

RODNEY BEASLEY
Beasley's Best Bar-B-Q – Meridian, MS

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Date: June 29th, 2010
Location: Beasley's Best Bar-B-Q – Vicksburg, Mississippi
Interviewer: Meghan Leonard, Southern Foodways Alliance
Transcription: Meghan Leonard
Length: 24 minutes
Project: Southern BBQ Trail

[Begin Rodney Beasley Interview]

0:00:04

Meghan Leonard: Alright. I’m sitting here with Mr. Beasley at 3:07 at Tuesday, June 29th. We’re at Beasley’s Best Barbecue in Meridian, Mississippi, and can I ask you to state your name, your occupation, and your birthday?

0:00:15

Rodney Beasley: Rodney Beasley. Birthday February 12th. Occupation Beasley’s Best Barbecue.

0:00:22

ML: Alright. When did you open Beasley’s Best Barbecue?

0:00:23

RB: December 10, 2009.

0:00:26

ML: How long have you been in Meridian?

0:00:27

RB: Two years.

0:00:29

ML: Can you tell me a little bit where you came from?

0:00:31

RB: I came from Flint, Michigan. General Motors capital.

0:00:38

ML: Why did you move to Mississippi?

0:00:40

RB: Because God showing people how good my barbecue is.

0:00:45

ML: Now your barbecue is pretty good. It’s pretty delicious. I was hoping you could tell me a little bit about what makes it the best.

0:00:51

RB: Well, I cook it real tender and make an old fashion barbecue sauce and tropical base. And I take my time and cook it real slow.

0:01:05

ML: Your cooker that you have out there, did you make that yourself?

0:01:09

RB: Yes, I did.

0:01:10

ML: How long have you had it?

0:01:11

RB: For about a year.

0:01:14

ML: Were you in another location before Beasley’s Best here in Meridian?

0:01:17

RB: Yes, I was. I was at Eddie’s Supermarket cooking in Meridian-Yamahaw cooking.

0:01:27

ML: How has the response been to this location here?

0:01:30

RB: Very slow.

0:01:32

ML: It’ll get there; you’ve only been open for six months. Now tell me a little bit about who eats your barbecue here.

0:01:39

RB: Well, the mayor of the city, she eats it. And then Lindsey Hall, Channel 11 news, he eats it. Angela Williams eats it. And a few more people eat it that know good barbecue.

0:01:55

ML: What makes your barbecue better than the rest?

0:01:57

RB: Because I am the best.

0:02:02

ML: Tell me a little bit about how you learned to do barbecue.

0:02:04

RB: Well, I started cooking at home in the backyard of Flint, Michigan, and I started making sauce out of barbecue sauce that I mix up. And I started liking barbecue and finally, it took me thirty years to learn how to cook barbecue. So I been cooking barbecue about thirty years and making a homemade barbecue sauce that’s old fashioned, back in the Thirties, that I make.

0:02:38

ML: How would you describe your sauce?

0:02:40

RB: Finger-licking good.

0:02:41

ML: *[laughs]* Everybody says that. What kind of base do you use?

0:02:45

RB: Base is like a tropical base that I make out of lemon, mango, onions, butter, vinegar, chicken fat, sweet sugar, and tropical juice to where it’s real tasty to where it’s marinates your food all while you’re cooking it. And it’s real good.

0:03:12

ML: And you crea—that’s your own recipe. You created that yourself, right?

0:03:15

RB: Yes, I did.

0:03:16

ML: Tell me a little bit about your competitions. I know you’ve competed in some barbecue competitions; tell me a little bit about that.

0:03:23

RB: Well, competitions ain’t nothing. I go in to win, and I have won.

0:03:28

ML: Where have you won?

0:03:30

RB: When I was in Detroit, and I won the Midwest tournament. Then in Atlanta, Georgia, and I won the Midsouth Tournament. Then I won one here recently at Meridian Yamahaw.

0:03:44

ML: Where else do you want to compete? Do you see yourself competing in Memphis in May?

0:03:48

RB: Yes, next year. *[fans himself]*

0:03:51

ML: It’s hot. What all do you have on your menu?

0:03:56

RB: Well, I have pulled pork sandwiches, whole pulled pork, rib sandwiches, rib dinners, half a slab of ribs and slabs, and barbecued chicken and rib tips and Polish sausage.

0:04:10

ML: What kind of sides do you guys have?

0:04:12

RB: Collard greens, candied yams, mac’n’cheese, black-eyed peas, baked beans, potato salad, cole slaw.

0:04:18

ML: What’s the most popular item on your menu?

0:04:21

RB: Baked beans and potato salad.

0:04:24

ML: What about for your meat? What’s your favorite meat item?

0:04:25

RB: Ribs. Spare ribs.

0:04:30

ML: And I noticed the last time I was here you had a lady come, and she said she just ordered food for the week. Do you have a lot of people that come in and just order your food to just last them two or three—

0:04:40

RB: For two or three days, they’ll order for the family.

0:04:45

ML: Do you do a lot of catering?

0:04:46

RB: Not yet, not yet.

0:04:48

ML: Where do you see Beasley’s going? Do you want to expand or stay in this location?

0:04:54

RB: Going on all over the Midsouth and the Midwest.

0:04:59

ML: Last time I was here you mentioned going to Atlanta. Is that still something you want—?

0:05:00

RB: That’s the next Beasley’s Best restaurant. We’ll be opening up first of the year.

0:05:07

ML: Does your family have any background in barbecue?

0:05:11

RB: No, just me.

0:05:12

ML: Why do you think that is? Were you the only one with a passion for it?

0:05:15

RB: Well, no. It’s something that I like to do. Cook on the grill.

0:05:20

ML: Are any of your kids interested in it?

0:05:24

RB: I have a daughter named Tashiva Beasley. She’s very interested in selling my sauce.

0:05:28

ML: Do a lot of people buy your sauce—just the sauce?

0:05:31

RB: Yes, they do.

0:05:33

ML: Do you want to keep Beasley’s Best in the family?

0:05:36

RB: Yes.

0:05:38

ML: You hope she’ll take it over one day?

0:05:40

RB: Yes.

0:05:48

ML: What’s your favorite thing about being in barbecue?

0:05:51

RB: Knowing I’m the best.

0:05:53

ML: *[laughs]* And you want everybody to know you’re the best, right?

0:05:56

RB: Yes. God gave me a talent, and I’m going to put it out there.

0:05:59

ML: How long have you been barbecuing?

0:06:04

RB: Ever since I been eighteen years old. Now I’m 54.

0:06:07

ML: That’s a long time. Have you changed the way you barbecue over the years?

0:06:11

RB: Yes.

0:06:12

ML: How so?

0:06:13

RB: Well, I change the way I barbecue about twenty-some years ago to where I learned twenty seven years ago how to barbecue.

0:06:24

ML: What change did you make?

0:06:27

RB: Cooking the meat right and making my own barbecue sauce.

0:06:33

ML: The last time I was I here you told me the sauce would make me snap back. What do you mean by that?

0:06:38

RB: You got to take your time to eat it.

0:06:43

ML: Tell me a little bit about the ribs that you're making right now. How do you do them differently than other people?

0:06:49

RB: Well, I take my time. I try to get them tender where you don't have to wrestle with the meat. You can just—you enjoy eating them. They're not tough. Lot of people say you don't need no teeth to eat, but they lie. This one here, you don't need no teeth to eat them. They fall off the bone.

0:07:11

ML: How much meat do you cook per week?

0:07:14

RB: Well I try—well, right now I'm just opening up so I say about two cases of spare ribs a week for ribs and then chicken, probably about 10. Pulled pork, seven—I probably do about six to seven pulled porks.

0:07:32

ML: Where do you get all your meat?

0:07:34

RB: Through Sysco.

0:07:36

ML: What made you choose this location in Meridian?

0:07:39

RB: I’ve been coming down to Meridian for about nine years, and I saw that people loved to eat barbecue and I said that I would like to get them some ribs to taste, show them barbecue.

0:07:53

ML: Real barbecue?

0:07:54

RB: Real barbecue. *[laughs]*

0:07:55

ML: Now being from the North and Meridian here is in the South, how do you think that’s influenced the way you do your barbecue?

0:08:02

RB: Well, they say can’t no northerner cook barbecue, but that’s a lie. This northerner will cook all over these southerners.

0:08:09

ML: What do you do differently than these southerners?

0:08:13

RB: I cook the meat.

0:08:15

ML: You cook it better than the southerners?

0:08:17

RB: Yes, I do.

0:08:18

ML: What’s more important to you – the sauce or the meat?

0:08:20

RB: Everything plays a major part.

0:08:23

ML: What—do you rely on one thing more than the other? Do you rely on your sauce—?

0:08:28

RB: I rely on me cooking it. If I perform and cook it right, it ends up being good.

0:08:34

ML: How do you—where did all your recipes come from? With your sides, is that family, passed down or you just learned?

0:08:44

RB: I just learned, and I make my own recipes.

0:08:47

ML: Trial and error?

0:08:48

RB: Trial and error.

0:08:51

ML: And all that knowledge, do you just keep it up here? [motions to head]

0:08:53

RB: Yes, I do.

0:08:56

ML: That’s a lot of knowledge to keep in your head. How do you—how do you get the word out about Beasley’s?

0:09:04

RB: Word of the mouth spreads.

0:09:07

ML: Do you think your business is going to grow in the next year, maybe now that we’re almost out of the recession?

0:09:12

RB: Yes, it will. Yes, it will.

0:09:16

ML: Do you guys do any catering?

0:09:18

RB: Yes, we will.

0:09:21

ML: What kind? What kind of functions?

0:09:23

RB: Any kind as long as it pays.

0:09:27

ML: Do you have any competition in the local area?

0:09:30

RB: Well, you can call it competition, but it’s nothing to me.

0:09:36

ML: You are the best.

0:09:37**RB:** I am the best. I’m a bad dude now. *[Laughs]***0:09:45****ML:** What is your favorite thing on the menu that you think, personally, is the best?**0:09:48****RB:** Spare ribs. Pork spare ribs.**0:09:52****ML:** The last time I was here you told me that you could do the ribs anyway anybody wanted them. What kinds of ways—different ways can you do them?**0:09:59****RB:** I can do them jerk style. I can do them wet, dry, any kind of way they want me to do them. They just got to let me know.**0:10:07****ML:** How do you do them? If you were to eat your ribs, how would you cook them?**0:10:11****RB:** Well, I would marinate mine in my own marinate for at least a night, overnight. And then I would slow cook them to where they get a real juicy flavor to where you really don’t need sauce to eat them.**0:10:27****ML:** How long do you cook most of your meat?**0:10:31****RB:** Well, the first slice of meat I just put on the grill, that would be three hours on that grill, slow cooking.

0:10:40

ML: Is that the only smoker you’ve ever used, or is that a new one?

0:10:44

RB: No. No, it’s not. I have smokers up north.

0:10:47

ML: What kind of smokers do you have up north?

0:10:50

RB: The big boys.

0:10:51

ML: Can you describe them for me?

0:10:53

RB: Well, they hold anywhere from 25 to 45 slabs of ribs at a time.

0:11:01

ML: Did you make those too?

0:11:03

RB: Yes.

0:11:04

ML: How do you make your smokers?

0:11:05

RB: Well, I— *[phone rings]*

0:11:08

ML: That’s okay, we’ll pause. Alright, we’re back. Now, we were talking about your smokers. Do you want to describe them, how you made them?

0:11:17

RB: Well, I did all the welding, cutting them out for the doors and stuff, and welding the handles, spot-welding the handles together, and putting them on the—I can't *[inaudible]*. I just make them.

0:11:39

ML: Tell me about the wood you use because I know you don't use hickory, which a lot of people in Mississippi do use. I want to know about the wood you use and why.

0:11:44

RB: Well, I like hickory but a lot of people in Mississippi use pecan. But I prefer hickory, but I use pecan just to put a smoky flavor in there and try to put another color on it but I prefer hickory.

0:11:58

ML: What is the difference between the flavor of the meat that the pecan gives as opposed to the hickory?

0:12:04

NB: It just puts a smoky flavor in there and that's a flavor that a lot of people look for with their meat, and I try to cook it in hickory—I mean, pecan. That's what I'm getting ready to cook it in in a minute once its brown.

0:12:21

ML: Have you always cooked with pecan? I now you said you prefer hickory but have you cooked with pecan before, or is that a new thing?

0:12:26

RB: It's a new thing since I've been in the south but I always cook with hickory.

0:12:31

ML: What do you think the difference is in difference in Mississippi—the Mississippi barbecue tradition, as opposed to North Carolina, South Carolina, or even Alabama?

0:12:40

RB: Well, it's the difference—a lot of people in Mississippi can't cook barbecue.

0:12:45

ML: Maybe that's why there is no tradition. What do you think—if you had to describe the tradition, what would you describe it as?

0:12:53

RB: Fair.

0:12:55

ML: Do you have a favorite southern style of barbecue, or are you creating your own?

0:13:00

RB: I'm creating my own.

0:13:01

ML: And it's going to be the best?

0:13:02

RB: It is the best.

0:13:04

ML: Hands down the best? When you compete, what do you bring to the competition?
What meats do you compete with?

0:13:12

RB: Well, it depends on what meat I sign up for. That's what I would bring. If I signed up to cook spare ribs, that's what I would bring. If I sign up to cook Boston butts, I'll bring Boston butts. If I signed up to cook chicken, I'd bring chicken.

0:13:27

ML: Have you always been in barbecue, or have you had other jobs and you just kind of fell into owning your own barbecue place?

0:13:36

RB: Well, I worked at GM for 20 years. But I still cooked barbecue on the side, and I got to liking to cook barbecue to where I just started cooking it to where it's something I like to do.

0:13:51

ML: Owning your own place, what does that mean to you as a barbecue connoisseur? Is that the epitome of everything?

0:13:58

RB: You know good barbecue, that's why you're in my place.

0:14:02

ML: That's right. I stumbled upon you a couple weeks ago, and we really liked your barbecue. What do you see for the future? I know we've already kind of talked about this, but where ideally would you like to be in a year?

14:16

RB: Well I would like to meet Bobby Flay and have a throwdown with Bobby Flay.

0:14:22

ML: Is he your favorite?

0:14:24

RB: Yeah.

0:14:25

ML: Why's that?

0:14:26

RB: Because he goes from town to town having a throwdown with cookers, and I want him to come have one with me.

0:14:33

ML: Let's see. Do you have any desserts on your menu?

0:14:38

RB: Well, no. I had a peach cobbler, but the people don't order it and banana pudding, they don't order it.

0:14:47

ML: Why do you think that is?

0:14:48

RB: I'm in the South.

0:14:50

ML: The last time I was here, a lady said that your burger was her favorite. Is that something that a lot people come here for too?

0:14:57

RB: Well, yeah. They come for the big Beasley burger.

0:15:02

ML: What makes the Big Beasley burger special?

0:15:03

RB: Big Beasley.

0:15:05

ML: Because it's not McDonalds, right?

0:15:07

RB: Right.

0:15:10

ML: Do you need to check on your ribs? We can pause. Beasley's Best is not your first restaurant, am I right?

0:15:18

RB: No.

0:15:19

ML: Where were you before? Can you describe restaurants you've worked in before this one?

0:15:23

RB: Well, I've worked in the Golden Fry up in Michigan and Chicken Affair in Michigan, Mac Beef in Michigan. I had my first restaurant in Winona, Mississippi. Not successful. Now I had a concession stand in Philadelphia. Not successful. And then I had

a *[inaudible]* in Atlanta, Georgia. Successful. But I still came to Mississippi to start my barbecue dream.

0:15:52

ML: What made you choose Meridian?

0:15:54

RB: Long story.

0:15:56

ML: Let's hear it.

0:15:58

RB: Well, I met a friend of mine that stayed in Meridian. And she ordered some ribs and said that, "You should come to Meridian and barbecue." So, I came down to Meridian, tasted a few barbecue samples at different places, and I said, "They need to taste barbecue." So that's what made me want to come to Meridian.

0:16:18

ML: To change the name of the game?

0:16:20

RB: Right.

0:16:21

ML: Do you think you're doing a good job so far?

0:16:22

RB: I'm doing a beautiful job, just got to get the customers in here.

0:16:27

ML: Do you advertise in the papers around here?

	0:16:28
RB: No.	
	0:16:29
ML: Just word of mouth?	
	0:16:30
RB: Mm-hmm.	
	0:16:33
ML: Where do you think your passion for cooking came from?	
	0:16:35
RB: When I was a little kid, I started cooking with my mother. And I started liking to cook.	
	0:16:42
ML: Your mom cooked all the while when you were little?	
	0:16:44
RB: Mm-hmm.	
	0:16:46
ML: Did she ever do barbecue?	
	0:16:47
RB: She tried.	
	0:16:48
ML: She wasn't very successful?	
	0:16:50

RB: No.

0:16:52

ML: So you're self-taught on barbecue?

0:16:55

RB: I taught me how to barbecue.

0:16:59

ML: When you first started barbecue, like, for a business, was there a standard that you tried to meet, or did you just try to be the best?

0:17:05

RB: I tried to be the best. I go barbecue.

0:17:09

ML: What kind of barbecue did you eat growing up in Michigan if there was any?

0:17:13

RB: Pork spare ribs and chicken on the grill, hot dogs on the grill.

0:17:20

ML: Just regular grilling out foods?

0:17:21

RB: Mm-hmm.

0:17:22

ML: Did you know what you were getting into when you opened your own barbecue business?

0:17:27

RB: No, I didn't.

0:17:28

ML: Do you regret anything?

0:17:31

RB: No.

0:17:34

ML: So, you think it's worth it to own your own business and to—to do your own—
Beasley's own version of barbecue?

0:17:39

RB: Yes, it is worth it to put it out there.

0:17:43

ML: What—Now you guys don't have a logo or anything. Is that something you're going
to have more—maybe some Beasley's t-shirts?

0:17:49

RB: You tried the rest, now try the best.

0:17:51

ML: So, you have a great slogan. Do you feel a responsibility to the people of Meridian
to cook them the best barbecue?

0:17:58

RB: Well, I want to give them a chance to taste the best barbecue.

0:18:03

ML: They won't go back after that?

0:18:05

RB: They get to tasting this, and they won't go back.

0:18:10

ML: What—your smoker is old school, and it's amazing. What do you think about electric smokers, electric cookers?

0:18:18

RB: Electric cooker don't put the flavor into the meat the way I charcoal grill cook the flavor in there and wood flavor. Gas don't do it neither.

0:18:28

ML: Why do you think that is?

0:18:30

RB: It's a difference in the taste.

0:18:31

ML: How would you describe that difference?

0:18:34

RB: In the gas cooker, you're not getting the smoke that's coming into it. You're not getting the outdoor air that's coming into it. You're just getting direct gas. A flame broiled or a char broiled.

0:18:50

ML: Every time that I've been in here, which I mean, this is only my second time, but you're here. You're the man of Beasley's Best. How important is it for you to be in your restaurant?

0:19:00

RB: Well, it wouldn't be ran without anybody here.

0:19:04

ML: If you're not here, nothing?

0:19:06

RB: Right.

0:19:09

ML: I like that about Beasley's. I think people like that about you too. Are you planning on expanding your menu anytime soon?

0:19:14

RB: Yes.

0:19:16

ML: What are you going to add to it?

0:19:17

RB: Well, I'm going to add the coleslaw on top of the pulled pork if I can get people to buy it, see. That pulled pork sandwich is famous in the Carolinas and made it to Memphis to where the people in Meridian don't know nothing about it. They know about it, but only a few know about it. They would ask for it, but the rest of them want it straight up. I'm going to put that on the menu all the time.

0:19:45

ML: Are you going to do anything different to your meat?

0:19:48

RB: No, I'm going to cook it.

0:19:49

ML: Just the same as usual, the best?

0:19:51

RB: Yes.

0:19:52

ML: Do you need to check on your ribs? Okay. I'll pause. And we're back. What are your hours like here?

0:19:58

RB: 8—11 to 8.

0:20:00

ML: Day after day?

0:20:03

RB: Tuesday through Saturday.

0:20:04

ML: So, you have your Sunday and Monday off to relax?

0:20:07

RB: Yes, I do.

0:20:08

ML: Is barbecue a tough business to be in when it's just you?

0:20:11

RB: When you're good, it's beautiful.

0:20:14

ML: *[laughs]* And if you're bad?

0:20:15

RB: You're good.

0:20:18

ML: So you work pretty long days?

0:20:20

RB: Yes.

0:20:21

ML: Is it worth it?

0:20:22

RB: Yes.

0:20:24

ML: Is there anything you would change about Beasley's Best?

0:20:25

RB: No.

0:20:27

ML: Perfect the way it is?

0:20:28

RB: Yes.

0:20:31

ML: I think we might be out of questions. You've been such a good interview. Let's see.

What do you people—when people come into Beasley's Best is there every anything on the menu that they want that you don't have, or that they request specially?

0:20:45

RB: No.

0:20:46

ML: You've got everything?

0:20:48

RB: Yes.

0:20:49

ML: The last time I was here you told me that you can do the sauce anyway people want it.

0:20:55

RB: Anyway they want the sauce. They want vanilla, banana, pineapple, cherry, strawberry, peach. I'll make it that way for them.

0:21:02

ML: *[laughs]* How would you do that?

0:21:04

RB: Well, that's my secret.

0:21:06

ML: Yeah, you don't want to tell me everything. I totally understand. Now you told me you wanted to go to Atlanta. Is there where else you would want to go?

0:21:14

RB: Well, I want to go to Memphis in May next year to win that worldwide contest. I'm the best.

0:21:22

ML: Would you ever want to go back up North and do barbecue up there?

0:21:26

RB: One day in the near future I will go back home.

0:21:28

ML: Back to Detroit?

0:21:30

RB: Mm-hmm.

0:21:31

ML: What about somewhere like New York or even out West, would you take barbecue out there?

0:21:36

RB: Well, I would show somebody and teach them how to barbecue, and if they want to go, they can go.

0:21:42

ML: Do you have any young kids that come in here and want you to teach them how to barbecue?

0:21:48

RB: Nobody but my daughters.

0:21:50

ML: And how many daughters do you have?

0:21:51

RB: Four.

0:21:52

ML: Do they all barbecue?

0:21:54

RB: Just one.

0:21:55

ML: Is that your youngest?

0:21:57

RB: My oldest daughter.

0:22:01

ML: Do you hope that one day—well, we kind of already talked about this, but you want to keep Beasley's in the family?

0:22:07

RB: Yes.

0:22:09

ML: Does she know all your recipes, or are you going to let her learn for herself?

0:22:13

RB: No, I'm going to teach her my recipes. That way she can carry the dream on.

0:22:19

ML: And what dream is that?

0:22:21

RB: To be the best I am.

0:22:23

ML: Is there anywhere else in Mississippi—I mean, we talked about Memphis, we talked about Atlanta. Is there anywhere in Mississippi you could see taking your barbecue?

0:22:33

RB: No.

0:22:35**ML:** Just Meridian?**0:22:46****RB:** Mm-hmm.**0:22:36****ML:** With Meridian being on the Alabama side of the state, do you see an influence of Alabama-style barbecue here?**0:22:44****RB:** Well, I wouldn't mind Mobile, Alabama. I wouldn't mind it.**0:22:50****ML:** Why's that?**0:22:52****RB:** Well, they got a guy named Fat Jake. He was on the Food Network too. I want to give him a go for his money.**0:23:00****ML:** What kind of barbecue does he do?**0:23:02****RB:** He do the same as I do.**0:23:05****ML:** Does he use the white Alabama-based sauce?**0:23:09****RB:** Right, he uses the white Alabama sauce too.**0:23:12**

ML: You were using that on your ribs the last time I was here.

0:23:14

RB: Yes, I was.

0:23:15

ML: Do you alternate—do you switch that up a little bit, or do you primarily do that?

0:23:19

RB: Well, I kind of mix it together when I'm cooking. Cook it into the meat, then I come along with the red barbecue sauce and glaze it.

0:23:31

ML: What difference do you think that makes in flavor?

0:23:33

RB: Beautiful.

0:23:36

ML: The best there is, right?

0:23:38

RB: Yes, there is.

0:23:39

ML: Well, I think I've asked about all of my questions. You were super fast in this interview. Is there anything else you want to add?

0:23:48

RB: I'm a bad dude now. *[laughs]*

0:23:51

ML: *[laughs]* And you're the best?

0:23:53

RB: Yes, I am.

0:23:55

ML: Alright. Well, that was Mr. Beasley, and we're signing off.

[End Rodney Beasley Interview]