

**JULIE GRANT, SHARON GRANT COAKLEY, LINDA PINCKNEY**  
**Bertha's Kitchen – Charleston, South Carolina**

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Interviewer: Sara Wood

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

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**00:00:00**

**Sara Wood:** Okay; I just need to introduce the tape. So this is Sara Wood with the Southern Foodways Alliance and I’m sitting here with Miss Julie Grant, Miss Sharon [Coakley], and Miss Linda Pinckney, and we’re sitting here at Bertha’s Kitchen. And we’re in North Charleston and just to get started I want to have each of you introduce yourself and tell me your name and if you can tell me your birth date for the record?

**00:00:33**

**Julie Grant:** My name is Julie Grant and my birthday is December 21, 1961.

**00:00:39**

**Sharon Grant Coakley:** My name is Sharon Grant Coakley and my birthday is October 20, 1958.

**00:00:47**

**SW:** I’m sorry Sharon; can we—?

**00:00:53**

**SGC:** Sharon Grant Coakley, October 20, 1958.

**00:00:59**

**Linda Pinckney:** Linda Pinckney; my birthday is January 29, 1960.

**00:01:06**

**SW:** And oh sorry [*Interruption*]. And it's three ladies and one microphone so I'll kind of follow you and I might have you repeat yourself. Can you just talk about what it was like growing up with your mother and what kind of person she was, maybe a memory or story about her?

**00:01:41**

**JG:** Okay; I remember her as always been very attentive, always taking care of us. She worked really hard. She worked like a couple of jobs, Manhattan, she worked at a shirt factory for a long time and when she got into cooking she was always very giving, caring, and always willing to help out. And she always did take care of her parents. She was very caring with them until they were—until they passed.

**00:02:17**

**SGC:** I feel the same way. She was a very caring person, very attentive; she made sure we had everything and she also—she worked part of her life for the shirt factory sewing and then she became arthritic and I went away to college, so I missed a little part when Julie and Linda was in high school but she made sure we had the best of everything and she was very caring at that and she took care of her brother. She had a brother that passed, her mother and father, and she was just so attentive, just making sure everybody was happy. And she was a very caring person, my mother.

**00:03:04**

**LP:** My mom was—she was a loving person, very religious, you know very, very religious. The church family and her family, you know she surrounded that and as far as working with her with the business, I mean I think I started with my mom when I was maybe twenty-two years old, we started. And she was always you know tried to make sure—she taught us you know everything that we know now and you know her—you know the years that we had been with her, I mean every day that I walk into this kitchen, you know my heart because you know she's the one that had—got us to where we are now, you know the hard work. She was—you know was a hard worker and determination you know that got us to where we are now.

**00:04:00**

**SW:** Did the three of you intend to go into you know—your brother [Bobby Grant] told me about how the business started—was it your intentions and this is an individual question for all of you; was it your intention to get involved in the business with her or did it just happen like that?

**00:04:17**

**SGC:** I can answer that; it just happened like that because when I came home from college with a BS degree I couldn't find a job and it was a way to make money of course and—and in the process of making money we learned 'cause she was very dedicated. She wanted us to make sure we did it right and she was very strict about certain things had to be a certain way. She wanted us to put our heart into it; that's another thing about it. Everything has got to be done with your heart as if you're going to eat it.

00:05:00

She was just awesome. It just happened. We started cooking a little bit and people started tasting it and before you know it, we just got this building and our business just blossomed and the taste of the food is really what set it off, the way she taught us how to do it.

00:05:21

**SW:** And Sharon from what I understand when Bobby first built the kitchen in Simmons Motel you worked with her there?

00:05:28

**SGC:** Well when I came home from college, like I said jobs was kind of hard to find. I have a BS degree in Business Administration and everybody would say you know, “You’re overqualified for the position.” So me and mother started cooking and believe it or not people started coming and the food tastes basically just made people tell other people. And then before you know it we was—we was having more customers than we had food. *[Laughs]* So what we had to do, lock up; we had to close up and then come back and work later at night to open back up the next day.

00:06:08

We started with a real low amount of food, maybe one or two pots of this and one or two pots of that and it wasn’t enough. And then we found—me and my sister done found this building which gave us a bigger capacity where we can cook more and mother just stick(ed) in there and tell us we have to do it right, do it right, and this is where we are today; yeah.

00:06:32

**SW:** And I know you told me this yesterday Sharon but could you—for the tape could you tell me where you went to college?

**00:06:36**

**SGC:** I went to St. Augustine in Raleigh, North Carolina. I lived in Raleigh and I went there in '75 [1975] and I came back and worked a year in '76 [1976] and then I finished in '80 [1980]. I graduated in '80—1980.

**00:06:55**

**SW:** And I wanted to ask the two of you too; I mean did—was it your intention to be a part of the restaurant from the start or did it just—?

**00:07:04**

**LP:** It just happened because I got—I was married and was—you know I had worked with my mom and I got married and then my husband was in the Navy so we moved away to Jacksonville [Florida] for two years and I came back home and I fit right back in with the restaurant. You know I came right back in with my mom and you know so it's something that I loved doing. You know I love cooking, you know and so you know that is something that I, you know wanted to do, uh-hm.

**00:07:37**

**SW:** Jacksonville, Florida is that where—?

**00:07:38**

**Linda:** Yeah, Jacksonville, Florida, uh-hm.

**00:07:41**

**SW:** And how about you Julie?

**00:07:42**

**JG:** Well, I really wanted to be a cake decorator. I went to two years of commercial cooking and management and we did a lot of wedding cakes and things like that. I really wanted to do cakes. But after I got out of school and I got into—and I went to work at Montgomery and Wards, a department store, after that I went to Robertson’s Cafeteria. That’s when the food thing kind of kicked in. After that my brother [Bobby Grant] had a club in Mount Pleasant that he opened and me and him ran in Mount Pleasant and we started serving food like how Sharon and my mom was selling but we were just across the bridge. So after he closed that—and that’s when I came in; I was the last one to come in but that’s when I came in and from there on, you know she had already taught us so I was doing it over there anyway so that just kicked in and we just—I just came right in and we just jumped in and she just taught us what we know.

**00:08:43**

**SW:** Where was the club at? What was the name of it?

**00:08:44**

**JG:** It used to be called Airport 80; it was on [Highway] 17 North and Mount Pleasant but after he got it he named it the Crystal Lounge, so we were you know an all-day lounge/club, happy hour. We did drinks or whatever and served a little food for lunch, afternoon for dinner.

Sometimes when people wanted little things at night we had like chicken wings, fries, and things like that. But that—after that I really got into the food thing, that’s when I came over and we’ve been here ever since.

**00:09:17**

**SW:** Was your mother just completely floored and loving it that the three of you ended up in business with her? I mean what—how did she feel about that? What—I mean did she ever tell you any—?

**00:09:30**

**JG:** I think she was very happy; it’s a family thing you know and we’re together—her girls. She always said, “My girls,” you know and she was the type you know—she always tried to make sure we did things right. Okay. So if you didn’t you’re going to go back and you’re going to do it you know the right way and then she was always like really giving, like every year we rented the church the restaurant so they can have a chicken dinner to raise money for special projects at the church and things, but she was just always—oh man.

**00:10:10**

**SGC:** She—if we needed to cook for a re-pass, you know if someone needed a dish made, you know there was nothing else said, we’d just do it and she was very dedicated to the Methodist Church whereas like she said she—every year we give one day in September for the church to come in and use our restaurant to earn money for special projects and we’re going to keep that tradition going as long as we live. She started it. She is a United Methodist woman and she’s very godly so we had to be very careful with what we say. [*Laughs*] But she was very godly and

her heart was so giving that sometimes we wanted—but I guess she got back you know but she—she was very happy to have her girls with her. She'd always say, "My girls; my girls," not that she didn't have boys, but she liked her girls being in here with her. And we had our little times but we stuck in there. Everything had to have been done right, believe me.

**00:11:17**

**LP:** Yes, we still have her chair because you know when we come in—we come in like eight o'clock in the morning and my mom was always here you know. We'd make—she had us rolling in you know doing what we're supposed to do and she would sit in her chair and we still have her chair today and she would sit all day long and watch us. You know she would watch; she would sit in the chair and watch us and you know the customers enjoyed seeing her in here too. You know when they'd see her, you know every—she was a loving person. Everybody loved her. "Hi, Miss Bertha; how you doing today?" You know she would talk to the customers and stuff. But she—in the meantime she's watching over us to make sure that we're doing what—continually doing what she wants us to do you know. She was just you know—.

**00:11:59**

On her birthday you know 'cause she was always giving—giving people; you know what I'm saying. She never wanted nothing. I mean my mom would work. She—we—we ran the business, but she—we would always say well, why don't you do something for yourself mom or why don't you, you know do something for yourself, so on her—what was it, her seventieth birthday, what—we had a seventieth birthday party and we bought her a Cadillac, a green Cadillac and she was so happy. That's the happiest we—you know she was so happy that you know that we did that for her because she would never spend any money on her. As long as we were fine you know that's all that mattered to her, as long as her kids was fine—it didn't matter

to her you know about anything else. You know she never wanted to spend anything on her—on herself. “Why don’t you go do this or why don’t you go do this?” No. She would be in here all day. She would sit in here all day and all night with us, you know just sitting watching you know. She was so happy. She was happy doing that—being around us you know every day and—.

**00:13:10**

**SW:** I just wanted to ask what—what do you think it was about your mother; what did she love so much about feeding people? Why was that—was that—why was that so important to her?

**00:13:22**

**SGC:** Well I think well she just loved to see people eat. You know when they’d taste the food it’s a look that comes up on their face that says, “Oh, Miss Bertha this is so good.” And she had a certain—well first of all it’s got to be fresh. No cutting no corners, no skip, no hops; fresh from the start and you got to cook it with love and the expression that comes over people’s faces when they taste or get a meal it’s overwhelming and I think it was overwhelming to her heart the thought of giving and that’s what made her happy. That’s really what made her happy, yeah.

**00:14:08**

**JG:** That sums it up right there. [*Laughs*]

**00:14:14**

**SGC:** The joy of feeding people made her heart, made her happy, the joy of feeding people made her happy; yeah, sure it did. And before she died, she was so happy, around seventy—of

course she was a happy person all the time, all her life. I could remember she was just so amazingly happy when she had her seventieth birthday and we gave her the surprise party and she never stopped talking about it.

**00:14:41**

**LP:** She never did.

**00:14:41**

**SGC:** Never stopped—

**00:14:44**

How you girls could do that and it was a surprise. We liked to have killed her ‘cause we thought she was going to have a heart attack, but—

**00:14:50**

**LP:** I don’t know how we pulled that off without her knowing.

**00:14:52**

**SGC:** —after that it was nothing in the world could change it. It was like she was floating on a cloud and nothing made her hurt and nothing made her sad and she was just so happy until a few months later when she had—her health started failing and even when she was not—in the hospital not feeling well she was still happy. And she wanted—she told us. This came out of her mouth; she told us. She said, “You girls have made me—this is the happiest day of my life,”

when she had her birthday party and she was so surprised. All her friends and people from out of town and the Cadillac; she said, You guys tried to kill me.” **[Laughs]**

**00:15:36**

**JG:** We had about like 200 - 250 people were there. And another thing, everybody that knew her—know as Miss Bertha but everybody called her mom. She had so many kids—even the ones she didn't even bore. She had so many kids all over; everybody called her mom and they just enjoyed seeing her. And they'd come in and they'd say—some people would just come in from out of state but they just had to see Miss Bertha. So when she sat in that chair sometimes she'd get up and she'd come over her and she'd talk and relate with them, she loved that. She loved for other people to come in and when she'd talk to them and she was telling them about where—where they're coming from and she would tell them, “Boy I'm so happy that you came. Did you enjoy the food? Can I get you anything else?” She was just like that.

**00:16:23**

**SW:** Do you ladies remember when you were growing up, I read this somewhere that—that she you know there were three girls, three boys but that sometimes people from down the street would come over and eat—did you have a big dinner table? I mean—

**00:16:37**

**LG:** She fed the neighborhood. Anybody that was hungry. You know a lot of people—we were close around here because you know it's a close-knit neighborhood but whenever a pot was brewing and if somebody came there and said they were hungry she would feed them. It didn't

matter you know who they were, they—she would feed them. She—I guess she just loved feeding the hungry and satisfying their stomach. *[Laughs]* She loved it.

**00:16:59**

**SW:** Is that something that you guys carry with you, the—I mean that love that she had for helping others? I mean that's something that you—that keeps going?

**00:17:10**

**JG:** Definitely.

**00:17:10**

**SGC:** Definitely; believe it or not during our lunch rush several times a day we have people outside who don't have a meal begging for quarters and nickels, asking other customers to pay for their food and we don't allow that around here. Before we let them scrounge and beg for food we'll bring them in and feed them and that's what mother did. If she found it was somebody outside that was hungry she would bring them in here and feed them and we still do that today—still do that today.

**00:17:47**

**SW:** Does that happen very often?

**00:17:50**

**SGC:** Oh yes, it's a lot of people who don't know where their next meal is coming from. We—I believe we do it if not once a day sometimes twice a day. It's always somebody out the door that

don't have a meal and are really hungry. You know we don't give out cash for food but we'll definitely feed them.

**00:18:13**

**SW:** I wanted to ask you before I forget 'cause you guys talked about this a little bit but your mother sitting in the chair and everybody had their job. I'm wondering if you could give me some specific examples or a couple of—a time where you were doing something and she said—like specific things that had to be done a certain way and what they were and what she said to you when she told—when she corrected you about it if you have any—?

**00:18:39**

**LP:** Well with my mom everything is on a time schedule, like we know at a certain time, at ten o'clock that—that cornbread has to be in that oven by eleven o'clock [*Laughs*] so it—it will be ready by eleven. So if we're doing something else and we don't have that cornbread in the oven she'd say, "Linda; it's time for the cornbread to go in. [*Laughs*] It's ten o'clock; it's time for the cornbread to go in," 'cause everything is on you know a time schedule so it will be ready—fresh and ready. She wanted everything to come out at eleven o'clock. The chicken is fresh off the fryer. The cornbread is fresh out of the oven. Everything is on a—you know a time schedule so we—a certain time we have to drop certain things in order for it to be ready, uh-hm.

**00:19:21**

**SGC:** She's real strict about—guilty—what time you come in? [*Laughs*] You got to be here in a certain amount of time. I mean I'm always late; I'm the late Sharon because I'm the late Sharon at night. Well we got a system going; we prepare for the next morning and Sharon helps prepare

for the—at night to get them ready for in the morning 'cause Sharon can't get out of bed. I'm always the late Sharon. You got to be in on time. She wants us here at eight o'clock. Sharon is never here at eight. But Linda and Julie are the younger ones, okay and Sharon is the older one so me and mother was doing this eight o'clock thing for a long time. And I'm kind of worn out, so I have to step down a little bit and let Linda and Julie come in and I come in at ten and close. And we got a real good system going that way. That way I get Linda and Julie ready for in the morning and they can come and do what they got to do and then at night I try to get them ready. So they're not too happy about it but I'm the oldest girl and I'm not a morning person.

**00:20:31**

**LP:** No, you're not.

**00:20:36**

**SGC:** But it works out really good believe it or not. Me getting them straight at night when they come in the morning and putting the bread pudding and the macaroni and this and that and that at eleven o'clock we try to have that food nice and hot just like mother always do. That way when that door opens and the people walk in they can get hot fresh food. I mean they—we don't cut any corners. Mother never allowed it; we're not going to allow it and we're not going to let our kids do it. We're going to try to keep it real just like she is and—and she was real big about if it's too expensive. A lot of people can't afford meals as it is so we got to run a special to help them out. And when you're pinching your pennies and you need a meal you need a discount meal and that's how we get the special going. With the special you're going to have a full stomach and it don't kill your pocket. And believe it or not she was very good on that making sure your price is right.

**00:21:35**

**SW:** And there's a special—is it four dollars?

**00:21:40**

**SGC:** Four dollars—and believe it or not, lima beans and rice is a very filling meal. It'll last you all day. When you get lima beans and rice and the chicken comes with it—a leg and thigh and cornbread that's a meal to last a person all day, who can't really afford it. And if you keep it simple and keep it fresh I think that really works for us. It really works for us.

**00:22:04**

**SW:** I want to ask you ladies a little bit about the menu but before I forget, Julie is there anything that your mother was very specific about with you that you remember, very particular that she would correct you?

**00:22:15**

**JG:** Well she was always on me to make sure I have that meat in that pot by nine o'clock. Since we clean our meat every day, wash it and clean it and we put the meat into the beans pot, like Linda was saying everything is a time schedule; nine o'clock that red rice is going to be already in the pot, the meat is going to be in the pot, ten o'clock we're going to be getting that cornbread in the oven. But meanwhile everything else is cooking and we're just rotating. It just—you know we're doing whatever it takes to get that ready and be having it hot and fresh by eleven o'clock.

**00:22:45**

**SW:** And could you ladies just talk a little bit about the menu? What do you serve here, the same things that your mother served when she started?

**00:22:53**

**LP:** Uh-hm, yes it’s many of the same things that—we haven’t changed the menu. We’ve added a few things to the menu because we didn’t—never had oxtail before. We never tasted oxtail. My mama never cooked oxtail. But a lot of customers were asking about oxtail, so we tried it and it’s going over pretty well, the oxtail. I think that’s about the only thing that we really added to the menu.

**00:23:22**

**JG:** Barbecued pig feet is real good and they asked a lot about that. And then years ago we started with the turkey rice and the brown rice, I mean turkey rice and chicken rice. There’s two different flavors of rice that we had two different days but the way we did it—can’t give away the secret—it was so good. She taught us a real good—good thing with that and how to make that rice, uh-hm.

**00:23:50**

**LP:** And she liked that you take over the bacon because Julie loves to bake so certain days she will have her strawberry cake or her lemon cake you know ‘cause she loved to bake.

**00:24:01**

**JG:** Now—I still bake now; I’ve been doing it for what—wow, almost twenty years, yeah.

00:24:08

**SW:** I ate a piece of vanilla and strawberry cake.

00:24:12

**JG:** Oh you did?

00:24:12

**SW:** Yeah, is—do you—do you have just time for a couple more questions? Can you guys hang in there? Okay; can you talk about—I know this is hard to do so maybe it's not possible but can you talk about the one thing that your mother cooked that you just loved so much like is—was there just that one thing?

00:24:30

**JG:** Here or at home? Okay, my favorite was the iced potato soup. She made it with big chunks of potatoes and neck bone over rice. It was so good. That was my favorite.

00:24:43

**LP:** My favorite was the shrimp and—shrimp and gravy, even when we were pregnant, each one of us was pregnant that was our special dish. *[Laughs]*

00:24:53

**SW:** You all ate the shrimp and gravy?

00:24:54

**LP:** Yeah, we loved the shrimp and gravy, yeah, the shrimp and gravy was you know—it seems like when you’re pregnant we all were craving the shrimp and grits and egg and rice.

**00:25:05**

**JG:** Whatever we were craving she was always there to whip it up and she made it taste so good. Oh it was good. It was good.

**00:25:13**

**LP:** My mom every Thanksgiving we would you know the family we would all eat here on Thanksgiving.

**00:25:18**

**SW:** At the restaurant.

**00:25:19**

**LP:** At the restaurant, we all—yeah. We all would gather here at the restaurant and my mom made the best hen in the world. I mean you know I’m doing it now but you can never get that taste like that mom taste. I’m close now [*Laughs*]; I’m close but not—once you—you can’t that taste back again you know. She had the best hen in the world.

**00:25:43**

**JG:** I got to say it was good; it’s close to it. I would say you got it and the sweet potato pie with the scripts on them. She does the pie also; Linda does. It’s real good.

**00:25:56**

**SGC:** And she taught me the bread pudding. Our bread pudding is the number one seller here. Not too many people can make bread pudding. A lot of them got glazed bread pudding but made with certain ingredients give you a different taste. Our bread pudding sells out every day—every day we sell out of bread pudding. And she taught me how to do that real well.

**00:26:22**

**SW:** Okay; because she taught you ladies how to—how to cook basically is it hard? I mean you mentioned the hen. But is—are there other things where you make today and since she passed has it changed at all like have you changed it and put you own or do you keep it the same?

**00:26:40**

**LP:** We keep it the same. Just how she taught us.

**00:26:44**

**SGC:** How she taught us—fresh, cook it with love and the same ingredients, the same way. I don't think we'll ever change the way our food tastes. We might add a few other dishes, but a lot of things we can't take away 'cause our customers expect them every day. You know they know you're going to have this every day; we got to have it. On certain days we got to have certain things. It's hard to take away or add anything to our menu.

**00:27:15**

**SW:** How—how have things changed for you ladies since your mother passed away and you've taken the reins?

00:27:22

**LP:** How things changed? Well it hasn't really changed, but you know we're getting a little older now you know and it's getting a little harder now you know to go like how we used to go. But you know—you know I think about what my mom told us you know before she passed, you know she—she called us in the room and she told us, she said, “You know y'all girls y'all need to stick together because you're going to need one another.” That was her last words to us you know. And it's hard you know being you know without her 'cause we're used to her being in here with us every day you know so that's what keeps me going you know her last words that she said to us to stick together. Now you know it's hard; we're raised up in the house together and we're here twelve, thirteen hours a day, three sisters. We get in our arguments, but it all boils down to it that you know we love each other. We might get in arguments but we always think about what she said, you know her last words that she said to us you know, “Stick together 'cause you're going to need one another.” And we do need each other you know to run a business. It takes a lot of hard work and dedication and that's what she taught us, you know. That's what she taught us you know. And we try you know—it's hard; you know we—we're continuing on with it and you know we—we have our kids you know like my daughter, she—she works with us now. Sharon's daughter, she comes in and helps out. Julie's daughter, they come out and help us, so you know when they see their moms a little weary you know they'll come in and help us out for a couple hours and still continue you know with their life too.

00:29:11

You know and that's—you know all that revolves around to my mom because she was the—the foundation; you know and my daughter told me the other day she said you know, she said, “I miss my granny because she held everything together. Whenever there was a problem in

the family you go—I'd go to granny and she makes it feel so much better.” You know she just was the—the foundation you know. And when you don't have that anymore you try to—you try to find that you know. You try to find the foundation of the family with somebody that you can talk to. You know a mom—you know anything; you know if you're having a bad day or you know I could call her and I could talk to her about anything and she'd make you feel so much better, so much better you know.

**00:30:03**

**JG:** I think the same thing pertaining to—okay; she could say the same thing pertaining to her sisters and brothers. She was like a—a glue that kept everything together with them too because she had a brother that was sick. Her mother was sick. Her father was sick. And then her husband, my father was sick also and she took care of all of them. She helped us keep the bond in the kitchen going. I mean they weren't like just sick for a little while. This was like a period of time so she was juggling and she was doing so many things, but still keeping us together. You know the kids, the sister, you know her brothers, everybody. And also the grandkids; all the kids miss her. They talk about her all the time. They got her pictures everywhere. I mean she's still here. You can kind of feel the—I can feel her at times. You know it's kind of hard to explain but you can actually kind of feel her presence or even when you're getting ready to do something and you have to think, “Oh, what would she think you know? I'm going to think about that before I do that you know.” That's how it is. I don't think we'll ever lose what she taught us and what she instilled us; it's always going to be there and we hope to pass it onto our kids, you know. But I miss her. Everybody misses her.

**00:31:29**

**SGC:** My thing was—and this might sound funny to my sisters, but you remember the time she just sat there and said, “You girls better get together ‘cause I’m not going to always be here?”

**[Laughs]** She would say that all the time, “Get it together. I’m not going to always be here.” And little did we know that her time was short then when she was trying to tell us, “You girls get it together ‘cause I’m not going to be here.” And it went in one ear and came out the other. I had no idea; I was the last time to feel that she was going to leave us and I was the last one to think that she was still gone—let her go but she was real sick when we did let her go and she didn’t want to be—she didn’t want us to hurt. She—she just didn’t want us to hurt so I guess she didn’t let us know about all her health problems. She hid it from us. And when she really got sick and she called us together and said, “You girls stick together,” that’s when we realized that we was losing our mom. Someone who has been there for us like forever, I mean even today like Julie say, I still feel her presence and I have to think, “What will mom think?” But she has put something into our heart that will never leave and she has put such an impression on the neighborhood and people that it’s going to always be there. It’s been six years now and it seems like it was just yesterday when she left. But she did not—she didn’t want us to worry. And I think that she’s in a better place and she—she’s happy with what we’re doing now, the fact that we’re sticking together and the kids are coming and helping us and that our business is prospering ‘cause we stick together.

**00:33:23**

**SW:** I just wanted to ask you this and I mentioned this earlier, but being women and running a restaurant is it—is it rare around here to be women and have a restaurant or is this something—?

**00:33:33**

**JG:** It's not rare; it's very few men that own restaurants. And you know like in the city and peninsula you have a lot of big restaurants and they have a lot of chefs and all that but we don't have a lot of that. This is just a lot of—the restaurants that are in the north here are mainly females and they won't let men in their kitchens. So you know men have asked us, "Y'all need to hire some men back there." We said, "No, no, no; we don't want any men in the kitchen."

**[Laughs]**

**00:34:01**

**SGC:** Dedicated strong women; got to be dedicated, strong—it takes a strong woman to get up every day and come in here and work twelve, thirteen hours for thirty-six years. You got to be dedicated, strong women and you know another inspiration too is our kids. You know we're trying to get—show them that we can do this thing. You just can't just give up. You got to keep pushing and pushing and believe women are pushers. They're the backbone. They're not going—they're not going to just give up like that. They got to keep driving and that's really what makes it work.

**00:34:39**

**SW:** You guys still use her pots? Is that true?

**00:34:49**

**JG:** Yes; they started when y'all first started.

**00:34:53**

**LP:** Yes; we did.

00:34:54

**JG:** We sure do, yeah.

00:34:57

**SGC:** A lot of reminders—things that mother would use—that never left the kitchen, her pots—she had certain things for certain things. This pot is for this and this pot is for that ‘cause it’s thicker and it’ll cook better, ‘cause it will fry in this better, but we have all our pots from—believe it or not back in ’81 [1981] when we started and we added a few pots but we never throw away the old pots. [*Laughs*]

00:35:26

**SW:** Before I forget I just wanted to ask you about your kids and how many kids each of you have and you each mentioned a daughter so I wondered if you would tell me their names if you wanted—.

00:35:37

**LP:** Okay, I have three daughters, Cabira, Crystal, and Alicia.

00:35:45

**SW:** And do all three of them help out?

00:35:47

**LP:** Yes; well Crystal is my oldest daughter. She helped out but she moved to Charlotte and Cabira is my second oldest daughter and she works with us now, today, and she's a morning person and she does the stock. She tries to keep up with the bills and make sure the bills are paid and stuff like that. So you know because that was—she made—my mom made sure—. I took care of the bills. That was my job, you know to make sure the bills were taken care of and the finance and make sure the stock was up and everything and Bira has been with us maybe what three years or four years and I'm—I'm pushing that onto her, you know I'm teaching her how to do that you know.

**00:36:28**

**SW:** How about you Sharon?

**00:36:30**

**SGC:** And I got—I have three girls, April and Brittany and Shaniqua. April worked with us a little while and she went to college and graduated and then went on but she still comes in and helps. Brittany worked with us for a period of time. And she just wanted to try something a little new, but she also comes in and helps, too. And Shaniqua, they've all come in and helped when they feel like their mom needs a hand. But you try not—to let them feel their own things, too **[Laughs]** so they're in and out, in and out and that makes us feel good. And what we're trying to do is teach them what mother taught us. And I think it's working.

**00:37:13**

**SW:** Linda was talking about how she worked on the business side. Is there something—did you have a specific job that you did that you took care of or something you do for the restaurant that's specifically a thing that Sharon does?

**00:37:25**

**SGC:** Well like I say, the—the preparing the night before was basically my job, to make sure that those beans are on, the beef is done, the prep is up, the meat is out, the business is clean, the janitorial work is done, and everything is out for the next day. That way when—yeah; the closure lady so that when they get here in the morning they're getting—the macaroni made, so they'll stick the macaroni in and put the bread pudding on and put the beans on and you know I'm the—I'm the night before girl. *[Laughs]*

**00:38:04**

**SW:** And Julie, so could you start by telling me your—your children's names and then—?

**00:38:09**

**JG:** Okay, I have two girls and one boy now. My oldest is Kayla and my second oldest is Kendra and then I have my nephew, which my mom raised and after she passed he came to live with me, so I have a boy also and his name is Quinton, Jr.

**00:38:28**

**SW:** And how old is he?

**00:38:29**

**Julie:** He’s twenty-two, Kendra is twenty-two, and Kayla is twenty-three.

**00:38:34**

**SW:** And Julie what was your role—what—do you have a specific role here?

**00:38:38**

**JG:** I’m the morning person. I get here first and I’m the one that is putting everything you know start getting everything together and putting everything in the oven. I kind of keep it rolling because when we don’t have something in the morning my brain is steadily ticking to what I need to get in here before we start serving. So I you know get a little head start for Bira to let her know you know what we have or what we need and I’m the server. I kind of took over the line when my mom started—when she stopped, so I have been a server for a while.

**00:39:17**

**SW:** I’m wondering if there’s—if there’s anything else that I didn’t ask the three of you that you think is really important or central to this recording and to this story of your mother and the story of how you guys became involved in the restaurant and your family—anything that you think?

**00:39:34**

**SGC:** I was astonished; just like Julie said, mother was everybody’s mother and I was astonished when she died how many kids she had. I mean how many people loved her, how many people tasted her food, how many people has been in this restaurant. How many people—who loved our mom like we loved her, and it was overwhelming to know that number and it’s sad that you only find that out when someone dies. And my mom had more kids than I could

imagine. More people loved her than I could imagine. Just like we do, and I think someone must have knew that because my mom has a best friend. Her name is Miss Mary [Glover] and she come like and took us on after mother died. So it's like we got another mother here. We love her, too but a lot of things she says kind of makes us think that it's coming out of mother's mouth. And it's—it's really strange to say that we picked up another mom but it's—they're two similar people. So I miss my mom it's true, but we got another loving mom here, too and it makes us feel good. It makes the girls feel good to know that someone loves us just like our mom and the fact that love in this world can just go so far. It's so many people that loved her and like we did.

**00:41:18**

**JG:** I was amazed at the funeral; there was over 3,000 people I think were there. We shut down four counties.

**00:41:25**

**SW:** Can you say that again? I'm sorry. I interrupted you.

**00:41:28**

**JG:** I was just amazed at the funeral. We couldn't have it at our church because it was too small. So we went up on Reynolds Avenue at Saint Matthews. They can hold at least 3,000 to 4,000 people and I know it was a good 3,000 people there and when we left from the church to go to her home to bury her with her mom and her dad we went through at least three to four counties and they shut it down all the way. The line was like forever long. You could see cars forever. So when we left from here and we went like straight up [state highway] 52 and we went through all

those counties, everything was shut down, the whole—all the side streets. Nobody could pass us because the procession was just that big.

**00:42:18**

**SW:** Wow; I don’t think—I don’t think some presidents—what’s that?

**00:42:24**

**LP:** The Mayor, Keith Summey, he spoke at here funeral you know which was you know—

**00:42:30**

**LG:** He dedicated a day.

**00:42:31**

**SW:** What day?

**00:42:32**

**LG:** It’s her—the day she passed, they dedicated that day to her, so every year on that day we have a little shrine and we do a little celebration of her passing.

**00:42:44**

**SW:** And what day is it, what day—?

**00:42:47**

**SGC:** April 24.

00:42:50

**LG:** Twenty-third.

00:42:52

**SGC:** April 23<sup>rd</sup>.

00:42:53

**SGC:** April 23<sup>rd</sup> we have a day for Bertha’s. We always—he dedicated that day and we make sure April 23<sup>rd</sup> that we have a candle lit and it’s sort of like a celebration ‘cause mother is still here. We still can feel her. We still can feel her. I still can feel my mom here—her presence and I’m sure she don’t want us to be sad. She wants us to be happy. But she has instilled so much in everybody. I mean she just went all out. She did.

00:43:23

**SW:** Do you keep the restaurant open that day or—?

00:43:30

**JG:** The first time, the first year we opened half a day and then we all went up to the gravesite. But then after that we’ve been opening every—every day since then.

00:43:42

**LP:** The second year is when we—we donated a bowl of beans, we—you know free—yeah—

00:43:50

Everybody got a free bowl of lima beans ‘cause that was her specialty you know lima beans so on that day we give out you know bowls of lima beans to the customers; uh-hm.

**00:44:00**

**LP:** Yeah, in appreciation, uh-hm.

**00:44:02**

**SW:** What is the name of the town that she’s buried in? I know—I know your brother mentioned it but I just want to make sure.

**00:44:07**

**JG:** It’s Saint Stevens—well we go through Saint Stevens; that’s Bonneau.

**00:44:18**

**SW:** Linda is there anything you wanted to add that I—that I didn’t ask?

**00:44:26**

**SGC:** I think we pretty much covered it—pretty much covered it.

**00:44:33**

**JG:** We don’t ever want to leave out our brothers ‘cause we love them dearly. You talked with Bobby [Grant].

**00:44:39**

**SW:** What are the other two brothers’ names?

**00:44:41**

**JG:** His name is David, Junior, and Quinton, uh-hm, Quinton, Senior, uh-hm. They helped us—helped my brother along when we were first making the move you know doing things and painting and things like that. They were there to help us along with that, uh-hm, but they kind of—but they're still here in and out you know, come over and get something to eat, whatever. Whatever we ask them to do they will do it, yeah.

**00:45:08**

**LP:** Bobby would always like when we go—we go on vacation in July and when we come back he will always try to do something to beautify the place for us. Well this—this year he didn't do anything [*Laughs*] but he was busy on his job but you know he will try to freshly paint it or you know like he will add, I think it was last year he added on a different—another washroom on for us you know for to do the dishes and stuff. And you know every year he would do something you know to help us out—the sisters—.

**00:45:41**

**SGC:** I think he is a real good, very good carpenter 'cause if you could think he moved us from there over to—open up wider to upstairs to spread out, yeah. He did it; he did it.

**00:45:57**

**JG:** He did it all; he did it all.

**00:45:58**

**SGC:** That’s right; and we was astonished when he did it because this building has been here a long time. I think since I remember—a little girl, remember; this used to be an apartment building and now we’re a full-scale restaurant. I just couldn’t believe what he has done. He’s a miracle worker.

**00:46:18**

**JG:** And we also want to always thank Mr. Henry Smith. He was the man from downtown and he owned a lot of property. This was one of his properties. And he came to her and he told her, “I want you to have this building,” when she was down here. “I want you to move up; I want you to have this building.” So he sold it to her. And that’s how we got this building.

**00:46:44**

**SW:** You know can you tell me a little bit more about him? I mean did—did he live in the neighborhood or—?

**00:46:48**

**JG:** He was actually—he owned a liquor store downtown, a couple of other businesses, but he was downtown but my mom was raised from the city so I think that’s how she knew him from—from the city. But he would always come by and talk to her all the time and they’d just sit and talk and he said, “I want you to have this building.” And he was pressuring her so much at first she didn’t want to do it. But he was getting older and his health was failing and he was determined for her to have that building, so he wasn’t going to take no for an answer so she—that’s how we bought the building. That’s how we got this building from Mr. Henry Smith. He was a good man. He was a real nice man.

00:47:36

**SW:** I just want to make sure I know. Miss Mary what's her last name?

00:47:39

**SGC:** Miss Mary Glover, she's my mom's best friend. They'd go to church together. They'd go to United Methodist camp together, the retreat. They used to talk on the phone together for hours. She would tell Miss Mary our problems. **[Laughs]** And she'd tell Miss Mary when she's tired, she'd tell Miss Mary when she's tired and they'd sit and talk every night on the phone you know. She said, "I'll call you back. I'm talking to Miss Mary." Well Miss Mary was mother's best friend. And I don't know what happened but when mother died it's like Miss Mary cling(ed) to us and—

00:48:15

**LP:** Yeah; because Miss Mary—she was the one—she used to come with my mom like on Wednesdays, we would have to do maybe sixteen bunches of greens and my mom, she—she believed that you have to go each—cleaning these greens and that was hers and Miss Mary's job. They would come in on Wednesday and sit to the—sit and talk and that was—that was their job. My mom passed and Miss Mary continued to come in and she's—every Wednesday she's here and makes sure—like her and my mom used to do—clean the greens, do the cornbread, you know just—you know she helps us out with you know since my mom passed. They were real—that was her best friend. It was her best friend.

00:48:56

**SW:** So does she—does Miss Mary live around here, close by?

00:49:00

**LP:** Yes; she lives close by so you know she's here every Wednesday and Thursday. And Thursday, she comes in two days a week. 'Cause Miss Mary is about maybe seventy-five or seventy-six?

00:49:12

**SGC:** Yeah, she's seventy-six. Her and mother was the same age I think. And Miss—now it's been six years and Miss Mary should be about seventy-six, but she's very dedicated and on Wednesday she's here to clean those greens and to show you strict my mother was it's leaf-by-leaf, leaf-by-leaf. It's got to be squeaky clean. **[Laughs]** So she does that on the Wednesday and Thursday, Miss Mary. And she also watches us and she takes—and I think she—she just watches us—.

00:49:43

**JG:** Just like she used to do all the time.

00:49:44

**SGC:** Yeah, just like mother used to do. She watches us. **[Laughs]**

00:49:47

**SW:** Does she ever correct you ladies?

00:49:48

**Female(s):** Yes. [*In Unison*] [*Laughs*]

00:49:52

**Female:** Yes, she does.

00:49:54

**SGC:** She tells you just how she feels. She does. And that’s how mother was. She would tell you just how she feels and—yeah she—she is hard on us, me and Linda ‘cause she knows we’re cigarette smokers and mother was like that too. She never liked cigarette. Oh god, that was the worst thing you could do was smoke cigarettes. You had to go around the building to smoke a cigarette. [*Laughs*] Sneaking, but she was just like mother, just like mother is still here ‘cause a lot of things she says to us mother used to say and it’s –

**LP:** “Plenty of water, lay off the sodas,” you know.

**SGC:** “Drink some water. Did you take your medicine today? You shouldn’t do that. You shouldn’t smoke that cigarette.” Oh god; yeah she is just like mother. [*Laughs*]

00:50:41

**LP:** Concerned about our health.

00:50:43

**SGC:** Yeah, she’s very concerned and very loving. She’s very loving, too ‘cause we can't leave her without a kiss and in the morning you get a kiss and in the afternoon you get a kiss. That’s all to it; you got to have it. *[Laughs]*

**00:50:55**

**JG:** You get to see her like three days a week because when she comes on Wednesday and Thursday and then we all join together in church on Sunday, so that’s another mama, you know hey kissing, telling about the week and everything but she is—I think she’s a replica. They were so much alike.

**00:51:13**

**LP:** And if you’re not in church on Sunday she’s going to call you and ask you, “Why weren’t you in church today? *[Laughs]* Why weren’t in church today?” Yes, uh-hm.

**00:51:22**

**SW:** Do you go to the church that your mother went to?

**00:51:24**

**LP:** Yes, uh-hm.

**00:51:24**

**SW:** And what’s the name of the church?

**00:51:26**

**LP:** New Francis Brown; uh-hm, New Francis Brown.

**00:51:32**

**JG:** New Francis Brown United Methodist.

**00:51:35**

**SW:** I just—before I forget I just want to ask you one more thing and it’s about the painting.

Who—you explained a little bit this—yesterday Sharon, can you just talk about who made these—was it two different people who made the paintings?

**00:51:48**

**SGC:** Yeah, the—the painted picture on the glass right here is—the picture that mother took.

We took this after church one Sunday and mother said, “I want to take a picture with my girls,” so we took that picture and a guy named Charles [DeSaussure] –

**00:52:05**

**LP:** This right here.

**00:52:06**

**SGC:** —yeah painted—he painted us onto this glass from that picture. And it turned out pretty good. And—and a lot of people likes to see that painting. And this picture here I have a brother who is incarcerated at Estelle Correctional Institute and mother had her seventieth birthday and he couldn’t come, but we sent him a series of snapshots from the seventieth birthday party and

believe, the guy—it’s a guy in there that’s so talented that he pieced the pictures together and made the family portrait. So that’s my brother up top right there, David; he’s the middle—is in the middle of Bobby who is on the bottom and Quinton who is the baby up top. This is Bobby. You talked—that’s Quinton. That is Bobby and that is [Quinton] my brother who is incarcerated. Well right next to Bobby is my sister-in-law Pat; that’s his wife. She works with us. And then right next to Pat is Linda’s husband, Tim, and that’s Linda and that’s Julie, and that’s me. [Interviewer’s note: Julie kindly walks up to the painting and points to each person while Sharon names everyone in the painting.] **[Laughs]** It all started for mother and dad; that’s from up top. That’s my father and that’s Miss Bertha right there. That came from out of the—Bobby’s wedding pictures, sure did.

**00:53:39**

**LP:** Yeah.

**00:53:40**

**SGC:** And then right next to mother is her brother, Adrian Middleton and this is her sister Charlene.

**00:53:48**

**LP:** She worked with us; she worked with us.

**00:53:50**

**SGC:** She worked with us too.

00:53:49

**SW:** Charlene?

00:53:51

**SGC:** Yeah, Charlene worked with us for a period.

00:53:52

**LP:** And Charlene’s—she is—when my mom got down real sick ‘cause you know Charlene worked with us maybe—maybe—she had two sisters that worked with us. Louise and Charlene; Charlene worked with us maybe about ten years. She worked with us about ten years and then she moved onto another job. And Louise worked with us a little longer. I think Louise did maybe like fifteen years she worked with us and she went on—you know she moved on and went somewhere else. But Charlene—to Charlene and Louise, my mom even though they had a mom, you know their mom, but my mom was more like a mom to them because of the age difference and you know my mom took care of them, you know. And it was very hard. To this day it’s still hard on Charlene when you talk about my mom ‘cause she goes to crying, you know. It’s very hard on Charlene since my mom passed ‘cause they were you know real close. She’s—she’s with us in the restaurant also. My mom taught her a lot of things also in the restaurant.

00:54:56

**SGC:** That just goes to show you the—the fact that she was the glue of our family that Charlene and—which is her sister and you just could have come to her with anything and she will make your day so much better. And I’m talking if you’re having a real bad day; if you feel your world is falling apart, if you have aches and pains, if you have worries about anything, you can go to

her with anything and she will look in your eye and she won't cut corners. She'll tell you straight, but she said—she'll tell you just how it is and before you leave it's just a whole new you. She has a way of putting the worst thing—not that she's making it better but making you feel better. She has that knack; I don't know. It was a gift my mom had just an impression on everybody, just a big impression.

**00:55:58**

**SW:** Ladies, I don't want to keep you any longer 'cause I know you have—you still have stuff to do around here but if there is any—if there is anything else you want to add—I've asked you this already—I feel like that's a good place to stop. But if there is anything else that you—?

**00:56:11**

**SGC:** No.

**00:56:14**

**JG:** I'm thinking back to when y'all first started and you had April when y'all was cooking and y'all had to sit her underneath the table. **[Laughs]** You know everybody was having babies back then and I mean we all were having kids back-to-back. **[Laughs]**

**00:56:29**

**SGC:** My mom was such a loving person; you know we all was in the business and we were cooking. But our kids were raised up right with us. There was no daycare back then. I mean you stick a bottle in their mouth and if you had to change their Pamper you'd take the baby out of the restaurant and you'd take care of what you got to do. And at the time it was just—.

00:56:57

**SW:** There was a phone going—

00:57:00

**SGC:** At the time it just was—it was our mid-life you know, twenty, twenty-two, out of college, we’re having babies and—and it just so happened, our world just got real busy there for a minute because it was one point when mother just wanted to say, “What is wrong with you girls?” But Julie was pregnant and I was pregnant. Me and Julie had the kids the same age. So when something was done it was doubling up and that really made her really upset. She said, “What in the world are you doing?” Okay. Julie has a twenty-two year-old. I have a twenty-two year-old. Julie has a twenty-one year-old. I got a twenty-one year-old. So every time we got pregnant it seemed like it came in twos and at that time she was—she said, “What is wrong? We got a business to run and y’all having babies.” Well do you hear me; we did it once, we did it twice—a year behind each other, so there are four kids together. And at the time she said, “What is wrong with y’all? Y’all don’t know what makes babies?” [*Laughs*] She was—she was so mad with us. She was—I think she was actually angry with us.

00:58:13

**LP:** Yeah, she was, “Because y’all tried to kill me.”

00:58:17

**SGC:** “Y’all tried to kill me,” well believe it or not, those four that we had together, and then we had four but this late lady had one right behind us, so there are five together, so when me and

Julie finished with the four that we had right, Linda popped up with another baby and she said, “Oh my god. Y'all are trying to kill me.” But anyway we got five kids: twenty-two, twenty-one, twenty and she thought that we was going crazy but at this time those five kids are the ones that are always thinking about mother. They made a lasting impression on her—those five. And that was—she thought we was going to kill her but that’s where all her love came from.

**00:59:00**

**JG:** And she got another one. [*Laughs*]

**00:59:04**

**SGC:** Having these babies was really driving her crazy. But believe it or not she loved all her grandkids. I mean they was so astonished with their grand-mama. She—their grand-mama was the world. And they had other kids, not only their friends were attached to mother; you know that’s that love thing I guess. Mother just spread her love all over the place—spread her love all over the place. She had more kids than she knew she had, yeah.

**00:59:38**

**SW:** That’s a really good place to stop if that’s okay with you.

**[End Bertha’s Kitchen]**