

ROSETTA & EDNA ERVIN
Ervin's Hot Tamales
Sledge, MS

* * *

Date: June 28, 2005
Location: Ervin Home – Sledge, MS
Length: 30 minutes, 5 seconds
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Project: MS Delta Hot Tamale Trail

[Begin Rosetta and Edna Ervin.mp3]

0:00:01.0

Amy Evans: This is Tuesday, June twenty-eighth, 2005 and I'm outside Sledge, Mississippi, and Tunica, Mississippi, in the Ervin home with Miss Rosetta Ervin and her daughter Edna. And we're here to talk about hot tamales. Would y'all both mind saying your names and also, if you don't mind, your birth dates for the record, so we can get the generations right.

0:00:30.6

Edna Ervin: Okay. Momma, they need your name and your birth date.

0:00:37.9

Rosetta Ervin: Okay. Tell it to her? Rosetta Ervin, December the second, 1923.

0:00:50.2

AE: And Edna?

0:00:50.8

EE: Edna Ervin, April the fifteenth, 1959.

0:00:56.4

AE: And Miss Rosetta, were you born in the area--in the Delta?

0:01:01.4

RE: I was born in Quitman County.

0:01:05.9

AE: Okay.

0:01:06.2

RE: And then I moved to Tunica County when I was six years old.

0:01:10.3

AE: Yeah? And what was growing up in the North [Mississippi] Delta like when you were young?

0:01:17.1

EE: [To her mother, Rosetta] She said how was it when you were young when you was growing up?

0:01:20.4

RE: Well it was fine. It was just--it was a farm and you had to work hard.

0:01:27.0

AE: Yeah, your family worked on a farm?

0:01:28.3

RE: Yeah.

0:01:30.0

AE: Your family farmed?

0:01:30.0

RE: Yes, ma'am.

0:01:30.8

AE: Picking cotton, growing cotton?

0:01:33.2

RE: Yes--yes, ma'am. Um-hmm.

0:01:35.8

AE: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

0:01:39.3

RE: Well, I had three sisters. Um-hmm.

0:01:45.4

AE: And when did you learn to make hot tamales?

0:01:47.6

RE: When--when did I learn?

0:01:49.1

AE: Yes, ma'am.

0:01:52.5

RE: Well my husband bought this recipe, I'm--I'm thinking [in] 1966. It was in the '[nineteen] sixties, I know--I don't know if it was [nineteen] sixty-six, you know, just directly.

0:02:01.2

AE: And your husband's name was Louis?

0:02:03.9

RE: Louis Ervin.

0:02:03.9

AE: What year did y'all get married?

0:02:07.4

RE: Nineteen and fifty-three.

0:02:14.7

AE: And was he from this area also?

0:02:16.8

RE: Uh-huh, Dundee [Mississippi]. And he stayed in Tunica County.

0:02:21.7

AE: So he just got his hands on a [tamale] recipe?

0:02:24.2

RE: Well, he bought this recipe from a--a guy out of Arkansas.

0:02:29.1

AE: Okay. And did he see a future in the tamale business? Is that why he bought the recipe?

0:02:37.0

RE: [To her daughter, Edna] What did she say?

0:02:37.6

EE: Did he see a future?

0:02:40.4

RE: Well, he thought--he thought somebody did. [*Laughs*] He had been with somebody that used to make them when he was a kid; that's where he got his idea from.

0:02:52.8

AE: So in those days--in the [nineteen] fifties and sixties--were there a lot of tamale vendors on the streets in towns up in this area?

0:03:01.1

EE: [To her mother, Rosetta] Was it a lot of people selling hot tamales during that time?

0:03:05.7

RE: No, no. No, um-hmm. Not in Tunica.

0:03:08.9

AE: No? But you said he grew up knowing somebody who made hot tamales?

0:03:13.9

RE: He did, um-hmm.

0:03:14.0

AE: Just at their house?

0:03:16.5

RE: Yeah.

0:03:16.8

AE: Was it just at their house that he was exposed to them?

0:03:19.1

RE: Well, I really don't know, but he said he used to be with--he was a Jew. This man was a Jew. And he used to be with him when he was a kid, and he made hot tamales.

0:03:28.0

AE: Okay. And so the man that--or the restaurant or the person that he bought the recipe from in Arkansas, do you have any recollection of how he had that contact or who it was?

0:03:41.4

RE: No, I don't. I really don't.

0:03:43.5

AE: Do you know if it was a restaurant or just a person?

0:03:46.3

RE: I'm afraid to say. I--I--it might have been a restaurant but I don't--I really don't know.

0:03:51.0

AE: I know I'm asking you to reach back.

0:03:52.4

RE: I know that's where he bought it from. [*Laughs*]. He went to Arkansas, and he ran up on this person and then he--you know, he bought the recipe from him.

0:04:03.5

EE: [To man making delivery at back door] Hey, I'm sorry about that.

MAN: That's okay.

AE: [To Rosetta Ervin] So when he got his hands on the recipe--when he got his hands on the recipe did he start making them then?

0:04:10.1

RE: Uh-huh, yeah.

0:04:12.4

AE: And selling them?

0:04:12.9

RE: Uh-hmm.

0:04:12.8

AE: And do you remember making them with him that first time?

0:04:18.8

RE: Ooh, Lord, no. All I can remember--he was selling them, I believe, for seventy-cents a dozen at that time. I just really don't know how the making up was.

0:04:34.3

AE: Were you helping him make them then?

0:04:36.7

RE: Sometimes, you know, I'd be standing around watching. [*Laughs*]

0:04:40.3

AE: Yeah? Had you eaten a hot tamale before?

0:04:44.3

RE: I had. I went to Texas one time, and I got some chicken hot tamales.

0:04:50.8

AE: What is it do you think about hot tamales in the Delta here?

0:04:57.0

RE: Well, I really think they're the best ones that I've had.

0:05:01.2

AE: Do you have any idea how they got so popular here?

0:05:04.6

RE: No, I don't.

0:05:06.7

AE: No? Everybody likes hot tamales, though. [*Laughs*]

0:05:09.1

RE: [*Laughs*]

EE: [*Laughs*]

0:05:09.7

AE: So what year did your husband pass, if I may ask?

0:05:14.5

RE: Hmm?

0:05:14.6

AE: What year your husband passed?

0:05:15.6

RE: That—he--what--oh 1980—eighty-one or eighty?

0:05:21.9

EE: [To her mother, Rosetta] I thought it was 1980.

0:05:24.6

RE: Probably was 1980. I just know it was January the first.

0:05:32.1

EE: Uh-hmm.

0:05:32.6

AE: And so for thirty years y'all made and sold tamales?

0:05:36.2

RE: Almost—well, right after he passed, I think we missed about year or maybe two years before we started back.

0:05:45.8

AE: Is that what y'all did to make a living or was it just something on the side?

0:05:49.1

RE: Just something on the--well he was disabled from work and that--that was just a little side job.

0:05:56.4

AE: So on the weekends you'd go downtown maybe or--?

0:05:58.5

RE: Uh-hmm.

0:06:01.0

AE: Did you have a cart or a stand or a shop?

0:06:02.7

RE: We had a stand--a stand.

0:06:05.0

AE: Where was it?

0:06:05.8

RE: Well, it was a bus. It was in Tunica.

0:06:07.5

AE: Where in Tunica? Or everywhere?

0:06:11.5

RE: [*Sighs*] You know where Tunica Pharmacy--you don't know nothing about Tunica, do you?

0:06:18.0

AE: I know Highway Sixty-one in Tunica, that's about it. But if we get it for the record people will know.

0:06:24.7

RE: We was--we was over in town right in the front of Tunica Pharmacy.

0:06:28.3

AE: Okay. And was it a stand that y'all built or had built?

0:06:35.2

RE: Well it was a truck that my husband had fixed up. A bus, rather.

0:06:39.6

AE: Uh-hmm. And so y'all would make the tamales at home and then cart them around on the weekends to sell?

0:06:45.6

RE: Uh-hmm.

0:06:45.9

AE: What did your truck look like, do you remember? Besides it being a--?

0:06:50.3

RE: What did it look like?

0:06:49.8

AE: Uh-hmm.

0:06:50.2

RE: It was just an old milk truck; it's sitting out there now [in the side yard].

0:06:55.2

AE: Oh, okay.

0:06:56.3

RE: And he fixed it up and had it wired up and everything, so we could have a stove and refrigerator and everything on it.

0:07:07.4

AE: Did you sell a lot of tamales back in the day?

0:07:11.1

RE: Huh?

0:07:11.2

AE: Did you sell a lot of tamales that way?

0:07:14.5

RE: Well, not a lot of them, you know, but they were pretty good because it was something new in town. Hadn't been done in Tunica in a long time, so they said.

0:07:24.4

AE: Uh-hmm. So the recipe was a success that he bought?

0:07:27.7

RE: I think it was a success.

0:07:28.1

AE: Yeah? Have you enjoyed selling tamales all these decades?

0:07:32.3

RE: Hmm?

0:07:32.4

AE: Have you enjoyed selling tamales?

0:07:33.6

RE: Oh, yes. Yes. I have.

0:07:38.7

AE: Can you talk a little bit about what it was like in downtown Tunica in the [nineteen] sixties because I--it's changed so much, I know, just in the past five years.

0:07:46.6

RE: Well, it really has made big changes. It wasn't near as many people, and we would just sit over there on that bus and every now and then somebody would come by for some. And we really enjoyed it.

0:08:04.0

AE: And Edna were you a little girl on the--

0:08:06.1

EE: Yes.

AE: --on the bus on the weekend?

0:08:06.8

RE: She was a little girl. *[Laughs]*

0:08:08.3

EE: Yes. [*Laughs*]

0:08:09.9

AE: What are you earliest memories of being in the tamale bus as a little girl?

0:08:16.4

EE: Well, I was just excited. And I got a chance to see people. And by me being in town, I was just excited. And it—well, it just changed my life about dealing with people.

0:08:33.8

AE: How so?

0:08:34.4

EE: I got a chance to learn how to conduct myself as a businessperson. Uh-hmm.

0:08:43.4

AE: And interact with people on a professional level?

0:08:46.4

EE: Right. That's right.

0:08:46.6

AE: Do you have brothers and sisters?

0:08:49.6

EE: I have one adopted brother.

0:08:53.6

AE: Is he involved in the tamale making at all?

0:08:56.3

EE: No. Every now and then but [*Laughs*] no, um-umm.

0:09:00.9

AE: So when did you first start to learn the recipe?

0:09:04.0

EE: When did I first start?

0:09:06.3

AE: Um-hmm.

0:09:06.8

EE: Well after my father passed, which was 1980, then I got in--involved more helping my mother.

0:09:18.9

AE: So you grew up eating tamales, I would imagine?

0:09:23.3

EE: Well, you be around them so much, you know, you really [*Laughs*]*--*you get used to eating them. But it's not like something that you would want to have every day.

0:09:35.7

AE: Um-hmm. But you like tamales?

0:09:37.3

EE: Yes, I like tamales.

0:09:37.9

AE: How would you describe the tamales that y'all make?

0:09:42.8

EE: How would I describe them?

0:09:43.5

AE: Uh-hmm.

0:09:44.1

EE: Well. [Short pause] What--what--how would I--how good they are or--?

0:09:53.3

AE: Well, I'm sure you're going to say they're great, but--. [*Laughs*]

0:09:55.7

EE: Well the proof--the proof is in the pudding. You have to try them for yourself to really know how good they are. I don't want--I really don't want to brag on them, but I've been told that they are good.

0:10:07.5

AE: Because I mean you know everybody does a tamale differently I'm finding out, you know.

0:10:11.3

EE: Right.

0:10:12.5

AE: Some people steam them or they simmer them or they have a sauce or no sauce or shucks or parchment or more meat or more masa--more dough. So I just wondered if you could describe one, without one being in front of me here, what they were like?

0:10:32.0

EE: Well they're meaty. More meat than bread [meaning, masa or cornmeal].

0:10:39.9

AE: What kind of meat do you use?

0:10:41.7

EE: Beef, uh-hmm.

0:10:42.5

AE: Okay. Are they wrapped in shucks or--parchment?

0:10:46.8

EE: No [not shucks].

0:10:49.1

AE: Were they ever [wrapped in shucks]?

0:10:50.6

EE: Yes.

0:10:52.7

AE: When did that change happen?

0:10:56.1

EE: [To her mother, Rosetta] Daddy started using shucks back in the [nineteen] sixties, right?

0:11:01.5

RE: When he first started, he'd use shucks sometimes. There started being problems in corn so much, he just got off the shucks and--.

0:11:10.5

AE: And changed to using parchment paper? Is that what y'all use?

0:11:13.3

EE: Yes, uh-hmm.

0:11:14.7

AE: And how is that--that different? Do you like it better or not as much?

0:11:20.2

RE: Well, for a while people really didn't like them as well as they did in the shuck. But as time passed they got where it didn't really make no difference, it's a tamale.

0:11:34.6

AE: Is it easier or different working with the tamales when you're not using shucks?

0:11:40.1

RE: I think it's--I think it's a little more easier.

0:11:43.9

AE: How so?

0:11:44.5

EE: Easier to roll.

0:11:48.3

AE: Okay.

0:11:48.7

EE: With a shuck sometime you would kind of have to patch them together; with the regular paper you just roll them.

0:11:57.6

AE: Okay. Do you remember, Miss Rosetta, where you were getting the shucks in the early days?

0:12:04.0

RE: Do I—[To her daughter, Edna] What did she say?

0:12:05.6

EE: Do you remember where daddy got the shucks from?

0:12:09.8

RE: Oh, he was ordering them out of Texas, so I--I don't know just where, but anyway he was ordering them out of Texas.

0:12:16.0

AE: Okay. And your other ingredients in the early days--did you get them locally or--?

0:12:22.1

RE: Did I get them what?

0:12:24.9

EE: Did you get them around here or did you have to order them?

0:12:27.4

RE: Well sometimes he would order them and sometimes he would be blessed to get them at a place you call Shady Nuke's down to Clarksdale.

0:12:41.3

AE: And that was like a supplier or a grocery--?

0:12:45.8

RE: No, it was a hot tamale place. This man did--he did hot tamales for a company.

0:12:50.3

AE: Oh, okay. And--and his name again?

0:12:51.9

RE: It was Shady Nuke.

0:12:55.2

AE: Shady Nuke?

0:12:55.4

RE: Uh-hmm.

0:12:56.9

AE: Okay. Okay, and so when your husband passed, was there any time that you thought maybe that you'd stop making tamales or you--?

0:13:07.2

RE: I thought of—did. In fact, we--we stopped for about a year and better, and then people kept asking and asking for them, and we decided to try it.

0:13:18.8

AE: You still had it in you, huh?

0:13:21.3

EE: [*Laughs*]

0:13:20.8

AE: So do people come out here to get the tamales, or do you still take them into town?

0:13:25.6

RE: Well see--well some will come, you know, and mostly we take them out peddling.

0:13:34.2

AE: Uh-hmm. So do you still use the same truck?

0:13:36.9

RE: Oh, no, uh-umm.

0:13:38.8

AE: No?

0:13:39.3

RE: The truck was going down. She [Edna] uses her personal truck.

0:13:48.0

AE: And so you'll go--will you go to a parking lot, or will you deliver door-to-door, or how does that work?

0:13:55.3

EE: Door-to-door.

0:13:57.7

AE: So you have some regular customers that you cater to?

0:14:00.5

EE: Yes, uh-hmm.

0:14:01.3

AE: Are there any customers you have that you've had for all these years that you remember?

0:14:10.7

RE: I don't have any that we had when Louis started.

0:14:15.1

EE: Um-hmm. Mr. Granbury.

0:14:16.2

RE: Well, he passed.

0:14:17.4

EE: Uh-hmm.

RE: No, we really don't have any.

0:14:24.8

AE: So as--as a married couple doing this on the side, were y'all still farming or were you doing other jobs?

0:14:33.7

RE: Well when he first started he was trying to farm a little bit and his health got bad and then he had another little outside job at this Tunica Pharmacy. He didn't--you know, whenever he felt like it. He just really wasn't a permanent job.

0:14:54.5

AE: Did you hold a job?

0:14:55.7

RE: Did I what--did I have one?

0:14:57.6

AE: Yes, ma'am.

0:14:59.1

RE: Not when we started--no. No, I was still over farming. *[Laughs]*

0:15:11.2

AE: Well, have you tasted many other tamales?

0:15:14.6

RE: Have I tasted many of them?

0:15:16.2

AE: Yes, ma'am.

0:15:16.6

RE: Occasionally, I--occasionally I have tasted some.

0:15:19.8

AE: Do you have an idea of any other places around here that have them today?

0:15:25.1

RE: Right around here now?

0:15:26.2

AE: Yes, ma'am.

0:15:28.1

RE: Not that I know of. Well there's a place down in Clarksdale there that I see when I pass. It says hot tamales--get barbecue here and hot tamales on the sign.

0:15:39.1

AE: Hicks [World Famous Hot Tamales & More], maybe? I know Hicks is down that way.

0:15:42.3

RE: Where?

0:15:42.6

AE: Hicks Hot Tamales and Barbecue?

0:15:45.6

RE: I really don't know.

0:15:49.2

AE: Well, so Miss Edna, are you going to carry on the tamale--tamale tradition as long as you can?

0:15:55.8

EE: If God is willing.

0:15:57.6

AE: Yeah? Do you hold another job too?

0:15:58.5

RE: [To her daughter, Edna, about carrying on the tamale business] You want to, huh?

0:16:00.2

EE: Yes, I work in the school system.

0:16:03.8

AE: Okay. And I know how labor-intensive tamales are, so you must spend every spare moment rolling and cooking.

0:16:12.7

EE: Yes, it's--it's a lot of work in it.

0:16:14.8

AE: Yeah.

0:16:15.4

EE: It is.

0:16:15.8

AE: What kind of schedule do y'all keep of tamale making?

0:16:18.9

EE: We really don't have one. [*Laughs*]

0:16:25.0

AE: No?

0:16:25.8

EE: Um-umm.

0:16:27.1

AE: There's not--just--is it just on demand or--you don't like cook the meat on Thursdays and roll on Fridays or anything like that?

0:16:32.3

EE: We just really don't have a regular schedule; we just do what we can do. [*Laughs*]

0:16:40.4

AE: Do it when it feels right, huh?

0:16:42.3

RE: When we can.

0:16:43.0

EE: Uh-hmm.

0:16:43.6

AE: Do you have other people helping you, or is it just [the two of] you?

0:16:46.0

EE: No.

0:16:48.6

AE: And are they known as Ervin's Hot Tamales, the Ervin Family Hot Tamales?

0:16:54.4

EE: Yes.

0:16:54.7

RE: Ervin's Hot Tamales.

0:16:57.7

AE: Okay. Okay, I know there's something we haven't covered yet, and I'm so pleased to be talking to y'all. So this--you know, this project came out of--I think initially when Joe Pope died in Rosedale [owner of Joe's Hot Tamales/White Front Café]--are y'all familiar with him?

0:17:15.8

EE: No.

0:17:15.8

AE: He has a tamale place down there. He passed in December [of 2004], and he sold tamales for a lot--a lot of years down there.

0:17:22.3

EE: Really?

0:17:23.1

AE: His sister has the business now. Yeah, and you know, everybody when they talk about tamales in the Delta [they] talk about Mexican migrant workers coming up to work in the cotton fields in the [nineteen] thirties in the Delta and bringing [a] hot tamale tradition with them. And then it's stayed in the African American community in the Delta. And so we're just trying to put those pieces together and see kind of how far back we can reach and where that history goes.

Does any of that sound like something you've heard before or--?

0:17:59.1

EE: No, not really. About the Mexicans bringing the recipes here.

0:18:06.3

RE: No, I didn't know about any of it.

0:18:09.0

EE: I have heard it but not really that--I didn't know it.

0:18:13.6

AE: Okay.

0:18:14.1

EE: Um-hmm. I never even talked to someone that, you know--a guy came through from Illinois, and he stopped, and he asked was I a Mexican. I told him no.

0:18:28.8

AE: He thought you might have some in you because you were making tamales?

0:18:30.0

EE: Right, right.

0:18:30.9

AE: Hmm. Well, you know, and there are a lot of other people who said that the tamale was just always here. So, you know, with the ingredients of corn and--and beef, it seems logical that it

didn't have far to travel to be in the Delta. But it's amazing that it's stayed, you know. And that so many folks like yourself spend the time to make them by hand. And may I ask how much y'all sell a dozen for today?

0:18:56.5

EE: They're eight dollars a dozen.

0:19:02.0

AE: And you say they were seventy-cents a dozen when you started?

0:19:04.1

RE: Uh-hm.

0:19:05.0

AE: That's a big difference. [*Laughs*]

0:19:06.3

RE: Yes, it is.

0:19:10.2

AE: Over the years has there been anything that you've changed about the recipe, or is it exactly the same?

0:19:15.1

RE: Not a thing.

0:19:16.0

AE: Exactly the same, huh?

0:19:19.8

EE: So--excuse me, so you're doing a piece on African Americans with the tamales?

0:19:24.6

AE: Well it's--it's come up that mostly African Americans have maintained the tradition of making hot tamales [here in the Mississippi Delta].

0:19:30.7

EE: Oh, okay.

0:19:32.7

AE: There are a couple [of people] like the Signa family--the Signa family in Greenville, they're Italian and they make hot tamales.

0:19:39.3

EE: Really?

0:19:40.1

AE: And so there's some talk of the Italian and Mexican languages being--or Spanish and Italian being so similar that there was that communication--ease of communication that was part of the transfer of recipes. There are lots of hypotheses, but, you know, who's to say? [*Laughs*]

0:20:00.7

EE: [*Laughs*]

RE: [*Laughs*]

0:20:02.0

AE: But it is, you know--it is something that's--it's unusual to the Delta. I mean I know that there are tamales in Texas of course and some in Louisiana and Tennessee, but for this swath of western Mississippi to have so many people who make and serve and sell hot tamales is--seems unusual.

0:20:22.0

EE: It does. [*Laughs*]

0:20:25.4

AE: Maybe more unusual now that I'm here, huh? [*Laughs*] Well would it be possible for y'all maybe to talk about what it goes into preparing them? Not necessarily giving away any secrets but, you know, a day in the life of a tamale maker? What goes first and--?

0:20:48.9

EE: [*Laughs*] [To her mother] What goes first and how do we go about preparing for making them?

0:20:56.2

RE: Well, I really wouldn't--don't want to talk about that.

0:21:01.9

AE: Okay.

0:21:04.5

RE: It's a lot of work, that's about all I can say.

0:21:07.6

AE: I know it. It takes some time to make them.

0:21:10.7

EE: Yes, it does.

0:21:11.9

AE: How many do you think y'all make at a time?

0:21:15.2

RE: Make what?

0:21:15.7

EE: [To her mother, Rosetta] How many do we make at a time?

0:21:18.7

RE: Oh, well it really depends on how many people that call for them, you know. Uh-hmm. We try to make as--enough to satisfy the ones that call for them. Usually they call in for them.

0:21:38.1

AE: Do you ever keep some frozen to have around?

0:21:40.4

RE: We have--we have frozen.

0:21:44.0

AE: Yeah? And are there--I may be remembering this wrong, but are there restaurants that y'all supply to in Tunica also, or does that get too confusing?

0:21:57.6

EE: [To her mother] She just asked do we supply to restaurants in Tunica?

0:22:00.7

RE: Oh, now sometimes--this is not a regular thing. It's just that we have contracts with restaurants now, but sometimes they might maybe like coming up for a holiday or something they might want--they want some.

0:22:18.1

AE: Uh-hmm. Are you aware of people who come through the area from far away for your tamales?

0:22:25.1

RE: [To her daughter, Edna] Do they come from where?

0:22:27.3

EE: [To her mother, Rosetta] People that travel like Chicago--different places, coming in and asking for our tamales?

0:22:34.7

RE: Oh, yeah. Yeah they do, they do.

0:22:39.7

EE: Because they still remember Daddy.

0:22:44.2

AE: Uh-huh. Can you describe your dad a little bit for the record? About his personality and who he was?

0:22:50.3

EE: The greatest man that ever lived. [*Laughs*] Yes. To me. [He had] a beautiful personality. He could deal with any race. He was just that type of person. He just had that personality.

0:23:11.6

AE: A real people-person?

0:23:12.1

EE: People-person, uh-hmm, yes.

0:23:18.1

AE: And he would interact with the customers and all of that?

0:23:20.5

EE: Right, uh-hmm.

0:23:21.9

AE: And that's your job now?

0:23:23.4

EE: Yes.

0:23:24.6

AE: So you must take after your father pretty well then.

0:23:28.8

EE: [*Laughs*] I hope so, anyway.

0:23:32.7

AE: And so what do you think the future of the Ervin family tamales might be?

0:23:39.7

EE: Well, no, the future is--it's so hard to say about the future, but I pray that it be a success. I really do. I really pray. I pray for the best for it. That's about the best I can say--about the future. It's so unpredictable.

0:24:00.4

AE: Indeed. Well is the recipe something that y'all will pass onto other family members or that y'all might sell when the time comes or anything like that?

0:24:13.3

RE: Won't pass on the recipe. It's supposed to be a secret.

0:24:21.0

EE: [To her mother, Rosetta] She's saying like you no anytime in the future if--?

0:24:25.2

RE: Oh, in the future? Well it's really hard to say about that but as of now, I don't think so.

[Laughs]

0:24:29.9

AE: So you wouldn't consider selling it to someone else when the time comes?

0:24:36.1

RE: Not--not as of now. I don't know what might--from what my husband paid way back in that time, I doubt anybody would want to buy it now. [Laughs]

0:24:46.5

AE: You remember how much he paid for it?

0:24:50.9

RE: Paying--it was much over a thousand dollars.

0:24:52.8

AE: My, oh, my.

0:24:55.5

EE: And that was in the [nineteen] sixties.

0:24:58.0

RE: We never thought that they would go over like they have and--and perhaps they might go on up, up, up.

0:25:08.6

AE: Wow.

0:25:08.5

RE: I don't know if anybody would really want to buy it. [*Laughs*]

0:25:13.0

AE: Well that's something that he wanted to buy it for that amount of money that long ago.

0:25:17.4

RE: Yeah.

0:25:17.8

EE: He sure did.

0:25:17.9

AE: He must have really had faith in the recipe. [*Laughs*]

0:25:20.0

RE: What I--what I think he could remember as being a child and how well this person did with this is what made him want it. He was an old Jew but he used to have--he must have did a lot of good to make my husband want to try it.

0:25:38.6

AE: I'd say so. Do you have any idea if that Jewish man sold the recipe to other folks?

0:25:45.6

RE: I really don't know. I don't think he did around this area because it wasn't too many people, you know, that made them.

0:25:59.0

AE: Uh-hmm. Do you remember where in Arkansas he was?

0:26:01.9

RE: No, I don't remember.

0:26:04.1

AE: Okay.

0:26:04.4

RE: I sure don't.

0:26:07.3

AE: Wow. Well that's something. That's quite a recipe.

0:26:09.9

RE: That's been a long, long time.

0:26:13.7

EE: And here it is 2005.

0:26:17.6

AE: Uh-hmm. Yeah, that's some history right there. That's a shocker actually. [*Laughs*] So the tamales in the Delta are--you know, they---I'm finding out through this project that they're all

very different, and they all come from very different places. I mean, we talked about the Mexican laborers coming through in the early part of the Twentieth Century but also now a Jewish man who had a recipe, and some Italian families who have the recipe and--it's complicated history, I'm finding out.

0:26:51.8

EE: It sure is.

0:26:54.8

AE: Yeah. Well, Miss Rosetta do you have any final thoughts about your life tamale making?

0:27:03.8

RE: What's that?

0:27:04.3

EE: Do you have anything you would like to add?

0:27:08.8

RE: No.

0:27:08.9

EE: [To her mother, Rosetta] For the future?

0:27:12.1

RE: Nothing. I just hope we can continue and hope it gets greater and greater than it is. It has come a long ways so far.

0:27:24.3

EE: A lot of blood—hard work. It's more than meets the eye.

0:27:31.1

RE: Uh-hmm. [*Emphasis added*]

0:27:31.4

EE: People seem to think it's easy, but it's not easy.

0:27:37.1

RE: It's just like going in the kitchen and cooking a meal but it's--it's far from that. A lazy person wouldn't do it; it's got to be somebody that really wants to do it. *[Laughs]*

0:27:52.1

AE: Can you make the recipe just by memory, I would imagine?

0:27:55.3

RE: Can I?

0:27:58.1

AE: Do you--do you know the recipe by memory?

0:28:00.2

RE: Uh-hmm.

0:28:02.8

AE: So you don't have to measure anything or anything anymore?

0:28:05.7

RE: Well, I really don't have to but it's--it's always to kind of [good] to measure up a little bit to really know everything is going to be all right.

0:28:17.3

AE: Are your tamales real spicy or not so much?

0:28:20.1

RE: Huh?

0:28:22.5

AE: Are your tamales spicy?

0:28:24.9

RE: Well, we make three different kinds, uh-hmm.

0:28:28.2

AE: Oh, okay.

0:28:28.6

RE: The hot and mild and then the regular ones. And some people like them real, real hot. Some don't like them quite as hot. And some can't even eat the hot ones, so that's where the mild ones come in.

0:28:41.7

AE: And so the regular one is like a medium-hot?

0:28:45.8

RE: Uh-hmm, um-hmm, um-hmm.

0:28:46.9

AE: Is there one that you think you sell more of?

0:28:50.9

RE: Hot.

0:28:51.8

AE: Hot? *[Laughs]* And when y'all eat them do y'all like to eat them with crackers or anything?

0:28:58.5

RE: I used to eat them with crackers when I eat them. I don't--I don't eat them too regular--but I mostly eat crackers.

0:29:07.8

AE: Uh-hmm. Have y'all heard or seen of anybody who likes to put something odd on a tamale? I've heard of ketchup and--.

0:29:15.4

EE: Yes, rice.

0:29:18.3

AE: Okay, tamales and rice?

0:29:18.6

EE: Uh-hmm, chili and tamales. Some people even--I've been told that they drink milk and eat them.

0:29:29.2

RE: I don't believe that's good, though. **[Laughs]** That just don't sound like that's good.

EE: **[Laughs]**

0:29:34.5

AE: It sounds like somebody is trying to have them for breakfast. **[Laughs]** Well all right then.
Well any final thoughts, Edna?

0:29:47.1

EE: Just like my mother said, I just pray that the business continues to get better and better.

0:29:55.6

AE: I'm sure it will. And I hope it does.

0:29:59.3

EE: Thank you.

0:29:59.7

AE: Thank you both so much.

0:30:01.5

RE: [*Quiet laugh*]

EE: You're very welcome.

0:30:05.4

[End Rosetta and Edna Ervin]