

**SYLVESTER COLLINS**  
**Collins Dream Kitchen - Jackson, MS**

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Location: Collins Dream Kitchen - Jackson, MS

Interviewer: Rien Fertel

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

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Project: Jackson's Iconic Restaurants

**[Begin Sylvester Collins — Collins Dream Kitchen]**

**00:00:02**

**Rien Fertel:** All right; check, check, all right this is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is Sunday, March 9, 2014 about 2:30 in the afternoon. And I am sitting in Collins Dream Kitchen with the owner, Mrs. Sylvester Collins. I'm going to have her introduce yourself, so please give us your name, please, and your birth date?

**00:00:22**

**Sylvester Collins:** Sylvester Collins, June 12, 1940.

**00:00:28**

**RF:** So how long have you had this restaurant, this establishment?

**00:00:34**

**SC:** I been here—I been in business twenty-seven years.

**00:00:37**

**RF:** Let's go back: where were you born?

**00:00:41**

**SC:** I was born in Learned, Mississippi. Hinds County.

**00:00:45**

**RF:** Say that again.

**00:00:45**

**SC:** Learned, Mississippi in Hinds County.

**00:00:49**

**RF:** And where were you born? Is that a town? Was it country?

**00:00:52**

**SC:** A little country town, small country town.

**00:00:56**

**RF:** And tell me about your family. Who were your parents or your grandparents? Who did you grow up with?

**00:01:01**

**SC:** I grew up with my mother and my daddy. My mother and my daddy both they're deceased. And my mother been gone about three years and happily she was ninety-two years old when she passed. She had a sound mind; she was an independent living. And so she—matter of fact she was with me seventy years because I'm seventy-three now.

**00:01:28**

**RF:** What did your mom do? Was she a housekeeper? Did she have a job?

**00:01:32**

**SC:** My mother, she went around—well she started out in the restaurant and she worked at a restaurant also. But after she retired she worked with elder peoples, like keeping elder peoples and stuff like that. Then she come up here and answered the telephone for me, like on a Friday and like sometimes on Sunday, and she just liked to stay busy. And she still did her own cooking at home and everything.

**00:01:59**

**RF:** What was her name?

**00:02:00**

**SC:** Corinne Collins.

**00:02:02**

**RF:** And what did she cook or where did she work? You said she worked in restaurants before?

**00:02:09**

**SC:** Yeah.

**00:02:10**

**RF:** What restaurants?

**00:02:11**

**SC:** Well that's a long time ago. She worked at Billups Café a long—that was long years ago. She didn't work with no—you know, like Kroger or nowhere like that, because I worked for the Sack & Save for fourteen years. But Food Center—but she didn't work no place like that; the only place she only worked was like small places.

**00:02:31**

**RF:** Okay.

**00:02:32**

**SC:** Uh-huh.

**00:02:33**

**RF:** In Jackson?

**00:02:33**

**SC:** In Jackson; uh-hm, her home in Jackson also—Hinds County like Learned, Mississippi.

**00:02:40**

**RF:** So did she teach you how to cook?

**00:02:42**

**SC:** No; she didn't. I was taught at school where a long time ago they had Home Ec, and I learned a whole lot from Home Ec.

**00:02:52**

**RF:** Where did you go to school? Where did you take these classes?

00:02:54

**SC:** Jim Hill High School.

00:02:56

**RF:** And that was here in the City?

00:02:57

**SC:** Here in Jackson, Mississippi; uh-hmm.

00:02:59

**RF:** And so you were taking Home Ec classes. Do you remember what you learned in those classes or the name of a teacher?

00:03:06

**SC:** Yeah; I had two teachers the best, Ms. Zuber and Ms. Monmouth. They both are deceased. And then we learned how to like what food to prepare like your protein and all that kind of stuff, and then most of all we learned portion-wise, you know, about portions and everything else. And then we cooked breakfast, so they did it very interesting. So I think they should go back to Home Ec now because so many young people they really don't know how to cook.

00:03:39

**RF:** Yeah.

**00:03:40**

**SC:** You know, they really don't know how to cook and you learn a whole lot from Home Ec, because a lot of times children come in up here, young folk, they don't even know white meat from dark meat, you know, so—.

**00:03:53**

**RF:** Well you answered my next question. It was—Home Ec disappeared a long time ago—

**00:03:58**

**SC:** It did; it did, a long time ago. Home Ec is gone and which I think, you know, they should bring it back because so many people need it. So many people need it; uh-hmm.

**00:04:08**

**RF:** What grades were you taking Home Ec in do you remember?

**00:04:09**

**SC:** Hmm tenth and eleventh; uh-hmm.

**00:04:12**

**RF:** Okay; so you were a kind of older teenager?

**00:04:13**

**SC:** Uh-huh; yeah an older teenager, yeah, uh-huh.

**00:04:16**

**RF:** Were you cooking, you personally, were you cooking at home before those Home Ec classes?

**00:04:19**

**SC:** Oh yeah; oh yeah. I'm the oldest of five and I started cooking like when I was like seven years old. And it went on from there, uh-hmm.

**00:04:29**

**RF:** And so were you cooking beside your mom when you were that young?

**00:04:31**

**SC:** No; no I was cooking at home.

**00:04:33**

**RF:** Okay, but you—who was watching you or were you—?

**00:04:37**

**SC:** My mom, my mom, my grandmother; uh-hmm, my mom—mostly my mom and my grandmother, yes.

**00:04:43**

**RF:** And what did your father do?

**00:04:45**



**SC:** My father worked at a plant. That goes a long time ago, like with a petro plant. He worked at a plant; uh-hmm. And they also were farmers long years ago.

**00:04:55**

**RF:** What did they farm?

**00:04:55**

**SC:** They had vegetables and corn—you had cows and, you know, they just was a farmer; uh-hmm.

**00:05:07**

**RF:** Do you know when they moved to the City?

**00:05:10**

**SC:** Well they moved from Learned, Mississippi and went to Arkansas, which ain't nothing but another part of the country to me. [*Laughs*] And so they moved there, but then we moved back, and we moved back to Jackson after so many years.

**00:05:26**

**RF:** So it sounds like you didn't like Arkansas.

**00:05:28**

**SC:** I hated it. I really hated it.

**00:05:31**

**RF:** How old were you then?

**00:05:32**

**SC:** I was like—I was probably around ten or so like that; uh-hmm. But I didn't like the school way back then up there, you know, I didn't like nothing about it.

**00:05:41**

**RF:** Yeah. Why did they go up there do you know?

**00:05:45**

**SC:** For a better living, but they still was farming. They thought it was a better living.

**00:05:50**

**RF:** Was it because of what was going on in Mississippi at the time?

**00:05:54**

**SC:** No, no; we were back when integration first started, we were back. Because a matter of fact my daddy got—I had a brother which he is—he was walking with the Freedom Riders and then he stepped down off the curb and my daddy went to get him out of jail and my mama told him don't go. And he went and got him anyway and matter of fact he got fired.

**00:06:20**

**RF:** He got fired from his job—your dad or your—?

**00:06:22**

**SC:** He got fired. My dad got fired from his job.

00:06:25

**RF:** For being associated with his son?

00:06:29

**SC:** My brother; yeah, uh-hmm, uh-hmm. That was long years ago. [*Laughs*]

00:06:33

**RF:** Wow. And did he—he didn't get his job back. Did he have to go to another factory?

00:06:37

**SC:** He had to get him another job; uh-hmm.

00:06:39

**RF:** Did—so was your—that was your older brother? Oh no; you said you were the oldest.

00:06:45

**SC:** I'm the oldest. That was my—he was the—he was third oldest; uh-huh.

00:06:51

**RF:** Okay; what was his name?

00:06:52

**SC:** Solomon Collins.

00:06:54

**RF:** And did he continue to be active in the Civil Rights Movement?

**00:06:57**

**SC:** No; he, you know, he went onto school. He went to school. He went to Paul Quinn College; and that's in some part of Louisiana somewhere [**note: it is in Dallas, TX**]? He went away—it's an all-black college, Paul Quinn College. He continued his education down there and then after he finished down there he moved to Michigan, Benton Harbor, Michigan. And so that's where they retired now from Benton Harbor, Michigan and so they are—they stay up there in Benton Harbor in the summer and come down here in the winter. Matter of fact they're down here now, him and his wife; uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-hmm.

**00:07:32**

**RF:** So you get to spend some time with him?

**00:07:33**

**SC:** Uh-hmm; yeah I do, I do. We do; uh-hmm.

**00:07:35**

**RF:** How do you—so how do you remember it, you know, it sounds like, you know, with your brother involved and with your brother being arrested and with your dad losing his job, did you ever march? Did you ever join a protest? How was it for you growing up in Jackson?

**00:07:53**

**SC:** Well, it was all fine. Well the bus one time, we was on the bus and my friend [**Inaudible name**] we got on the front seat and they—and the bus driver told us to move back to the back. And so we kind of just hesitated a little bit and he got up. I don't know what he was going to do because he got up, so both of us got up. But we were—we went on back to the back, you know, like they said, but, you know; uh-hmm.

**00:08:17**

**RF:** Where do you remember eating or being able to eat? Did you ever go out to eat or was—did you only eat at home?

**00:08:22**

**SC:** I went out to eat but it wasn't in no white restaurants. You know, because, you know, back then the only place you could go in the back.

**00:08:30**

**RF:** Where would you go? What were the names of the establishments?

**00:08:32**

**SC:** It was a place on Farish Street like Peaches and—Peaches still on Farish Street—and down—places like that; uh-hmm.

**00:08:40**

**RF:** Yeah; so you did go to Peaches. Did you ever go to the Big Apple Inn, or Big John's?

**00:08:44**

**SC:** Yeah; we went there too, the Big Apple Inn with Big John, yeah. We went all those places which is still downtown.

**00:08:50**

**RF:** Yeah; so when was your—what was your first job in the food industry? What was your first cooking job?

**00:08:56**

**SC:** Where was my first cooking job? I was working at a—I first started off washing dishes and I was determined that I wasn't going to wash no dishes. And so I used to go back there and watch the lady, named Miss Elsie, and she was a real good cook and she's deceased too now.

**00:09:16**

And I went back and watched her cooking and that's where I learned a lot of my cooking from her, just watching. And so then I started cooking at, you know, short order at Billups. I cooked short order at Billups and then I started doing dinners over there for another small—Mertz[?] Restaurant, another small place; so I went over there. And so—and then so I went on and on and on and then I got the job at Food Center Warehouse and I cooked there for about fourteen years.

**00:09:48**

**RF:** Okay; what was the name of that first restaurant where you worked with Miss Elsie?

00:09:52

**SC:** That was Billups Café.

00:09:56

**RF:** Billups Café with a B?

00:09:58

**SC:** Uh-huh; yeah, but he gone. He been gone; yeah.

00:10:02

**RF:** Was it an integrated restaurant or segregated restaurant?

00:10:04

**SC:** It was integrated.

00:10:05

**RF:** It was?

00:10:05

**SC:** No; segregated, uh-huh because they had truck drivers come in the back and eat, uh-huh.

00:10:11

**RF:** Okay; so—

00:10:12

**SC:** Yeah; uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

**00:10:13**

**RF:** And do you remember her last name, Elsie's?

**00:10:15**

**SC:** What was Miss Elsie's name? I can't remember. Harvey? I can't remember Miss Elsie's last name. I think it was Elsie Harvey, if I'm not mistaken. Been so long ago; uh-hmm.

**00:10:31**

**RF:** And then you went to another restaurant. What was the name of that one again?

**00:10:34**

**SC:** I went to Mertz, Mert Robinson; it was a small building—Pearl, a small restaurant—around Pearl. She hadn't too long opened up, but I started cooking for her over there; uh-hmm.

**00:10:46**

**RF:** Okay; and the—and you—what was the third one?

**00:10:50**

**SC:** Sack & Save Foods; it was the Food Center Warehouse. That was long years ago.

**00:10:55**

**RF:** What was that?



00:10:56

**SC:** It really was Jitney Jungle. I know you remember the Jitney Jungle.

00:11:00

**RF:** Okay; I've seen signs for Jitney Jungle, yeah.

00:11:02

**SC:** Yeah; uh-hmm.

00:11:02

**RF:** It was a grocery store?

00:11:03

**SC:** Yeah; but they had, you know, a restaurant area in there, cooking part in there.

00:11:08

**RF:** Oh in the grocery?

00:11:09

**SC:** Yeah; uh-hmm.

00:11:10

**RF:** What kind of cooking would they do?

00:11:12

**SC:** Like a regular cook like we do here, like vegetables and meats and chicken and they had sandwiches and they had everything; uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

00:11:24

**RF:** Okay; do you remember—what are your first memories of cooking in an integrated establishment? Was that—do you remember that at all?

00:11:34

**SC:** Hmm; not really. Not really; not really, not really, you know, I just, you know, cooked. Matter of fact though we all got along though cooking there. Uh-huh; we all got along, white and black got along. You know, we all—we just was a—you know, you wouldn't even know that was going on outside; uh-hmm, yeah.

00:11:56

**RF:** So you opened this place in a different location twenty-seven years ago?

00:12:02

**SC:** Uh-huh; yeah.

00:12:03

**RF:** Why did you open your own restaurant?

00:12:06

**SC:** Well for one reason, I got tired of working and I wasn't making no money, because I was the head cook down to Food Center. And I worked real hard, did two or three people work, but I wasn't making any money. And I told—I said one day; I said when my younger child—he gotta be six—I said when he finishes high school I'm going to leave. I said no; I'm not. I said I'm going to before he finishes. And it was a small place. Everything was carryout. It wasn't nothing eat in; everything was carryout, a very small place. And so I started from there, with carryout.

**00:12:49**

**RF:** The first location.

**00:12:52**

**SC:** Carryout; it was a carryout. Everything carryout and then where I was—and then after a while, it was another side to it and the boss let me knock the wall out. And I knocked the wall out and got a little place they could sit down and eat. And then after then Hollow Donut Shop; I don't know if you remember it on Ellis Avenue. I moved over there; they had a larger place to sit down and eat—eat too; uh-hmm.

**00:13:22**

**RF:** So that was the second location?

**00:13:23**

**SC:** That was the second location.

**00:13:24**

**RF:** And this is the third where we are now?

**00:13:26**

**SC:** Uh-hmm; uh-hmm, yeah.

**00:13:27**

**RF:** Okay; what was the name of the first location? Did you always—?

**00:13:31**

**SC:** The Collins Carryout.

**00:13:33**

**RF:** Oh, it was called Collins Carryout and then what was the name of the second location?

**00:13:37**

**SC:** Same thing: Collins Carryout.

**00:13:39**

**RF:** And then when you moved here you renamed it?

**00:13:41**

**SC:** I named this a *Dream*, Collins Dream Kitchen. So I always had a dream about this and so that's why I named it Collins Dream Kitchen.

**00:13:49**

**RF:** Was it a dream because you wanted to do it or you actually had a sleeping dream?

**00:13:53**

**SC:** No; I wanted to do it. I always enjoyed cooking and I always enjoyed the public, you know. I always making—love making people smile, you know, by my cooking. And so just like down here I done fed many, many homeless people. Everybody comes by here and they say they're hungry and I ain't got no food. They want something and I'm always going to feed them, you know; uh-hmm because God said *bless the cheerful giver*, so I always feed them, uh-hmm.

**00:14:23**

**RF:** That's beautiful and it fits into the dream? I guess it—

**00:14:26**

**SC:** Yeah; uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And just like I always said—tell everybody; I said God put me on this corner for a reason. I said he not only put me on this corner for a—

**00:14:41**

**RF:** You need to get—? All right; so you were saying that the Lord put you on this corner for a reason?

**00:14:48**

**SC:** For a reason; you know, so many people come through here and they be hungry and then I have had work—I had work, you know, like they been on drugs or something like that and I give them a job, you know, for to help them have a second chance, you know, uh-hmm.

**00:15:04**

**RF:** Why do you do that? Is it the way you were raised? Is it church? Is it—what makes you want to kind of help the community in that way?

**00:15:14**

**SC:** Matter of fact, when I'm so sick of people on drugs and alcohol I have a family—that's what they—drug and alcohol. Like my oldest son, he was a drug addict and alcoholic. But he got off of it. He been off of drugs over thirty or thirty-five years or something. And that's where he go around now speaking to those kinds of people too. And so my youngest son, he was on drugs. And I think that's the reason he's gone today. I just wanted to—you know, help somebody, you know; I couldn't stop it. I want to help somebody. That's all I want to do—help somebody. And then I have my housekeeper here who helped me. She stayed with me while I was sick. I had been down sick and she stayed with me until I got better. And while she was staying with me, God let her get off of crack. And when she got off crack all she did was listen to the spiritual and look at TV and started reading her Bible and going to church. She did not go to rehab. She didn't go nowhere. So that's why I just reach out to somebody, you know, because that stuff is powerful. It is really truly powerful. It's powerful than you and powerful than me and that's how I look at it every day, you know. And a lot of come back from my area where I am and a lot of them come through here. And they're on drugs and stuff; uh-hmm. Sometimes they come

through here and want me to feed them and I feed them, you know, because I know they can buy crack they can buy their own food but God said *feed them*, you know. So I do that; uh-hmm.

**00:17:03**

**RF:** What do you remember when—you've lived in Jackson this whole time, what do you remember when it started changing and, you know, drugs really started moving in here? What—

**00:17:15**

**SC:** Hmm; well it's been here for a while, you know. I don't remember when it just started. You know, maybe when I was coming up, you know, it was. But I didn't, you know, fool with nothing like that, you know. So I wouldn't know. But it's been here for a while. It's been here for a while.

**00:17:35**

**RF:** But tell us about the neighborhood we're in, where the restaurant is. What's it called; the neighborhood is called or what do people call it?

**00:17:43**

**SC:** This neighborhood is West Jackson. That's what it is, West Jackson; uh-hmm, West Jackson.

**00:17:51**

**RF:** And you're very close to Jackson State University.

**00:17:53**

**SC:** Yeah; uh-huh.

**00:17:54**

**RF:** Is that important to be close to the University? Do you do a lot of University students or administrators?

**00:18:00**

**SC:** Yeah; they come, uh-huh they come. They come here; uh-hmm, yeah. They be looking for home cooking if you can't go home to Mama come to Collins. So that's my—that's my slogan. You can't go home to Mama come to Collins.

**00:18:16**

**RF:** So let's talk about the food. Let's talk about the menu.

**00:18:18**

**SC:** Okay.

**00:18:21**

**RF:** Do the recipes go back to the beginning to your first place?

**00:18:23**

**SC:** Yeah; I been having the same thing most all the time. My—a lot of people love my chicken; I'm famous for my fried chicken and baked chicken and stuff.

**00:18:33**

**RF:** All right; why is your fried and baked chicken so good? How do you fry your chicken?



**00:18:37**

**SC:** We marinate it and soak it overnight and stuff, got special seasoning and stuff we put on it. And then we flour it, you know, batter it and flour it; uh-hm.

**00:18:48**

**RF:** And do you fry—do you deep fry it or fry it in a skillet?

**00:18:54**

**SC:** No; we got an old—well, deep fry it but it's an old fashion deep fryer, not the one that, you know, you pressure—you know, so a lot of them got pressure cookers. But we don't have no pressure cooker. We got the old-fashioned deep fryer; uh-hmm.

**00:19:08**

**RF:** And your baked chicken, tell me about that.

**00:19:09**

**SC:** Oh, the baked chicken, we got some seasoning we put on it and put it in the oven, you know, and make sure it's good and clean and everything and put it in and smother it and bake it. We sell a lot of baked chicken; uh-hmm.

**00:19:22**

**RF:** Now when I was here two days ago I had—the focus of my plate I ate turkey necks.

**00:19:29**

**SC:** Oh yeah; that's a good seller. That turkey necks is a very good seller; uh-huh. We even put that in the oven. We bake that in the oven.

**00:19:36**

**RF:** And then you smother them?

**00:19:38**

**SC:** No; we put all—everything in the oven, uh-huh. They come out the oven; sure do. A lot of people boil them but we put ours in the oven and smother them; uh-hmm.

**00:19:48**

**RF:** Okay; you smother them in the oven.

**00:19:50**

**SC:** Smother them in the oven; uh-huh.

**00:19:52**

**RF:** I see.

**00:19:53**

**SC:** Our turkey wings we do the same way. We smother them in the oven; uh-hmm. Our chop steak, we don't put them on the grill. We put them in the oven. A lot of food we put in the oven.

**00:20:03**

**RF:** Why; why do you believe in the oven?

00:20:05

**SC:** One thing, you ain't got all that fat. That's one thing; uh-hmm you ain't got all that fat.

00:20:11

**RF:** You keep the fat or the fat—say it again.

00:20:15

**SC:** Well one thing, you know, we ain't got all that fat, saturated fat. That's why you put it in the oven.

00:20:19

**RF:** I see; so it's just in its own juice, okay.

00:20:22

**SC:** Uh-huh; yeah uh-hmm, yeah.

00:20:25

**RF:** Instead of throwing it on a grill or—?

00:20:26

**SC:** A grill or something like that; we put it in the oven and bake it in the oven, uh-hmm.

00:20:30

**RF:** Do you call your food—what do you call your food?

00:20:35

**SC:** I call it just “good eating.” That’s what I call my food, good eating.

00:20:42

**RF:** Do you—

00:20:42

**SC:** A lot of people say soul food, but I call it good eating.

00:20:44

**RF:** Do you not use that—that was going to be my question—do you use the word soul food or not use it?

00:20:48

**SC:** I don’t hardly use soul food [*Laughs*], because one day somebody come in here—because we don’t have no fat in our food and one lady they from out of town somewhere and they said they had never seen a soul food place that didn’t have like bacon or some kind of pork or something in it. But mine don’t have it.

00:21:08

**RF:** So to you, you say soul food has chopped up pork or bacon or fat drippings?

00:21:16

**SC:** That's what they, you know, that's what a lot of them like but now that everybody don't like all that now and so I changed mine around. So my greens, my peas, cabbage, I don't put no meat in anything.

**00:21:32**

**RF:** Well, okay.

**00:21:32**

**SC:** I put seasonings.

**00:21:33**

**RF:** Did they use to have meat?

**00:21:34**

**SC:** They used to have meat.

**00:21:36**

**RF:** But when did you change?

**00:21:37**

**SC:** I changed—well I done changed for a while now when, you know, we got—. So, you know, most people got high blood pressure, diabetes, you know, the health thing, you know, so I'd been right healthy—you know, a healthy way of eating, you know. You can still eat out and still eat healthy. That's what I think; uh-hmm.

00:21:59

**RF:** So there's no—I had the cabbage and it was some of the best cabbage. There's no fat in there?

00:22:04

**SC:** No fat—not fat in it.

00:22:05

**RF:** How are they so good?

00:22:07

**SC:** That seasoning. I got so I learned that you can still, you know, we were brought up on all that pork and stuff. We didn't know no better. You know, that's why so much heart attacks now and that kind of stuff, strokes and all that kind of stuff, on count of what we eat; uh-hmm.

00:22:20

**RF:** So and by seasoning you mean spice and not pork seasoning?

00:22:24

**SC:** No pork, not pork.

00:22:25

**RF:** So spice seasoning.

**00:22:26**

**SC:** Spice seasoning; uh-huh spicy seasoning uh-huh, uh-hmm, yeah.

**00:22:30**

**RF:** So we don't call it soul food. I like that; okay.

**00:22:35**

**SC:** [*Laughs*] Yeah; and so greens, we don't put no fat in the greens. Squash, we don't put fat in anything. Now we got on the side if they want it, see like we had the neck bone on the side, like we have ham hocks on the side, and we have it on the side, but not in your food.

**00:22:54**

**RF:** Right; and you can get the gravy poured over?

**00:22:55**

**SC:** Yeah; whatever you want, uh-hmm, yeah uh-hmm, yeah uh-hmm.

**00:23:00**

**RF:** What's your most popular side dish?

**00:23:03**

**SC:** You know, what my popular side dish: rolls, those rolls.

**00:23:07**

**RF:** The rolls?

**00:23:07**

**SC:** Rolls; everybody loves those rolls. They come a long ways to—and cornbread, cobbler, cakes, macaroni—macaroni and cheese, everybody loves that.

**00:23:19**

**RF:** Yeah.

**00:23:19**

**SC:** Because you make it from scratch.

**00:23:20**

**RF:** Tell me the rolls. I didn't have those. I had the cornbread. What are the rolls?

**00:23:24**

**SC:** Yeast rolls. You didn't try one?

**00:23:28**

**RF:** No; I'm going to get one right after—

**00:23:28**

**SC:** Yeah; uh-huh, you didn't try a roll? You missed out. **[Laughs]**

**00:23:33**

**RF:** Is there crackling in the cornbread or no?



00:23:35

**SC:** Yeah; there's crackling cornbread but we got regular cornbread. Uh-huh; we got crackling cornbread and we got regular cornbread, uh-huh. You know, who want crackling they get crackling. Who want regular they get regular. And, every once in a while, I have Mexican bread—not too often, but every once in a while; uh-hmm.

00:23:51

**RF:** You have what kind of bread is that?

00:23:53

**SC:** Mexican bread; you know, Mexican.

00:23:53

**RF:** Oh Mexican, okay; and what is that?

00:23:56

**SC:** With jalapeño peppers and cheese and stuff like that. Uh-hmm; yeah.

00:24:01

**RF:** So is it—are there the same sides and meats every day or do they change throughout the week?

00:24:09

**SC:** They change throughout the week. We have different; uh-huh, we have different meats, uh-hmm.

**00:24:13**

**RF:** And what's your most popular meat?

**00:24:15**

**SC:** Uh—

**00:24:17**

**RF:** Besides the chicken; we talked about the chicken.

**00:24:20**

**SC:** Yeah; I know the chicken. The turkey wing is a—that's a popular meat; and turkey necks, that's a popular meat too. And our spaghetti—

**00:24:28**

**RF:** Okay; tell me about the spaghetti. Do you—what do you call it?

**00:24:31**

**SC:** Spaghetti with meat sauce.

**00:24:33**

**RF:** Okay; did you ever call it *soul spaghetti*?

00:24:35

**SC:** No; no, our always says spaghetti with meat sauce, uh-hmm.

00:24:39

**RF:** Okay; so spaghetti with meat sauce and what do you do to it? Why is it so good?

00:24:43

**SC:** I just—I don't know but they said it's the best spaghetti. You know, I just make it up, you know. I guess it's the sauce I put in; uh-huh, yeah.

00:24:55

**RF:** So do you still do the cooking or who does the cooking?

00:24:59

**SC:** I season it; I do all the seasonings.

00:25:02

**RF:** You come in at the end I guess or in the beginning?

00:25:05

**SC:** Yeah; when they put it down, I season it; uh-hmm.

**00:25:08**

**RF:** Why is it important that you keep seasoning it?

**00:25:11**

**SC:** I really don't know but I'm trying to train them to season it, you know. But, like I said, I was gone for a while, sick, and then they said they could tell the difference in the food, so I don't know.

**00:25:22**

**RF:** Your customers?

**00:25:24**

**SC:** My customers. And so I just season it now; I just season it for them.

**00:25:28**

**RF:** How long were you gone or sick for?

**00:25:31**

**SC:** I was gone for about a couple months.

**00:25:34**

**RF:** Oh, wow.

**00:25:36**

**SC:** Uh-hm for a couple months.

**00:25:38**

**RF:** How is your health now?

**00:25:39**

**SC:** My health is good. It's very good; uh-hmm. That's my baby brother right there; that's Butch Collins right there and he a [inaudible]. He done retired; uh-huh. **[Aside:]** An interview; uh-huh. **[Laughs]**

**00:25:54**

**RF:** Just a couple more questions. You said a son helps here or a couple sons. Tell me their names and what are their roles here; do they cook, do they—?

**00:26:02**

**SC:** No; they know how to cook but my—one handles the finance part and he handles the money part. I don't handle no money because they say I can't—I spend too—. So I don't spend no money. And my other son he comes in and he'll keep the books and tell me, you know, what I need to do—this and helps out at the counter and stuff like that.

**00:26:24**

**RF:** And what are their names, the two sons?

**00:26:26**

**SC:** Glen Collins and Timothy Norris; uh-huh.

**00:26:31**

**RF:** And it was the first of the two was an NFL player?

**00:26:34**

**SC:** No; that's one, Glen Collins.

**00:26:38**

**RF:** Oh, Glen Collins.

**00:26:36**

**SC:** Uh-huh, uh-huh; so a lot of people know Glen Collins.

**00:26:40**

**RF:** Right. How's it feel to be the mom of an NFL player, former NFL player? That's—

**00:26:46**

**SC:** You know, it really don't feel no different. You know, I hear people talking about it but it don't feel no different. It doesn't, you know, I hear people say, "How do you feel?" I don't know; I—you know, it doesn't really phase me. That's what he always wanted to be, always; it's his dream was, you know, and he first dreamed he would go play ball and he said, "I'm going to

buy you a home.” I said, “I already got one.” He said Lady, “I’m talking about your home.” You know, we live in a small house, a hub-house and all that kind of stuff, but—you know, and so that what he done when first was a pro. He bought his mama a house; uh-hmm.

**00:27:22**

**RF:** Did you used to watch him on TV every Sunday I’m guessing?

**00:27:25**

**SC:** I didn’t watch him on TV. I used to go see him.

**00:27:27**

**RF:** You’d go see him?

**00:27:28**

**SC:** I’d go see him. I went when Cincinnati played Pittsburgh in Cincinnati and then I went to Houston, you know, I used to go see him. But I never did fly though. *[Laughs]* I never—

**00:27:41**

**RF:** You’d drive there?

**00:27:42**

**SC:** No; yeah we drove on a bus.

**00:27:44**

**RF:** On a bus.

00:27:45

**SC:** Uh-huh; they said, “You mean your mama came way up here on the bus?”

00:27:48

**RF:** You don’t fly?

00:27:49

**SC:** I’ve flown one time. [*Laughs*] And two weeks after—9-11.

00:27:55

**RF:** No more flying for you?

00:27:58

**SC:** I will fly again; no. I am—I made up my mind I will fly again. [*Laughs*]

00:28:02

**RF:** Are you going to go on vacation? Do you get to take vacations or do you have to be here all the time running the restaurant?

00:28:08

**SC:** We close down like on some weeks in December and January. But and we close on July—in July, too; uh-hmm.

00:28:20



**RF:** So, you've been around for twenty-seven years. Why do you think Jackson—why do you think you get so much support in Jackson, and why do you think that you've been able to stick around that long and be so busy?

**00:28:32**

**SC:** God. God. God is my source. He's my source; uh-hmm. And He directs my path and I know what He got for me is for me. Yeah; God. God keeps me going, yeah.

**00:28:54**

**RF:** How long do you want to be here? Do you plan on retiring?

**00:28:58**

**SC:** I was thinking about that a while ago. I told a girl back there; I said—matter of fact, I got to go have another surgery on the 25<sup>th</sup>. I told them when I come back I'm going to cut down some. I am; uh-hmm.

**00:29:12**

**RF:** And stay at home more?

**00:29:14**

**SC:** I don't know about staying at home, now. I'm not a home person. [*Laughs*]

**00:29:18**

**RF:** You can't stay; you have to come here.

**00:29:20**

**SC:** That's what I said I'm coming down but like I'm going to leave early and not like spend the whole day, come back like that; uh-hmm.

**00:29:28**

**RF:** Do you plan for your sons or do your sons plan to keep it going?

**00:29:36**

**SC:** I think they do. They really do; uh-hmm. Uh-hmm; they really want to keep it going, uh-hmm.

**00:29:42**

**RF:** Is this food difficult to cook or easy? Can you teach someone or—? How do you cook this kind of food?

**00:29:48**

**SC:** I'm trying; I'm trying. But it's hard. It's really hard.

**00:29:52**

**RF:** Why is it hard? Is it the people or the food or—?

**00:29:54**

**SC:** No, not the food but, you know, some people are trainable and some people are not. Everybody you can't train. But when I worked at Sack & Save I used to train people coming in

from different, you know—they had peoples all over, you know, everywhere and everybody they had they'd bring there to me for me to train.

00:30:12

**RF:** And I'm guessing some weren't even from the South or from Jackson?

00:30:14

**SC:** Uh-hmm; you know, Jitney Jungle and most all of them—most all the stores in the South and stuff but they—uh-hmm. Yeah; I had to train them.

00:30:23

**RF:** Why do you love cooking so much? You've cooked, you know, so—

00:30:27

**SC:** I don't know why. I just always loved cooking and I always didn't want to give nobody nothing I wouldn't eat; you know, very picky, very picky. My sister used to tell me, "You're just too picky." I said, "I can't help it." **[Laughs]** You know—yeah; I'm very picky about my food, uh-hmm, very particular.

00:30:46

**RF:** Did you cook at home or do you cook at home? Did you cook at home for your sons growing up or—?

00:30:51

**SC:** Oh, I did; I have four boys and one girl and so, yeah, I cooked. I cooked a lot.

**00:30:56**

**RF:** Was it the same food at home? Was it different?

**00:30:58**

**SC:** It was probably the same food at home but even back then we didn't have a lot of pork at home; uh-hmm, yeah. Even back then I put a lot of food in the oven. My son—we were talking about that the other day; you know, I didn't have too much fried food; uh-hmm, yeah.

**00:31:16**

**RF:** Do you think that has something to do with—because most people associate Southern food with the parts of pork. Do you think that has something to do with your success is that it didn't always have a lot of pork and pork seasoning?

**00:31:27**

**SC:** No; we're not a—we never really had a whole lot of pork, uh-hmm, yeah, sure didn't. But I still have pork here, but it's always on the side. And chitlins that's another thing they love.

**00:31:40**

**RF:** You do the chitlins?

**00:31:41**

**SC:** We do have chitlins; somebody cleans them for me, and we do chitlins. You heard of chitlins, haven't you?

**00:31:46**

**RF:** I have; I've eaten them, yeah.

**00:31:48**

**SC:** Really; you like chitlins. You like fried or boiled?

**00:31:50**

**RF:** I like them fried better. I can't eat them boiled, personally.

**00:31:53**

**SC:** Oh okay; okay, okay.

**00:31:55**

**RF:** I've tried but they're not my favorite.

**00:31:56**

**SC:** [*Laughs*] I know more white folks like them fried.

**00:32:01**

**RF:** Yeah; it's—

**00:32:03**

**SC:** They like them fried.

**00:32:04**

**RF:** It's the smell and—

**00:32:05**

**SC:** Yeah; get over that—and some people don't want them cooked in their house, you know, chitlins, uh-hmm.

**00:32:12**

**RF:** Yeah; all right so what's your favorite thing to eat?

**00:32:16**

**SC:** Oh mine? I like seafood.

**00:32:21**

**RF:** Oh, you do?

**00:32:20**

**SC:** I like seafood.

**00:32:22**

**RF:** But you don't ever do seafood?

**00:32:23**

**SC:** I do fish.

**00:32:24**

**RF:** Oh you do? You fry fish?

**00:32:25**

**SC:** Catfish; uh-hmm, whole catfish, catfish fillet and whittings. We fry fish; uh-hmm, uh-hmm, yeah.

**00:32:34**

**RF:** So just one more question and maybe I'm going to ask you why do you think Jackson loves this restaurant?

**00:32:47**

**SC:** Wait; what now?

**00:32:47**

**RF:** Why—what do you think this restaurant means to Jackson and the area?

**00:32:51**

**SC:** I don't know. I think it means a whole lot to them. You know, because they been seeing my face around here so long and I try to be real friendly with them; I don't think I've made an enemy since I've been here, so—.

**00:33:10**

**RF:** All right; well—

00:33:12

**SC:** I just love people. I love people; uh-hmm, yeah.

00:33:17

**RF:** All right; well I want to thank you so much.

00:33:20

**SC:** Okay.

00:33:22

**RF:** I love your restaurant.

00:33:22

**SC:** Well, thank you; thank you. Well come back.

00:33:25

**RF:** I will.

00:33:26

**SC:** All right; come back. *[Laughs]*

00:33:27

**RF:** Thank you.

00:33:28



**SC:** Now thank you.

**00:33:29**

**[End Sylvester Collins — Collins Dream Kitchen]**