

**DOLLY INGRAM**  
**Bolton's Spicy Chicken & Fish - Nashville, TN**

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Interviewer: Amy C. Evans

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

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**[Begin Dolly Ingram Interview]**

**00:00:02**

**Amy Evans:** This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Saturday, May 31, 2008. I'm in Franklin, Tennessee, at the Franklin Food and Spirits Festival. But I'm here sitting with Dolly Ingram of Bolton Spicy Chicken and Fish in Nashville. And Dolly, if you wouldn't mind saying your name and also your birth date for the record, please?

**00:00:19**

**Dolly Ingram:** Sure, Dolly Ingram; birth date April 15, 1958.

**00:00:24**

**AE:** Now could I have you state what it is that you do, actually? Like if I were to ask you what your occupation is—if you could just say a sentence that describes that?

**00:00:35**

**DI:** I'm an entrepreneur of food. And that's my life for the last past seven, eight years.

**00:00:44**

**AE:** And you're business partners with Bolton Matthews, his namesake restaurant. Can you describe how you got into business with Mr. Matthews?

**00:00:54**

**DI:** Yes. We actually met doing another type of business and we branched off into food. His uncle, a lot of people may know was Bolton Polk, who had the Chicken Shack down on Shelby Avenue in Nashville. For many of years later to Charlotte—or either from Charlotte to Shelby, excuse me—and his name—his nephew was Bolton Matthews who was named after him, Bolton, and happened to share his chicken recipe. And I had a fantastic fish recipe, and we put it together. And since his uncle was famous we used his first name, which is his—also first name. And we named it Bolton Spicy Chicken and Fish.

**00:01:41**

**AE:** All right. And if we could back up—if you know anything more about the chicken shack about what years did it start and a little bit more information on that?

**00:01:48**

**DI:** I guess I could say it was round about twenty-five, thirty years ago and stood for a long time, and we still have some clients that were clients of his uncle's that come by and visit us and share memories of the Chicken Shack on how good the food was.

**00:02:08**

**AE:** And so was Bolton Polk doing hot chicken at the chicken shack?

**00:02:11**

**DI:** Yes, he was doing hot chicken. He was almost famous for his wife's desserts and had just—meeting and having good times.

00:02:24

**AE:** And what kinds of desserts did his wife make?

00:02:25

**DI:** As I understand she made a pretty mean chess pie and good on the potato salad, too.

*[Laughs]*

00:02:32

**AE:** So do you have any idea how Bolton Polk came to start making hot chicken and where it came from?

00:02:38

**DI:** I think it was an old family recipe because when he shared too with his nephew, believe me, it's a recipe. *[Laughs]*

00:02:49

**AE:** Now you said the first Chicken Shack was in Charlotte, is that right?

00:02:51

**DI:** Right, on Charlotte Avenue, uh-hmm and then it moved to the bottom of Shelby Street Bridge.

00:02:57

**AE:** Okay, I'm sorry. So Mr. Polk was he a native—or is he a native of Nashville?

00:03:01

**DI:** Yes.

00:03:04

**AE:** So Nashville has some other hot chicken in and around the town. And I wonder how that—that dish gained popularity and how it came to be and—and what that—kind of history that is. Do you have an idea about that?

00:03:22

**DI:** Well, I think along years ago probably all of the hot spicy chicken foods, the ancestors was—they know—they knew each other and from when their families branched out different ones carried different parts of the recipe, and so now you have this one, that one—whatever.

00:03:43

**AE:** Can you explain why people are attracted to hot chicken, what—what people like about it?

00:03:47

**DI:** Of course. It's just an awesome taste. I mean it's nothing like hot—you know some people like it real, real hot where you just lose your composure, and then some people just like the spicy taste of it with a little kick. And I'm telling you, if you're dozing or have any type of sinus problems and you eat a piece of that, you're cured. *[Laughs]*

00:04:09

**AE:** So what year did you and Bolton Matthews open Bolton's Hot Fish and Chicken?

00:04:14

**DI:** Nineteen ninety-seven.

00:04:19

**AE:** And can you talk a little bit about going into business and finding a location and all that?

00:04:24

**DI:** Yes, he wanted to be near downtown and he found a place, and the first place that he found I wasn't too enthused about it but he said that he was set on that one, so we just got down and with a little arm muscle and cleaned the place up and sealed the place up from ceiling to wall and wall to floor. And, as everybody knows, when you start a business, you have to have codes and all the other licenses that go on. And we just started from scratch.

00:04:56

**AE:** And what—did you have another line of employment before you went into business in—in hot chicken and fish?

00:05:00

**DI:** Yes, I used to have my own janitorial service, and he had his own janitorial service. And before that I worked for Cigna Insurance, corporate life. **[Laughs]**

00:05:12

**AE:** So are you—was it exciting for you to go into the restaurant business? Did you know how much work it was going to be?

**00:05:18**

**DI:** It was exciting, but I didn't know quite how much work it was going to be. [*Laughs*] It's a lot of hours.

**00:05:25**

**AE:** So is Bolton Polk's restaurant, the Chicken Shack, is that still open? And if not, when did it close?

**00:05:32**

**DI:** No, it closed I guess about fifteen years ago, and he's now deceased.

**00:05:39**

**AE:** Okay. So and you've been open about twelve years, then. So that was—was his passing kind of an inspiration to—to open another fish and chicken place?

**00:05:49**

**DI:** Well, he was ill and before he passed, he gave his nephew the recipe, and Bolton decided that he wanted to try it. And I gave the fish recipe a shot. And it just blossomed.

**00:06:10**

**AE:** Before Bolton Polk gave the recipe to his nephew had—do you know if it was written down before, if anybody else had it?

**00:06:18**

**DI:** Other people thought they had it, but he actually said nobody actually had the original recipe. They had the recipe with modifications. He had the original recipe.

**00:06:29**

**AE:** So does Bolton Matthews—is he working still from that original recipe and does he have it written down?

**00:06:33**

**DI:** I'm pretty sure he has it written down. He hasn't shared that with me but, yeah, he's operating off the original recipe.

**00:06:41**

**AE:** Is he the only one who makes it at the Shack?

**00:06:44**

**DI:** He's the only one that fixes the recipe.

**00:06:48**

**AE:** What happens on a day if he doesn't feel like coming in?

**00:06:49**

**DI:** Well really it's a spice that he mixes together and he makes sure that you know we have ample supply. But nobody knows what goes in the spice.

**00:07:00**

**AE:** Is it—is it like a dry spice when he makes it up or is it more like a—a liquid or—or kind of rub?

**00:07:09**

**DI:** It's more of a dry spice when he mixes it together.

**00:07:12**

**AE:** Do you have any ideas of what might be in it?

**00:07:15**

**DI:** I can just tell you parts of it is probably made from pepper bomb spray. **[Laughs]**

**00:07:23**

**AE:** Good one. **[Laughs]** And now what about your fish recipe; where did that come from?

**00:07:30**

**DI:** The fish recipe came from when I was growing up. The neighborhoods used to have fish fries in the back yard and little card parties and stuff and that was just always such a hit. And then in all our neighborhoods, we would always have some type of fish shack. Well, when I grew up and, you know, you couldn't find that as much, and you couldn't find that same taste and

most people are used to restaurants selling square pieces of fish and minced fish, fixed cod, or something like that and I grew up with the real fish, laying off the bread, filleted, boneless, you know fixed—seasoned with hot sauce, mustard, onion and pickle.

**00:08:17**

So when I introduced that to the restaurants and different places we went, they just had no idea what that was and we still have people asking us, “What is whiting? What is catfish? Hot sauce, mustard, onion?” You know, they’re just like, “What?” [*Laughs*] And when they try it, they truly enjoy it.

**00:08:39**

**AE:** And you have another kind of fish? You have three kinds of fishes—listen to me—fish.

**00:08:43**

**DI:** Yes, we have grouper and we have catfish and whiting, and they’re all filleted, boneless.

**00:08:50**

**AE:** And you prepare them a few different kinds of ways, is that right?

**00:08:51**

**00:08:53**

**DI:** Correct. You can get them regular, which is without the spicy seasoning, and you can get it spicy and then you can get it hot.

**00:09:01**

**AE:** And is the spice for the fish is that the same as the spice for the chicken, or it different in any way?

**00:09:07**

**DI:** No, I use all of his spices. That's the benefit of having a partner. *[Laughs]*

**00:09:14**

**AE:** You get to share.

**00:09:15**

**DI:** Yes. *[Laughs]*

**00:09:15**

**AE:** And is there anything about—in the way that I guess the chicken more specifically is it—does it sit in the spice before it's fried or does it—is the spice applied right before it's cooked?

**00:09:31**

**DI:** It—he usually marinades and we sell quarters, whereas most restaurants give you a separate wing from a breast or a separate thigh from the leg, and most of our chicken comes in quarters—the breast quarters and leg quarters. But we do sell wings and strips and chicken on sticks, but that's the authentic part is the quarters.

**00:09:54**

**AE:** Was that something that was important to Bolton early on and did his uncle do that also—serve the quarters?

**00:10:00**

**DI:** His uncle also served the quarters and, as a matter of fact, I can't remember what year, but I read a news magazine where they did an article on his uncle's restaurant and when he first started out I think the leg quarters were \$1.39—cooked and served.

**00:10:17**

**AE:** What are they now?

**00:10:18**

**DI:** Four dollars.

**00:10:21**

**AE:** And tell me how you serve an order of hot chicken.

**00:10:23**

**DI:** We serve them in plates or sandwiches. Everything we have you can get as a sandwich or a plate or one side with fries, whatever you would like—pretty much however you would like—fix it your way.

**00:10:39**

**AE:** Now is—the things that you have on a stick, are those popular? Is there one thing, one kind of way that it's served that's more popular than another?

**00:10:46**

**DI:** We have chicken on a stick, and it's very popular in outings and events because like to walk around and they can just hold the stick and walk and talk and, you know, function, whereas when you have a plate holding it in your hand you have to kind of like sit down and eat it. So and we fix our chicken on the sticks regular, spicy, and hot also.

**00:11:07**

**AE:** Will you be doing the chicken on the stick today at the festival?

**00:11:09**

**DI:** Yes, we will.

**00:11:11**

**AE:** Now describe to me the level of heat in the different—in the regular, medium, and spicy and—and what that's like.

**00:11:19**

**DI:** The level of heat can go on a scale of one to ten. I'll say the spicy is around about a six or seven and your hot—hot would be like a nine to ten. We have had people come back and bring the food, and say they can't eat it. They just—they would like another piece of meat without as much heat, so, to me, I guess, that's pretty hot.

**00:11:47**

**AE:** So tell me about the people who come and like and order a lot of the hot chicken.

**00:11:52**

**DI:** They leave satisfied. What they usually say is, “It’s spicy and it’s hot, but you can also taste the chicken.” You know, sometimes you can get that hot flavor so it just like blends out everything else. You can't tell if you’re eating poultry or fish or whatever because all you taste is the heat. Ours is, you taste the heat, plus what you’re eating—the seasoning and the chicken. And most people leave out going, “Mmm, mmm that was good, and we’ll be back.”

**00:12:22**

**AE:** And but do they have kind of like—do people develop an addiction for the hot chicken, like that’s all they can have?

**00:12:26**

**DI:** Yes, we do have a lot of repeat customers that—we’re closed, they’re next door—the next day, excuse me, they’re banging on the door and they’re wanting their chicken, or if they missed coming during the times we’re opening—when we’re open they are pretty upset the next day because they said, you know, “I had a craving for it.” This is the term that they use. They have a craving for it.

**00:12:52**

**AE:** Do they describe what it does to them or for them?

00:12:54

**DI:** Says it gives them a rush; gives them a rush, they can breathe better [*Laughs*], they can function at work better because their mind is more alert. Beats me. Hmm. [*Laughs*]

00:13:07

**AE:** So people—do people come in specifically to—for health reasons to clear their sinuses and all to have your hot chicken, do you know?

00:13:14

**DI:** I don't really know, but I've just heard the comments at the table.

00:13:20

**AE:** Do you serve more medium over hot or—?

00:13:23

**DI:** Hmm, more hot, yes. Well we're known for spicy chicken so when they come—most—most people, I would say seventy-percent, are already looking for something spicy to hot. Then you have those that just like the flavor of the chicken, and they just want it regular, maybe just a tad bit. But the majority of people want it hot.

00:13:48

**AE:** Now is—is regular still spice, it's just not hot, or is it just regular fried chicken?

00:13:52

**DI:** It's spicy a little bit—just a little bit.

**00:13:58**

**AE:** So you have people that come more than once a week, some regulars that come in for hot chicken?

**00:14:03**

**DI:** Oh yes, definitely so, three times a week. We even have some people come every day. They may not get the same thing because we do offer a lot of different items in our restaurant. We also do ribs, shoulder, pork chops, just a variety of items.

**00:14:22**

**AE:** So you have barbecue and then also like a meat-n-three kind of scenario?

**00:14:26**

**DI:** Yes, we have plates with turnip greens, macaroni and cheese, hot water cornbread, white beans, baked beans, green beans, homemade spaghetti with hamburger meat in it. We have a lot to offer.

**00:14:39**

**AE:** Tell me about your hot water cornbread because not a lot of places serve that anymore.

**00:14:43**

**DI:** Right. Hot water cornbread it has a recipe too. *[Laughs]* All I'm going to say on that issue is, it's truly hot water cornbread with a little spice.

**00:14:53**

**AE:** Is that a recipe that came from you?

**00:14:55**

**DI:** No, it's a recipe that Bolton and one of our employees came up with.

**00:15:02**

**AE:** Did they come up eating hot water cornbread and that's why they wanted to include it, or they just thought it might be just a different offering?

**00:15:10**

**DI:** We all came up eating hot water cornbread, and it goes very good with turnip greens and white beans. It's a Southern dish.

**00:15:18**

**AE:** So tell me about some other sides and things that you serve.

**00:15:22**

**DI:** We also serve French fries, coleslaw, potato salad, along with the other steam vegetables we have that's hot.

**00:15:33**

**AE:** And maybe I should ask you about beverages too because somebody has got to have something to cool of their palate after they're drinking all this hot food.

**00:15:39**

**DI:** Yes, we have a variety of sodas and also we carry water. And eventually we're fixing to graduate to tea. [*Laughs*]

**00:15:49**

**AE:** [*Laughs*] Sweet tea, I presume?

**00:15:50**

**DI:** Correct.

**00:15:51**

**AE:** Why haven't you had it up until now?

**00:15:53**

**DI:** Well we just been—what you call a little hometown restaurant. And I guess when we grew up, tea wasn't a very popular thing. We just always had I guess what you call soda pop, cold drinks—whatever. It depends on what part of the country you come from, and we just kind of like stuck with that—something you can just grab because people are like, “Give me something, give me something,” you know.

**00:16:21**

And with hot food—tea doesn't really cool it down a lot. And then you wouldn't never have anything in your pitcher—free refills. **[Laughs]**

**00:16:33**

**AE:** Do you enjoy eating the hot chicken?

**00:16:35**

**DI:** Yes, I do, but I will admit I don't eat it very, very hot. I just like it nice and spicy and with some dill pickles to complement it. It's delicious.

**00:16:46**

**AE:** How many pickles do you think you go through?

**00:16:49**

**DI:** Seven per sandwich—slices, excuse me. **[Laughs]**

**00:16:56**

**AE:** And so you've received some attention for your hot chicken. Can you talk about—I'm going to make it up if I say where it was—I want to say *Southern Living*, but some of the people who came to—to cover your restaurant and what that was like?

**00:17:11**

**DI:** Yes, we were covered by *Southern Living*, *Gourmet Magazine*, *Ten Best Awards*, *The Tennessean*, *The Scene*, and an airline magazine. I don't want to call the wrong one but—she's

asking me this off the top of my head [*Laughs*] and some others that I can't just remember and it was very exciting. And we've had two country artists to do photos in front of our building for their album covers or CD covers and one is for a video.

00:17:46

**AE:** Do you remember who the artists are?

00:17:50

**DI:** One, the last name was West, and I wasn't there for the last fellow that came. He was up and new-coming, but I'm pretty sure when it comes out on TV we will recognize it. [*Laughs*]

00:18:02

**AE:** So what does that mean when you've been in business for just twelve years but Bolton Matthew's uncle, you know, had a legacy that he passed on obviously, but to have gone into the restaurant business kind of late and not been in there really too long and get all this recognition, what does that mean to y'all?

00:18:20

**DI:** It's very exciting. We're very grateful. We love our customers dearly. We just have a lot of gratitude. We're thankful and we try to give the best to our customers. We don't serve anything that we wouldn't eat, and we just let them know we love them and we appreciate them and we—we've learned that customer service given in the best is the best that you can do.

00:18:49

**AE:** Yeah, I've heard a lot about your place being—I haven't been there unfortunately yet, but I'm definitely going to be eating with you today, but I've heard a lot about a family atmosphere at your place.

**00:18:58**

**DI:** Yes, we try to have a family atmosphere. We try to make people feel at home. They can get up and do—turn the TV if they want to, or we have paper towels and anything or a bag. They can just get what they want and just feel at home and relax, kick off their shoes if they want to, sit down and have conversations with them. And we have people that come in and don't even know each other and sit down and have conversations with each other.

**00:19:22**

We have a couple of churches that some time come in, and they have their little business meetings and it's not real fancy but, you know, it's just plain and clean and a homely atmosphere.

**00:19:33**

**AE:** And it's pink, too, from some pictures I've seen.

**00:19:36**

**DI:** Yes. *[Laughs]* That was my color choice. I tried to say rose, but when we painted over white it turned pink. *[Laughs]* But it looks good.

**00:19:47**

**AE:** How does Bolton feel about that?

**00:19:48**

**DI:** At first he was skeptical and the ladies came in and liked it. So he kind of warmed up to it. But the contrast is, after I had a pink dining room area, he painted his kitchen red. **[Laughs]**  
Wow.

**00:20:09**

**AE:** And your dining room area, it's not very big. Do you have many customers come sit down or do most take-away?

**00:20:14**

**DI:** We have both. It's not very big, but people they share with each other. I guess we can hold around twelve now. We plan to do some improvements where we can at least get twenty-four in. Constantly, we have people coming in and sitting down all during the day and then sometimes they sit outside. They sit on the trunks of their cars. They sit in their cars and, you know, we just have a good time.

**00:20:45**

**AE:** Now do you—what is your role in the restaurant on a daily basis?

**00:20:49**

**DI:** On a daily basis Bolton and I both are able to cook, operate the register, take care of our customers, do the whole nine yards. Whatever we have to do, we can do it.

**00:21:02**

**AE:** How many employees do you have?

**00:21:05**

**DI:** We currently have two other employees.

**00:21:08**

**AE:** So does everybody pretty much share responsibilities of cooking and—and all that or is—are there specific—more specific jobs?

**00:21:16**

**DI:** No, if you're working in the restaurant, we train from top to bottom. And because you never know when someone can't be there, and we don't want anything to be lacking behind because someone is not there, so they're pretty much trained to do everything.

**00:21:32**

**AE:** And who does all the cooking of all those sides?

**00:21:35**

**DI:** Well, Bolton makes some sides. I make some sides. Now we're the only two that do the cooking for the home vegetables. And our potato salad and our coleslaw is not made inside the restaurant. And of course everybody knows how fries come [*Laughs*] but all of our steamed vegetables, they are home-cooked.

**00:21:59**

**AE:** Now describe your slaw for me. Is it like a vinegar-based slaw or a mayonnaise-based slaw?

**00:22:05**

**DI:** It tastes more of a mix. It's not too vinegary, and I haven't been able to taste it where I can just say, "Oh, mayonnaise." But it's very good. We sell a lot of it. It's very popular, especially in the summertime.

**00:22:19**

**AE:** Uh-hmm. And describe for me your potato salad.

**00:22:22**

**DI:** Potato salad is awesome. I enjoy it very much. I eat it myself, and I am a potato salad fan.

**00:22:28**

**AE:** Do you put pickle relish in it?

**00:22:30**

**DI:** It comes with—has a little relish in it, just a little.

**00:22:35**

**AE:** And your sides, I mean you've described some of them, but how many in number would you say that you do?

**00:22:41**

**DI:** Nine.

**00:22:45**

**AE:** Okay, can you name them all?

**00:22:48**

**DI:** Yes, if I'm off one please forgive me: green beans, baked beans, white beans, macaroni and cheese, turnip greens, spaghetti, potato salad, coleslaw, French fries, baked—did I say baked beans? Oh okay, I think I'm forgetting something, but I can't remember. [*Laughs*]

**00:23:13**

**AE:** And I think I read too that you do a barbecue-spaghetti.

**00:23:16**

**DI:** It's not barbecue-spaghetti; it's just homemade spaghetti and if you—it has a little pepper in it, but it's very tasty. It's like done from scratch when you boil your spaghetti, yeah, and we brown hamburger meat and add it in, mix some sauces together, little spices together. It tastes good.

**00:23:40**

**AE:** Now you know your business name is Bolton's Spicy Chicken and Fish but the—the plate lunches and all these vegetables, do people know about that when they come to you or they just—they have to come to you to find that out?

**00:23:51**

**DI:** They can read it on the menu that you can see from outside, or when you come in we have menus on the tables and they can see that we have sides. Or, when people call, they want to know what sides do you have, and we're able to relay that to them at that time.

**00:24:06**

**AE:** Do you have many people ever come in and just have vegetables or sides?

**00:24:10**

**DI:** Yes, we do sell vegetable plates, yeah. We have people come in and get a double order of turnip greens, potato salad, and cornbread.

**00:24:21**

**AE:** Oh, tell me about your cornbread or the—the hot water cornbread is that the only cornbread that you do?

**00:24:24**

**DI:** Yes. Other bread we have is white bread or wheat bread.

**00:24:30**

**AE:** And I lost my—what I was going to ask you next. Your little picture of your building here that I'm looking at, you said you have kind of a menu outside. Is it a full menu or just kind of what—?

**00:24:50**

**DI:** The full menu is on the outside by the window that you can order when you—at certain times we lock the doors and it's hanging on the window outside on the side. The view that you have that you're looking at now currently, it's on the front on Main Street.

**00:25:06**

**AE:** How did y'all come up with the color scheme for the exterior of the restaurant, red, white, and blue?

**00:25:12**

**DI:** It's red, gray, and white. It was my decision. I thought it would look good together and we also used a little black trim, uh-hmm. And those colors you can take and do a lot with. As you can see, I have on a Bolton's black t-shirt with white writing. **[Laughs]** We also have a moving kitchen bus, and it's white trimmed in a black, gray, and red.

**00:25:45**

**AE:** How long have you had the kitchen bus?

**00:25:48**

**DI:** We've had it for about a year, but it's only been operating about six months. And it's delightful. We really enjoy it.

**00:25:57**

**AE:** So you intend then to do a lot of kind of catering events and festival events like this one?

**00:26:00**

**DI:** Yes, it makes it much easier on us.

**00:26:05**

**AE:** Now how are y'all going to have time for all that to keep the restaurant and do all that—use the van?

**00:26:10**

**DI:** Well, we have currently now the two employees are at the restaurant and Bolton and I, we'll be here at the event.

**00:26:20**

**AE:** So tell me about your hours that you're open for business and days.

**00:26:24**

**DI:** We're currently open definitely Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays from 11:00 till 9:00; Fridays and Saturdays 11:00 till 11:00 or twelve midnight, and you can call on Sundays and Mondays. If we don't have events planned then, we may be open.

**00:26:46**

**AE:** So hypothetically or—you could be open seven days a week?

**00:26:49**

**DI:** Yes. Yes. [*Laughs*]

**00:26:52**

**AE:** And I wanted to ask you about your fish, is the other thing I forgot earlier, but there are three kinds of fish. How did you decide to do three different kinds and how are they different?

**00:27:03**

**DI:** Your grouper is your ocean fish, which is a white flaky mild tasting fish. Your catfish and your whiting are river fish, and your catfish is your scavenger fish, which has a different taste than your whiting because your whiting is going to swim sort of like middle—in between the top and the bottom, so both of them have different appetites, so that makes their flesh taste a little different.

**00:27:28**

Catfish is very popular in the South; whiting is very popular in parts of the South. Your whiting is your thin fish. Your catfish is going to be a thicker fish. And then your grouper, like I said, is going to taste hmm, very, very mild. And it's like in between thin and thick, medium-sized.

**00:27:54**

**AE:** So what would you say that maybe you sell most of?

**00:27:57**

**DI:** Excuse me?

**00:28:00**

**AE:** What you sell most of out of those three fish?

00:28:03

**DI:** We sell mostly whiting and catfish. Grouper is pretty popular, but not everybody has been exposed to it. If you've been to the larger restaurants, they carry grouper but nobody carries it in the sandwich form, take-out form—nothing like that. And I think we're the first to do that.

00:28:23

**AE:** So the hot fish when you're cooking it has the spices. Are the spices part of the—and you don't have to answer this if it's too much of a secret, but part of the batter or the cornmeal mix or however—the covering—the fry covering that you put the fish in?

00:28:39

**DI:** No, that's totally separate. It goes to—through two different stages and that's all I'm going to say on that matter. *[Laughs]*

00:28:48

**AE:** Can you describe what the fry texture is?

00:28:53

**DI:** Yes, it's not very cornmeal(y) and it's not totally flour. I've had the opportunity to eat at a lot of different restaurants and do traveling in the Caribbean and such, and so I've tasted a lot of different flavors. And that's why I came up with the grouper here because I thought, "Oh, that's awesome." *[Laughs]* And I can say it's—it's not—if you want it fried hard, you can get it fried

hard, but if you don't like that real mealy taste, you don't have to worry about it. And then if you like something a little bit more than just flour(y) taste, we got you covered.

**00:29:31**

**AE:** Is the chicken the same way kind of?

**00:29:33**

**DI:** The chicken is prepared totally different. It's in a flour base. And it marinades in the seasoning before. And everything is cooked to order.

**00:29:49**

**AE:** Do you ever—if you know you're going to have a busy day do you ever make chicken in advance or is everything literally cooked at that moment that it's ordered?

**00:29:57**

**DI:** Well we'll know if we're going to hit lunch hour we go ahead and start a skillet of chicken and by the time it's done, it's all sold. [*Laughs*]

**00:30:04**

**AE:** And the—so the chicken is cooked in a skillet?

**00:30:07**

**DI:** The chicken quarters are cooked in the skillet. Our wings and chicken strips, chicken on a stick—is cooked in the deep fryer. But the quarters are in a cast iron—gigantic—skillet.

**00:30:20**

**AE:** And why—why do you do the quarters in the skillet and not in the fryer and vice-versa?

**00:30:24**

**DI:** Well the—when you cook it in a skillet it gives it a whole totally different flavor. And that's the way Uncle Bolton taught us. And we didn't question that. He just said, "This is the way you do it and don't ever change it." And I have had a chicken quarter cooked in the deep fryer, and it is a totally different taste. So he was right. Not to say it was better or worse, but it's different.

**00:30:52**

**AE:** So then why then are the—the wings and the chicken on a stick cooked in a fryer and not in a skillet?

**00:30:58**

**DI:** Well, you can cook the wings and the chicken tenders and the chicken on a stick in a deep fryer. They're cooked quicker, but for your larger pieces of chicken it comes out much tender, much more taste consumed within the chicken if you do it in a skillet.

**00:31:14**

**AE:** So would you say for somebody coming for their first hot chicken experience at Bolton's that—would you recommend that they get the quarter? Would you tell people that if they came in for the first visit?

**00:31:23**

**DI:** Yes, I would ask them what part of the chicken they like—dark meat or white meat—and I would recommend them to try a quarter first before they branch off into the other items we have.

**00:31:33**

**AE:** Can you describe at all what that difference is that makes the skillet-cooked chicken taste different?

**00:31:39**

**DI:** It's moist on the inside, crispy on the outside, and you can have the flavor of the chicken and the pepper all the way through because really, the oil is spicy.

**00:31:52**

**AE:** So then the quarter chicken cooked in the skillet ends up spicier also?

**00:31:56**

**DI:** Yes. And it's just a totally—you have to experience it. I can't put it into words, but it's totally different. Believe me when I say that.

**00:32:07**

**AE:** And I read on one of the reviews of your place that y'all described the hot chicken as hot lava hot chicken.

**00:32:13**

**DI:** *[Laughs]* That was Bolton's words. *[Laughs]* It—it can be very, very hot, I mean people sit at the table and start screaming—you know, it's hot. And they're—they're screaming but they're enjoying. And you know, "You want something else?" "No, I love it but it's hot." You know, tears rolling down their eyes, cheeks all flushed and everything and they're sniffing with their little tissue paper and everything, but they're steady more eating, so they say it's delicious.

**00:32:40**

**AE:** This is not a very delicate or decent question really, but I have to ask you about your bathroom facilities at Bolton's. Is that ever a problem with the hot chicken?

**00:32:47**

**DI:** *[Laughs]* No, there's not never a problem—maybe the next day they come in and say, "Oh, I had to call the fire department," you know. *[Laughs]* It's usually the next day. *[Laughs]*

**00:33:01**

**AE:** Do you have any Tums or anything on the counter that you have to offer people if they need them?

**00:33:07**

**DI:** No, because we generally cook in vegetable oil with no cholesterol and no trans fat. So therefore indigestion is not the problem because we try not to have it—you know it's not greasy or anything, although we do have people that ask for it to be dipped in—dipped in a little light oil. They like the low flavor of it because, like I said, it's a little spicy. But we use vegetable oil, so it's no lard or nothing like that—nothing to clog your arteries. *[Laughs]*

**00:33:37**

**AE:** So are you—now that you've been in the business twelve years and you've changed from the corporate world to be in the restaurant business, what do you think now about that decision?

**00:33:46**

**DI:** I wouldn't change it. I—I can't—I couldn't—it was—it was nice to be in the corporate world and I liked my friends and I liked my little cubicle, but it's much better knowing that you're going and if you're five or ten minutes late, nobody is going to give you a point, so—. I love it a lot better, and plus more—I feel satisfied doing what I'm doing. You know, sometimes you're just born to do what you're supposed to do. This is gratifying for me, satisfying for me, and nothing makes me more happier than when I can put a smile on somebody's face from giving them something that we produce.

**00:34:25**

**AE:** So what's the future of Bolton's Hot Chicken and Fish?

**00:34:28**

**DI:** When—we're not sure, but we're looking into maybe franchising or opening up more than one. We've had a lot of contacts and interest and—but most of all we still just—our main goal is to really just satisfy our customers at this point.

**00:34:49**

**AE:** Do you foresee a day when—when Bolton shares the recipe and passed it onto somebody else?

**00:34:57**

**DI:** Bolton? No, the doctor would have to give him grave news. **[Laughs]** And we don't want that, so no, I can't foresee that day. **[Laughs]** I think he'll probably do like his uncle, keep it till when he just has to pass it on. And there's nothing wrong with that.

**00:35:17**

**AE:** What do you think his uncle say about him now that he is using the recipe and has a restaurant of his own?

**00:35:23**

**DI:** I think, when he passed it on he knew that he was going to open up a restaurant because that was his uncle's wish, and he did get to see the facility. We hadn't really opened it because he was just starting in everything, but he would be very, very proud of him. He would be very, very proud in the way that he conducted himself and the way that our customers are satisfied and the way that his old customers still come by and say, you know, "Is this Bolton? Is this Bolton Polk that used to be on Shelby?" And we have to explain, you know, "This is his nephew. I'm sorry to tell you that he's now deceased and blah, blah, blah." And they just go on and on about, "Boy, that used to be some good old chicken. Boy, that was the hottest chicken. We used to go there and just stay there four hours and just laugh and talk." So it's sort of similar to the same atmosphere.

**00:36:15**

**AE:** And tell me about—you were talking earlier about traveling and things and hot chicken is so specific to Nashville. What do you—do you have any thoughts on that and what that means for Nashville and when people from out of town come to you?

**00:36:29**

**DI:** The—well I really think it's very popular in Nashville, like I said, because a lot of—there are people that are living today who had ancestors that was just stuck on [cayenne] pepper. I don't know why, you know. I don't know if it's because maybe they had hypertension and couldn't use salt, so they used pepper instead, and a lot of people thinks pepper runs your blood pressure up. And I'm not a doctor or anything, but I know if you generally use real pepper, real pepper has no sodium. And I think that's what it derived from. And so therefore, you'll at your Sunday dinners, the big—the Big Mama's Dinners, as they used to call them, everybody would sit around and you'd get used to that taste. And then when you grow up, you're still looking for it. So you're searching for it.

**00:37:24**

And so you get a couple of generations like that and you know you just got to clientele for hot and spicy chicken.

**00:37:32**

**AE:** And how often does Bolton eat his hot chicken?

**00:37:34**

**DI:** If I didn't stop him, he would eat it every day. [*Laughs*] He loves it. He loves chicken.

00:37:41

**AE:** Does he like the hot—hot?

00:37:42

**DI:** Yes, he loves everything hot—hot. Hot—hot pork chop, hot—hot ribs, hot—hot shoulder, anything he can eat he wants it hot—hot. *[Laughs]*

00:37:53

**AE:** Well I know that you've got some—a lot of work to do today and I appreciate you sitting here with me, but is there anything that I haven't asked that you want to make sure to add before we go?

00:38:02

**DI:** No, I would just like to thank you for this opportunity, and I hope that whoever hears this or reads this will like to come and try out our recipe and like I—I'd just like to say we're just very grateful for everybody and thanks very much.

00:38:17

**AE:** All right. Well Dolly, I appreciate it. Thank you. It's been a lovely visit.

00:38:21

**[End Dolly Ingram Interview]**