

KIM AND VIVIAN BARNHILL
Ms. Lena's Pie Shop – DeValls Bluff, Arkansas

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Interviewer: Sherri Sheu
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[Begin Ms. Lena’s Pie Shop]

00:00:01

Vivian Barnhill: Maybe I’ll have a fried pie and maybe I won’t, you know. It just depends but I’m not a breakfast person.

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Sherri Sheu: Okay; you’re not a breakfast person?

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VB: No; never was.

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SS: Have all these people—

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VB: Everybody is getting up and cooking gravy and sausage and biscuits and eggs at five o’clock in the morning and I’m still laying there thinking, “Oh, how silly. You know you could be sleeping and you’re up cooking.”

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SS: This is true, trading food for sleep—it’s a tough trade-off. Can you scoot in just a little bit closer?

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VB: Sure.

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SS: All right and we should be good. All right and I can hear everything so I think everything is working. All right good afternoon; it is August 2, 2013. It’s roughly 2:25 in the afternoon and I am sitting in the—Ms. Viv Barnhill’s—yeah in your kitchen though in the—in I guess your home kitchen that is right behind Ms. Lena’s Pie Shop. And we are going to do an awesome oral history today. Can you introduce yourself Ms. Viv?

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VB: Yes; my name is Vivian Barnhill and I own and operate Ms. Lena’s Pie Shop in DeValls Bluff, Arkansas. And I’ve been doing it for many, many years.

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SS: And if you don’t mind for the record can you tell us your date of birth?

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VB: March 22, 1949.

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SS: And just however you want to tell the story can you tell me about the Pie Shop and how did y'all get started?

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VB: Well, started back probably in '94 I believe. And mom, she just—she made this awesome recipe for fried pies and she said, “Let’s do fried pies.” And she had this little pie shop built on. You see how small it is but it works. And so me and her started out, when she was like, probably seventy-five, seventy-six, anyway we started out and I was helping her and she was just doing it like I think one day a week like maybe Saturday and so we did that. And it worked out real good. And then Chuck Nolas [television reporter] got a hold of it somehow and he came along and after that it just kind of boomed, you know. And she just couldn’t keep up. And so we’ve been doing it. Then we—me and my daughter after mom—mom passed away in '05 and she had cancer—and she said on her death bed, “Would y'all please keep my pie shop going for me?” She said, “I worked too hard to throw this away.” She said “I’ve got everything perfect. All you have to do is do it.”

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And we told her we would; we’d do our best. Well it was—she passed away in January and I think it was in April before we really opened back up. And my brother, my youngest brother wanted to open it up with me. So I said “Well, let me think about it for a little bit,” because that was kind of soon. And he said “Well, we ain't got time to think.” He said, “We need to do it for mom.” So I said “Okay; we’ll get—get going.” So we got everything together and got it going back; I think on April 2nd or something like that we started back.

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Then he worked here I think ‘til 2012 maybe—’11 or close to '12 and he decided he’d open his own pie shop in another town, which was too far out in the sticks for—in the first place, you know too far off the highway. I didn’t think people—I even talked to him about it. I said, “Do you really think people are going to drive that far and out of the way?” And he said “Yeah; yeah, they will. “So he had built him a pie shop and he opened it up in Ms. Lena’s name and

used that and I think he was probably there about three months. And other things came up you know along the road—grocery stores opened and things that kind of slowed him down and stuff. So it didn’t—it only lasted like about three months. And then after that—after he quit and I closed and I was closed probably like a year or more and people were constantly here beating on my door and wanting me to reopen. “Oh don’t close; we’ll find you some help,” you know. Well the dough, like she does—I taught my brother how to do the dough from mom and it has to be the right consistency. It can't be too wet and it can't be too dry. It’s got to be perfect to go in the hot oil because if it’s not it just comes all to pieces in the pan.

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So I am thinking—I thought for a long time, “Do I want to start over again,” you know? She—she wanted to do it after he quit. And I’m thinking—

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SS: And this is your daughter, Kim?

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VB: Uh-hm; and I’m thinking, “I don’t want to train her on that dough for six months,” you know. And because it’s so hard to do, but you know she came in and I showed her and I told her, I said, “It’s got to be this way. It can't be too wet and it can't be too dry. I’ll show you how to make it.” Do you know the first time she made it, it was perfect, and she’s been doing it ever since for me. She rolls the dough for me. And she’s done an awesome job. I couldn’t ask for anything better. But I was thinking it was going to be a long-term you know—shut down yet and wait on her to learn everything and then—. No; she picked it up just—I mean whole pies and everything. She just—I just told her; I said, “Here’s the recipe for it.” And you know on the

whole pies and all and she just—it was like she already knew. Maybe it was a part of mom; I don't know. But—and here we are.

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SS: And when you were growing up did your mother make a lot of pies or—I know she wasn't in the business then but was she making lots of pies for families or for church or for anything?

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VB: Usually mom made them for—out of biscuits because there was eight of us, you know and that would have took a long time to make her dough and everything. So she made them out of canned biscuits. They were good. But they ain't nothing like these you know. But no; there was eight kids for her to take care of and her and daddy and you know back that far back they—the pay wasn't good and stuff, so she done the best she could. She done a good job I think.

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SS: And did she—where did she learn the recipe for these fried pies from?

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VB: She did it herself. She worked—I seen her; she told me, she said, “Give me a week and let me work on something.” And I said okay. So I figured you know she'd work something out. And she did. She—I seen many, many recipes that she had wrote down. It had—some of them had eight to ten—twelve ingredients and she put it aside and she'd start over. And she did another one. And she'd put it aside if it didn't please her.

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So when she got this one, I think there's probably four ingredients in it, you know so—. She got it down.

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SS: And take me back to when she—when y'all are just going into business together. How did—is this house that we're in right now, was this her house?

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VB: No; the house that was here was torn down because it was—it was back in 1980, I believe that I bought the house and land that was here. And mother didn't live here then. I think she lived up somewhere around Searcy or Judsonia at that time. But anyway, she—it got old; it was old to begin with. I think they told me it was like 100 years old. And so we tore it down. We had it tore down. And when we got it tore down she was living I think with her sister at the time. And I told her; I said, "Mom, why don't you come build a house on this land?" And we had just bought a huge trailer, a three-bedroom, two-bath trailer and put right behind, which is still there but it flooded in this last flood we had. And I said "Why don't you build a house there?" And she had remarried. And they decided that's what they'd do. So they had somebody come in and build a basement and built a house. Those kids built the house I think—her sons; they built the house and then when she decided she wanted a pie shop, she had them add that room on. And I don't really know exactly what year it was, but I'm thinking it was like '92 when she had that built on but she didn't open then. I don't think she opened until like '94—on or about; yeah.

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SS: So you already had the land before you decided on this very nice location next to the highway that people come by?

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VB: Oh yeah; yeah. I bought—we moved here in—we—we lived in Michigan and mom and dad always went up there and picked apples and cotton and whatever you know when us kids were little. Well, we moved back to here when—I think it was '71—'70 or '71 and we lived at Loomis Landing, which is about eight miles you know out. Well I was waiting on some land or a place to come up to buy and I got this for \$80 a month for—no interest or anything; all I had to pay was \$80 a month and he—he gave me all the time I needed and we got it paid off and I got an acre of ground with it. So that's where—I moved up here in '80 and that's where we ended up at. That's where we've been ever since. *[Laughs]*

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SS: And your—did you know if—do you remember if your mother had always wanted to open up a pie shop or was this something that she was inspired by? How did she decide to open a pie shop?

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VB: Well um, what started the whole thing, I think was my sister, my oldest sister lives in Judsonia and she has a pie shop like mine. And she has mother's recipes. But anyway, she wanted to make fried pies for some reason and that's when I had first bought the new trailer and put down there. That was before the house was here. And I told her, "Oh, okay; well, what are

we going to do? Do it out of my trailer?" And she said yeah. She'd drive down here from Judsonia every day or every weekend and we'd do fried pies.

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So we did and I guess the trip was kind of long for her. And she—I don't know if she really did that good, enough to you know, just starting out, to have to travel. Well she quit and we had orders that we had taken for the next weekend. And I'm—I told mom, I said "Well, what am I going to do?" I said, "She's not coming back. She said she's quitting." So mom—that's when mom told me; she said, "Give me about a week and I'll—I'll help you out and she did." And it's been the best. As people come from—we've had people from New Zealand and—we've even had people from Kuwait, Iraq. They called here and said "We got some of your fried pies;" you know and said, "they was the best fried pies we ever had." And said some—some soldiers had flew over there and come here and picked up some and took them to them. And she was having a hard time finding them soldiers that brought them to find out where they got them from. Well finally she—she found out and she called here and she called me. I can't remember what time in the afternoon but she told me it was midnight there. I know there's a lot of difference in their time and ours. And I was sitting here talking to her and she said "It's midnight here." She said, "I wished there was some way that—I got forty in my platoon." She said, "I wish there was some way that we could get them over here" because she said "I ain't never had a fried pie as good as that." So that was pretty far off.

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And we had this guy that drove through here one time and he was riding a bicycle. And he said he was from New Zealand. And he wanted—he seen it said "fried pies" but he didn't know what a fried pie was. So we told—we just handed him one; you know he said, "How do you eat it?" I said, "Well you put it in your hand and you eat it." He said, "I need a bowl of

milk.” And I said, “Why?” He said, “That’s how we eat pie. We eat pie in milk.” And I said, “Well just try it like this.” So I gave him one and he stood there and ate like three and just went on and on about no grease; you know he’d look at his hands. “No grease” **[Laughs]**; he said them was the best things he ever ate.

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But he—what he was doing, he was retired at a young age of like twenty-six and he was traveling in Arkansas on a bicycle. But he would get to a certain place and he would get a motel room. And he would go a fifty-mile radius of that motel. Well when he got that fifty-mile radius used up and saw what he wanted to see he would move to another one fifty miles off and he would do the same thing. And he came through here and he was just so amazed about the minnow ponds and you know everything here that he’s never seen before he said. He was—he sat out there on his bicycle and told us you know he had retired at twenty-six. And he wanted to see the world. And he was so glad he came by here. **[Laughs]**

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SS: And how do your customers usually find you if they’re not biking around Arkansas on—from New Zealand?

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VB: You know I guess it’s the [Facebook] page that we got up on Ms. Lena’s because we get—when we put up anything or post anything on there we get like thousands of people that like and I guess they all—it goes all over. They all see it. And also Kat Robinson, she’s the—she comes here and she does stories on us and stuff. And her photographer comes in a lot of times and he’s done photographs and stuff and everything. And she’s put it in a book. She’s supposed to be

sending me a book or bringing me one. But word of mouth; mom says the best is word of mouth. And that's what it was when them people would come here and get a pie and go off and tell. "Man, you don't know what you're missing. I got this down there." They just swarm down here, you know to get pie.

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SS: And did you grow—so tell me a little bit more about your childhood. Did you—you mentioned something about Michigan; can you go a little bit more into detail on that?

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VB: I really don't remember a whole lot about it because I was—I was very small when we moved up there and we had moved away from there in between, but we went back up there. And I don't—I was probably about maybe nine or so. And then I wasn't until like seventeen before I came back here. But I met a—my husband up there at sixteen; I met him and I worked at H.J. Heinz where they make pickles and ketchup and met him there. And we got married and I mean—we got married November 5, 1965 and our first baby was born November 30, 1966. And we—when mom and dad—dad retired and they—dad wanted to come down here and be a commercial fisherman which he was and so we came back with mom and dad.

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SS: And how many kids do you have?

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VB: Me?

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SS: Uh-hm.

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VB: I got three. I've lost—you know I had several miscarriages and I've lost one at five and a half months but I've got three. And I've got two girls and a boy.

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SS: And your daughter Kim helps you out in the store?

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VB: Uh-hm; she helps me with a lot of things—most anything.

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SS: Can you talk a little bit—I mean I find it really interesting that you worked alongside your mother making pies and that now your daughter is working alongside you making pies—can you talk a little bit about that mother/daughter bond there?

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VB: Yeah; we had—we had a lot of fun. I was—I was the aggravator. I like to pick and have fun and aggravate. And it was funny; mom, she would go by—she'd set her pan on the stove she was making something with. Well she'd set it off the burner. And I thought you know she had that macular degeneration. But I didn't think it was that bad or anything but she had that and I

thought she wasn't seeing. So I'd go by and shove her pan up on the burner. And she'd come by and pull the pan back off the burner. Well I'd—I didn't know she was doing that on purpose. So I'd push it back on the burner. Finally she come by and she said, "Would you leave my pan alone?" I said, "Well, mom it's going to fall off the burner." She said "Well, the handle gets hot and that's what I'm doing that for." **[Laughs]** I said "Oh okay; sorry about that."

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Well then she—she always wore an apron and she'd get her busiest and I'd go behind her and pull her string and let her apron fall. **[Laughs]** She'd laugh about it you know but I just like to pick and have fun and aggravate her. We had a lot of fun—mom and I. And still yet, you know people will come in the pie shop and say, "I still smell grandma in here. I still smell your mom." You know just that smell about mama; it was just a sweet smell. And the kids will even tell me now—grandkids when they come in, "Oh my god; I still smell grandma." And that—it brings tears to my eyes, you know when they say that, but I know it's true.

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SS: And I notice that even the shop you have quite a few pictures of your mother on the walls.

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VB: Oh yeah; yeah. I got many, many pictures of mother. I can't talk about her too long because I get choked up. **[Emotional]**

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SS: And how—what's it been like carrying that down with your—with Kim with having your daughter working in this—in the shop?

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VB: What's it like having Kim in there? Awesome [*Laughs*]; you see she works. She is my working child. She has—she'll—she just works and works and works. She never stops. If she's not working here in there she's mowing my yard, she's weed-eating, she's cleaning my house, she's just—anything I want done you know. I don't have to tell her to do it. I don't have to ask her to do it. She's just doing it. If she sees something that—mom this needs to be washed or done or—she does it. You know so it's awesome. I—I wouldn't be here and I wouldn't be this far on anything if it wasn't for her. She's my rock; yeah or my right arm, whatever you want to call it.

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SS: And I notice that y'all are only open two days a week. Can you kind of explain why you're only open two days a week?

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VB: Well I just broke my ankle Valentine's Day and it's still not you know healed up right. I don't think it ever did. But she has kids that she has to take care of. She works other places. She is not just here. And she can't help me during the week. And we just decided Friday and Saturday. Most people are out driving around doing nothing. A lot of people during the week are at work, you know and you can sit here all day and maybe not sell what you want to sell but the weekends people are out doing things and traveling. And I told her, I said, "I think two days a week is enough, you know, instead of having to work all week long and you try to go in between what we're doing and do what you got to do." And she's raising two kids on her own. And so that's mainly the reason.

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SS: Can you take me through a typical day on Friday or Saturday when y'all are starting up?

Well what goes in to preparing all of the pies?

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VB: Uh usually we start on Thursday; we—we have to cook up our fillings like—we do dried fruit and we have to—you know it takes quite a while to cook peaches and apricots and stuff like that. And then you have to—we cook everything we make. They don't come out of a box or a can. We cook it on top of the stove. We make our chocolate, our coconut cream and we usually do the three fruits—apple, peach, and apricot, and cherry—sometimes we do cherry. We have like thirty different flavors that—we always do the five, the apple, peach, apricot, chocolate, and coconut. We always have those because that's everybody's favorite. You know that's what they want when they—but well, every weekend we'll try to change—add a flavor like I think this weekend it's cherry and she probably—you know she added two, probably coconut, pecan. Sometimes we'll add lemon. We just—raisin; we just pick a flavor that we haven't—we got one called woodpecker and the reason we got that is the hunters. They had teased us and come in here and say “Um, when are y'all going to make a woodpecker pie,” you know? “Well we don't have any woodpeckers. You bring us some woodpeckers and we'll make you some.” Well my sister, my little sister, she lives up the road here, she said “Let's make them a woodpecker pie.” I said “Well, how?” She said “We'll think of something.”

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So you know woodpeckers are usually like black and red and white or dark and red and white. She comes up with chocolate and miniature marshmallows and maraschino cherries. And

you mix that. You cook your chocolate and you—you melt your marshmallows through it and you put the cherries in there and you deep-fry them and oh my god they loved them. They went after them. And when it's hunting time that's what they want when the hunters come around. They want that woodpecker pie. And we've had so many laughs about it. [*Phone Rings*] But anyway—

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SS: And I know the—I saw that y'all make both sort of regular pies that are not fried and also fried pies. Y'all make the regular pies and also the fried pies. What—what is your more popular of the two pies?

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VB: The coconut cream really. That's why I had you try that and it was pretty awesome wasn't it?

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SS: Uh-hm; the fried pie, the—the fried coconut was—

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VB: Well the coconut cream is the same thing. We just have—. [*Phone Rings*] We just have to thicken it a little bit more for it to stay in the crust because your—your whole pies are not quite as thick. You have to thicken it a little more to make a fried pie and that's all there is to that. And then you put meringue on them. And everybody wants my meringue recipe because that was

mama's special recipe too because they said that theirs won't be on there thirty minutes and it's sliming and running off and stuff. And mine will hold for a solid week. It won't do it.

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SS: And I'm—from the look on your face I'm going to say that you don't give that recipe out very much.

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VB: No. *[Laughs]* No; no, but she said that she made that recipe for her kids and that's the way she wanted it to stay and we was honoring whatever she asked.

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SS: I guess it's also for all the people who are traveling by and getting to enjoy her pies.

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VB: Oh yeah many people.

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SS: And how many people on a—on a very busy weekend, how many—how many pies will you sell?

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VB: Well, you mean whole pies, fried pies, what?

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SS: Both.

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VB: Both; oh gosh. I don't never count the fried pies. I really couldn't—couldn't tell you that. But I know we have sold as many twenty whole pies a day, you know the big ones. But the fried pies, like I said, it varies. It depends on weather and it depends on what people are doing. If they're having some kind of big thing at—close to here or in town that's going on we have less people. But if they don't then we have more people. So really I have no way of knowing.

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SS: And you make the fried pies when people come in, right?

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VB: We make them all day long but we make like ten or twelve of each to start out and—because we don't want them sitting there very long and also we don't want them cold—cold. So we try to keep them—she keeps them rolling all the time. And she gets low on one she'll check and see which one she's low on and go start over, you know and just keep the trays up 'til what we need.

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SS: And where do you source your fruits from for the fruit pies?

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VB: I have—I have my fruit ordered from a place that a guy orders it for me and I get it from him, you know. And Sam's—I'd buy it from Sam's but Sam's don't carry them. They carry the apricots but they don't carry the peaches and I don't understand that. I wish they did. **[Laughs]**

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SS: It would make life a little easier.

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VB: Yeah; it would where I could get everything at one place. But most of the time we buy our stuff at Sam's, like our paper products and—or Wal-Mart. A lot of times you can get stuff at Wal-Mart that we need.

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SS: And that's pretty close by I take it.

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VB: Wal-Mart, the closest Wal-Mart to us is probably, about well see, there's one in Long [Oak]—probably about 25 miles away one way.

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SS: And you've talked—you've had a couple stories about your customers. Have you had—have there been any very memorable customers, some of your more memorable customers that come by for pie?

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VB: I have a lot of memorable customers. [*Laughs*] Most of them are. I mean mom when she was here she'd tell me; she said—she'd just talk and talk and talk and she'd say, “I just love every one of them that walks through this door. I just love them.” You know a lot of them—mom and them would get to be close friends, good friends and some not, you know. But she still just talked and she was just so good to them, you know treated them so good. She told me one thing: “You remember, the customer is always right.” I said—because I seen a few times I thought mom—that is wrong. That is not right. And she said: “Now you remember;” so I have to go with what she says. You know and mom [wanted] to please and make everybody happy and if they wasn't happy, she wasn't happy.

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SS: And what are some of the reactions when people have some of the pies for the first time? What have been some memorable reactions to the pies?

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VB: Oh, well, when they taste them for the first time, “Oh my god;” you know and “oh this crust is awesome.” You know, “How did you do this?” And there was this one young guy who come in here and he was probably in his thirties. And he looks at his mom and he says, “Do you believe this?” He said “Why can't I do this? Why can't I make something this good?” I guess he baked too, but the—the way I took it. He never explained it but it was like “why can I not do this?” So they just—it was—it's always “Oh my god. Oh my god.” You know they just stand there eating and “Oh my god.” And then people will be coming in that they don't know to get fried pies and they're standing there eating and they're saying, “Oh my god. You're not going to

believe this.” You know like they ain’t never been here before. **[Laughs]** But they just—they’re amazed by how good they are. And like I was telling you how much filling is in it, but yet the crust is you know real light and thin but yet it holds together. You know so that’s kind of amazing too. But mom knew what she was doing.

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SS: And she knew where her handles were.

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VB: That’s right. **[Laughs]** Exactly.

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SS: And for—are most of your customers, do they come from just around—around here or are most of them from travelers?

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VB: Well we have both. I mean it’s hard to—I wouldn’t say they were mostly from here but other towns like Hazen, Stuttgart, DeWitt, Brinkley, Holly Grove, Monroe; you know they’re just—we got a guest book out there and you wouldn’t believe some of the places they’re from you know. But they come from all over. And they’ll tell me they drove for hours to just find this place. They had—their like food sticklers or whatever they call it—

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SS: Foodies.

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VB: Yeah that they heard about it and they had to drive down here and try it out. And they said, “We drove like four to five hours to find this place you know just because we had read about it or seen it in a magazine.” And they were pleased. They were always happy. So that was good.

00:33:02

SS: And in terms of—I know I saw the article that you have out in front with the *Southern Living* piece—what has the impact of that been on business?

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VB: Well when they did that this is—this is the funny thing—my brother was here and when—when that—when that came out, that magazine, we were cooking in an electric skillet believe it or not. We weren't—we didn't have a big cooker like that. And we had an electric skillet on the counter. And we could pretty well keep up enough pies just constant going on the trays for people just walking in and out. But when *Southern Living* did that and that came out we had people that was lined all the way up that walk all the way around the driveway out there waiting to get in. And I'm like, “What are we going to do?” You know he says, “Oh my god; I didn't expect this.” And I said, “No; I see you didn't.” He said, “Well, we won't be caught like this again.” He said, “Next week we'll have a cooker.” He said we can't let this happen because we had a lot of people that didn't get any because we had—they had to wait for them to be cooked and that—and these—this cooker you can drop twenty to thirty at a time in it you know and then in just a few seconds they're done, but not an electric skillet.

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So we went that—that very weekend, we went up to Searcy at that place where you buy cookers and it's called some kind of equipment—kitchen equipment or something and we bought that big cooker and that did it. I mean we—he said, “We ain't going to be caught with our britches down again.” *[Laughs]* So we wasn't and been doing it ever since.

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SS: And how long was it taking on that electric skillet?

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VB: Oh *[Emphasis Added]* it didn't really take them a long time to fry when it was hot, but you know each time it's like dropping a piece of chicken in hot oil. That chicken is cold and it's going to slow that oil down a little bit. And it was like dropping those cold fried pies into that hot oil in that little electric skillet and it just wasn't getting it you know. It—it took longer—a lot longer than what this one takes, lots longer.

00:35:34

SS: And you mentioned the foodies that will drive four or five hours to—to come have a piece of pie. What do you think it is about pie that really draws people?

00:35:48

VB: Um, about pie or about my pie?

00:35:52

SS: Both. *[Laughs]*

00:35:54

VB: [*Laughs*] I—I think what draws them is—is well, different things; it’s the way they’re treated when they come in here. I don’t treat anybody any differently. I’m not a racist. I don’t believe in treating a black person any different than I treat a white person. I mean you know for the color of their skin or nothing, but I think it’s how they’re treated and the—the pies themselves speak for themselves, you know the fried pies. The whole pies, I don’t know; they just—they just tell me everything about them is just amazing you know. They’re—the—for one thing, the meringue doesn’t run. It doesn’t slime like a lot of people tell me theirs do. They’re always—we try to put—put them full. They not only get quality, they get quantity, you know so we don’t skimp. Mom always told me that: “don’t skimp. Whatever you do, don’t skimp.” And she [Kim] tried a couple times, you know and I got—I had to tell her, “Uh-uh. We can’t do that. Mama said not to do that. So don’t do it anymore” and she didn’t.

00:37:14

But it’s just—I don’t know; it’s just the pies are just so good.

00:37:20

SS: And I know that in Arkansas that people in Arkansas take their pies pretty seriously.

[*Laughs*]

00:37:29

VB: Oh yeah; they sure do.

00:37:33

SS: What do you think pie means to the state?

00:37:41

VB: Pie means to the state?

00:37:44

SS: Uh-hm, like do you think there's a special place for—that there's something about Arkansas, people in Arkansas and their pies that's a special—?

00:37:50

VB: I think they're southern and they know how to cook. [*Laughs*] That's what I say about myself. I know how to cook, you know. It's the southern thing, I think mostly. You know what you're doing and you know what goes in it and—and you know it's the best and people know that. And we've even went up one dollar on the whole pies and they don't care. They say, "You know, they're worth it; we don't care." But you know with things going up like they are, you have to go up a little bit. People that own restaurants have got an advantage with that because they can go up a few dollars on some—or cents on something else and compensate and go up a few cents on something else but we have nothing but pies to go up on, you know. We can't say "Well, we'll—we'll add ten-cents to that and charge teb-cents more for that and we can compensate." We can't do that. We got pies and that's it. So when we go up we just have to go up. And I have no complaints. I have not had one complaint about them going up.

00:39:15

SS: And I think that's most of what I wanted to talk to you about and I'm sure we can get Kim in and have her share some of her stories. I can hear her [*Laughs*] grinding away back there, already working.

00:39:30

VB: She's peeking out at this right now.

00:39:34

SS: Hello Kim. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

00:39:41

VB: No; not—more or less, I enjoy doing it and—but I mainly do it for mother because that's—that was her last request. She died right here in this house. She—we got her a bed and had her brought here from the hospital and that was the last thing she said. Was, “Would you try hard to keep my pie shop going?” And I said, “Yes, mama; I will.” So it's pretty much it.

00:40:14

SS: And so she was literally in this house that is adjacent to the pie shop?

00:40:18

VB: Yeah; she—well she—see, she lived in—she—they built this house for her. We had the old one tore down. She lived here. This was her house. And she kept telling me in the hospital she wanted me to live here. And that told me she was leaving. And I couldn't handle it. You know and I'd cry. And she'd say, “Why are you crying?” And I said mama, “You're telling me you're

leaving me.” And she’d say, “Well, don’t cry.” And she’d say, “But I want you to live in my house.” And I said “Mama; I have a three-bedroom, two-bath, walk-in closet; you know I got stuff, a lot more than what you have. And I could never get my stuff in here.” And I couldn’t.

00:41:04

When I moved up here I finally—it took me probably two years before I could do it. I did it for her because she said that’s what she wanted me to do. And I kept telling her, “Don’t tell me that” because I knew she was telling me she was leaving. And I couldn’t handle that. And I—like I said I better not talk too much about her because I still can’t—you know there’s times that somebody can say “mama” and that’s all it takes, you know. And I’m—yeah. So I probably better let you talk to Kim. [*Laughs*]

00:41:48

SS: Well thank you so much for sitting down and sharing your stories with us and with the Southern Foodways Alliance. Thank you for your time.

00:41:55

VB: You’re welcome.

[Break to discuss interview logistics with Kim Barnhill]

00:42:01

SS: All right; now—and we’re back with the second part of our interview—of our oral history here at Ms. Lena’s Pie Shop and my name is Sherri Sheu. I’m with the Southern Foodways Alliance. And I will let Kim Barnhill introduce herself.

00:42:22

Kim Barnhill: Hi; I'm Kim. I'm Vivian's daughter. I roll the dough for her, I make the big pies, I do the fillings for the pies, and um, I go and get the groceries and I do most everything—she's more the PR person.

00:42:46

SS: And if you're comfortable, what your birth date is?

00:42:49

KB: My birthday is November 30, 1966. I'm old.

00:42:54

SS: And can you tell me a little bit about how you got involved with the pie shop that was—that your grandmother started?

00:43:04

KB: Well I got involved because my mother, the person that was helping her left, and she was really wanting to carry on the legacy of my grandmother's pies. And she—she felt really depressed and I wanted to help her to feel better, so I told her I would help her. And she just brightened right up and we've been going ever since.

00:43:27

SS: And when was this?

00:43:30

KB: Um, I don't know; it's not—I don't think it's quite been a year. I'm not real sure what day but several months ago.

00:43:39

SS: That y'all reopened and—?

00:43:42

KB: Right.

00:43:42

SS: On the weekends, and I understand you have a full-time job besides this?

00:43:49

KB: Well, I clean a house—for different ones, you know if they ask me. I'll clean their house, or—plus I have two kids, little kids at home and an older daughter too. But I have—that's a full-time job in itself.

00:44:03

SS: Absolutely. *[Laughs]* You have a lot going on.

00:44:05

KB: Uh-hm; ball and you know my little girl plays softball and it—it's strenuous to do it by yourself.

00:44:14

SS: Yes; I saw the—I guess now that you say that your little girl plays softball I saw that great picture of her swinging the bat. It sounds like she's—looked like she was very, very passionate about it.

00:44:24

KB: Yeah; yeah, she is. She told me that was her passion. She's in fall ball, fixing to start fall ball. She plays catcher and third base.

00:44:37

SS: And when you were growing up were—were there a lot of pies around in the family or is this something that later—that the family only got into later?

00:44:46

KB: Yeah; it's something they got into later. I think my grandmother just—maybe she got a whim that she wanted to bake one day and then somebody came by and said “you ought to do this” or you know I don't know how it came about really. But she was passionate about it. And that's what she asked my mom to do when she was on her deathbed. She said, “Please keep my pie shop open,” and my mom is trying her best to do that. But things are getting so expensive, it's getting hard to keep the prices low and give people what they want.

00:45:20

SS: And how did you learn to make the pies? What was your experience like learning how to make the pies?

00:45:27

KB: It was really easy. It—it—you know I have my grandma's recipe right there in front of me. You can't mess up because you got grandma's recipe. But it's—it's really easy and to—and plus I watched them a lot and just standing there and talked to them and watched what they did and it just seemed like it was second nature. It came easy.

00:45:49

SS: Your mom was telling me that she expected it to take much longer for you to learn but that you caught on very quickly.

00:45:56

KB: Uh-hm.

00:45:58

SS: So can you walk me through your typical day at the pie shop? You're only open on Fridays and Saturdays. So what—what will you do in order to prepare for that?

00:46:07

KB: About Tuesday we'll go and get what we need at the store. Wednesday we come in here and we separate our eggs and because we—we use the yellows for one thing and the white for the meringues on the pies. And that way it keeps us from having to stop and crack eggs every few minutes. And then on Thursday we make our fillings to go in our fried pies, so they'll be cooled. They have to be cold. And on Thursday night we do the big pies so they'll be ready for

the next morning. And here comes the boss in here now. **[Laughs]** So that's basically—you know and just stand and do the—fry the pies during the day and keep them fresh on the shelf.

00:46:57

SS: And what have been some of your memorable experiences working in the pie shop in terms of customers coming in?

00:47:09

KB: Oh well they're always so happy to be here and especially people that come all the time. And they're just like, "Oh man. I see you got coconut today." Or, "I'm so happy to have this or that." And it's just—it's good to see everybody, they come in here—and even people that have never been here before, they're just so ecstatic about being here. And it just makes you smile to know that you're doing something that they like.

00:47:36

SS: How has it been like being—this is your—the third generation that's been in this pie shop—what is that like for you? What does it mean to you to be—to carry on this family legacy of pie making and doing it so well?

00:47:52

KB: Yeah; well it means a lot because I know my grandmother wanted us to do it. But if it hadn't been for her I don't know that I would go into that because I'm really—baking is not really my thing. But you can't tell—by what I do but I mean it's really not something that I'm—I would like to do every day. But it's—it's fun.

00:48:15

SS: You had that look of [*Laughs*]—. It's all good. So did you grow up around here?

00:48:32

KB: Uh-hm; I live here—I've lived here, I guess my whole life. I don't live here. I live in Hazen, which is seven miles from here. But I'm over here every day.

00:48:43

SS: So a lot of—are a lot of your customers people that you've known your entire life?

00:48:46

KB: Uh-hm; yeah, pretty much most of them—locals yeah.

00:48:53

SS: And take me back to y'all reopening a couple months ago after a couple months of being closed, right.

00:49:00

KB: Right.

00:49:00

SS: What was that like the first day that it reopened? Did y'all immediately have people coming back or was—has it taken some time to have people come back?

00:49:11

KB: It took some time. People—I guess to get the word out and even now to this day people are coming in saying, “I didn’t even know y'all were back open. And I drove by here and oh my Lord, I saw the sign!” And they’re excited that we are back open.

00:49:29

SS: And the first day that you opened back up was there—were people already coming back that first day?

00:49:34

KB: We had it on Facebook and you know stuff like that. But it was—it wasn’t like it was before, you know.

00:49:45

SS: All right; is there anything you would like to add for the record Kim?

00:49:53

KB: No. [*Laughs*]

00:49:55

SS: All right; well thank you so much for taking the time to sit down and share some of your stories about pies in Arkansas with us.

00:50:02

KB: You’re welcome; thank you for coming.

00:50:02

SS: Thank you.

00:50:04

[End Ms. Lena’s Pie Shop]