaurant?

00:48:19

CB: Well I—I—I hope that he can put it back, you know, like he wants to because he really loves this place and it was—it was devastating to get that call because, you know, just before the election and the flames were up in the air down there, and it was a frightening thing. And of course all the family came—all of his siblings and we did—and everybody brought food, you know. You have to eat when you have a tragedy—in the South, anyway. And—and we all went down there and plowed around in the—and it was raining on top of that. And you know really, I guess it was a good thing it was raining because if it hadn't been raining and the wind was blowing high it could have burned everything on this island. So we were really lucky. But I mean I want him—for his sake, I want him to have it back.

00:49:25

AE: Can you imagine what the—the grand opening will be like, everybody flooding the island to—to come visit?

00:49:31

CB: Probably going to be a pretty good many people coming.

00:49:35

BB: I just—I don't know what he's going to do. They—they get quite a few suggestions as to what to do, and I think Pat has good ideas about things and he's—his idea is that if he builds it back he wants a—a roof-top that's flat and you can have the—you can dine up there on the roof-top because the view would be great. But I—Robert—Robert might want try to and put it back like it was. The—I really don't know what they want to do and what—what he can do or what they'll let him do, you know.

00:50:20

AE: So he—he's probably not grandfathered in to be able to build that ground level building?

00:50:25

CB: We don't think so, but we don't know. He's been working with all the conservation people and all that. But it would be neat if he could—even if he tried to build back everything like it was and then maybe put that roof-top thing; that would be a fun thing to—to have it up there because you could see forever. I know our daughter's house down here that—they're built up and then they have a second story above the first floor up, and you can see to the tip of Folly Beach. And

that's the way—and that actually—where that restaurant is—is the best view on—it's the best view on the whole island. This is a good view, but that one is even better, I think.

00:51:11

AE: Pretty place, for sure. Well is there anything that I haven't asked that I maybe wouldn't know to ask that you would like to add or some final thoughts about anything?

00:51:22

CB: Uh-umm, we talked your ear off.

00:51:27

AE: No, I love it.

00:51:30

CB: No, I can't think of any—of anything else.

00:51:34

AE: What would you—how would you describe Bowen's Island as it was to someone who hasn't been there before?

00:51:41

CB: As it is right now?

00:51:42

AE: Before.

00:51:46

CB: It—it’s exactly what he’s got on his cards: it’s a state of mind. You either love it, or you don’t like it at all. I’ll tell you one little story. My cousin was with the State Department of Education, and she brought a bunch of new people down from the State Department and brought them out here. And she said, “Now don’t dress up.” So when they got here they—you know it’s just a little one-story building and they said, “What is this place, anyway?” She said, “Don’t worry about it, just come on.” Well they got in and they sat down, and this was before Robert came, and my mother-in-law came over to the table. And they kind of looked at my cousin and they said, “Well I don’t know about this.” And she said, “Just order.” So they ordered fried shrimp, and she brought them and they ate them and they loved them. So then they called her over and they said, “Can we—we’d like another order all the way around of fried shrimp.” So she fixed those and brought them back, and then they ordered a third order. And she brought them back, and she said, “Now you can’t have anymore.” **[Laughs]** And that was—she said. “You’ve had enough. You can’t have anymore.” But she operated in such a way that you—people pay for advertisement and she just—she—she was at—people came to her and she never advertised—never, not one time did she ever advertise. You couldn’t buy the kind of publicity that she’s gotten, you know. But she was quite a character.

00:53:29

AE: I’m sorry I never got to meet her. Well, all right. Well I appreciate y’all giving me all this time and all these good stories. It’s been lovely.

00:53:36

CB: You’re certainly welcome.

AE: Thank you.

00:53:38

BB: You're welcome.

00:53:40

[End Cile & Bob Barber Interview]

00:53:41