RITA FORRESTER
Family Member & Executive Director - Carter Family Fold – Hiltons, VA

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Interviewer: Amy C. Evans, SFA Oral Historian
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[Begin Rita Forrester Interview]

00:00:01

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Saturday, February 21, 2009. I'm in Hiltons, Virginia, at the Carter Family Fold in the kitchen here with Rita Forrester. And, Rita, if I could get you to introduce yourself for the record and what you do?

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Rita Forrester: My name is Rita Forrester, and I'm the Executive Director of the Carter Music Center. I'm also the—the cook for the Carter Fold.

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AE: And daughter of Janette Carter?

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RF: I am. I'm Janette Carter's daughter and A. P. and Sara Carter's granddaughter.

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AE: May I ask you to share your birth date, if you don't mind?

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RF: Not at all. It's September 5, 1954.

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AE: And would you mind if we started talking about your grandparents and then easing into your growing up years here in Hiltons?

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RF: Well, of course, my grandparents were A. P. and Sara Carter. My grandparents divorced when I was—well long before I was born. My granddad, A. P., lived with us until probably a year before his death, so—because my mother and father were divorced, he was sort of the father figure in our household and someone that I really just really worshiped, practically, was my granddad.

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AE: Can you describe, for the record, his personality and then the kind of person he was?

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RF: He was a sweet caring person. He—after he divorced—he and my grandmother divorced, he raised his children alone, which in that day in time was pretty much unheard of. He was a—a loving father and a loving grandfather and, to me, that was more the way I thought of him than the famous musician that he was. By the time I came along, he was retired, and he wasn't doing much with his music.

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AE: He had the—the store then, A. P.'s Country Store?

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RF: He did run the little country store, which is next door to the Fold building here and it—it is now a museum. He ran it as a little country store, one-room country store.

00:02:00

AE: And do I understand or remember correctly that he built that himself?

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RF: He did build it. After they came—the Carter Family came back from Texas and then they worked a while in Charlotte, North Carolina, he came back and ran his sawmills and farmed and ran the little grocery. He built it in the late—the late 1940s.

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AE: And what all did he sell from there?

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RF: Well he tried to keep a little bit of everything. Of course country stores there weren't Wal-Marts or the big super stores like they have now, so he kept a little bit of everything: nails, clothes, you know, flour, sugar. He had—there was candy, soft drinks and just a little bit of everything—an assortment.

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AE: And I was telling you earlier I read that wonderful book about the Carter Family, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone*, and there's a lot in there about Neal's Store in that family that—that

was you know *the* store for the area and—and A. P. was kind of competition for him when he opened his store.

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RF: Well now that part, of course, I don't remember, but I know they probably both ran at the same time. But Neal's would have kept virtually the same thing as what he would have kept, and they probably actually had more than what he would have kept. I know they—at one time Neal's Grocery also served as the Post Office, which meant it was the hub of the community. And I know Mom said they would go and trade their eggs and things for staples like flour and—and sugar and a lot of times they would go and have their—their meal and their flour ground down at Lunsford Mill. There was still a functioning mill at that time.

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AE: Yeah, I also read that there were like forty or so different mills in Scott County.

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RF: There was a lot. There was—Lunsford Mill was closest to us. There's Bush's Mill over on the other side of the mountain that is still an operating mill. They still open it up a couple times a year and actually grind there but—. And there's—I know there's one in Abingdon, the White's Mill was in Abingdon. That was really the only way people had of—of getting their—their cornmeal and their flour for the longest time was to get it ground at the—at the mill.

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AE: And I—you know, everything I'm going to talk about is from that book about your family, but I understand that—that Sara, your grandmother, worked the grist mill for a while, is that right or do you know anything about that?

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RF: Well, now, that's something I don't recall. She did a whole lot of different things. She took logs off the mountain. She—nothing intimidated her. She tackled a lot of different things, and she very well may have worked at one. I don't recall ever hearing that story.

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AE: And there's also just this wonderful portrait of your grandmother painted in that book about what a wonderful homemaker she was and some things that your Uncle Joe [Carter] said about her, about her having a—a taste for cooking as—as talented as she was with songs, she was talented with cooking. Do you have some memories or stories about that?

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RF: Well, of course, by the time I came along, my grandparents were divorced. My grandmother, at that time, lived in California, so my experience with her was more having her come in for summer visits, and because she came in a motor home, she did relatively no cooking. We did all the cooking. I know she was a good cook. I mean but she—when she was here, most of the cooking was done by us. And she visited mostly in the summer months, so my memories of her cooking are—are not the same as Uncle Joe's would have been growing up in the house as—as a boy and her cooking. I know she was a very good cook.

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AE: And what about your—your mother, Janette, and—and her cooking and what she got from her mother?

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RF: I'm sure she got some things from her mom, but my mom was only six years old when her parents divorced, which meant that she had not really started to learn to cook too much. My mom actually learned more about cooking from my dad's mother; Ocie Vermillion is the one who taught her. Of course my mom married at sixteen, and everybody in the country—you grew up cooking. You had to because that—that was—there wasn't any fast-food places, and they wouldn't have had the money to go if there was. So she—she grew up cooking. Of course her sister, Gladys, would have done the majority of the cooking in their household because she was several years older than my mom, so that—those duties fell to her. And my mom did learn the majority of what she learned about cooking from my dad's mother, who was a great country cook.

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AE: Can you talk about some of what that—that is—the tomato gravy and dumplings and cornbread?

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RF: Well, I know my grandmother, Ocie, they owned a 300-acre farm, and they would have work days—the country people call them thrashings—when they would come in and thrash the wheat and the workers would work all day. She would lay a table that was half as long as this

room that we're in right now full of food. They killed seven hogs a year, so there was ham usually on both ends of the table. She would do cornbread; she'd do lots of cornbread, homemade biscuits, all the vegetables from the garden, the corn, the green beans, the—you know, all the things—the fresh tomatoes that would come out of the garden. And she would—the table would actually be sagging in the middle from all the food. She would feed the workers and then, of course, she had a big family and she fed all of them. And we'd go Christmases and I remember that table being just laid with more food than you can imagine, more than anybody could possibly eat.

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AE: What about like, you know, Appalachian foodways traditions of canning and—and saving beans and seeds and—and all of that?

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RF: Well of course we grew up doing every bit of that. You had to, or you really didn't have anything to eat if you didn't do that, so everybody had a garden and everybody knew how to can. I've canned. I still can to this day a lot of green beans and tomatoes and things like that. They're much better than anything you can get in the store, so we still do a lot of that. I don't—I'm not able to have a garden like I used to because the Fold keeps me busy, and then I work full-time as well, but I love to garden and I grew up doing it. My mom did a lot of it and certainly my—my grandparents did a lot of it.

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AE: Did your mother keep a garden later in her life also?

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RF: She kept a garden until not long before she died. When things started getting so busy here at the Fold, we sort of gave up gardening and—and went to the Farmers Market instead. And we would still get the same things and just can them, but we just didn't grow them. We didn't have as much time to do that. The Fold takes a tremendous amount of time. It took a lot of my mom's time, and of course she devoted, I guess, thirty-three years to creating it and—and making it work, and a lot of what she did when she would bring the bands in, because she didn't have maybe money to pay them a tremendous salary and they might not make much more than their gas money to get here, so she would usually keep them overnight and she would feed them. She'd feed them their supper and then feed them breakfast before they left the next morning, so the food and the things that she did were an extension of their hospitality here at the Fold.

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AE: Now when she started the Fold in the [nineteen] '70s, can you talk about—kind of that time between when her father, A. P., died and when she decided to start the Fold here?

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RF: Well my mom, for years—of course we—she was the only one in our household. My parents were divorced. My mom wouldn't take jobs if it meant she was going to be away from us. She worked at the school cooking, or she worked at Shoney's and restaurant cooking, but she wanted to be home when we came home from school, my younger brother [Dale] and I. And she made a point to do that, so she wouldn't do a lot of traveling or anything until we finished high school. And then, when we finished high school, she decided that it was time that she could do

some of the things that she had wanted to do and her music—devoting more time to her music was one of them. She began to travel. And then in ’74 is when she started the music shows here. She had promised her dad that she would try to do something to preserve his music. He was afraid his—his music was going to be lost and forgotten. That was the beginning of the rock and roll; everybody was listening to rock and roll, and folk music was—was on a downturn and he was really afraid it would be forgotten. And he asked her to do something to make sure that—that didn’t happen.

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She wasn’t sure how to accomplish that, and she said that, you know, she had prayed about it and she looked down and realized that—of course he had left her the little house that she lived in just on the hill here and the one-room store, so she decided that she owned the store and she could start music shows there. She knew a lot of people in the music industry and from where she traveled to various festivals she had met a—a lot of people who were touring and performing. So she started having shows every other Saturday in the little store, and the very first one, there were more people than would fit inside the one-room, so it spilled out into the—into the parking lot. And it didn’t take it long to outgrow that little small one room. A couple of years and then this building was built and her brother, Joe, built the building and helped her and her sister, Gladys.

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AE: And so was—when she started the—the musical performances here at the Fold, did she start serving food at the same time or did that come later?

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RF: No, she always served food. Mom was a firm believer in food as—as a way of making everybody around her feel welcomed and loved. I never remember a time when there wasn't something on our table or our stove. She would leave the—the food that she cooked in the morning, the extra biscuits or whatever would—would stay on the table in case anybody came in that was just passing through. Her brother might come in and want a bite to eat. So there was always food; there was always something to eat. And she saw the thing she was doing here with the music was a big part of everything, but food was an essential part of—of making that experience warm and welcoming. She kind of wanted the music shows to feel like you were coming into the Carter Family's house—into their home and, you know, you don't come into a home unless there's food, too.

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AE: Well and I wonder, since you mentioned that she worked in a kitchen at school and then at Shoney's, if that—the restaurant experience and cooking for large numbers of people certainly had to help here, too.

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RF: Oh it—I'm sure it helped her tremendously. But she—you know, she cooked for lots of people, as long as I can remember. I mean it didn't intimidate her. We had a huge family and, you know, food was always a big part of our get-togethers and that sort of thing, so—and we would cook a lot for the church, you know, get-togethers and dinner on the ground and that sort of thing. So she never was intimidated by cooking for—for large amounts of people. But it is a huge undertaking. **[*Laughs*]**

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AE: Did she take any of her own recipes to the school cafeteria when she worked there?

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RF: Not really. They—they sort of had their—their set recipes. I'm sure she tweaked them a little bit, if I know my mom, because she was always kind of improving the things that she did, so I—I feel like she probably put her own little touches to some of the things that they cooked. But they really had a basic menu and, of course, they had to use the surplus food, the—the government surplus foods they would have to use. They gave them a lot of beans. I know there would always be a—a bean day. And on bean day they would—instead of cornbread, they would have the homemade yeast rolls that were oh-so good. And those were just—oh, they'd melt in your mouth, so they did a lot of—of—actually like home cooking, which they don't do now in schools. It's—it's more processed foods in the schools now.

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AE: So do you have a sense of what, you know, to—to grow up in—in this remote area and be so, you know, you know, relying on your talents as a cook to raise your family and feed yourself and then to carry that into someplace like a school and then to carry it into someplace like the Carter Family Fold and what that—what that does to your cooking and—and to your family. I don't know if I'm making sense but—.

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RF: Well I always grew up thinking that every family in this community had visitors that just dropped in—that they didn't know and—and that it happened on a regular basis. It—I was a

teenager before I discovered that that really wasn't the case—that our family was really unique and that people sought us out and because we are located so far away from town or, you know, we're like twenty, thirty miles from the closest town, we would end up a lot of times, even though we didn't know those people, we'd end up keeping them overnight. If they had traveled a long distance, they would stay overnight. We would always feed them for—we didn't have money to take them out so we—we naturally fed them. And so it was just sort of something that, you know, country people do, and I never would have thought of being any other way. You know, it just was—it felt natural and like the right thing to do.

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AE: Over the years, as the Fold has grown and become more well known and established itself, has the food that you've served here changed over the years?

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RF: We hope it's still, you know, has that feel of—of what you would get if you were coming into somebody's home. It has become more difficult to do because of the volume that we have to cook in order to feed everyone. We've had to rely a lot on freezing certain foods, and my mom never wanted to run out of food. It was so important to her that the band had something to eat before they left at night. And, you know, if they had a long distance to go, she wanted them fed. She didn't want anybody turned away that wanted something to eat before they left here, so that meant that we froze a lot of foods. And like we'll freeze our hotdog chili, our barbecue is frozen, and we unthaw it on Saturday and, of course, we buy the fresh hot dogs and—and put them in that morning but we also keep frozen ones in case we run out on Saturday night.

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AE: And what—you told me, too, on the phone about meals that you make special according to a certain crowd you might have but then also according to a certain musician that might be here at the Fold?

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RF: Certain musicians, you know, are going to pack your house, and if you have a packed house, you've got to have enough food for that full house, and it's usually better then to have something you can just hand them out the window without too much prep, like soup beans have to be ladled out. You have to go to the oven and get the hot cornbread. But if you have a ham biscuit or if you have a chicken salad croissant—something you can just hand to them then that speeds up the processing of the line. And the—the food line spills out onto the dance floor, so you don't want the dance floor taken up with your people trying to buy food, so we try to make it that they have a quick something they can pick up. And of course in the summer, they don't eat as much of the soup beans and cornbread or the soups as they like to do in the winter. So it—the—the weather affects how you cook for a crowd, what kind—what band is coming; that kind of tells you how many people. The weather has an effect on it. If it's going to be cold, they love the soup beans and cornbread, or if it's going to be cold they love soups—homemade soups. We do a lot of those, so you really have to tailor it. And then the other thing is how much time I have to fix it because I work full time, so sometimes I just don't have as much time, but we'll do—in the summer we'll do sometimes boxed lunches for like tour buses or different ones, and if we do that, then Aunt Nancy [Carter] comes and fixes like ten or fifteen pounds of chicken salad. We let that sit so all the flavors, you know, and cool and all the flavors are—are mixed and it's—and

it's tasty. And then we'll work all day to put the boxed lunches together, plus set the kitchen up for the other folks.

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AE: And you were—y'all were saying earlier when we were chatting here around the table about people coming as much for the food as they come for the music, and somebody who comes—is it from Florida all the way here—?

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RF: There used to be a gentleman who would come every year for the [Carter Family Memorial Music] Festival, and he said the main thing he came for was Fern's cornbread. My cousin, Fern [Salyer], would do the cornbread. At that time, the church was doing most of the outside food. It was a fundraiser. I was Youth Director at Mount Vernon United Methodist, and we used that as a fundraiser for the youth to take them to conferences and things. We would use that money, so she would stay out there and cook cornbread just about all day and it—it never stopped. She'd be worn out. She'd cook for two or three days—cornbread—solid.

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AE: Now is her cornbread different from the cornbread that we have over here [in the kitchen at the Fold]?

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RF: We pretty much use her recipe, but it's sort of a family recipe. It's—it's just kind of traditional, the kind of meal that we use and—and how we prepare it that sort of—. And you

have to have something—the reason we fix it in muffins is because otherwise it would dry out too much. You want it to stay moist in the center, be able to be warmed up, and still maintain that little crunch that I love in cornbread—that crispness on the outside—so that's why we make the larger muffins. They sort of—they hold that moisture a little bit better. You can't really do pone cornbread, it's—it wouldn't be near as easy. The muffins are easier to handle and easier to keep warm and—and tasty.

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AE: Would you share the cornbread recipe?

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RF: Yes, I can share the cornbread recipe. I've written that down. I always use Three Rivers [white] cornmeal. I don't know if that's available everywhere, but for one batch—and that's the six compartment large muffin pan we use—and I—I—I eye it a lot. I don't always measure it. I don't always measure it evenly, but roughly two cups of Three Rivers cornmeal—self-rising—two eggs, and a fourth a cup of oil into the batter and then two tablespoons of sugar and one and a fourth cups of buttermilk. And sometimes I'll—I'll use a little flour just to keep it a little lighter but very little flour. I won't use much flour. And then we put Wesson Oil in the bottom of those muffin tins as well. Of course we mix all that up into a batter, and I kind of heat the oil in the muffin tins a little bit before we put the batter in, and then you bake that at 450 [degrees] for about fifteen to eighteen minutes and you've got—. Of course we increased the amounts a lot when we go—like we'll—an average Saturday we'll cook fifty-four to sixty corn muffins. During a festival, we'll need 300 to 400 corn muffins, so it's a huge undertaking.

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AE: So is this recipe, is it a variation on an old family recipe or has it stayed kind of the same?

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RF: It's sort of just a country way of—of cooking cornbread. Everybody has their—their favorites and some people don't like sugar in their cornbread. I like a little bit—not a lot but just enough to know it's in there. So everybody has their favorite way, but it is sort of a family—Fern is known for her cornbread, so—and my mom was always known for her cornbread so—.

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AE: Did you grow up with sugar in your cornbread?

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RF: My mom didn't use sugar in her cornbread. That's something I've kind of added. She would—and she made mostly pone cornbread, but she would make it real thin. She didn't like it really thick. She wanted it thin and she wanted the crust crunchy and, of course, the hotter you serve it, the better.

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AE: Now tell me about the soup beans—Carter Fold soup beans.

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RF: The soup beans are—we use pinto beans and I'll cook—I'll buy a ten-pound bag of the dried pinto beans and you have to "look" them. We call it "looking them," but you go through

and pick out any bad beans that might have molded, and there's actually little rocks that are in the bean bags, so you have to go through and sort the rocks out. Once you've done that, I just place them in a large—it's really a pressure canner and put them in there—. I let them soak anywhere from twelve to twenty-four hours, and I'll change the water a couple times and put really hot water on them to swell your beans up and—and get them back to the right consistency that you want them. And I'll change that water a couple of times, wash them for the last time, take that hot water off, and then put them into your pressure canner with—I use three cups of Wesson Oil. Now country people would throw a big hunk of middling meat or fatback in there. Of course I can't do that because the Health Department and—and you know we—we have to cook not with—in other words, we couldn't buy fatback to throw in there and a lot of people like the Wesson Oil because it's healthier. So we just use the Wesson Oil, but I use three cups of oil, and I'll put four tablespoons of salt and then cook it in that large pressure canner. You'll let it—start it out on high. Of course you'll fill the water up to about four inches or so above your beans—at least four inches, so you have plenty of soup. Cover that and put your canner lid on and put your jiggler on, and let it get to ten pounds of pressure on high heat, and then keep it there for forty-five minutes and then let it cool. And then I always like to put it in the refrigerator and let the beans cool back down because then that soup thickens up real nice, and then you've got a real nice thick soup for the beans.

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AE: And now the soup beans are such a tradition in Appalachian cooking, and I'm sure in your family, and do people, when they visit the Fold, realize that—that they're getting this really traditional meal?

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RF: I think they do. I—one of my favorite stories is the lady had a visitor here from Turkey—the country of Turkey—and you could tell he knew nothing about Appalachia and certainly nothing about our foods, and we had soup beans and cornbread that night, and he asked, you know, "Well what should I eat?" He asked the lady with him, and she said, "Well you have to have soup beans and cornbread because it's what we eat here. It's a traditional Appalachian food." So to see people from other cultures be introduced to it, it's really pretty unique. But we—we're kind of known for our soup beans and cornbread. That's one of the—people's favorites when they come here and it is a—a perfectly traditional Appalachian food, you know, and—and we do it a lot. We serve it a lot.

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AE: When you serve the soup beans here at the Fold, do you serve them with chow-chow?

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RF: We normally don't serve them with chow-chow. I would have to buy chow-chow because, again, you couldn't use your home-canned chow-chow. So normally what we do is just serve them with onions. We do keep a little jar of chow-chow in case there's a chow-chow person that has to have it, but it's processed and—and bought off the shelf, instead of our home-canned chow-chow. Now my mom was famous for her chow-chow and that's in the—she had her recipe in the Fred Sauceman's cookbook [*The Place Setting: Timeless Tastes from the Mountain South, From Bright Hope to Frog Level*] from ETSU [East Tennessee State University].

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AE: Can you tell me about the recipe for the chow-chow?

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RF: I know that the recipe for the chow-chow came from my dad's mother. And of course my dad's mother was a Vermillion which meant she had some French origin, but I'm not sure that—the spices used in chow-chow are actually like Middle Eastern spices, so I'm not really sure where chow-chow got its—got its start. But I know the recipe came from my dad's mother; that's where she got her chow-chow recipe.

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AE: And is it something—something you grew up eating all your life?

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RF: Yes, we did. We had lots of it.

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AE: Nancy [Carter] is back. I'll pause this. All right, so we were just talking to your Aunt Nancy for a minute, and I think we left off talking about chow-chow.

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RF: We did, yeah. Of course I'm—as I say, I don't remember where my mom—or I know she got it from my dad's mother, but the origins of the chow-chow recipe I'm not sure where that came from. But it's definitely something that people in this area love on their soup beans.

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AE: Now in Fred—Fred Sauceman's piece that he wrote about your mother's chow-chow, he said in that article that the recipe was taped inside a photo album.

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RF: My mom has—I have cabinets full of my mom's recipes, and that's something I really need to do is to catalog them. And we have one cookbook that we made here at the Fold. It's called *Carter Country Recipes,* and of course a lot of her recipes are in that, but she had volumes of recipes. She collected them everywhere she went and a lot of times she would put them just in—in empty books or photo albums, any—anywhere, but a lot of them are in her handwriting.

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AE: Now did she have a favorite meal that she liked to eat?

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RF: Well I'm—I'm sure she had a lot of favorites. The thing that stands out in my mind of the things that mom would cook are like the Easter dinners and lunches or the Christmas meals that she would cook. It was usually turkey with homemade dressing, and sometimes we'd have ham as well, and then she would always do corn, green beans, and she loved to make homemade macaroni and cheese. She was wonderful at that and homemade rolls always with the—with the meals and then usually a huge big cake or something very nice for dessert. But she—she cooked huge meals and—and loved every minute of it.

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AE: What kinds of cakes would she make?

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RF: She—cakes were one of her favorites. She did an Italian marble cake. She liked—one of the cake recipes that is kind of associated with our family is a molasses stack cake, and that's a country tradition. I don't know if y'all do molasses stack cakes in Mississippi, but it's sort of a mountain thing. A lot of people, because they didn't have a lot of sugar and they did have molasses, they would use it to cook with—the molasses. So I know Grandma Carter was known for her molasses stack cakes, and she would make them as high—she'd make—I know she made them as high as thirteen, fourteen layers high. And you'd roll them out real thin, and molasses is what you used to sweeten them and it is in our cookbook. And then in the middle you'll fill it with apple butter—homemade apple butter—and you talk—oh, you talk about good with a glass of milk. Now it doesn't get better than that.

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AE: Now the tradition, as I understand it, in Appalachia is for the stack cake to be brought to weddings?

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RF: Well I think it—it was just something really special that they did. I know Mom said her cousin who was oldest, Blanche, for her thirteenth birthday, Grandma Carter asked her what she wanted in terms of a cake or what she would like, and she said, "Well of course molasses stack cake." So she made her a special one with thirteen layers for the thirteen years. But you know country folks didn't have a lot of the processed sugars and that sort of thing, so they had to make

do with what they had. And I know Grandma would make the molasses cookies from the leftover dough; she would do little cookies in addition to the cake. But yeah, I'm sure they took it to a lot of weddings. Yeah, I'm sure that there wasn't a wedding cake probably or anybody to bake one, so they would have baked what they had to use and work with.

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AE: And also in that tradition there's some competition in the number of layers that—?

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RF: Probably so. And of course the higher you get it, the more likely it is to slide off because you got that slippery apple butter in the middle, so yeah, I think it—it was a competition to see how high you could get your stack cake. And it—of course the thinner you rolled your layers, the more likely you were to get more layers on your cake.

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AE: Now apple butter—apple butter is something that shows up a lot in that book about your family, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone*, and even insofar as—as A. P. being on his—his deathbed and asking for some apple butter. Can you talk about that tradition in your family?

00:29:36

RF: Apple butter was made every year, and my Granddad loved to make—he would make pear butter, as well, and I haven't had pear butter since I was a little girl, but apple butter was made every year. And of course in the big copper kettle—you'd use and do it all outside and you would have to stir all day and keep your fire going and—but that would give you enough apple

butter for the year, if you made it that one day but it—it was a tradition, about like hog killing. You—you made apple butter, you killed hogs, you know, it was just sort of a tradition that you did and normally once a year—couple times a year.

00:30:09

AE: Now because I didn't know that A. P. actually made his own apple butter, but he has also in his—his past a moment where he sold fruit trees and this—can you talk about that?

00:30:21

RF: He—that's how he met my grandmother. He—he sold, I think it was Stark Brothers fruit trees, but he did a lot of things. People in this area—it was a very poor area, and not a lot of jobs available and not a lot of things for people to do, so my granddad did a lot of things. He was a carpenter. He ran a sawmill. He farmed. He sold fruit trees. You know, you name it and he—he did it. He would get timber out of the mountains and sell it to Eastman or some of the—the industry in Kingsport. He did pretty much anything he had to do to survive. So he did a lot of things—a lot of things.

00:30:57

AE: And now with—with the cookbook that you're talking about that you have here at the Fold and I have—you know I've been looking at the June Carter Cash's cookbook [*Mother Maybelle's Cookbook*] of Mother Maybelle's food, and I wonder, you know, being the first family of country music and, you know, how you're talking about how food is so important to your family and to—to people—country people in this area, what it means to be known for both now, you know?

00:31:24

RF: Well it—you know, any woman in the South I think is—is proud of her cooking. That's just part of Southern tradition. That's part of being a good wife, a good mother. You—you want to try to be the best cook you can be. And you know, my Aunt Maybelle [Carter] was—if—if—of course she was known as Mother Maybelle. She mothered everybody she came in contact with. My mom had that same quality. She wanted to take everybody in and make them feel welcome and make them feel at home. So it's—it definitely goes hand-in-hand. I know the first time Johnny Cash came to our house; June brought him around to meet every relative before they married, and it was an unannounced thing, so we did not know he was coming. It was in the summer, and she just called and said, "We'll be there for lunch," and my mom was in a full-blown panic. We had nothing but vegetables. It was summer, so we did have our vegetable garden, but we really had nothing to serve them. We had no meat in the house, but we didn't eat a lot of meat. We ate mostly fresh vegetables, so she said, "I don't know what we're going to fix." So we went to the garden, and we did fresh green beans, corn, cornbread, sliced tomatoes, you know, all the—probably soup beans. I imagine she had some soup beans, too, and she probably did macaroni, just the things that she had. And I remember him saying—we didn't even have tea. We served them water. I remember it very clearly. And she said, you know, "He's going to think that we just don't have anything." And I remember him saying that that was probably the best meal he had—had in he couldn't tell her how long. Of course, he grew up in Arkansas, very poor just like the Carter Family, and was not used to real fancy things. And—and, to him, that was probably like going back home to have that good country cooking. Yeah, so there's—it's nice to be known for your cooking, as—as well as the music.

00:33:14

AE: About how old were you when—when he came for their first visit?

00:33:17

RF: I would have been very little. They married in, I believe—I'm not sure exactly when they married—in the early [nineteen] '60s, I guess [1968]. I know John Carter was born in about '68 or '69—'70 [1970], so they would have married in the '60s. I wouldn't have been ten years old—eight or ten years old, just a little girl, but I remember it very vividly.

00:33:46

AE: Did Johnny Cash mean Johnny Cash to you back then?

00:33:48

RF: Well we were awe-struck by him. Of course he was a big country artist and, you know, we didn't—we were just like everybody else; we were in awe of him. If he came into a room, he had so much charisma that you weren't aware of anything else in that room except him. He was just that commanding of presence and that commanding a person but he—he embraced June's family just like he did his own. He—he really loved us all and was so good to my mom here. You know, he did I don't know how many benefits. Part of the stuff that's here today would not be here except for him. He came about once a year and did a benefit show to raise money for the Fold. He believed in what Mom was doing, and he was probably her biggest advocate. I really believe he was. He—he helped—probably his last dozen performances were here. He would perform here when he came to visit, even after he retired, and of course word would get around and we—we would have a full house when that happened.

00:34:53

AE: Would you serve anything special on those nights when Johnny Cash was here?

00:34:56

RF: Oh, that would be a challenge to try to feed everybody. I remember the last night he was here there was 1,700 people, and we did tuna salad because we thought it would be easy, and we could just hand it out the windows. So I don't know how many tuna salad—we did little hoagies and I don't know how many we made. It was a bunch. I was tired, I know that. It—it was a lot.

00:35:16

AE: And now you and the world lost June and Johnny and your mother, Janette, all within a couple years of each other?

00:35:24

RF: We lost everybody. It seemed like it just started and then it didn't quit. It started with June's sister, Helen, was the first and—and that sort of rapid succession. She died first, and then within another year it was June's baby sister, Anita, and then June followed and then John and my Uncle Joe and my mother, and so it was sort of that whole generation just left us within the span of a few years and in very rapid succession, and it was very difficult because they had been such a force and such a presence. And I guess a part of me thought I would always have a family member—an older family member that would be here, you know, guiding the music and doing all the things that it took to keep everything going. And, to me, it was a very difficult time and a very hard transition, you know. Of course losing my mom was the worst, and then right before

my mom passed, my—our oldest brother died real suddenly at sixty-three. He died six months before my mom, after complications from surgery. My mom died within six months, and within a year my dad died, so it just seemed like, you know, every three months to six months I was back at the funeral home and it was—it was a bad experience. And I'm not over it yet. I mean it still hurts, and I miss them. I miss them a lot.

00:36:46

AE: Is there something significant, insofar as the—the memorial services and food and the funeral food—the traditions that you have here?

00:36:57

RF: Well what Southern people are known for, of course, when your family member dies, you don't do any cooking. Everybody comes and they bring food to you. And they keep that up until probably right after the funeral—you'll have food the whole time. So it's a Southern tradition that everybody else cooks for you when—when your family member passes, and the church, you know, brings stuff and they just sort of gather around you and—and do the things that—that you really don't have the energy to do or—or the will to do when you've lost someone. So you get lots of good things, and people are known—you know, certain persons will bring—they're known for their deviled eggs. They'll bring deviled eggs. And you know that this person is going to bring a baked ham. You pretty well know what they're—they like to cook and what they're good at so—.

00:37:47

AE: And so when your—your mother passed or before she passed, did you know that you were going to take over the Fold? Were you prepared for that?

00:37:53

RF: Well I always envisioned—I have a baby brother [Dale] who helped for a long time, and I sort of hoped it would be the two of us doing it together, and it was that way for about a year. And then he decided that he didn't want to be here performing anymore. So it did all fall on my shoulders and—but it had pretty much been on my shoulders, the—the business part of it. I had seen my mom just gradually not being able to do the things that she did, like she would book a band and then book another one, not realizing that she had booked two. So when I saw that happening in about '02 or '03 I said, "Mom," you know, "maybe I need to start working with the booking and learn what you're doing," you know. Of course I had always been helping in the background with grants and that sort of thing, but she had pretty much run things the way she wanted to all those years, and she deserved to. She built it from the ground up, and I would never, you know—I wanted her to do anything she wanted to do, and the things she wasn't able to do I—I sort of stepped in and gradually started doing those things. And then it just got to be greater and greater, and of course she made it a point to be here really until the week before she died. She came faithfully and—but it was a challenge to—to get her here and to have her be rested and—and dressed because she—for probably the last two or three years of her life she couldn't dress herself or even get herself a drink of water, so I had a full-time job and my mom, practically an invalid, at her house next door to me, my dad who was becoming one in a house in Bristol, and then trying to—to make things work at the Fold, too, and—and a son who was sick during that whole time, so everything sort of just snowballed and—and it was difficult. But folks like Faye and Blanard [Collins] helped me; and then the lady who cleans here, Eula, she would

come in during the day and help my mom and cook her meals, and then in the evenings, you know, my family and I would take over; and weekends we would be with her, but she couldn't be left alone. So it was a challenge to keep it all. And mom would help here, you know, on Saturdays until—like Aunt Nancy was telling you, until about '03 or '02 or '03 when she got to where she wasn't able. We would spend the whole day setting the kitchen up—Mom and I would—and we wouldn't have a break until right before the show started. But when she got to where she couldn't do that anymore, then Aunt Nancy [Carter] and Mary [Hartsock] came and started helping.

00:40:20

AE: What other recipes of your mom's do you still make here, like the egg salad that you were fixing today?

00:40:25

RF: Well the egg salad recipe is hers. The—the chili for the hot dogs is her recipe, although I've added my own little things that I like to it, but it's basically her—her. She started out cooking the hot dogs with homemade chili. She loved to do egg salad. She liked to have homemade desserts and we've—we've tried to keep that tradition with the cakes. She used to do cookies sometimes or whatever she had time to do, she would cook and bring it, you know. The tea. She wanted sweet tea, and she wanted them to have a good variety. You know, some people don't eat meat, so the egg salad is sort of something that vegetarians can eat. So she wanted something for everybody.

00:41:07

AE: And you say you still do the homemade desserts?

00:41:09

RF: We do. I don't do them as often. Faye, the lady who helps here in the kitchen, she does the desserts and another lady, Chickie Renfro. You'll talk to both of them today but they—they sort of—the desserts are their specialty. I'm running out of steam by the time I do the chili and the soup beans and the cornbread. I—I'm glad to let the desserts be somebody else's responsibility.

00:41:32

AE: Now you have a division of labor in the kitchen here.

00:41:34

RF: Pretty much. We kind of all pitch in and—and do what we can, you know, to help it. It's a challenge to feed—tonight won't be as big a crowd because it's a winter night; it will be a little bit smaller crowd. But in the summer, you know, when you have these huge crowds; it is a huge challenge to feed them all. You just about can't cook enough food to feed them all, especially good fresh hot food. You know, you could buy something processed, but it probably wouldn't taste nearly as good.

00:41:59

AE: Now can I ask you a business-side question about the food? And I wonder if—if the—what the balance is between the admission fees that you get for the music and what you sell in food.

00:42:11

RF: Well everything is kept very low. It's part of our mission statement. The admission prices are kept very low. The food prices are kept very low, so the food doesn't make a tremendous amount. Of course, you have to buy all of your supplies back, and you have to pay taxes on what you sell in the food, and then, you know, the fee for the Health Department. They have to come; we're inspected just like a regular restaurant that is open seven days a week, so we have all of that, but it—it's not a tremendous money-maker but it—it's still a huge part of the experience. And without the food, you wouldn't—this place wouldn't be nearly as warm and welcoming as it is but the food or—or the Fold neither one set the world on fire making money. We are non-profit and—and we try to, you know, keep enough money in the bank to pay our bills, but we rely on grants. You know, we do still get a grant from the Virginia Commission for the Arts and other grants. You know we—we had grants to do the remodeling and the—the upgrades to the facility. They gave us nearly $1,000,000 to upgrade the facility in terms of flooring and seating. We just got a—a grant for a $20,000 sound system. We couldn't make enough money to keep this place going without grants.

00:43:24

AE: So what does an—an order of soup beans and cornbread cost here?

00:43:29

RF: You know, I believe it's $2.50. I think is the price we charge right now is $2.50. We try to keep it low. We want people to be able to come—mom, dad, grandma, grandpa, the babies—be able to afford their admission to get in and also afford something to eat, so hopefully you can come here and for less than ten dollars a person, you can get in and have a wonderful meal and be able to bring your whole family at—at a good—good price.

00:43:59

AE: Are there extra special things that you do at the festival—annual festival?

00:44:03

RF: Well at festival time we—we do some extra things. Of course we—we've moved the soup beans and cornbread outside for the festival. **[*Phone Rings*]**

00:44:14

AE: All right, so we were talking about festival.

00:44:17

RF: At festival time we move the soup beans and cornbread outside to a tent because we just can't do everything inside. So we move that out, and we'll have soup beans, cornbread, and homemade desserts at the tent outside and the hot dogs, barbecue—that sort of thing will stay inside. So we—we do—it's just what we do, only expanded or multiplied quite a bit.

00:44:42

AE: Tell me about your barbecue and how you do that.

00:44:44

RF: Well barbecue is the one thing that I don't try to prepare. I mean we use a combination of Clifty Farms Barbecue and Byron's Barbecue, and Aunt Nancy goes through it all and takes out any fat pieces or—or gristle—anything that would be in it. She looks at every bit of it and then,

you know, puts it in the—the pot to warm up and we add a little barbecue sauce if it's dry or, you know, we tweak it a little bit, but it's basically processed—processed barbecue. It's probably as good as—as we could make or—or better. I'm sure it is. People like it.

00:45:20

AE: So you have all this family and friends coming in to help you make this happen every week. Are there any young folks who come and lend a hand in—in the kitchen or other parts?

00:45:27

RF: Well my youngest son—my oldest son, Justin—not the youngest, the oldest—he does our sound. We do have some young folks. We have young folks who help with our parking but mostly it's—it's folks that are my age, you know, or—and older who do the volunteering and the helping and, you know, we do have some young people who come, but primarily they come at festival time, you know, and help us then.

00:45:52

AE: And when people come at festival, what—what have you heard over the years about how people have been influenced by your family and—and what the Carter Family means to people?

00:46:03

RF: Well most people tell me, if they talk to me about my family, they always say that their music was a blessing to them, that they got something from their music, and that it enriched their lives. Of course their music was the music of the mountains. It was the music that the settlers brought over from England and Ireland and Scotland, the ballads and the—the folk songs that

they brought over, but they always say that the—the Carter Family blessed them or that they touched their lives, and I think a big part of that is probably the Gospel music. Probably a third to half of their music was—was Gospel music. And I think a lot of people are—are very moved by that, and their songs told a story and you got something out of their songs, you know. It's—you hear a rap song, you don't—you don't really get any benefit from it. It's a good beat and, you know, maybe they say something worthwhile. I doubt it. But if you hear a Carter Family song, it has a message and it gives you something that you can take, a life lesson, you know—stay true to your family, you know, stay in church, try to be the best person you know how to be. There's—there's a message, and there's substance to the songs that they sang.

00:47:17

AE: Did they sing a lot at home when you were growing up and do you sing or—or play?

00:47:20

RF: I do. I—I sing and help up open the shows on Saturday. They—they sang some. By the time I was born, of course, the—the original Carter Family had disbanded. I think Maybelle and the girls were in Nashville playing, and my mom would go out on the road with Maybelle occasionally when one of the girls was sick or pregnant. She would fill in but there, was a lot of singing, and of course singing in church all of my life, but as far as the Carter Family touring or doing a lot, it was minimal because my grandparents were older, you know. And Aunt Maybelle, of course, she stayed on the road until just before her death. But now my grandmother and my grandfather, they retired pretty early, and their divorce was a factor in that, you know. That was—it was difficult for them. They did perform together after they divorced in Texas and again

in Charlotte, North Carolina, but it—it had to be difficult for them because my granddad really never stopped loving my grandma, and that, to me, was always very sad.

00:48:22

AE: He stopped singing entirely after the divorce when he was living back here?

00:48:26

RF: I don't think he ever stopped singing. It just wasn't something he did every day. He would sing if people came through or they visited and that sort of thing, or he would sing at church, but it wasn't something he just sat down and did every day. You know, I think part of that may have been that it was a little bit sad for him. He didn't have my grandmother and Aunt Maybelle wasn't there and, you know, I imagine it was a little bit sad for him. So it wasn't something I heard him do a lot. And his—his health was failing by the time I came. I was only six when he died, so my granddad wasn't in good health for most of the years that I remember.

00:49:04

AE: What do you think your grandfather would say today about the Fold and—and you running it?

00:49:09

RF: Well, I hope he'd be proud. You know he—he did want his music to continue. I think he'd be amazed that, you know, so long after his death and so long after the recordings in '27—it's been over eighty years now, you know, that—that people are still listening to the Carter Family music. I think he would be truly amazed. I think he would have loved the fact that this face was

on a postage stamp. I think he would have liked that best of all. He would have enjoyed the fact that they went into the Hall of Fame, but he wasn't a big advocate of Nashville music. He—he tended to think it was a little bit flashy and—and over the top for him. He liked to present his shows—you know, the posters for their shows would say, "This program is morally good." He wanted to be dressed in his three-piece suit, and he wanted that show to be prestigious. He—he did not want to be viewed in any other way and—and it was a very serious thing for him. So you know I hope he'd be very proud of what we're doing here. He's a lot of the reason I—I work as hard as I do because I did just practically worship the ground he walked on. He and my mom are the reason that I keep struggling so hard to do this.

00:50:21

My granddad died never having fully realized his contributions to music. My grandmother and Maybelle got to see the induction in the Hall of Fame and some of the accolades that came their way, but my granddad did not. **[*Phone Rings*]** That's another reason we try to cook so much here is because folks coming from long distances, there's not a lot of places for them to eat once they leave Kingsport or Bristol, twenty-some miles away, so we feel like we have to have food here for them when they get here.

00:50:52

AE: And you said that—because you just took a call, so I can explain this for the record—from a woman who was asking if there was a place to eat nearby, and you explained to her that you have plenty of food here, but that you start serving food at 4:30 and the show doesn't begin until a couple of hours later.

00:51:05

RF: Well we'll serve it as early as 4:30 or 5:00, depending on, you know, how many folks are here and if they're really hungry. Sometimes it will be at 5:00 or a little after. It just depends on how fast they have everything set up the way they want it because I leave that to Faye and Carol. But if folks come to the window and say, you know, "We're starving, and we want something to eat," we can fix them—you know feed them an egg salad sandwich, something that may not be hot completely—it might take a little longer, but we've got something we can give them if they're hungry.

00:51:34

AE: Before you took that call we were talking about your mother and then Aunt Maybelle seeing the success and the—the inspiration and—and legacy of the Carter Family and seeing that realized. What—what do you think is the future of the Carter Family Fold here?

00:51:52

RF: Well I sure hope it will be here for years to come. I mean we've invested a lot of time and a lot of our own money in making sure that it does. And I hope it will. And my son, my oldest son, Justin, is on our Board of Directors, and I hope that he's learning everything I'm doing so that one day he'll step up and, hopefully, he'll have a wife to help him do the cooking because I'm not sure he'll want to tackle that but lots of volunteers and—and folks to help him, so I hope it continues for years to come.

00:52:22

AE: Is there something that is written already or will be written in the bylaws about insisting on serving soup beans and cornbread for the—?

00:52:31

RF: No, that's just something that I know if I didn't do or—or like if—if I didn't do things the way I know my mom wanted them, like if I didn't have really good home-cooked food or I didn't keep the band playing the way she would have wanted them to—if they didn't do a Gospel tune, if they didn't do enough fiddle tunes—I would feel like she was going to—she would tug at the band's coattail, like she would sit on that bench, and if they didn't do what she wanted, she'd kind of jerk on their coattail and say, you know, "This is what you need to do." She would be tugging on my coattail, so, you know, it's—it's pretty well—I just pretty well know how she wanted it done. It doesn't have to be written down, and I don't think Justin has to have it written down because he grew up pretty much with her around him his whole life, so I think he pretty well knows, you know, what she would have wanted.

00:53:18

AE: Well if I could backup for a minute again and talk about your Aunt Maybelle and—and Sara also because I know—and Fred Sauceman also wrote an article about Sara's tomato dumplings and her tomato ravioli.

00:53:33

RF: Well now Fred Sauceman did do an article, and I think my sister-in-law is the one who gave him the recipe. The tomato dumplings would have been my mom's recipe, and the ravioli would have actually come, not from my grandmother, but from her sister-in-law who married an Italian man in California. That would have been Stella's recipe for the ravioli, yeah. So my grandmother didn't do—ravioli is like an all-day event of cooking that you do, so my

grandmother, I never saw her do that. That would have been her sister-in-law who did all that, and of course Stella would visit us and, you know, she—I've seen her make it, and then I've made it but it's—it's something that is sort of you do for special things. The tomato dumplings is kind of an everyday thing that my mom loved, and she would make them a lot for Tom T. Hall. He was a big fan of tomato dumplings, so when he came he had to have the tomato dumplings. It's—it's a very simple basic country food.

00:54:29

AE: Are there other foods that like that—that musicians would request from your mother?

00:54:35

RF: Well Tom T. Hall always wanted her potato soup, cornbread, and tomato dumplings, and I think that was because he grew up in Kentucky and the country, and of course his wife, Dixie, was not really a country girl. She grew up in England, and she learned our cooking but it—it's different when you learn it than when you grow up doing it all your life, so I think that kind of took him back to maybe how his mom prepared the foods that he ate growing up. We always cooked for Marty Stuart, and he doesn't have a particular food that he requests, but he expects that wherever he is, that if he's within a fifty-mile radius there will be a full meal, you know, meat and vegetables and cake and it all gets carried to him so—. And of course when he comes here, we always make a big spread, you know. I know the first time he came and brought his band the—we did like—we did turkey and we had dressing; we had all the country foods and homemade rolls and stuff. And one of his—I guess it was one of the roadies. I don't remember what the guy's position was, but he came over to me later and he said, "Ma'am, I don't know what kind of food I just ate but," he said, "it's the best stuff I've ever had." And he said, "I just

am—am amazed." And Mary said, "Well now you've done it." He said, "You've spoiled them. I'll never get them by here again without thinking they have to stop and you have to feed them." So we've—we've sort of made that a tradition. Of course he comes and helps us do—he'll do benefit shows on occasion, and I think Johnny Cash sort of passed that on to him, you know. Johnny couldn't help us, and I think without maybe not telling Marty that specifically he wanted him to do it, I think Marty knew that he would like him to sort of watch after us and—and he does. And so we try to cook him anything he wants. He normally gets a homemade cake at Christmas and he—he pretty much gets whatever he likes.

00:56:28

AE: Is there a specific cake he gets at Christmas or just anything homemade?

00:56:30

RF: Well I have to give him something that I can mail at Christmas. I can't mail him a molasses stack cake because it would be a mess, so normally I do like a homemade coconut pound cake or a pound cake with walnuts and—and glaze, something that I can mail to him because, obviously, he's in Nashville or Hendersonville. So, yeah, I have to do one that—that mails well. **[*Laughs*]**

00:56:52

AE: Yeah? Wonderful. And so Mother Maybelle—and I understand that she was really known for her divinity.

00:57:02

RF: Well, you know, I wasn't around Aunt Maybelle a lot, but Aunt Maybelle was a tremendous cook. Anything she did was delicious and she—I know she made a lot of candy so but I don't—and I remember eating divinity, but I don't remember watching her prepare it. I wasn't around her, you know, a tremendous amount. When my grandmother would come to visit, she would always make a point of seeing Maybelle, but they would normally do that in Nashville. And we didn't travel down there a tremendous amount. We just didn't. So, you know, if we were passing through Nashville, certainly we'd stop and eat with her and stop and see her, but I wasn't around her a lot when she cooked, but I know she was a tremendous cook.

00:57:44

AE: And I have to ask about Hank Williams also and his connection to your family?

00:57:47

RF: Well what I know about it is just the stories that I've heard June tell, and it's basically that Hank's wife and June were very good friends, and of course June was godmother to Hank Williams, Jr. He was connected with our family. He—Maybelle is sort of—took a lot of the Nashville artists kind of under her wing, and I think that's why everybody called her Mother Maybelle because she just sort of mothered them all, and I think he was one of those. Anita was the one female country singer that he ever sang with to my knowledge. She was the only one, so he was just sort of our—one of our extended family members, you know, although I did not know him or ever meet him but—but certainly they did.

00:58:34

AE: And then something just reminded me to ask about Poor Valley and talk about that and that is—is called Poor Valley more—more relative to the soil quality than anything else because there's Rich Valley adjacent?

00:58:47

RF: That's what they say. That's what—when Mark [Zwonitzer] and Chuck [Hirshberg] did the book, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone*, they did tremendous—well they did ten years worth of research and they came up with the fact that this was named Poor Valley because of the—the farming and the—and the fact that the soil was maybe not as—as rich and as—as good for farming as it was in what they called Rich Valley. That's what they told me, but I had not known that.

00:59:12

AE: So how has the area changed since you've grown up here and the stories that, you know, about your grandparents, because I really expected not to see so many—near so many houses up in this area?

00:59:21

RF: Well it's changed quite a bit. I mean growing up, there weren't as many houses and everybody here in the valley was either directly related to you or you had known them all of your life. Now that's not true anymore. You know, there are folks moving in and, you know, it's different. It's really growing. It—this is sort of folks who work in either Kingsport or Bristol or Johnson City, twenty and thirty miles away. They like to be out a little bit, so they come out into

the country and they build and you—it's not true that you know everybody anymore, but you know a tremendous amount of people but—but not like it used to be when I was growing up.

01:00:02

AE: And what do you think—you know the Carter Fold serves fans of the Carter Family and fans of the musicians who come here, but what do you think it's meant to the community right here all these years?

01:00:09

RF: Well I think, initially, the community didn't know what to make of the Fold. They—I think they thought it might change their lifestyle, and they were a little bit apprehensive; and we are in the Bible Belt, so I think a lot of people thought that maybe it wouldn't be run as a—the kind of family establishment that it really is. And I think, initially, my mom was the topic of a couple of sermons because they thought maybe this would be a dance hall or people would drink. That does not happen. It's—it's family fun and most of those people who had the doubts should really come and see. You know they—and I think they've learned that it's a clean, fun, family environment and that, you know, we don't allow alcohol. There is none of that so it's—they didn't know what to make of it. I mean a lot of people thought my mom had lost her mind. She's a—you know a woman who is—she was fifty—in her fifties when she started this and I think they just thought she's crazy, you know, to—to tackle something like that. She didn't set out to create a tourism destination, and she didn't really set out to found a museum or to found a non-profit corporation. It just grew so quickly that—that was how she coped with it and how—how it evolved. But she set out to do one thing and that was to fulfill a promise to her dad, not to do all these other things, but those other things happened in the process.

01:01:35

AE: Well if we maybe—we've been talking for a while and we can wrap this up. But I wonder if maybe we could end on your description of a nostalgic meal that you had in your mother's home growing up?

01:01:50

RF: A nostalgic moment in my mom's home growing up. I would really have to think about that. Of course just—I guess just the everyday things are—are what stand out in my mind, not so much anything big but just every day with my mom, you know, was such a treasure. She was the best mom that anybody could ever know, you know, so just every day with her was a delight.

01:02:15

AE: What about, you know, not only carrying on the Carter Family musical tradition but carrying on, you know, traditional Appalachian foodways here in Hiltons?

01:02:24

RF: Well, you know, that just is sort of part of who you are. I mean it just—if I didn't come down here and do what I do on Saturday night, I would be riddled with guilt like the feeling you have when you don't go to church on Sunday. I would feel like I had let somebody down, so I feel like I have to keep doing this and—and doing it in a way that brings all the honor and dignity to my family that they deserve. And that means doing everything to the best of my ability—the food that we cook, keeping it clean; everything we do—keeping the grounds clean, keeping the—the artists who come here of a certain caliber and keeping the shows clean, doing

the Gospel shows—all of that is just part of my growing up. And it—it just feels like it's natural, and it's what I'm supposed to do. It's my duty and my obligation, I think.

01:03:18

AE: Has there ever been a moment when you wanted to leave Hiltons?

01:03:21

RF: Well I did leave Hiltons, but I didn't like it. I—when I first got married, my husband and I lived in Nashville for about three years, and I worked for the County Music Hall of Fame. It was a good experience, and it's helped me here. I worked in marketing, and I liked it, but the part of me who—that was a country girl never liked being in the city and never adapted to it and I would cry and want to come home. I—I missed my mom, even though I was an adult and, you know, then when I—when we decided it was time that we really wanted to start having children there was no question. I knew I had to come back home because I wanted my children to grow up in this same kind of loving family environment, even if it meant that we did not make the money that we made when we lived in Nashville. That wasn't as important to me as it was to have my children grow up in the kind of upbringing that I had. We have very little in terms of possessions and money but goodness gracious that's—that doesn't mean anything if you don't have your family and you don't have love, and I think that compensates for a lot, so I've never regretted leaving Nashville. I don't miss it at all. I like to go visit but briefly, and then I'm ready to come back home.

01:04:37

AE: The home you live in is your family home place?

01:04:38

RF: No, actually, the home I live in we built next door to my mom's house. My granddad built the little house that my mom lived in—or started it. When my parents divorced, he built a couple of rooms for her, and that's where we lived. And then when my mom got older we—when we wanted to build our home, we decided that we wanted to be next door to my mom. I knew she would need help, and it just was where I wanted to be, so it felt very natural to be right next door to her and we hadn't lived in the house—we hadn't even got in it; it was still under construction. There's this little path between my house and mom's house that animals travel it, the kids travel it and it's still the same little worn path so—.

01:05:24

AE: And is there—have there been a lot of cast iron skillets and other kitchen tools handed down to you?

01:05:30

RF: Oh, yeah. My mom had a huge collection of skillets and—and they're still—they're still at her house, actually. There's—there's some here. I have a few down here. I have a few at my house. But she loved her skillets and—and had bunches of them. She probably had fifty, I guess, skillets—my mom had—she loved to collect cooking utensils, recipes, and then she had—there's a cabinet—a kitchen cabinet at home full of recipes. I—it would take me all—I won't be able to go through all the recipes before I die probably, but I hope to go through some of them and maybe do a cookbook just of her recipes. So she—yeah, she had a huge collection of cooking utensils and dishes. She loved dishes. June loved dishes, you know, and all of them were—they

were dish fanatics, and I used to tease them about it, and then one day I got bit by the dish bug too, and then I'm just like they are so—. **[*Laughs*]**

01:06:24

AE: Well is there any—any specific note you'd like to end on or—or thought—final thought?

01:06:30

RF: Well just that—that we're glad you're here with us and we, you know, hope your project turns out well and that you get some good things to share with folks, and that anybody who comes here would have a true sense of Appalachian culture—not just the music, but the food and the whole experience of being an Appalachian and living in the mountains. It's a wonderful place to be and to grow up, and if folks can take a little bit of that back home with them, then I feel like we've done what we need to do here at the Fold.

01:06:59

AE: Wonderful, that's a great note to end on. Well thank you, Rita, so much for sitting with me.

01:07:02

RF: Thank you very much.

01:07:03

[End Rita Forrester Interview]