

**ELLEN BREWER, MICHAEL BREWER,
GEORGE BARBER & DAVID BARBER
Fresh Air Bar-B-Que – Flovilla, GA**

Date: February 26, 2008

Location: Fresh Air Bar-B-Que – Flovilla, GA

Interviewer: Amy C. Evans, SFA Oral Historian

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: 1 hour, 12 minutes, 55 seconds

Project: Southern BBQ Trail: Georgia

[Begin Fresh Air-1 Interview]

00:00:00

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Tuesday, February 26, 2008, and I'm in Flovilla, Georgia, at Fresh Air Barbecue with the Brewer clan. And I'm sitting next to Mrs. Brewer and, if you would, please ma'am, state your full name your birth date for the record?

00:00:20

Ellen Brewer: My name is Ellen Caston Brewer. I was born April 15, 1947. The original barbecue place was just a very small pit with a fold-down table that covered up a window and that's where it got the name Open Air or Fresh Air Barbecue. It was started sometime in the late fall of 1928 or January of 1929, which is what we claim, since that's the one we can prove. It was started by Dr. Joel Watkins, who was a local veterinarian. He raised rabbits and goats, and he barbecued them on the weekends. After that, my father came here in 1945 and rented the building from him for half of the week, and he cooked during the week and doctor or—is that right? He cooked during the week, and Dr. Watkins continued to work on the weekends. After Dr. Watkins died, my father continued with the business and in the early '50s he was able to buy the business from all of Dr. Watkins' relatives, and he's been here ever since, until his death in 1996.

00:01:39

AE: And your father is George—?

00:01:42

EB: George Milton Caston, yes, and everybody called him Toots until the day he died. That's what everybody called him, including the grandchildren.

00:01:47

AE: How did he get that nickname?

00:01:50

EB: He used to drive an old man that lived in Butts County. His name was Toots Waits, and he used to drive him around when Daddy was twelve, thirteen years old. He would drive him around, and everybody called him Little Toots and it just stuck.

00:02:07

AE: So when you say that your father came here, did he come to Flovilla or he just came into the barbecue restaurant?

00:02:14

EB: He came into the barbecue restaurant. He was born and raised in Butts County. He was born in 1907—March 3, 1907, and he was a lifelong resident of Butts County.

00:02:26

AE: And where did his parents come from? How did they settle in this area?

00:02:29

EB: I really don't know, to be honest with you. They died when I was a small child, and I have very few memories of them, but I really don't know how they came to be in Butts County. Our

family is—I guess I’m the sixth or seventh generation in the County, so we’ve been here a long time.

00:02:45

AE: Uh-hmm, I’d say. And your mother’s name?

00:02:47

EB: My mother’s name is Doris Woodward, and her family has been in the County since seventeen—something. Twenty-nine?

00:02:56

Michael Brewer: Before the founding of the County.

00:02:58

EB: Yeah, before the founding of the County, so, yeah, whatever—supposedly 1700s.

00:03:05

MB: Seventeen-seventy, I think.

00:03:06

EB: Something like that, yeah.

00:03:07

AE: So you were talking before we started recording about your memories of being at the original place when you were just five or six years old. Do you have some stories or memories that you can share from those days?

00:03:18

EB: Well, I remember playing on the sawdust floor when I was a little girl—or in the sawdust. The floor was concrete, but the sawdust was brought in from outside and it covered the floor most of the time, so everybody always assumed the floors were sawdust. But no, I remember playing here as a little girl and, you know—four or five years-old and my mother would work on—in the weekends and I’d come down here and play, and it was a lot of fun.

00:03:42

AE: Do you remember much about Dr. Watkins and what kind of personality he had and all that?

00:03:46

EB: The kind of personality that you don’t tell too many stories about. [*Laughs*] He was—he was a wonderful old man. He played jokes on me when I was a little girl, and his brother lived across the road, and I used to spend some afternoons with him playing with him too. And one of the funniest things was that he had a little black goat born one time that his mother wouldn’t have him, so Dr. Watkins had raised him with a bottle, and when he got to be about six weeks old he gave him to me one afternoon. And I took him home with me and that’s the—the one time in my life I remember seeing my mother just go what they now call ballistic. She says, “You can’t have that little goat. I’m not going to have that.” So she made my daddy take me and the little goat and take him back, but I’ve—I’ve always regretted that. I always wanted that little goat.

00:04:40

AE: Do you know—I mean did Dr. Watkins have to reconcile in his own mind somehow that he was a veterinarian but he was cooking animals?

00:04:47

EB: I don't know that he ever thought about it. I really don't know. That was just, you know, people did what they had to do to survive in, you know—in those years. And all of these people were raised during the Depression and things just—people they didn't worry too much about eating animals back then like they do now, but—

00:05:04

AE: And you mentioned that he raised the goats and the rabbits that he cooked.

00:05:07

EB: He did. A veterinarian's job probably was not enough to support him then so he raised—raised goats and rabbits to sell.

00:05:18

AE: So with that—in the beginning, was that pretty much the menu or was there—was there pork on the menu or how did that change or evolve in the early days?

00:05:26

EB: I don't think Dr. Watkins ever had pork. My daddy is the one that cooked pork, and he cooked chicken pies and fried peach pies and he had a vegetable lunch during, you know—during the week. And it just all evolved. And the Brunswick stew recipe came from an old recipe of his daddy's that he worked with for years before he, you know, he got one that would actually

not spoil or—you know, and he used beef instead of pork, like a lot of people did, so it wouldn't spoil. So it was just a process of adding something here and adding something there, and he always said, you know, he did it just to try and feed his family. That's what he was trying to do.

00:06:08

AE: So when he went into the barbecue business, that was his main goal—was to feed his family? It wasn't an interest—an interest in cooking at all or did that kind of play into it?

00:06:15

EB: His daddy had always barbecued, and they had raised hogs when he was a little boy and that's how they fed the family was on the hogs that they had raised, so he had always you know—he had always known about pork and he was trying to find a way—he worked at the mill for many, many years and he just got tired of that. He wanted something a little better, and he wanted his children to have a little better than he had growing up. He grew up in a family with eleven children, and he always said he got one pair of shoes and that was when the weather turned cold. And when he outgrew them he went barefoot after that, until the next year when they could afford to buy him one more pair of shoes. But he quit school in the eighth grade to help feed his family and, you know, he's—he did real well for himself for somebody with an eighth-grade education. But I guess that—that was the norm then. It's, you know, it's not now but it was then when he grew up.

00:07:09

AE: And so what was—what were the—your clientele like in the early days? I mean, of course, presumably, mostly locals but would people come from far away in those early days to come have barbecue here?

00:07:22

EB: People came from all over. We have a fourth generation of people that come by here now with the great-grandparents. And you know, I used to eat here when I was child, and I want you to be sure and eat here, but we had Governors and all sorts of people that ate here and people that, you know, came through on the road from—from the North to Florida. People, you know, used to travel to Florida, and this was the main highway. And they would come through, and this is where they stopped. And now we ship it all over the world, so—and it costs more to ship than it does to pay for the food. *[Laughs]*

00:07:58

AE: And you have one sibling correct?

00:08:01

EB: Yes, I had one sister that died last month, and there were two girls, and then there were four grandsons, and three of the grandsons work in the barbecue business now.

00:08:11

AE: And tell me your sister's name again.

00:08:14

EB: Her name was Charlotte Caston.

00:08:15

AE: So what was it like—so what was it like for two young girls to be growing up, you know, running around a barbecue joint?

00:08:24

EB: Well she never did very much. She was ten years older than I was, and she didn't like it very much. **[Laughs]** So she stayed at home most of the time, and I would be down here.

00:08:34

AE: Uh-hmm.

00:08:34

EB: She was—she was a teenager when I was a little girl, so she didn't want to spend her weekends here. Of course we spent a lot of our weekend time at—at Indian Springs, which is two miles from here.

00:08:44

AE: But so did you like being involved in the restaurant and being here with your dad?

00:08:50

EB: Oh, I did because I was a tomboy; I was a tree climber, and I used to go with him when he'd hunt and, you know, that kind of thing. I was never much of a prissy little girl.

00:08:58

AE: So what kinds of things would he have you do to help out around here when you were little?

00:09:03

EB: I used to have to rake and sweep, and I don't enjoy doing either one now. *[Laughs]* But he—he rakes the—the—the sawdust that's out front; he raked it every morning, and that was one of his first jobs. He washed the tables off outside, no matter how cold it was. I've seen the cloth that he used to wipe the tables off stick to the table because it froze as soon as it hit the table, but that was just the way he was. He had a very strong work ethic and he was—he actually had a stroke early one morning as he was preparing to come to the barbecue place. So he actually worked until just a few days before he died at age 89.

00:09:47

AE: And what year was that that he would have passed in?

00:09:49

EB: He died in August of 1996 during the Olympics.

00:09:56

AE: And so can you talk about—or maybe should I ask Michael about when he came to this new location and was it just a better location or a bigger facility or—?

00:10:09

EB: You mean the facility? Well we just—we've always had so much business, especially on the weekends and in the summer time and in the fall that we just didn't have enough room, you

know. There would be—people would be waiting in line for a place to sit down and eat, or they'd stand and eat on their cars. So we decided in 1984—1984 to build an extra dining room and an extra pit because we, you know, you'd run out of meat at two o'clock on Sunday afternoon, and people would get really upset if they had driven down here from Atlanta and there was no food left. So we built an extra pit.

00:10:45

AE: But then what—what year—I'm getting my timeline all confused but the—the original pit in that building because you said first the original location Dr. Watkins opened was somewhere else?

00:10:57

EB: No.

00:11:00

AE: Okay—oh, okay. Oh, okay, I got myself confused.

00:11:02

EB: This was the original pit but—yeah—yeah. You need to talk to them [George and David Barber] about that.

00:11:14

MB: Two buildings, though. Two separate buildings. This original building here; there was one next door. And they would alternate. You know, they would open like three days a week in here for barbecue, and they opened four days in the other building for lunch. Like that.

00:11:22

AE: Okay, I get it now. Okay. Well what else to share about your father in the early days of the business?

00:11:31

EB: I'm not sure I know. What else I can tell. *[Laughs]*

00:11:35

AE: Well maybe we'll move around the table and talk to your son [Michael], and if something else comes up, we can come back to you.

00:11:44

EB: Okay.

00:11:46

AE: All right. And we are back with Michael Brewer, Mrs. Brewer's son, and if you could introduce yourself for the record and state your birth date also, please, sir?

00:11:53

MB: Well my name is Michael Brewer, and I was born April 14, 1966.

00:11:58

AE: And can you just tell me about your memories of—of your grandfather and the restaurant here?

00:12:04

MB: Well, I have a lot of good memories of my grandfather. One thing I always remember about him is, almost to the day he died, he was one of the strongest men that I ever knew—physically strongest people. He wasn't a tall man; he was kind of—he was a little shorter than I am now and more—I'd guess you say more of a round kind of figure but he was—he was strong. And I can remember even when he was in his seventies, he could pick up logs that weighed probably over 200 pounds still and—and he was—he was a physically active man his entire life. He enjoyed work; he relished work. He never liked to sit for more than—it was hard to get him to sit down for a couple of hours even—the only day the barbecue place ever closed, up until a few years ago, was Christmas Day every year, and we could barely get through Christmas dinner with the whole family before he was itching to get back down here to do some work to get ready for the next day's business. That's just—that was his ethic is he believed in hard physical labor, whether it be down here in the barbecue place—he could come down here. He was more semi-retired when I was younger than when he worked seven days a week, but he would come down here and work a few hours in the morning, like my mother said. He had his routine every single day. He'd come down here and make the coffee and clean the—sweep the floors, sweep the sawdust back out, wipe down the tables and get ready for some of the—the morning—there was some older men in the County that would stop by in the mornings and drink coffee with him and everything, and he'd do work around here till about eleven o'clock. He'd go home and take a short nap, and then he'd go do something in the yard all day long—pruning trees, planting stuff. He had some of the best tomatoes I've ever eaten grown anywhere—things that he just liked to do around the house. And then he would—usually, they'd either eat dinner at home, or they'd go out to dinner somewhere and they were—my grandparents were in the bed by about eight-thirty and sometimes earlier than that even every night. He'd get up about four-thirty in the morning to get

ready to come down here, and my grandmother would get up with him to cook his breakfast. So I remember that a lot about him.

00:14:15

His—he always seemed old to me even when I was a child because he was a lot older than me. He—he was old for a grandfather, but he had—his hands were scarred up and gnarled, the whole—the whole time I knew him his entire life. And George [Barber] probably remembers when he was younger and maybe not quite as beat-up and everything but he—he—because of the activity he did all the time, his hands were calloused; they were rough; he had spots on them and everything, but I mean they were—they were physically powerful, and he could just, you know, up until probably the last, I'd say, probably the last ten years of his life, he was in as good a shape at seventy-five as he probably was at thirty-five. And then he began to slow down, physically, the last few years that he was alive; he couldn't do as much as he used to, but he was still by and far in much better shape than most of his peers were, and he always accredited that to hard labor keeping him—keeping him physically fit.

Seventy-fifth birthday we went to go up there; usually the whole family would go out. That was a big thing in our family is he would take everybody out to eat somewhere at one of the local restaurants or some of the catfish places in surrounding counties or things like that. But for his seventy-fifth birthday we were going out to a fish restaurant out near High Falls State Park, and I think it was my—my turn that time to actually go get him, and [my grandmother] Dot [Doris Caston] and I went up there to the house, and he was about thirty feet up in a magnolia tree cutting branches. And I was—the first thing that crossed my mind is he's going to fall out of that tree and kill himself and it's going—his birthday and his date of death are going to be the same. But I mean that's just the way he was. I mean he—he did not realize his own limitations

even as he got older. I think it was kind of a shock to him when he finally began to realize that he couldn't do everything that he was always able to do.

00:16:04

AE: So back to the—the restaurant part of it and the fact that he grew up knowing about hogs and—and all and brought that to the restaurant, did he phase out the goats and the rabbits when he took over from Dr. Watkins or how did—how did that happen?

00:16:22

MB: I only remember him talking mostly about what he did as far as—as far as barbecue itself, the—the I guess you'd say the hog aspect of it. I think he used to use more different parts than what he used to, I remember him saying and then eventually he just went to—to just whole hams, things like that, but I know—I know he said and I had heard him say many times back during the years of the Depression he had—he had to get food sources to sell here—to serve here wherever he could get them, be it raising his own stock, what he could capture. I mean he just—sometimes his stories were a little inconsistent. I think he embellished a few things, but I think—I think what he was trying to say, for the most part, was—is that you know the—you know a restaurant that was opened right before the Depression and then, you know, he—after, you know, he was involved in other restaurant business stuff in the county. I remember my grandmother telling—you know, he—he had kind of been around in the restaurant business before in places that no longer exist in this county before he actually got to this place, but the stories that he'd tell are the same as most anybody else would tell about it. It was a—it was a hard business. Any business was a hard business to be in at that time.

00:17:35

AE: But did he—did he enjoy it the barbecuing?

00:17:38

MB: I think he—I think he loved it. I think it permeated every part of his being. This—I mean he was proud of this place. It was—I mean it's certainly not a showpiece restaurant, and that's the way people around here like it. You could go up—you could go up the road and build a brand spanking new Fresh Air Barbecue, and everybody would complain about it; they would not like it. They—you can—you can do that in other locations like have been done in Macon and Athens with newer barbecue places and go with more modern things, but this is the original. People expect it to be like they remember it when they were children. I think my mother [Ellen Caston Brewer] said, you know, three, four, or five generations of people have been coming in this place. They can—you have people who are in their forties and fifties that can remember coming down here with their grandparents, and that's one thing that appeals to them is what they see in this place is what they remember. Some of the details have changed but they—you can kind of phase that out. Memory can be selective, but you see the core and the essence of what was originally there when they were kids, and it brings back those pleasant memories that they have of better times when they were growing up.

00:18:43

AE: Well and I know that Fresh Air is so iconic in Georgia for, you know, an old—old barbecue restaurant, long-standing, family-owned and also the quality of the barbecue. Can you talk about how this place and your grandfather's barbecue have been an inspiration for other people who have opened restaurants in the state?

00:19:03

MB: I can't really talk to whether—whether it has inspired other people but—but I know—you mentioned a minute ago the word about the quality. That was—that was one thing about him that he—some people would try to save a dollar anyway they could. He could be frugal but not compromise the quality or the integrity of what he served. He believed in serving a superior product. If that meant—and—and he hung—we talked earlier about the—he honed the recipe into different ways based on what was available at the time, but he always tried to make a better quality product, one that would last longer, one that was a healthier product in some ways and he just—he liked—he liked to serve quality products. He had—he had pride in this place, and he had pride in what he served and—and I think the fact that it gained a reputation for its product all over the place only served to make him even more desirous to—to continue that quality because that's what—that's the level people expected. They expect that if you go to Fresh Air Barbecue, you're going to get the same quality every time you go there. The food is not going to be any different a year from now than it was a year before. It's going—every time you eat there it's going to be consistently good.

00:20:20

AE: Now was your grandfather the only one cooking the meat and manning the pits, or did he have other people, like his grandson, who—who did that kind of thing? [*Laughs*]

00:20:24

MB: There were—there were a lot of employees that—that were here over the years. My mother [Ellen Caston Brewer] can remember some of them back before me but I—I can

remember—and I'm sure my cousins [George Barber and David Barber] can remember, as well, some of the ones who were mainstays here for a long time. There were people like Otis Mangum, Marvin James, Lois Coleman, Hillary Wise, Mose James, Ozzie, I can't—

00:20:50

EB: Shivers.

00:20:51

MB: Shivers. I couldn't even—Ozzie was here forever. People along the way that helped doing pretty much everything that needed to be done here, whether it was cooking meat, putting wood on the fire, manning the front register, preparing the sandwiches. I mean it—there wasn't really to my recollection a delegation of responsibilities other than Ozzie had certain things she did. She cooked meals for the people that were working here in addition to other things, but down here everybody did a little bit of everything even—even the summers that I worked down here, you never knew what—what were you going to have to do till you got here, be it peeling potatoes or onions or shaking gallons of stew to make sure the ingredients—or sauce, excuse me—to make sure that the ingredients properly mixed or cleaning the grease off the pit racks on Tuesdays. That's probably the worst job down here.

00:21:36

[End Fresh Air-1 Interview]

[Begin Fresh Air-2 Interview]

00:00:00

Amy Evans: Okay, this is Amy, and we're back. We had to stop for a minute here. I'm back with Michael Brewer, and we were talking about the people who used to work here at Fresh Air over the years. And you mentioned a woman by the name of Ozzie who used to cook. You mentioned that she cooked for the—the other employees. Was it something other than barbecue that she would make for lunch?

00:00:20

Michael Brewer: Oh, absolutely. It's always been my experience that if you worked in the barbecue place full time, you never wanted to eat barbecue because it was really about the only thing there was to eat. So over the years they used—well for many years they always had somebody here that—she cleaned the kitchen, she cooked breakfast, lunch, and supper. That—that was—meals were provided to the people that worked here, and then she'd, during the day between meals and stuff, she would cut up hams in the back and do other things like that. And she was—she was a hard-working woman who was here for a long time.

00:00:54

AE: How long would you say total that she was here?

00:00:58

MB: Yeah, we—we think probably over thirty years—a little over thirty years.

00:01:04

AE: Is she one of the longer-standing employees or did you have—or still have people who have been here longer than that?

00:01:10

MB: I think—I think one of the people I mentioned, Otis Mangum, was here for—and he died the same week my grandfather did, actually. They were best friends growing up, close to the same age and played ball together. Otis was—was—he was probably here forty—thirty or forty years, probably. I can remember my father saying if he had a nickel for every barbecue sandwich that Otis had—had rolled, which is what we used to call it when you'd make a sandwich and then roll it in the paper, that if—if you had a nickel for every sandwich that he—that he had rolled, he'd be a wealthy man. He wouldn't have to work because he probably rolled several million sandwiches in his lifetime working—or the time that he worked down here at the barbecue place. We had—we had several employees that were just—they—they—some of them were distantly related or cousins to my grandfather. Some of them were just—were just other people but they worked here. They were loyal people that worked here and did the same level of hard work that my grandfather was doing, but they actually got days off. He didn't—he generally didn't until he semi-retired.

00:02:21

AE: And two things that I'm remembering now as you're speaking that—we had some technical difficulties with my machine here—but two things that we talked about that I think we may have—have lost in the recording process here, one was the—the controversy over the—the fountain soda machine that y'all installed, and then also the coleslaw that your cousin added to the menu sometime in the [nineteen] '80s. Can you talk about those things again real quick?

00:02:44

MB: Yes. Well, what I was saying earlier is that those are probably two big things that happened in the barbecue place, and for most people that wouldn't be a big thing, but for a restaurant whose consistency was its small menu, adding coleslaw—I'll go with that one first this time—adding coleslaw was a big deal because it was a new side item and I think it was—it was what the public had asked for over the years. People just came—came in and they wanted something, you know, maybe coleslaw or some—something cold to serve with the meal and a lot of restaurants had that and they added that to the menu. And my cousin, George [Barber], was here and introduced that into the—into the process, I think, in the early to mid-'80s. And then the other big thing was the switchover from the old pop-top Coca-Cola and—and all kinds of soft drinks. When we were—when I was growing up, we had just about every brand here. We had Orange Crush, Grape Crush, Coke, Pepsi, all the competing—competing brands sold under one roof and they were all in those pop-top bottles, and of course there was a deposit on those bottles and we didn't have—we couldn't—didn't have room to store them inside the restaurant so they got stored outside, and people would come by here and steal the bottles all the time because you could get a nickel or a dime for them if you turned them in somewhere. So they finally—finally went to the fountain drink and of course that—that raised an outcry from some of the local people because—and—and I still believe to this day that fountain Coca-Cola drinks are inferior to the ones that come in the old pop-top Cokes. They just—they were stronger. They were just better than—than what you have today but the economy dictates things and certain changes that have to be made, and that was one of them. It just—it was the right time for the time. It was just unfortunate.

00:04:28

AE: And your mother, I think, just passed you a note over there.

00:04:35

MB: I'll let—I'll let George talk about some of those stew cooking things and things. I had wrote down a few things just—the things I remembered about him that—that I'd like to mention. I think I already talked about the fact that up until the time he retired the first time—and there were several times he retired—about every year he would retire and then, you know, that would go on for a couple of weeks. They might take a trip, and then he'd start getting cabin fever, and pretty soon he was back down here, and he never really retired. Finally, we just gave up on trying to convince him to retire and—but he worked up until he began to semi-retire. He worked down here seven days a week, and they were usually long days and—and nights, too. He would stay down here a lot at night. I remember in an interview he did a long ago, and my grandmother has disputed this figure, but he said it—but he—he—I remember him specifically saying that, you know, he'd grown—he had grown up poor, worked in the cotton mills. His family had all grown up poor and he realized that he—as he quoted—he said he realized he could not make it on what he was doing there and raise his family, so he said he borrowed \$1,500 and went into the barbecue business. I think he actually paid more for it than that, but that might have been what he had to borrow at the time to—to match what he might have already saved up and everything. But I mean that story kind of stuck and everybody thinks that—that what became Fresh Air Barbecue originated from \$1,500 he borrowed, and that played a part in it but it—you know, it's not—I don't think that was the total story. I think there was some other—some back-story there, too. And that's really—that's really all I can remember, as far as that, you know. I just remember some of his stories about when the interstates were being built and how that—you know, traffic—this used to be the primary highway between Macon and Atlanta. I think they called it the Dixie Highway a long time ago. And before the interstate was built, if you were going to

Florida, you pretty much came down Highway 87, which is—or US 23, which is what this is. And State Route 87. And this was a popular stopping place because there weren't really many restaurants between Macon, until you got into Atlanta on the way, so this was a good halfway point for people to stop and eat. And I think by the time the interstate was built in maybe the late [nineteen]'60s—middle '60s, fortunately, by then the reputation of the business had been cemented; people knew about it; they had already been coming here for a couple of generations, and they weren't going to let an interstate stop them from coming to Fresh Air Barbecue. They'd get off down the road and come by here and go on up the road and get back on the interstate; so—. I think it's been—it's the third-oldest functioning business in Butts County. There are only two that are older than this business. One of them is one year older, and the other is the County newspaper, which has been in business since the 18—the late 1800s. But this one has had—has had a long history in the county. It is associated with the county—with [the town of] Jackson more—more so than [the town of] Flovilla because Jackson is more known, and it's really about equal between the two of them in distance, but it—it's associated with this area. When you mention—when people ask you where you're from, even in other states, and you say, "I'm from Jackson, Georgia," they say, "Oh, there's a barbecue place down there I know," you know. And they don't always believe you when they—you tell them, "Oh, I know the place. I was raised around it and everything. I was not raised in it, but I was raised around it. My father worked here for thirty-something years; my cousins have worked here most of their lives; my brother has been in it, and I ran from it, so—. [*Laughs*]

00:07:57

AE: And your brother is in it in Athens [Georgia]. He has a restaurant, Fresh Air?

00:08:00

MB: Yes, he has—he has another one—he opened, I guess, the third Fresh Air Barbecue in 1997 and then the fourth one in Bogart, which is really another part of Athens on the other side, in 1999. So he has two of them that he and my dad run over in Athens, Georgia.

00:08:20

AE: Now let me ask you this because—and I'll ask George also, but the place that is the barbecue restaurant and the pit, you can't duplicate that pit and that kind of thing but—but your family has recreated Fresh Air Barbecue in another place. Do you think that either—any of those things weigh more heavily than the other like the history of a place or the family behind it or the—the style of the pit and the place that it's cooked?

00:08:46

MB: I think—I think the perception of this place being the original and being the 1929 barbecue place that it is and people—people think that you can't duplicate that in other places. You can duplicate the food; you cannot duplicate the atmosphere that you have at this place as easily. You can come close but you can't—you can't completely duplicate it. Cooking methods—one thing that the generations beyond my grandfather tried to do is be consistent with the same way—in fact, my brother [Chris Brewer] is what I call a purist. He would not—everything Toots taught him, he would not deviate from it one way or the other. I mean he wants his stew to be exactly like it was when he was working down here and when he was raised here. He wants his barbecue to have the same taste. [My cousins] George [Barber] and David [Barber] with Jackson and the Macon stores have done the same thing. The other restaurant—to survive in—in today's environment have had to add more products than what you can get away with at this restaurant.

Most people on a new restaurant, if you went in and they only had three items on the menu, they're not going to come back. People—when a restaurant has been here as long as this one, they expect that. That—that's what's unique about it is that it only has barbecue, stew, coleslaw, potato chips and an assortment of drinks and that's really the choices you have and—and different configurations of those choices. With [the] Macon [location], you—you add other things like chicken and ribs because people want more variety in a newer restaurant. Athens has done the same thing and has a lunch buffet of different vegetables and things like that. It's just, you have to do what you have to do in each market to—to make your restaurant viable but the core of what is Fresh Air Barbecue is still there in each one of these locations.

00:10:26

AE: And does your brother have George's coleslaw on the menu over there now?

00:10:28

MB: Yes, he does, the same—same coleslaw is served over there. The same sauce is served over there. It's the same in Macon. What's funny, I've always thought, is people will tell me that they don't think the stew is as good as it is in Jackson, and it's all made here and—and trucked down there and it's—and I think it's because of—. And they tell me the same thing, that it's not as good in Athens. It's because of the perception that this is the real barbecue place, and they don't realize that some of the stuff that's sold down in Macon originates here in Jackson, and you know it's—it's that atmosphere. They say, you know, "It wasn't cooked in Jackson; it's not going to be as good."

00:11:07

AE: Well let me ask you, too, quickly, you work for Butts County now. Can you tell me about your—your role in the county and how you transitioned from coming from a barbecue restaurant to be in state government—county government?

00:11:20

MB: County. Well I tell people I was held prisoner during the summers at the barbecue place when I was growing up. I worked for my father [Jim Brewer]. My father was—was a good man for most people to work for but he was a lot harder on his sons than he was on his employees, so I never really had the aptitude for this kind of business. I wanted to do something different. So I went into Emergency Medicine when I got out of high school, went to Griffin Tech and became an EMT and decided, after a few years of that, I'd rather work indoors than out in the weather all the time. So I worked in various areas of 911 Communications over the years: Fire Department, Emergency Management. And the last seven years I've been working in the Commissioner's Office in the Administration Department as the Personnel Director for the County, and then last year I was promoted to Deputy County Manager. So I've been with the county for twenty-two years.

00:12:16

AE: And how often do you eat at your family's restaurant here?

00:12:19

MB: As often as I can get down here but the problem is my—my—my boss can't eat it that much anymore so it's hard for us—hard for me to get him down here. My wife can only take it in small dosages so she—she'll eat it every now and then but I think if you—I think you—people

from this area, I think their stomachs have a little more constitution for the sauce that has, you know, the vinegar and the sauce and the spices and the peppers and things that are in there and everything. She's more of a stew person, so when the weather is really cold she likes to come—I can get her to come down here, and she'll eat stew. But and my little—my three-year-old son who—he's fascinated with this place. He—he can't get it out of his head that George is not my grandfather because when we come by here we tell him—we tell him—to him, Toots is very much alive because we tell him, you know, that that's Toots' pickup truck sitting out there, this is Toots' barbecue place, and this is what we call it and everything. But he sees George and he associates George with Toots. So he thinks he's—he'll get over that eventually; he's only three. But—but he thinks this—this place is fascinating. He likes to come down here and I'd—I'd hate to turn him loose in here because there's no telling what he would do. And my brother [Chris Brewer] has two sons, and one of them at the age of five walked in the restaurant over there one day and told all the employees, he said, you know, "Some day I'm going to own this place." And I think they're both fascinated—I think both of his sons are going to be fascinated with the barbecue business and—and I hope that's the case because I hope that in some way or shape or form that Fresh Air Barbecue will continue on after all of us are gone, and I hope that, you know—I hope there will be a family connection to it for a long time to come.

00:13:56

AE: Well that might be a good note to end on, unless you have something else you'd like to add.

00:13:59

MB: I think I covered everything I can think of.

00:14:02

AE: All right. Well, Michael, thank you very much.

00:14:03

MB: Okay. Thank you.

* * *

00:14:07

AE: All right. We are back now with George and David Barber, cousins to Michael Brewer and also grandsons of Toots, here at Fresh Air. And if y'all would each please introduce yourselves for the record with your name and your birth date?

00:14:24

George Barber: I'm George Barber, and my birth date is January 30, 1959.

00:14:30

David Barber: And I'm David Charles Barber, November 13, 1962.

00:14:36

AE: All right. And George is going to take the lead here with—with talking about some elements of the—of the restaurant here. Do you want to just start with what you want to say or do you want me to lead you? Okay. Well since you—y'all are so—so much a part of the day-to-day establishment here in—in the history of the place, I definitely want to get some history of the

pit—the physical pit—and—and kind of how it’s evolved over the years, so maybe we could start there?

00:15:05

GB: Well you have—.

00:15:08

DB: Well originally—.

00:15:17

GB: Well the pit originally—originally was—was an open pit that extended the length of the building and they—and they cooked with—basically, they put a rack over coals. They would cook the coals down outside in a—like a fifty-five-gallon barrel and move the coals in and shovel them under the—under the meat the length of the building. It went, oh, probably twenty, twenty-five feet and—and the out—the exterior of the building at that time was open, so basically it was kind of like a shed-type situation. And of course that was not—that was more like a home-type cooking situation, so as time evolved and it became more of a business-type deal, they—they incorporated another—built the chimney. And another aspect to cooking was where they took the—they—they transferred the coals to a rack that was—that was connected to a chimney and it was—it was consolidated into a smaller area. And that was—that way of cooking was probably—what were the dates?

00:16:31

DB: That was—.

00:16:37

GB: From the—from the beginning in 1929, the—the pit that was used at that present time then was a—was a long pit that extended the length of the building and it had—also had an area in the back where you could cook there and for—for big orders you used the—the extension part that went the length of the building and it was covered with tin, and you used the coals to cook with that; you would cook down outside and shoveled in under the meat. And it would hold nineteen whole hogs and—and in the back area it probably would hold a few—two or three probably in the back rack that was—that was the covered type pit. And so that—that evolved until 19—I guess in the 1952 to '53 it was remodeled and used a closed-type system that was indirect heat where the smoke and the flames were—were at the—were not in direct contact with the meat but the smoke and the heat basically cooked the meat under a covered pit from that time—from—from 1953 on till the present time today.

00:17:50

AE: So would you—if I can get this straight here, that—1953, when your grandfather built this covered pit with this L-shaped element where the firebox is in the back, is that also when this was removed—the long—the long pit for the whole hogs?

00:18:08

GB: That's—that's correct.

00:18:10

AE: Okay. So he—by removing that, he also, presumably, stopped cooking whole hogs at that time?

00:18:16

R: Well, yeah. I think they did. They went—basically they cooked hams but it—well, of course, let me backtrack a minute. In the—in the [nineteen] ‘40s, meat of any kind was very difficult to get and he had to actually—he actually raised some hogs and slaughtered them during the week, and then he cooked them on the weekend. He also had a contact with Armor Packing Company in Atlanta, where he was able to obtain some meat. During, you know, World War II, everything was rationed—sugar, tires, you name it was rationed—and you couldn’t just, you know—you just couldn’t go buy something because you wanted it. So he had to really do whatever it took to—to obtain product to sell, you know, for his weekend business.

00:19:01

AE: Uh-hmm. And so when he—he created this—this covered pit, have y’all always cooked hams or were you ever cooking shoulders or anything else?

00:19:13

GB: He always was—he preferred hams. Most barbecue restaurants cooked shoulders. A shoulder is—it’s a less—it’s a greasier, less lean—I mean it’s—the ham is a more lean product. The shoulder is a greasier product. The shoulders are—are—are cheaper than hams, so therefore many barbecue restaurants use shoulders. We have always used hams, even though the cost of a ham is—is—is more than a shoulder, but it produces a—a leaner, more healthy product.

00:19:45

AE: And about, if you have an idea, how many hams your grandfather would have been going through in a typical week back in the ‘50s and ‘60s and what y’all do now?

00:19:53

GB: Well roughly, we probably do it pretty similar—well we're actually more now than we did then but it—it probably—in the '50s we're probably, you know, doing a—a 100 hams or so a week and now we probably do upwards of 150, maybe even more during certain holiday seasons.

00:20:19

AE: And can you tell me about the wood that you use and your—your process of—of starting the coals and—and putting the meat on?

00:20:28

GB: Well we use a mixture of oak and hickory. We obtain that from local pulp wood people. It's—it's and it—what we do with it is we don't cook it down in the coals, per se; we put the whole logs in and—and burn them and produce the coals that—that produce the smoke that smokes the meat. What was the other question?

00:20:59

AE: Just your kind of timeline of—of starting the fire and putting on the meat, and who mans the pits in a typical day kind of situation?

00:21:09

GB: Well basically we start out at approximately seven a.m. every morning, and the meat is—is taken—the meat that is done is taken off the pit and the new meat—the fresh meat—is put on the pit and that process, you know, extends usually twenty, twenty-four hours, and the meat cooks all day. And then at night we are able to—to leave a fire that will—that will burn, you know, from the time we leave to the time we come back in—in the morning, so it's basically a—a

twenty-four-hour process to cook the meat, which is kind of unique in the sense that, you know—that some people can cook it sooner but we feel that the—the longer that it's smoked, then, at the lower temperature, that it produces a much better product.

00:21:58

AE: So how did y'all kind of come up in the business? I mean your grandfather [George Milton Caston], I guess, taught you everything you know, but can you remember how he imparted that knowledge about his business and barbecue to you?

00:22:08

GB: Well, basically he was a—he—he liked to—to—to coach you and to—as a mentor and—and he always peeled onions and potatoes. That was one of the duties that was—that we did a few—a couple times a week and he would do that, and it would take about three—it was a three-or four-hour process, and usually we would sit with him and help him do that and that's how he—that's how he—we gained knowledge from him on—on barbecue and—and life history, so to speak.

00:22:44

AE: Do you remember any kind of philosophies of barbecue he may have had or—or rules about working with the meat?

00:22:53

GB: He—of course quality was—was an issue and consistency and we feel like that that's what's been able to bring people back for generations here is the—the quality and the consistency. And he was always—he was always, you know, real cognizant of that and wanted

you to do it—do it right and to—to have quality products to begin with and not to serve anything that was not, you know, up to par.

00:23:23

AE: And I want to ask you, too, before I forget, David was pointing out earlier the old gears that are in the old pit—the old stones. Do you want to talk about that?

00:23:32

DB: Doctor—Doctor Watkins actually tore down the old mill that was located a couple miles from here, and all the rocks that you saw that, you know, made up the pit and the old gears of what actually—that was the structure of the pit, I guess you'd say. That's what made the arch in it like you see, and just basically built out of rocks that came from Watkins Farm about a mile up the road here.

00:24:01

AE: So he built it himself?

00:24:04

DB: Doctor Watkins built the original part of the pit and then, like George explained, in 1952 when my grandfather was able to buy it lock, stock, and barrel, and then he changed the configuration just a little bit and made the pit as it is now and like it's been since 1952. Nothing's changed other than in 1982 we closed down for a week or two and had to do a little remodeling, because over time the heat, you know, cracked the pit and so forth, so we did have to do a little bit of repair work on it then, and it's about time to shut it down for a day or two and do a little more.

00:24:51

AE: And—and also back there in that original part of the pit you mentioned a—a swinging pit that rested on those hooks there.

00:24:59

DB: Yes, ma'am. Actually, in 1945, when my grandfather first came down here, he—he had a—it was like a steel rack box system that would—that he could actually swing out on those hinges that I showed you back there and he could get his meat out and slide it back in, and then he cooked down the coals and put under that and so, basically, he cooked at night where—where we cooked primarily in the daytime. My grandfather pretty much for decades stayed down here. He put on all his meat at night, so he had to stay here and man the fire all night, so that's—that's about the only difference.

00:25:56

AE: And now let's talk about the barbecue sauce and how that got developed and—and where the idea for that came from. Who wants to take that?

00:26:06

DB: I think actually pretty much the sauce recipe is—is about like it was when Doctor Watkins had it; my grandfather did a little bit of modifying, but for the most part I—I believe it's the original sauce of Doctor Watkins.

00:26:25

AE: Can you talk about what's in it a little bit?

00:26:29

DB: Well maybe a little bit. I mean it's—it's basically a—a vinegar-based—vinegary tomato base and—and some other spices.

00:26:42

AE: [*Laughs*] That shall remain nameless. Now George, tell me about your coleslaw and how you—how you developed that recipe to put it on the menu.

00:26:48

GB: Well, we were looking in the—in the [nineteen] '80s, since we had such a limited menu, to have something green on the menu as—as—to make it people wanting—asking for a slaw or salad or something of that nature, so we basically, you know, have—we've got a lot of catfish restaurants in this area that have coleslaw, and we looked at the ones that they had and then, you know, took some notes from that and, of course, what we had eaten over the years and—and then we experimented with—with slaw. And actually, what we came up with was just about 180-degree difference from what we started with. We found, after sampling and—and letting people try it, that they liked the sweeter slaw as opposed to the slaw that we initially were looking at that had a vinegar kind of base to it, so it kind of—it kind of went hand-in-hand with the barbecue, you know. We've got something that's sweet that goes along with the sour kind of, you know, to even it out.

00:27:53

AE: So you tested that, though, with your customers before you committed to a single recipe?

00:27:59

GB: Well, we did with some customers—some—some regulars and then with family members and, you know—and other people. We would just kind of make, you know, make some up and let everybody test it and kind of give an idea of what they liked and—and—and what we liked and what they liked turned out to be, you know, a different—different animal, so you know that's kind of the thing, you know. You can't always go with the recipe that you like because that's maybe not what, you know, what the public likes.

00:28:26

AE: And so I want to ask about the sandwiches, too, and how y'all serve them. Do y'all ever, you know, do request for chops of meat—pieces of meat and styles of meat to go on a sandwich like chopped or sliced or inside meat and outside meat or a combination of that?

00:28:44

GB: Well we've always—we don't do specifics, whether it be chopped—I mean outside or sliced or inside. We mix it altogether and—and the reason for that is, I think it gives a—a more of a consistent flavor, you know. If you were to just have part of the cut, you know, some—you know sold part of it as a—as a [*Phone Rings*]*—*part of it as inside or outside, then you'd be left with the remainder—you'd be left with the remainder of it and—and therefore, somebody would be missing the other side of it, so—. And it would be just too complicated just to have one or the other so—or both, so we just—we've always just mixed it together and that consistency is better when you do that, when you're able to cut the whole ham and mix it all together, and you get a more consistent product, you know, day in and day out. And—and as far as slicing goes, you know, a lot of people eat sliced barbecue, and it is popular with some people but in our—in

our—a sliced piece of meat, in my opinion, is not really cooked long enough. It may be—it's borderline as—as to being done thoroughly. The only way we could cook—do chopped—I mean do sliced meat would be to cook it, then chill it and then slice it, rather than—than—and then heat it back up, other than—because our meat just basically falls apart when we cook it slow and for a long period of time at low temperature, and it's just so tender that it just falls apart, so you cannot slice it.

00:30:21

AE: And I think you might have said this but what is the—the general cooking time for the hams?

00:30:27

GB: Basically it's about twenty-four hours.

00:30:29

AE: And then when you serve the sandwich, do you mix some of the sauce in the meat when you put it on the bun, or is that just left up to the customer with these big bottles of sauce on the table?

00:30:39

GB: We—we have a bottled sauce on the table, both our regular and hot sauce. We put mild regular sauce on it when we—when we make the sandwich. We don't pre-mix it, which—that's—a lot of barbecue restaurants do that. They will—they will cook meat two or three times a week or whatever length of time they need, you know—amount they need and then they will cut

it up and sauce it down and then reheat it. And we don't do that. We cook—all ours, you know, is cooked every day, and we put the sauce on it as we serve it.

00:31:15

AE: And now—I should have probably asked this at the beginning, but what are your specific roles exactly within the restaurant today?

00:31:23

GB: As opposed to David and I—is that what you're—?

00:31:25

AE: You two—you and David?

00:31:27

GB: Well basically, we just pretty much split our time up on the week—weekly basis. I'm here part—part of the week and David is here part of the week and—and so whatever roles that are needed done—to be done the days that we're here, we do those.

00:31:43

AE: And so have y'all both been affiliated with the restaurant since you were young? Has this just been a career that you started as—as little kids?

00:31:51

GB: Yeah, we've been here, you know, since we were—as we were growing up—worked here in the summertime, and I've been here full time since 1981.

00:32:02

DB: I've been here since [nineteen] '91 full time, but, yes, growing up, we—we worked here and I remember my granddaddy had me out here cutting grass and things like that when I was eight or ten years old and toting drinks and loading old bottle Cokes in—in—in one box and then we had to transfer them two or three times to get it out here to sell at the counter.

00:32:32

AE: Now Mrs. [Ellen Caston] Brewer was talking earlier about somebody who started working here at eight [years old] and—and your grandfather started paying them when they were ten. Who was that? Do you remember?

00:32:42

DB: Was that Chris?

00:32:43

GB: Sunshine.

00:32:45

DB: Oh, yeah, no, might have been Sunshine.

00:32:47

GB: What was his last—Lowe, is that right?

00:32:50

DB: I can't remember.

00:32:52

GB: Yeah, we had—had a young—young boy that started working here, I guess when he was about eight years old and—and he—he worked here until he was—I guess until he was basically out of school.

00:33:05

DB: Yeah, and he moved to Macon.

00:33:05

GB: He moved to Macon, right.

00:33:07

DB: Got on a bus every Friday—well, yeah, then—then he lived with his grandmother. It was a colored person and he—his grandmother—he lived with his grandmother, and they lived just right up the road from the place. He used to walk from his house where he was raised and lived here and—and then his grandmother and them moved to Macon was my understanding, and he would get on a bus on Friday afternoon after he got out of school, and he would come here and stay during the—on the weekend and help my granddaddy for, oh, years and years up until he got out of school, and then he pursued a military career and—and he's retired now and we stay in contact with him. And he lives in California, and he's been retired for a good while now as a pilot in the Air Force.

00:34:06

AE: And what is his name?

00:34:08

DB: Sunshine is all we called him. I can't—what was his name?

00:34:13

GB: I think it's Lou, I think.

00:34:15

DB: Honestly—I can't—he stayed—he really stays in contact more with my grandmother [Doris Caston], which is ninety-one [years old], so I mean I have talked to him on occasions.

00:34:26

AE: Uh-hmm. Well and I know that everybody wants y'all to talk about the stew pots. Who wants to take that?

00:34:33

DB: Well George you can go ahead and I will—.

00:34:38

GB: Well the—the stew was—has always been a, you know—a real labor-intense product and, you know, back in the—back—I guess back in the—from the [nineteen] '20s on it was cooked in a black iron pot—a couple pots. They were like twenty-five-gallon pots, and you have to continuously stir the stew with a—with a—.

00:35:02

DB: Poplar stick.

00:35:05

GB: Poplar stick or it would stick. So it was—it was kind of a unique job in the sense when you—when you first started cooking the stew, you had to continuously stir it until it was taken up in order for it not to—to stick and—and ruin a whole pot of stew. So and that was cooked basically over a—we used a fire for many years that heated a—heated a steel runway that—that the— that the stew pots were cooked on, and of course in later years that was changed out to a gas burner-type situation. And then I guess it was in the 1970s that we went to the present system of a—of a stainless steel jacketed steam cooking operation for the stew, which is a—a sixty-gallon kettle. But prior to that, when my grandfather, he cooked stew, he—he cooked stew actually up until—full time up until he was seventy-five or so years old, and that would have been, I guess, into the [nineteen] ‘80s—middle ‘80s or late ‘80s—middle ‘80s when he—he cooked all the stew up until then. And of course he transitioned from—from cooking on a fire all the way to—to a steam—steam-generated kettle situation, so—with an automatic stirrer. So—but that was a very labor intense process and—and it was something that he didn’t entrust anybody to do because it—it required—it was a lot of work. It required, you know, constant stirring and it was very difficult to—to move that stick constantly and—and actually he did it in two—he would cook two at one time—two twenty-five-gallon kettles at one time and have one arm stirring one side and one stirring the other, so and he did that for—for many years.

00:36:55

AE: And who—is any one person in charge of—of making the stew now? Is it a recipe that’s a family recipe, or do y’all share that responsibility?

00:37:07

GB: Well basically—basically now we—we have a person who's been here for roughly twenty years that cooks our stew now and that's all—that's all he does and we—we—we do the spice end of it, and he does the cooking end of it and we just blend those together and—because it is a—a secret family recipe.

00:37:32

AE: Uh-hmm. And—and Mrs. [Ellen Caston] Brewer mentioned before that y'all ship now—y'all ship your barbecue and—and do you ship your stew also?

00:37:41

GB: We ship both. Most—most of our shipping is down now out of the Macon location, due to the proximity due to the major shipping—FedEx and UPS. We have it down there, you know. It's easier to get it to, so we do ship all of our—mainly, well—all over the world. Occasionally we get some—some, you know, out of the country but mostly it's—you know, it's in the continental United States, and we do ship, you know, all over the United States.

00:38:10

AE: And when did y'all start doing that?

00:38:12

GB: We've been shipping probably for twenty years. And it's—it's—it's an aspect of the business that—that's not a real large amount but we—but it's continued to grow over the years and—and I guess the main thing with that is it's just so expensive to ship. I mean the—the shipping is—is a lot more expensive than the product itself. It has to be delivered overnight and

before lunch the next day, so it's a costly proposition to get it shipped but you can and we do ship.

00:38:46

AE: So what year, then, did the Macon location open and then also Chris' restaurant in Athens?

00:38:54

GB: Well the Macon location opened in 1990—May of '90 and the Athens location—I think Mike had—had already listed those times. I think it was 1999, I think.

00:39:11

AE: Okay, well what else—what else do you want to talk about and share about the restaurant here that—that I haven't asked about or hasn't come to mind yet—some other things on your list here that we haven't gotten to?

00:39:25

GB: Well I think—I think we've covered most everything. Of course, you know, the driving force behind the restaurant was my grandfather, D. W. Caston and—and—and I think we had earlier in the tape had mentioned that Michael [Brewer] had—his work ethic and he was very—he was very goal-oriented and—and his goal was to put out a superior product and—and to make sure that everybody, you know, here worked to obtain that goal and was kind of like, you know, two gears working together. He wanted—he wanted everybody to mesh and to do their part and he was—he was very strict about making sure everything was done properly and on time. Yeah, he—and he basically led by example. He—he was not a person to take a backseat and just tell somebody to go do something. He—he at first always showed them how he wanted it done, and

he had a specific way he wanted everything done. And I mean he had—he had a specific way to do everything here and—and a place to put it in and a time to do it and he wanted everybody to adhere to all those principles.

00:40:38

AE: Do y'all have something to say about the question I asked earlier about how Fresh Air has been an inspiration for—you know, for other people in the barbecue business and have come here and see what y'all do and try and do it somewhere else?

00:40:52

GB: Well, we've had—over the years we've had a number of people that have, you know, wanted to emulate Fresh Air and wanted to—us to franchise and we have thought about that, but our cooking process is something that's not easily transferable and it takes a—it probably takes a year of cooking to be able to—to produce the product that we've got. And we do have identical pits in all our locations and—and the people that are cooking there have been, you know, either—either trained here or trained by one of us and—and so it's—it's a unique product and it's very difficult to, you know—to—to maybe put that in—in a franchise-type system. But we have had some people over the years that have—Bob Newton was one of those who had a restaurant in Atlanta that—that used a similar concept to ours. Not exactly, but he passed away, I don't know, five or six years ago, but we have had people that you know did—did want to produce the product that we've got, but nobody, you know, has been able to do that in the past and we hope not in the future without our permission.

00:42:01

AE: And over the years has there been—have there been other barbecue restaurants in the area that—that have been competition or have y'all kind of held onto this one little location and—and general area?

00:42:12

GB: Well I mean barbecue has evolved into a—pretty much a national product now, especially in the Southeast, and there are a number of chain restaurants that are, you know—that are competitions, per se, but they are and they aren't. I mean, you know, they—we have a unique product and if you—if you like our product, you will come back and we—thankfully, we—we've seen that over the years in the generations of people that have continued to come back and—and so we feel like we've got a, you know—we've got a unique, very superior product and it—you know, that—that we will, you know, be viable into the, you know—into the future. And so we—we—we've done real well with that, but we do have competition and you have more and more of it every day and—but we have been able to, you know, be the predominant barbecue restaurant in this region.

00:43:07

AE: So what do you think is the—the future of this location and y'all's involvement in it, being in the family for so long?

00:43:16

GB: Well the—the future here should be bright, we hope. I mean things are—are, you know, going well. We—David and I both have—have children that are—that are—that are growing into—well, we have two in college. David has one, and I have one in college, and I have a

twelve-year-old. And we hope at some point in time, you know, they will be able to continue on with the tradition here.

00:43:42

AE: Do they come over here and—and put in some hours now as it is and start training early?

00:43:47

GB: Well they—they have worked some in the past but—but not really to the degree that—that we did. But you know that—that may change, too, in the future. You know you never really—I never have pushed my children to—to do any one thing and—and, as a matter of fact, I’ve been, you know—I’ve encouraged them to—to go ahead and get a college education and to pursue whatever, you know—whatever they would like to do—whatever they’re comfortable doing. But I think, you know, in time they will migrate back and, you know, that will—that will work itself out.

00:44:29

AE: Yeah. Is there—I mean your—your family has been in this area for so long, is there some pressure for the new generation, meaning your children, to—to stay around here or—or would you like to see them fly the coop?

00:44:41

GB: Well now, you know, naturally, you’d like to see them stay near but—but I’m going to be open-minded about that. I’m not going to pressure my children to do, you know, anything they don’t want to do, so, you know, hopefully they will, you know—will want to do this in the future, you know—one or both of them, but if they—if they don’t, that would be fine also.

00:45:02

AE: And tell me quickly about the sawdust out front. I know Mrs. [Ellen Caston] Brewer was talking about the original place having sawdust indoors, and now y'all have it out on the front porch there.

00:45:13

GB: Well, originally, the sawdust was on the floor inside. Actually, prior to 1952, when the building was remodeled, it was a sawdust floor and—and I think that one thing that prompted that was somewhat—some, you know, health conditions. The health department probably came into being around that time and required that, you know, you have a, you know—a solid surface floor. So what we did—so what my grandfather did to—in order to—to keep that, he basically moved the sawdust outside, which it was already out there also under our—under our shed roof out where the picnic area is out front. And—and so over the years we've just kept the sawdust out there. Of course the sawdust gets moved inside on the—on the concrete floor and, as a matter of fact, when it rains or it's moist outside, that—it will be tracked in and basically cover the floor up. So, you know, sometimes—sometimes, if it's raining, you know, you would think that the—the floor inside was sawdust also but—but, basically, that's kind of a tradition at Fresh Air is to have sawdust, and we will continue to do that, you know, in the—in the future.

00:46:22

AE: Now what [*Laughs*]*—*your brother is asking you to talk about something.

00:46:31

GB: Yeah, we were also voted Georgia's Best Barbecue in 1984, and that was sponsored by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* [newspaper] and the—and WSB-TV, which both are owned by Cox Broadcasting, and they took the top ten or the oldest ten and the best ten barbecue locations in the state and they did interviews with—with each of the—of the businesses and featured them, you know, one night a week during the special and had everybody, you know, vote on their favorite barbecue and send a ballot in on their favorite barbecue restaurant. And we were fortunate enough to—to win that vote and we were voted Georgia's Best Barbecue in a statewide contest in 1984.

00:47:16

AE: Well—that's—congratulations are in order. So what do you think, then, talking about Georgia barbecue, what do you think in—in the region that is the South [are] the different variations of barbecue and where y'all fit into that?

00:47:28

GB: Well barbecue to some—I mean it is a regional food. I mean I think that, you know, barbecue, in general, is—is maybe nationwide but it's the types of barbecue and the—you know, like beef is out west and Texas, and pork is predominant in the South and—and the way you prepare that and the types of sauces you use dictate what region it comes from and—and I think it is a regional-type food, and it's basically what—I think what you grew up eating is what you continue to like. I think that, you know, the people that come from different regions, you know, the type sauces they have are different from what we have here, and some people like it and, you know, some like what they originally—originally were raised in probably better in the sauce arena. But—but it's kind of a—it's kind of a—locally we—you know, we still feel like we've

got a product that's—that—that most people do like, according to what we found in the past—that our sauce is still, you know, universally liked in the South.

00:48:37

AE: So what do you think might be—and I want to ask you of both of you—your favorite thing or the thing you're most proud of being in this—this family barbecue restaurant here?

00:48:51

GB: Well, it's basically a tradition. I mean it's—you know, it's something you—you know, you were—instilled in you as—as a child growing up and—and you want to be—my grandfather did, you know, instill—to have pride in what you did and—and—and to do the best job you could do at anything, no matter what it was and that's what we—that's what we—the—that we do here is we—we try to do the best job possible, and we want to serve the best product possible and therefore, that, you know—we feel like that will continue to make us a success in the future.

00:49:29

AE: Thank you.

00:49:30

DB: My sentiments exactly.

00:49:34

AE: Well I want to ask you two quickly about the—is it Indian Springs—the camp over that way and they would come here for their camp weekend?

00:49:42

GB: Yeah, the Indian Springs Holiness Campground was founded well over 100 years ago, and it's only about a couple miles south of us on [Highway] 42, and it's basically a—it's a—a religious retreat that—that where they—the people come there once a year during the summer and—and that's always—I think it used to be in August, now it's in July—for two weeks and they have, you know, a revival there during that time, and that's also been a busy—very busy time for us during the years because—especially many years ago in the [nineteen] '40s and '50s and '60s, when there were not very many restaurants here; we were about the only thing available to eat. And that's kind of the way it's been as time has evolved, as far as restaurants go. I mean there are more and more restaurants but, you know, in the—in the '20s on through the '40s and '50s—'60s I mean there were not many restaurants available to eat at. And of course they—they did eat here, and they continued to come here from—from generations that have been going to the camp meeting for—for all those years.

00:50:55

AE: Is there anything that y'all want to make sure to add before we wrap up here—anything that we haven't talked about. David, anything that we haven't talked about? [*Laughs*]

00:51:07

DB: Can't think of anything.

00:51:08

AE: Well I sure appreciate y'all sitting here with me. This has been—this has been great. Thank you.

00:51:14

GB: Thank you. We appreciate you listening.

00:51:19

DB: Thank you.

00:51:19

[End Fresh Air-2 Interview]

[End Fresh Air]