

**JACK ARNOLD**

**Arnold's Country Kitchen - Nashville, Tennessee**

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**[Begin Jack Arnold-Arnold’s]**

**00:00:00**

**Jennifer Justus:** Okay, this is Jennifer Justus, and we’re at Arnold’s Country Kitchen in Nashville, Tennessee, and I’m with Jack Arnold. Jack, would you spell your name for me, please?

**00:00:11**

**Jack Arnold:** J-a-c-k--A-r-n-o-l-d.

**00:00:17**

**JJ:** Thank you. And if you wouldn’t mind to just start from the beginning and tell me how you came to be where you are today, and how you got into this business?

**00:00:26**

**JA:** Well when I was in — growing up my mother’s doctor graduated from Vanderbilt, so we — I developed a relationship with him. Matter of fact, he just passed away not long ago, but he was ninety-two, and he was still practicing in Asheville, North Carolina. But I was born and raised at the foot of the Blue Ridge Parkway, in fact inside the Blue Ridge Parkway. Our little three-room house is one of the few remaining structures that are still standing. I was born on a kitchen table. **[Laughs]** This is all true.

**00:01:15**

You know those little white tables that had the white enamel on them and the red trim around the edge of it? Well that’s what I was born on. And we had a lot of interesting stories

back through those hills. I don't really have the time to go in — through all of them, but if I had to choose between living in that little three-room house and a mansion today, I'd go back there any day — no electricity, no running water, but I had God's creation at my backdoor.

**00:01:48**

I could go out my backdoor and walk all the way to Richmond, Virginia and maybe pass a few paved highways and dirt ways and byways on the way but very few houses. That was the beauty of the Parkway, Blue Ridge Parkway.

**00:02:11**

Anyway, Dr. Richard Nailing, he was a doctor's doctor. He's not like these doctors today that they — quite frankly they just dole out. If a pill doesn't have the answer they don't have the answer. If the test can't tell you, they don't know what's going on. But the doctors back then did not have at their disposal all of these machines and all of these pills and so forth, but they were usually right on the money. And he was a very well-educated man and so I, I told him I wanted to be — I didn't have a father. He died when I was six weeks old. So these male figures that came into my mother's life, older men, I always tried to emulate them and, and identify with them.

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And so I developed a real strong relationship with Dr. Nailing, and I mean even when I had a broken foot [*Laughs*] playing soccer, he still attended to me. I think — I can't remember how many generations that he said of my family that he had been the doctor to, but quite a few.

**00:03:30**

Anyway he asked me one day, you know I think we — I was getting on up in years. I must have been in my sophomore year of high school. He said what are you going to do? I said I'm going to be just like you. [*Laughs*] Bad thing about it was I just didn't have the IQ to be just

like him. He was a genius. And I applied for a scholarship. I got an academic scholarship to Vanderbilt and — but I didn't get a financial. So I was strictly academic. And being church poor, you know, I had to work when I was there. And of course the place I worked was food services. Since I had started in food services as a child — I neglected to tell you, you can put this in wherever you want to, or if — even if you want to.

**00:04:24**

This friend of mine, his father owned a little dinette, typical Southern dinette with the vinyl upholstery on the inside, the stools, the counter, the whole works. And so I kept going over. We didn't live too far from him at the time. We had moved into the city itself. And this little — this fellow and I, we became friends. He was a — not a paraplegic but he had — he was born with a disease that his bones were very brittle, and he was remained to a wheelchair. So his father was very wise, and he bought him a guitar. And he learned to play the guitar real well. We would sit around and, and we were constant companions, not having any brothers or sisters. We had three or four, but you know Joe was in a world of his own, so we stayed there and played. I attempted to play the guitar [*Laughs*]. And I would always beg his dad for a job, because we needed money.

**00:05:27**

And the first job I ever had was shining shoes in — down on the Farmers' Market and I didn't like that too well because these farmers would deliberately go out and walk through the hog pen and laugh at me to try to clean his boots. But I would — I went to work. Mr. Deaton finally gave me a job. He told me, he said “Jack’ — they called me Jackie at the time — he said “Jackie.” He said — I'd always go up to the backdoor and knock on the door and the waitress that he shacked up with [*Laughs*] or slept with or loved with, Irene, she would always go get him and bring him to the door. And I said “Mr. Deaton,” you know same old routine. He said —

finally one day he said, “Jack,” he says, “I want to work you,” but he said, “let me tell you. If I give you a job and you walk through that backdoor,” he said, “you’ll never walk through the front. You’ll always come in the rear door, and you’ll leave by the rear door.” And he said, “Until you become a guest,” he was pretty — he was pretty liberal, but he had his rules.

**00:06:41**

And so anyway, he gave me a job. I started washing dishes, and it was all by hand. It was nothing like today. You had to hand-wash every piece of silverware, every glass, every cup, whatever.

**00:06:56**

**JJ:** When was this?

**00:06:59**

**JA:** This I would say would be 1949.

**00:07:11**

**JJ:** And you were how old about?

**00:07:13**

**JA:** About what?

**00:07:14**

**JJ:** How old about then?

**00:07:15**

**JA:** Oh I was born in '37, so you figure it out; in my early teens. But anyway I went in there and learned you know — I was washing dishes. One day the cook didn't come in, or the grill cook. And you know he had this — the grill was right on the line. You know the way — the situation is laid out in those old diners. And I sure do miss that place. It had a big Wurlitzer jukebox in it, the vinyl upholstery and everything, and the waitresses, you know, they were your typical Southern-style diner waitresses, loose as a goose but a lot of fun.

**00:08:04**

And all types of — we had all types of customers — the head of high school, coaches, head coaches of high school, doctors, lawyers, and they would drive four and five miles just to eat and have a meal because they knew they were going to get a real authentic Southern dinner. Matter of fact, I even introduced some of my mother's cooking when I eventually became —. One day the fry cook didn't come in and I became the fry cook. And he never reported back for work, and when he did, he had been out on a drunk and he told him, he said, "I found me someone." Of course I was still in school and I sort of nudged him and said, "You know I can only do this for another couple of months." *[Laughs]*

**00:08:55**

And but anyway he gave me a job working at night on the grill. And so eventually I moved over into the vegetable and meats and they — the biggest thing that we had going, or we sold more of than anything was a breaded veal cutlet. Of course you can't afford to buy veal today and sell it at a diner. It was a very simple menu, but it was good.

**00:09:28**

And when I went to Vanderbilt I ended up in food services *[Laughs]*.

**00:09:38**

**JJ:** So this place you were just talking about that was back home and it wasn't here, right?

**00:09:42**

**JA:** Yeah, Nashville was kind of — ended up in Rand Hall under the supervision of Bill James, who without a shadow of a doubt is the best cook that I have ever had the experience of working with. He was — during the summer — that was when Vanderbilt had interest in, in the nutritional aspects of living on a university, taking three meals there a day. They still had the, the students' wellbeing in mind or they just really cared. Later on it became out of the freezer into the steamer into the oven.

**00:10:31**

But anyway getting back to Bill, he was from Johnson City, could play the clarinet, well-educated man. He went to TSU as a student. Went to work at Vanderbilt as a student and augmented his living expenses. And he ended up over there just like me. But he would during the summer, every summer when I was there, he would go to New York and go to the French Culinary School of the Arts, as the result of Vernon Nelson, who was the Director of Foods, he wanted to send him there because being the head chef you also had to be responsible for the chancellor's parties, along those things — along those lines. He had to, you know, when I was there I know we served presidents, big company directors, especially the Ford(s).

**00:11:30**

**JJ:** So he was your boss?

**00:11:31**

**JA:** Pardon?

00:11:31

**JJ:** He was your boss there?

00:11:34

**JA:** Well no, he wasn’t, but actually I was a supervisor, line supervisor, but I always found my way during my off-hours, I would go back and be with him because he was a joy to be around. He was a lot of fun. He was a perfect gentleman. Never heard a cross word cross his lips. And he was easy to be around. He had a lot of respect for me. Even at our — my early age he would call me mister. Well he was from the Old South. And I finally — I got him to calling me Jack. He was a mulatto. And I just came — I don’t know whether his — his personality, he did not sound like a black person, not that there’s anything wrong with that, but he was well-spoken and did not have this Ebonics at all. And he, he wore red a lot.

00:12:37

**JJ:** And so then what happened?

00:12:39

**JA:** Huh?

00:12:39

**JJ:** So then what happened?

00:12:42



**JA:** Well [*Laughs*] I moved on shall we say out of a request by the director of foods. I became manager of the Women's Facilities, Feeding Cafeteria and so forth, and so I got into trouble because of that. And then one of the — well, I can't — I don't want to go any further because anyway, to say the least, hmm, I enamored several females and my wife caught me, and so I really got caught by the seat of the britches and got a boot in the process, not only from my work but from the university. And I thought that they would stand behind me at least as hard as I worked and everything, and the fact that I was a student. But it was — I didn't — and I moved on from there to — I had the good fortune of working with Bill Ogburn, David Kindle, and Ed Phillips, who was an excellent cook. He was a cook in the Navy and this was a company called Belle Meade Buffet. It's no longer there, but I worked for them for years. And as a matter of fact, I think the director of foods at Vanderbilt got me the job.

00:14:27

But you know it's, it's been stirring the kettle and baking the cakes and pies ever since. That's all I've ever done.

00:14:37

**JJ:** And so how did you come into this place?

00:14:40

**JA:** How did I come into this place? Well I got into trouble again with a couple of the waitresses on the butcher block, [*Laughs*] and women have been my nemesis to say the least — my joy and my — the depths of depression and the depths of deception. [*Laughs*] And I had always had a love for the women and art, music, literature and beauty. Those are things that I care most about.

**00:15:22**

**JJ:** Well while we're on the subject of music that's something I wanted to ask you about. It's been said that Nashville has more meat-and-threes than other cities and just wondering if there's any connection you think between music and, and that, and do you — what do you make of that?

**00:15:40**

**JA:** Music and that?

**00:15:41**

**JJ:** And meat-and-threes.

**00:15:46**

**JA:** Well there's music involved in literature. I mean math involved in literature, art, and food. I don't know whether that's anything to do with it or not, but that is a fact. Of course some of these old Southern cooks you had to wait for somebody with a more liberal or conservative approach to food to come along to give it a scientific equation. Make it consistent, keep it consistent.

**00:16:21**

I know Bill used to tell me when it came to food, he said, "Kiss it." I said what does that mean? He said, "Keep it simple. Keep it consistent." Ray Danner told me, I sought his advice one day. He used to come in here when he was alive, God bless his soul. The man was grossly misunderstood. Ray believed in quality, believed in keeping things within the reach of the common man. He learned to cook in the Navy, but he was a wonderful person. But where was I?

**00:17:07**

Oh yeah, anyway Ray Danner, he was — he influenced my life.

**00:17:13**

**JJ:** Well speaking of influences I heard you talk about your mom and bringing in her cooking and then Bill, so who — who are you — who has influenced you the most you think in your — in your business?

**00:17:24**

**JA:** I'm sorry. Someone shot too many guns by my ears. You'll have to speak up.

**00:17:30**

**JJ:** Who has influenced you most? You talked about your mom and Bill and —

**00:17:35**

**JA:** In this particular place? I had the good fortune of being — of one day I let everybody — I bought this from Lynn Chandler. I went to work for Lynn Chandler. And well you know who he was, right? Well Lynn Chandler was the kingpin of the meat-and-threes at Soda Shop, Elliston Place [Elliston Place Soda Shop], Sylvan Park, and he sort of took me under his wing when he heard that I was looking for a job again.

**00:18:11**

**JJ:** Was this after Belle Meade?

**00:18:13**

**JA:** Yes, yes. I can't say what I want to about Lynn. He was kind enough to give me a job. He was a businessman. He was not a food man. I will say that. He didn't know ups and downs about food. Whether it was good or bad, he knew that. But he, he would serve it straight out of a can and call it food, edible food. **[Laughs]** But he was a shrewd businessman, and I liked him a lot. Sorry with his passing, but we both had the same problem. We both loved the women. I don't know anything else worthwhile loving, but—.

**00:19:04**

Lynn got himself into a pickle several times because of his love for women. I couldn't understand it. He always chose the ugly ones. **[Laughs]** But anyway, it — Lynn was very good. He gave me a job here as managing it. And he had the worst food service people I've ever encountered working for him here. They were stealing from him. They were — knew nothing about food, and so when I came in I told him, I said, "The reason you don't have any business is because you don't have any food worth serving. And you — your children, the woman's children that are working there are selling other things other than food." And so I don't know if you can print that or not, but hmm, to give you an example, they would come in and Nashville Electric and — hey baby.

**00:20:17**

A lot of my — actually you know I'm more of a personality than I am a chef. **[Laughs]** I know quite a bit about food, but hell, I'll never know as much as I want to. I don't know of anybody that does. I come across — if you want to know what cookbooks influenced me, I would have to say the Army Cookbook for one, Cooking for Fifty. There's another example of a scientific approach to cooking. They had it down pat. And I still have that book and I refer to it every now and then. I got my meatloaf recipe book out of there. I mean my meatloaf recipe out of that book. But Mrs. Dell, I think that's her name--Dill--Dell. I think her name is Dell. And

Helen Corbitt. Helen Corbitt, she's — even though her — she cooked at Neiman Marcus a lot of her recipes is where all my party recipes come from. I can't always, and Sadie LeSueur as far as little dinner parties and so forth — I cannot get — I can't get my current staff, including my wife and my son to use them and refer to these. They want something — they want our food they say. I say well, you know country food — I say, “Well, a certain segment of society will, but you've got to cater to this upper-crust, these people that want, snooty food.” *[Laughs]* I can't think of any other way of saying it — or finer food. And they both were — Sadie LeSueur — she was a real whiz as far as parties and so forth. And Helen Corbitt, some of her recipes are simply to be killed for.

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**JJ:** Did you use those in the beginning here?

00:22:33

**JA:** Ma'am?

00:22:34

**JJ:** Did you use those in the beginning here?

00:22:37

**JA:** No, I did not. The books that I used here was the Army Cookbook, all my life, and then the recipes that I gleaned from Bill James, Ed Phillips, and I can't say — excuse me, I can't say that anybody cooking — oh, other than this young boy Jerry Stokes who walked in here one day off of the street. And it was right after I had fired everybody, and I was trying to — I had this old

Army cook and he just walked in off the street too, God bless him. I don't know. God must move in mysterious ways because even though I am not a religious person, I'm not a Christian or — well I'm more of a Christian and I'm definitely not a Muslim. I don't know if you can print that or not, but no. Everything that Muhammad stands for is against Christianity, the abolishment of Christianity, and anybody that stands there and says they're not is a damn liar. Muslims do not like Christians. Their main objective is to destroy them and to occupy what they have. I'll let that go at that.

**00:23:57**

But — and all this other bunch is just a bunch of lies. They — you know it's a curtain. It's a magical thing. They're the magicians. They think they are — deception.

**00:24:11**

No the — anyway, this young boy Jerry Stokes, he, he learned to cook from his mother. They lived in Alexandria, Tennessee. His brother was a cook. His sister was a cook. And they all worked in this little restaurant up there, the only restaurant in Alexandria. And I grew to know the gentleman who owned it. I grew to know all of his sisters, his mother; since I had no family here they were my family. She's a — she's — they're all dead now, even Jerry. Jerry, he had an affinity for vodka and he would not buy it by the quart or pint. He would buy it by the gallon and he would just not buy one gallon at a time. **[Laughs]** He would buy six, and he could drink six gallons of vodka in one week. But I loved him. He was a great guy. He could come in and cook drunk better than ninety-nine percent of these cooks walking around here sober.

**00:25:20**

And the other cook I had, the old Army cook he always kept a half pint hid in the cornmeal or the flour or the sugar or in the commode, tub, wherever. He always had some whiskey, so I finally gave up on it. I just said, "No problem. As long as he does the work he can

have his whiskey.” Matter of fact I took a drink of it myself every now and then especially mornings when I was really tired. Yeah, it’s — it’s a melting pot of people. The food industry is. You get all types of people — people that are down on their luck, people that are well-educated people that are ignorant but have potential. You know I can accept--there’s an old saying, “He who knows not and knows he knows not is a smart person. He who knows not and knows not he knows not is a fool. He who knows and knows he knows is a wise man.” I’ve had all three in here. I don’t know who said that originally, but you know I pick up little things like that.

**00:26:42**

**JJ:** What about the people who come in? How have you seen that change or stay the same?

**00:26:47**

**JA:** Hmm. Well since we have been fortunate enough to be in the press as much as we have and travel magazines and have these little video shows — entertainment, never — nothing is ever as it seems. Just keep that thought in mind when you’re viewing some of those TV shows and reading — listening to some of those articles or reading some of those articles. They have to put their best foot forward. And usually they’ve always shown me in a good light. And I’m thankful for that. And my staff is — now that gentleman there, he used to cook for me. But he, he had to decide between cooking [*Laughs*] and working in the dining room where he makes more money. So he decided to work in the dining room but he’s a hell of a cook. And I miss him back in the kitchen — a good pastry cook.

**00:27:50**

Matter of fact he — well, I’d say Jerry, Jerry Stokes taught me more about pastry even though I was around all these French chefs and everything he taught me more about down-home cooking cobblers and pies and so forth than anybody else. And, and I certainly miss him.

**00:28:09**

**JJ:** And what part — will you remind me where Jerry — where you met Jerry?

**00:28:14**

**JA:** Well he and Jeff both walked in the week right off of the street. Came in off of the street. There was a sign up there, “cooks wanted, help wanted--cook, line server, bus boy, dishwasher.”  
*[Laughs]* But all these people that we were working here were worthless.

**00:28:37**

**JJ:** So this was before you bought the place, right?

**00:28:39**

**JA:** No, it was after. Before I bought the place, right. It’s when I was working for Lynn Chandler and then Lynn didn’t, you know — I took \$300 a day lunch and turned it into \$800 in a matter of a couple of months after I got these boys in. And then Lynn, he saw that I was —I had a family to support and he had enough restaurants so he said, “Ah hell I’m just going to sell it to you. You know, you’ve done such a good job and so forth. And — and I know you can make it grow.”

**00:29:14**



And so he was nice enough to sell it to me for practically nothing and then customers loaned me the money to buy it, **[Laughs]** and to turn on the utilities and to staff it with my — and buy the food.

**00:29:29**

**JJ:** And what year was that?

**00:29:32**

**JA:** God, dates. One way or another they've been the downfall of my life — dates, birthdays, anniversaries, dates, dates. Let me see. I've owned it for twenty-five years, so what date would that be? This is nineteen — I mean 2012, so there you go.

**00:30:01**

**JJ:** Okay, what about the food? How's it changed from the beginning to now?

**00:30:10**

**JA:** Not a whole lot. I've gone from using a saturated — even though it's better. Chicken is better when you cook it in lard. I don't care what anybody says — cooking in lard. Everything is better with lard and butter. **[Laughs]** That's the mainstay and the reason it is, is because it grew out of the things that cooks had available to them when the South was really the South.

**00:30:42**

I remember going to hog-killings and lendering/rendering of lard, churning of butter, and milking of the cows, and feeding of the chickens and chasing as many roosters as I could, **[Laughs]** poking pigs that could eat me alive through the hog pen. My grandmother, she always

told me — the hog pen was up behind the house. You had to cross a dry weathered creek, but it was running all the time, but it was a low water bridge to get to the hog pen. And you had, in order to get, and to the outhouse, and they were all in that smelly direction. **[Laughs]** But I'd always poke the chickens and pester the hogs, but never went in the hog pen. The hogs in there were as big as horses almost. And she said, you know, she said, "I don't know how many of my boyfriends have been eaten by those pigs." **[Laughs]**

**00:31:38**

**JJ:** So you learned about food from family starting even back then?

**00:31:44**

**JA:** Family. We'd have a family, you know, everybody cooked in our family. My mother had twelve sisters and brothers. All the wives of the brothers knew how to cook. All the sisters knew how to cook. And when they would have a family reunion it was — you had your favorites. You went and got food, and you know who made the best cakes, who made the best chicken, who made the best —. And I sort of learned from them a great — what little I do know, from them and some of the cooks that I've had in the past—. I'm cold as hell. Aren't you? I'm cold. She's cold.

**00:32:23**

**JJ:** So you were just talking with someone that you said has been — or would come in every single day.

**00:32:28**

**JA:** Oh yeah.

**00:32:30**

**JJ:** So tell me about that. You had a lot of repeat like everyday, regular — ?

**00:32:35**

**JA:** Every day, never miss a meal. I had a lot of customers like that. And we became, you know I knew the name of their children. The younger people when they'd have a child, the first place they'd bring them is, "We want to introduce them to good food and so —." [*Laughs*]

**00:32:57**

**JJ:** What was the area like here when you — ?

**00:33:00**

**JA:** Scary. Very scary.

**00:33:03**

**JJ:** Tell me about that and how you've seen it change.

**00:33:07**

**JA:** Well they must have taken some plans — some ideas from Senator Corker. Have you been to Chattanooga lately to see how nice and clean, and you don't see any homeless people standing on the corner or laying in the street or whatever? I don't know what his program was, but it was successful. Chattanooga is clean. It's entertaining unlike Nashville. This used to be a warzone

down here. You had the Vietnamese soldiers, ex-soldiers and so forth and every — all of them were into some type of substance abuse. I felt sorry for a lot of them. They was, you know, screwed up in their emotions and their minds and —. I help out when I can, but when I, you know, help a person four or five times, and they come back and throw it in my face —.

**00:34:11**

**JJ:** I heard that you used to wear a gun in a holster when you were here.

**00:34:17**

**JA:** Still do. I still have a forty-five on my hip right now.

**00:34:21**

**JJ:** Okay, good to know. So can you tell me what you miss about this place because I know you're not in here as much anymore — miss about it, and don't miss about it?

**00:34:39**

**JA:** Well I can't say that I don't miss my drunk cooks, because I do. *[Laughs]* I think it's the daily routine that I don't miss. I miss, I miss serving food, preparing food, and exchanging of — rubbing elbows with some of the great, great customers that I had, and I'm sure I still do. I just don't know them.

**00:35:16**

**JJ:** Do you care to share a — maybe a few favorite moments, things that happened that burned in your memory?

00:35:26

**JA:** Well I think one of my — but he was not a regular customer, and I found out later on that he — and he was — Eddy Arnold was a homeboy, homebody. He was the type of person who only felt comfortable around — being around and no more than five miles away from home.

**[Laughs]** Eddy just would not leave Brentwood. I'd like to have a nickel for every acre of land that he owned out there.

00:36:11

But Eddy walked in the door one day, and I knew just like that **[Finger Snaps]** who he was. And he came through the line and he said, "So you're Jack Arnold?" I said, "Yes, sir. I'll be that way all my life." And he, he said, "I had a, had a brother named Jack." And he said, "Something compelled me to come in here and see the other Jack Arnold." And I said, "Well, I don't know. You know I'm probably better looking than he was." **[Laughs]** He got a laugh out of that, and we exchanged amenities for a few minutes and I never saw him again. But I talked to several people in the music business and they told me. They said you know once he becomes adapted going to one place, develops a habit, he goes back there no matter whether the food is good or bad. It's the people.

00:37:16

And then Chet Atkins was a real — one of the most down-to-earth homeboys. And sharing, sharing stories with him about real life, things that happened to him in his childhood, things that he did that he couldn't tell anybody about **[Laughs]**, and I wouldn't repeat them, but they were funny.

00:37:45

**JJ:** What have you learned most from having this place?

**00:37:57**

**JA:** I can't remember who it was. It might have been Henry James that said, "You have to live most of life before you have to learn how to live life." So I learned how to live life and to realize that, "Hey, there ain't no two people alike and everybody has problems." But you work around them, if they have any redeeming qualities. *[Laughs]*

**00:38:33**

**JJ:** Well what else would you like me to know or like everyone to know that we haven't covered today about, about this place?

**00:38:45**

**JA:** Well every, everybody every day puts in their best effort to prepare food and serve customers to the best of their ability. And I've always been a stickler. I don't know if my son shares the same opinion, but he'll be his own self one day. But he's like most children. He's sort of cement — made out of cement. *[Laughs]*

**00:39:23**

**JJ:** When did you know that he was going to take this place over? Did you have that feeling from when he was a young boy?

**00:39:31**

**JA:** Well my kids all — you know my wife raised them mostly down here. When I got this place my two boys were always — already up and out of the playpen. But Kahlil, I mean the other children — other three children that I have, they were — they were brought down here in diapers and were raised in the playpen, which was a small area big as this table, a little bigger. And all of my customers, well not all of them, but there were quite a few that brought them Christmas presents every year and birthday presents.

**00:40:10**

I know I had one couple in particular, Bobby and Barbara Chilton, who would--I mean they were born — Bobby Chilton was born into money and then he doubled his money. I'm not talking about pennies and nickels. I'm talking about big money, millions of dollars. And they were the most down to earth, accepting human beings I have ever met. They sort of took my family under their wing, bought them presents, and so forth when they knew that I didn't have the money. And I remember one year, Rose was out Christmas shopping and one of my — and it was about 10:30 in the morning, and she called me from the shopping center and told me that somebody had stolen her pocketbook, and it had all the Christmas money in it. And some customer, name of McCullough, Jean McCullough heard me on the phone and how upset I was. And I went back to the grill. And when the customers had died down, she came over to me and put five \$100 bills —.

**00:41:40**

I had my customers. They — like I said we were family, all family. They came here every day. I shared their sorrow. I shared their happiness. I buried their children, and I buried their husbands and wives. It's all part of life.

**00:41:59**

**JJ:** I've heard John Egerton say once that this is the only democracy there is — is a place like this where lots of different people are able to sit together and have a meal together. What do you make of that?

**00:42:14**

**JA:** Well I just think that most of my customers must have the same vein of thought that I have of life [*Laughs*]. They're down-to-earth. No matter the degree of wealth they have, they come in here because we share a common bond.

**00:42:32**

**JJ:** What about the, the James Beard Award that you got? Did — what did you make of that?

**00:42:38**

**JA:** I couldn't. I couldn't. I mean I love good food and I love people who really care and — about their food. And I think we do, too, but John Egerton must have — and John Edge, John T — must have seen something. They knew that I was devoted to what I was doing and that no stone went unturned. This place was a gem, a diamond in the rough. And that's what — and, and my charming my personality [*Laughs*] I guess, and so I remember being up in New York and being about three-quarter or halfway in the bag and John T came walking down through there, and I said, "You know what?" I said "I really" — even though I was the best speaker up there — that's what everybody told me later and I had not prepared a speech — I said, "You were so good up there on the stage. You were so funny. And everybody was so uptight but you, you were laid back, down to earth, and just let it flow." I said, "Well, I can do that sometimes especially if



they —” they wouldn't let you have any drinks before you went on stage. I somehow got around that. *[Laughs]*

00:44:10

And that loosened my tongue up a little bit.

00:44:14

**JJ:** Okay, well —

00:44:17

**JA:** I never felt like — there were people here in Nashville who certainly deserved it a lot more than I did, if in the vein of why it was there. James Beard, I never had the pleasure of knowing him. I enjoyed immensely the food that we had up there. I just can't say enough about it how impressed I was with, with those people. But there were some people who got it that, you know, had hamburger joints and some people had little holes-in-the wall and so forth. And I think that's good. I think anybody who devotes as much —. And then I felt like there were some people up there who didn't deserve it, who received the award that didn't deserve it. I'd like to be a judge on that panel because I know what — food that not only looks good; it has to taste good. And you have to, like I said, you have to like it.

00:45:19

**JJ:** Well you know that's something we haven't talked much about that we probably should is more about the food. Can you tell me what —out of all the things you've served that you're most proud of?

**00:45:31**

**JA:** People. *[Laughs]* No, I can't. Everything is good. Some things are better than others. Our turnip greens are unique. There's nobody else in the world that I know of that serves and puts what I put in my turnip greens. And I only learned it from experience and association. You know you taste one thing and you say, "You know I think I recognize this in something else in some other form." And, and so you, you combine those, those memories into food, and your association, practice, practice, practice, and keeping an open mind about it. You have to keep an open mind about food, so —.

**00:46:25**

**JJ:** Do you cook at home now?

**00:46:26**

**JA:** No. I'm going to start. My wife, out of my spiritual and emotional salvation, she went out and bought me a nice big Kitchen Aid, the biggest one they make, mixer, and so I've gone about collecting cookbooks on pastries, pies, cakes, and so forth.

**00:46:54**

You know who I used to love to talk to? We'd get together and have a great time talking about cooks and he, he would even order cookbooks and say, "Here, take it," was Jerry Thompson. Jerry was —he loved good food. One, he loved peaches, he loved barbecue. And I would go every year to this — and I haven't been since he passed away — but this barbecue place out here where he lived, it was a church, and they would have a social barbecue every year. And I would go to it, and it had great slaw, the best slaw I've ever had. But Jerry and I, I visited

him quite a — well, every chance I got when he was in the hospital, which was not enough. And then I went to his home.

**00:47:47**

His brother is just as funny as Jerry was. I think his brother might — he's got cancer too. You don't know him? Oh my goodness, if he's not dead, you need to get to know him. He's a funny guy.

**00:48:08**

I remember Jerry, Jerry and — I can't even remember his brother's name, used to go fishing quite a bit. And they'd take, you know, an ice — they'd pack a little, a little beer in an ice chest and made sure they had enough ice. *[Laughs]* And they would fish all night long at Percy Priest [Lake]. And one night they were fishing and Jerry said, "You know we'd had a few beers. And I think we went out there just to drink, not to fish," but he said, "I looked to my left and I saw this—" We were in this sort of cove, but we were about — at the mouth of it. And he said — damn, I'm freezing to death. I must have something. He said, "I saw this old truck going across the water with its lights on at about two o'clock in the morning." Well he said, "I know I've had a lot to drink," *[Laughs]* but he said, "I didn't think I'd had that much to drink. And he said, "It was going right across the top of the water and didn't miss a beat. When it went to the other side it just drove out like it was driving on glass floor or something."

**00:49:31**

"And I looked at my brother and I said — 'I didn't want to say anything — but did you see that?' He said, 'Yeah, I saw it and I didn't want to say anything.'" *[Laughs]* He said, he said, "I can't figure out what it was." So later on he told me, he says, "We had to find out what it was. Hell, we went up through there and looked at our depth finder and all of the sudden psssh, this old roadway came up out of the water. So it was only about a foot below the water surface if it

was that much.” He said, “But I cannot describe the feeling that I felt.” He said, “I knew we liked to drink, but I didn't know we had drank that much.”

**00:50:15**

**JJ:** Well anything else you’d like to add?

**00:50:19**

**JA:** Well I hope you will forgive me for receiving the James Beard Award. [*Laughs*] I was a little disappointed that I did not receive a little notification, not for myself, but I know my wife was extremely proud of it, and she’s worked hard to sustain and keep this business going. And I don’t know of any other cashier or manager or owner that’s as pretty and as pleasant as she is to be around.

**00:50:55**

**JJ:** I would agree with that for sure. Well, thank you very much.

**00:50:59**

**JA:** Thank you.

**00:51:01**

**[End Jack Arnold-Arnold’s]**