

Danny Haberman
Pok-e-Jo's—Austin, Texas

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Group Members:
Lisa Powell

[BEGIN INTERVIEW]

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Lisa Powell: Today's date is the thirtieth of August, 2007. This is Lisa Powell interviewing Danny Haberman at Pok-e-Jo's at 1000 East Forty-first Street, in the Hancock Center in Austin, Texas. So would you first state your name and your age, uh, for the recording?

Danny Haberman: My name is Danny Haberman, and I am age forty-three.

LP: Thank you. So, would you mind telling me a little bit about how you got into the barbecue business?

DH: Well, I've been involved in the Pok-e-Jo's concept since I got out of college in 1986. Um, but I have to give credit to the Pok-e-Jo's concept, to my partner, whose name is Doug Boney. And he got out of college. He went to UT [The University of Texas] here in Austin and wanted to start a business. And my father, uh, whose name is Porky and another fellow named Joe, thus the name Pok-e-Jo's, had a building, uh, out in north Austin that they let Doug remodel and turn into a barbecue restaurant. And that's pretty much how Pok-e-Jo's got started. I joined up about ten years after they originally started and helped them build their catering business. And we've, you know, opened restaurants and expanded as a partnership ever since then.

LP: Thank you. Could you tell me where that location was in north Austin, and if it is still one of the Pok-e-Jo's locations?

DH: No. The original location was an old house, um, at what would now be the intersection of Parmer Lane and MoPac [US Highway 1]. If you—if you ever drive up out that part of town, there's a bridge there now and that piece of property got condemned in, I believe it was, uh, I think, 19- probably '84 or '85. And that Pok-e-Jo's was shut down and they moved across the street into a strip center. And there's a new building at that particular location where the TxTag office is for all the toll roads. That's where the second Pok-e-Jo's was, which also got condemned. And at that point in time, which was about 1984, about '82, I'm sorry, um, that's not right either, about 1980, I think it was about 1989, um, we had to move out of that location and we opened up our Round Rock [Texas] location and our Great Hills [Drive, Austin, Texas] location at that time.

LP: OK. And could you, um, go ahead and talk about where some of the other locations have been and currently are?

DH: In our entire history, we've had seven locations—well actually, eight, nine locations if you include the first, the original location, which we got kicked out of, the second location, which we got kicked out of. Then we opened up Great Hills. We opened up our Round Rock store. And then we opened up our Fifth Street store. And then we opened up a store out off of, uh, [Highway] 2222 near [Highway] 620, which we ran for about a year. And it didn't work out the way we wanted it to, so we stopped running that one. And then we opened up our Parmer Lane location. And then this latest store that we've opened is here at Hancock Center.

LP: Thank you. And so, for the purposes of the tape, I kind of will say, uh, could you go ahead and, and talk about what some of the different meats are that you serve and, um, if there is a particular reason that you chose to have that meat on the menu?

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DH: Well, you know, Pok-e-Jo's is kind of modeled after, I think, after the traditional Texas barbecue restaurants, um, you know, where they have a cafeteria line. And typically the—the primary things you're selling are beef brisket, which seems to be the most popular item at most Texas barbecue restaurants. We also specialize in sausage. We do a smoked turkey breast. We do chicken. We do pork ribs and beef ribs. Throughout our history, we've—we've tried some pork—other pork products like pork tenderloin, pork loins, um, we smoke turkeys, you know, whole turkeys during the holidays for people. Um, but, primarily, it's, uh, you know, its brisket, sausage, and chicken, and ribs, which is what Texans really like to eat when it comes to barbecue. Um, we smoke all of our meats on mesquite. Um, we—we think that imparts a very unique flavor. And it's complimented by the, kind of, sweetness and the heat of our barbecue sauce. And we've—I'm not sure where the original recipes really came from. I think they just kind of, you know, they kind of evolve over the years. And really the—the barbecue pits and the style of the cooking imparts most of the flavor. So, you know recipes and spice rubs aren't as important I guess as we—as some people make it sound they are.

LP: Could you talk a little bit about the style of pit that you use?

DH: We've always used a rotisserie pit. Um, there's different brands out there, but the—the end result is that you're able to put your briskets on it, which is kind of where you start everything.

And you can cook them from anywhere from fifteen hours to eighteen hours at a really low, you know, slow temperature. Your other meats don't need to cook that long, but you need a piece of equipment that will cook the brisket long enough to—to break it down and make it tender. And that's, you know, something we discovered years ago that those kind of pits seem to work the best. We actually have pits in all of our stores, and we, we cook on location.

LP: Thank you. One thing that, uh, I've always found interesting about Pok-e-Jo's is the variety of sides that you have. So, could you, first of all, for the recording, list, um, the sides that you offer at Pok-e-Jo's? And maybe talk a little bit about why you have the variety that you do?

DH: Well, that's kind of evolved of the years too. I, you know, the original Pok-e-Jo's—we had what you'd call your traditional sides: your potato salad, your coleslaw, your beans. We've always had fried okra and French fries, um, and when we started out that's pretty much what we had. But over the years, you know, your customers kind of tell you what they want, and, you know, we feed a lot of families. And I'd say typically it's—the varieties have been added or the different sides have been added over the years to accommodate the taste of maybe some of our, our women patrons, their children, etc. You know, most men will come in and eat bread and meat. We've kind of added the other things for the rest of the world. Um, we've added some, I guess, non-traditional things. We do a baked potato casserole, we do a green bean casserole. We do corn. We do a cornbread, jalapeño casserole, um, we do really nice fresh salads, if somebody wants to be healthy. We just felt like variety is the key to, I guess, making people want to eat here more than once a week. You know barbecue doesn't necessarily have to be a treat. It can be

something you can eat every day. And by having all these other sides, you can kind of mix things up. And you can be bad or you can be good. So, that's why we've done that over the years.

LP: Thank you. And along that line, uh, could you talk a little bit about the pickle bar and how that came to be a part of Pok-e-Jo's?

DH: Well, the pickle bar is, again, probably started out very simply with pickles and onions. And over the years, we've just, as customers requests come in—you have so many regulars, I don't know if all restaurants are like this, but we have—we have people that eat in our restaurant sometimes four or five days a week. So, they're always looking for something different and they're always telling us about things they saw at other places. And so we just, you know, after a while, we realized that having lots of variety, you know, made people like to come back more often. So, just like with our sides, we've, uh, we just keep adding to that condiment bar every time we see something out there that looks like people might like. If they don't like it, we take it away and put something else in there.

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LP: And so what kind of things do you have on the condiment bar now besides just pickles and onions?

DH: Well, we do the pickles and onions. We do fresh Pico de Gallo. Um, we do jalapeños. We have kind of a butter, dill spear or a butter, dill pickle. That's a hot, spicy pickle. We do a pickled okra. I don't personally care for that, but there's a lot of folks that do. And, uh, of course we have our lemons and those sorts of things out there.

LP: So, you mentioned that you had a number of regular patrons who, um, eat at Pok-e-Jo's multiple times per week sometimes. Do you find that they tend to eat at the same location or that they eat at, um, switch around and go to different locations?

DH: Typically they eat at the same stores. But, you know, I'm in all of our stores at a fairly frequent basis and we—you know I see guys that, you know, have, you know, eat at Hancock Center every day and you'll see them over at the Round Rock store location on the weekends sometimes. So, I, you know, when—it's encouraging to us to, you know—once somebody eats Pok-e-Jo's and decides that they like it, you know, they'll kind of figure out where we are and they'll make their way to them wherever they are or if they're in that part of town, they'll go by there. So, we've—that's been part of our expansion model—just make ourselves kind of a convenient, neighborhood location for everybody.

LP: And are there any particular challenges that you've found, um, being in multiple locations?

DH: Oh, no. Not at all, no. Yeah, I'd say the biggest challenge in probably the restaurant business, and probably all businesses, is finding enough, uh, talented staff to run your stores. You know, we're always going to have those issues, um, getting the food and building the buildings and all that stuff is actually relatively simple. But keeping your—your people trained and, um, you know, attracting new people and people move on to other parts of their life and, and just in keeping people enthusiastic and excited about what we're doing every day. That's our biggest challenge.

LP: Thank you. And so, one of your locations has in the last year become no more. Could you tell us a little bit about both, uh, what the ad—what the former address was of the Fifth Street location, to give a sense of where it was on Fifth Street and the story behind, um, the demise of that location?

DH: Well, once again, we put ourselves in a location that we knew it'd eventually get, you know, something else would come along and replace it. It's the law of real estate is that most people who own property want to use it for its highest and best use, and I'm not sure an old barbecue shack is the highest and best use. We moved in that location in 19—I forget when it was—probably about '95—1995, 1996. So we were down there for twelve years. And, um, I'm not sure if it says that we're good businessmen or bad businessmen, but we had a lease for the first five years and we were on a month-to-month lease for the last seven years. So, our landlord would come to us a couple of times a year and threaten—not threaten, but he would inform us that he was about to sell the property and they were going to turn it into apartments or some other such thing. And this year, when he came and told us that, he actually meant it and then made us leave. So, we're not there anymore.

LP: And what was the address of that location again?

DH: 1603 West Fifth Street, about a block off of MoPac Expressway. It was a great location. We really enjoyed being down there, real eclectic. I think, uh, our customers really enjoyed it

because it was literally an old garage that we put some cedar boards up on the side of and, uh, sold barbecue out of.

LP: By garage, do you mean it had been a service station at one point?

DH: Before we got it, it had actually been two restaurants for about a year and a half before we got into it. So, it had been retrofitted for a restaurant. But prior to that it was a paint and body shop and it still had, you know, if you ever saw the floors in there, it had multiple layers of different color paint on them because it was the painting bay was the dining room.

LP: And that location, um, could you talk a little bit about the event facilities that that location had, the party barn for example? And do any of your other locations have such event facilities?

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DH: Um, we were—we were very fortunate in that, that particular location that it had grounds. It was on about a three-acre piece of property and the landlord had made an arrangement with us where we could use—they had had, uh, I guess an old storage shed that the—the family that owned the property before we got it was using as a construction storage site. And, um, they allowed us to clean that out and pour a concrete slab in there. And we put a volleyball court out in front of it and we called it the Party Barn. It was basically a three-sided, dilapidated building, but people really enjoyed having events out there. Our original Pok-e-Jo's on North Burnet Road, which is now North MoPac, had similar facilities. So we'd—we'd always kind of modeled that after our original location. And currently, none of our existing locations have—have that

amenity. We've kind of gotten stuck in strip centers. But we're always looking for another neat place like that.

LP: And whenever one of your locations closes, whether it was one of the earlier locations or the Fifth Street location, what kind of feedback do you get from your customers, if you get any feedback?

DH: In this particular case, the one, the one we had way out on 2222—it was really almost probably fourteen or fifteen years ago—we got out there too early. There just weren't enough—there wasn't enough people living out there at that time. And if you drive out there now, there's apartments and that country club that has just been built. And there wasn't even a single house out there at that point. So, we were just a little ahead of the marketplace I think *[Laughs]*. Um, Fifth Street, uh, thankfully thirty to forty percent of the volume of business we had at that store has transferred to our Brodie Oaks [Shopping Center] or this Hancock Center location. So, those customers, um, were not going there just because of where it was. They were going because they like Pok-e-Jo's and they like our food. And so they've figured out, you know, the next closest place and have, you know, it's given us the best feedback we can get, which is they keep coming and eating wherever we are. So, we're pleased with that.

LP: And I think maybe a couple of dates we maybe hadn't discussed earlier—what was the, the date when the Fifth Street location was closed?

DH: Off the top of my, I believe it was March twenty-eighth was the day that we closed down there. That was our final day of business down there.

LP: Of 2007?

DH: Yes, 2007.

LP: And, um, when did the Brodie Oaks location open?

DH: We opened that store about four years prior to that. So, it's been in—it's been in business for four years.

LP: Thank you. And so, you said that, kind of, one of the ways that you were super involved with Pok-e-Jo's through the years has been the catering business. So, could you tell us a little bit about the Pok-e-Jo's catering operation?

DH: You bet. Um, well, when I got out of college in 1986, uh, I graduated with a real estate degree. And, you know, if you look back in history, we were going through a real estate, uh, recession at that time. So, I didn't really have many options. Obviously, I knew Doug because of our family being involved in helping him start the first restaurant. And I asked him if he needed any help, kind of, kick-starting his catering business. He said, "Sure. Why don't you come see what you can do?" And, you know, from there we, uh, we managed to, you know, quadruple sales the first year and double them the next year after that. And put, you know, again starting

from zero is, or next to zero, uh, is not hard to quadruple things. We've managed to grow at a, you know, really healthy pace ever since then. We've—we've built our catering business into one of the top five largest catering businesses in the city of Austin. We typically get beat out by, uh, you know, some of the hotels like the Four Seasons and stuff like that, which I don't know that that's fair competition. But, uh, we do about 8000 catering events a year. We do stuff ranging in size from, you know, a party for fifty people to, uh, you know, employee appreciation at Advanced Microdevices for 5000 people. I'd say the largest even we've ever done is probably 8000 folks. Um, we've done multiple jobs for Dell Computers over the years. We do concessions at—at a lot of the big venues in town. We have a stand at the Dell Diamond [Baseball Stadium] out in Round Rock. We actually have three stands, where we sell sandwiches, out of the UT football stadium. So, we, we try to use that. We kind of use that as a—as our marketing and advertising really. We figure the more people we're feeding, the more people are going to know about Pok-e-Jo's. So, catering is a natural extension to, you know, having them come in our restaurants.

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LP: And, whenever you cater an event, and this may be a different question depending on the size of it, what is the sort of process like of—of a catering day?

DH: Process of a catering day. Well, it's, it's evolved over the years. We have—we have a fairly complex, uh, process for doing our catering. We do all of our what I call full-service catering out of our Round Rock location because we have a larger site and a lot of room in the back. We have a full-time staff that answers phones and sells catering events. And we also have a full-time operations staff that—that, you know, facilitates the, you know, whatever supplies that you're

going to need, the trucks that you're going to need to move it, you know, coordinate staff for the jobs. And, you know, so, the whole process, you're—you're taking an order. You know, you've got to set things up with your kitchen to get the food produced at the right times, and then packaged in insulated containers, and prepared to get put on trucks. Then you have a different crew of people that come in and take the—the food and the equipment, the tables and chairs, and **shaving racks** and things you need to serve the food to the location site. And they set it up and serve it. Um, so we've got a pretty, you know, I guess a big part of our business is—is built around that. And then at our store levels, we do what we call disposable catering and pick-up catering. So, if you've got an office or a drug rep here in town, might want to feed a doctor's office for twenty people, we have delivery drivers that go take that pre-packaged, you know, I guess, in disposable containers, and we set it up for them. And we feed people that way as well. And then I guess something a lot of people don't know about Pok-e-Jo's is we also have a, an up-scale catering division that we call All Fired Up Texas Catering, where we do some other menus besides barbecue. Our—our primary menus that we cater are barbecue and fajitas, but if somebody wants, you know, prime rib and, you know, green beans and the salad served on china with people in black-and-whites for their wedding reception, we—we have another division or another company name that does that. It's really all coming out of the same place. We actually have a chef in Round Rock that cooks, you know, other things besides barbecue. And—and that's just been at the request of customers over the years that wanted something, you know, we did their, uh, company picnic and they trust us and feel good about us. And then their daughter gets married, but they'd like to have something like prime rib and shrimp appetizers or something along those lines. So, over the years we've said yes and figured out how to do that as well.

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LP: And when did you start doing the more formal catering part of the business?

DH: Oh, you know, we've—we've dabbled in that off and on forever. I mean, since the beginning of time, we've had customers ask us to try to do something that we don't do on a daily basis. But probably the last five years we've—we've become, I guess, fairly adept at it. It's—it's become a very large, a large enough percent of our business to merit having a different name. We've got some staff members that primarily just do those types of events for us.

LP: And you did mention, um, that sometimes folks request that more formal catering for weddings. Do folks ever request the just normal Pok-e-Jo's barbecue for weddings?

DH: Absolutely. And that's, really a lot of times the menu is barbecue. But what—I guess my simple answer for—for what I'd call it is. But they want the setup and the presentation to be suitable for their wedding album. So, we, you know, we can—we can dress it up or gussy it up or whatever you want to call it. But we—we can put flowers on the table and put white linens on the table and do all the things that makes it look good in your pictures so to speak. But they still want to eat good old Texas barbecue and you know, treat Aunt Edna, you know, from up North to real Texas barbecue. And so we do a lot of that. And that's where that, a lot of that stems from as well.

LP: Do you think there's anything particularly unique about barbecue being a fairly regular part of wedding receptions in Texas?

DH: I do, I just—to me it's, uh, barbecue's are, it's kind of a social—part of the social fabric in Texas really. I mean that whether—whether you're going to a church picnic or you're going to a before-school thing, you know, whenever you get large groups of people together it just seems appropriate in Texas to serve barbecue. And, uh, weddings—it makes perfect sense. You're getting your family and your friends together and, you know, throwing a barbecue down is kind of what people expect around here. They know what to do with it. They know what the food is. And we—we laugh a lot of times when we go to events where somebody has requested food that—that people don't really recognize. You don't really get as much praise for that type of menu as you do for just the good old barbecue that you know, everybody knows exactly what it is and they get to eat all they want. It's, it's just kind of a fun, social thing.

LP: Thanks, um, and so returning to, uh, a little bit more about your different locations, um, there's a lot of interesting stuff on the walls of this location. And also, um, I remember there being at the Fifth Street and then I've—I've seen the Brodie Oaks location has some interesting stuff on the walls too. So how do you decide how to decorate your locations?

DH: I would like to say there's actually a formula for that, but, um, yeah, Texas junk I guess would be the theme. We, we typically just, you know, uh, find as much eclectic, kind of, Texas country stuff as we can to put in our stores. We put a lot of pictures in this store of old Austin things and UT-related stuff. Our other stores is really just kind of Texas and kind of antiquey-looking stuff. We've been fortunate over the years. We actually have a friend, uh, that owns about, I'd say, a fifty-thousand-square-foot warehouse full of antiques that he actually rents out

to, uh, restaurants—I mean to, uh, movie production companies. They rented stuff to the people that made *Lonesome Dove* and they have, I mean just this giant warehouse full of these old things. And he has let us borrow or—or I guess for more simplistic terms, store his stuff in our restaurants. And most of that's been for trade. We give him a catering job a couple of times a year, he eats in our store for free, and it's been a very great arrangement. It keeps us from having to go out and procure a bunch of real antiques, which is kind of hard to do nowadays.

LP: And going back to, um, the—you mentioned that you all do have stands at the UT football stadium. So around when did you start having those and how did you get involved in doing that?

DH: We've done that pretty much as far back as I can remember. I remember one of the very first things that, uh, I was involved in, helping—helping my partner Doug is—he did the—did the game-day event at the ex-student center [Texas Exes' Etter-Harbin Alumni Center]. I don't know if you're familiar with that, but they have a fairly big party that they do before game day, where they serve fajitas and barbecue sandwiches and beer and stuff for the—for the Texas Exes that come to the football games. And we had the contract to do that when I first started. Long about, I don't know, four or five years after we started doing that, Rosemary's Catering from San Antonio got the contract. And at that time we were able to secure a deal with Mary at Sodexho [Sodexho Management Services, manages concessions at UT athletic facilities], who now runs the concessions in the stadium, to be one of their local vendors in the stadium. And they—they have a requirement with their deal with UT to have a few local names in their product mixes. And so, we were fortunate enough to get involved with that. And we've been doing that ever

since. So, it's been about as long as Pok-e-Jo's has been around. We've been involved in that particular venue down there.

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LP: And what, um, products, foods do you offer at the stadium?

DH: Typically—typically it's just our barbecue sandwiches. We'll do our—we do our sliced beef, our turkey, and our chopped beef sandwiches. At different times in the past, we've had fajitas and we've also had sausage wraps, but right now it's just sandwiches.

LP: Thank you. And another question I have about, um, some of your products out, out and about town *[Laughs]*. I have seen pictures and things of the Pok-e-Jo's bottled barbecue sauce. And so, do you sell your barbecue sauce bottled, and if so where?

DH: We have it bottled, but we primarily just sell it in our stores. We, we've never explored trying to put it into retail locations. We want people to have to come to our stores to get it.

LP: And how long have you been selling it as bottled sauce?

DH: Um, probably for about four years. And the primary reason there is, up until about—uh, it's probably been up until about five years ago—we made all our sauce ourselves. But it became such a big, uh, project that we have found a company up in Dallas that makes our recipe for it and puts it in five-gallon buckets and ships it to us *[Laughs]*. It's still our recipe and made the

same way, it's just something that we couldn't—we didn't have room to do it anymore

[Laughs].

LP: And if you mind, if you don't mind answering this question, um, are there any other of your products that, um, maybe just because of the volume that you have—that you have outsourced to other locations?

DH: Actually, no. Um, we, we do currently commissary, which we make all of the potato salad for all of our units at our Round Rock location, where we also do all of our catering from. We tried about four years ago to have another company do that for us, but they couldn't, uh, they couldn't match the flavor. Potato salad needs to be about, uh, twenty-four hours old to have the optimum flavor. And most people, when you get into having someone else make something for you, they have to make it—you're not usually getting it usually for about a week after they made it. And while it's safe and it lasts long, it kind of dilutes the flavor. And, we've, we've just determined that ours is a better product. And our customers let us know this too, after about six months of serving their product, which was the exact same recipe, um, but it was just being made too many days early. People were saying, "Your potato salad doesn't taste as good, doesn't taste as good." And we went back and made it ourselves again and tasted it and what was happening is that the individual components—the eggs, and the pickled relish, and the mustard, and the things that give it its distinct flavor—you couldn't taste them anymore. It just tasted like potato salad and mayonnaise. And when you make it relatively fresh, you can taste all of those things individually, and people notice. So, we started making it ourselves again.

LP: And so, for the other side items that you have like the baked potato casserole, for example, the corn bread casserole, are those made separately at each of the individual locations?

DH: Yes. All the—all the meats and all the sides, other than the potato salad, are made daily at each store. And actually we—our philosophy is we try to make everything twice daily. So, even the people who are eating stuff at dinner time are eating something that is made in the middle of the afternoon because we find that fresh food is the best food, so.

LP: One thing I don't believe I asked about earlier when we were talking about the menu was your dessert selections. And so, what desserts do you offer and how did you decide to offer those desserts?

DH: Well, nothing real fancy there. We have what traditionally barbecue places in Texas had, a banana pudding. We have one that we've—we've had for years that everyone really, really likes. And then we have a couple of cobblers that have, you know, gone through different variations over the years. But it's—it's a cherry cobbler and a peach cobbler. The most popular seems to be the peach. And then we have, uh, chocolate chip, white chocolate chip macadamia nut cookie that we send out with all our catering. And so, that's a really good product as well.

LP: OK. Could you just briefly describe, um, banana pudding in case someone isn't familiar with it, what the product is like?

DH: Well, um, we make the banana pudding basically it's—it's the pudding set on a bed of crushed vanilla wafers surrounded by fresh bananas and, uh, we usually top it with some crunchy vanillas wafers. And that's—like I said, that goes back probably as old as my grandparents *[Laughs]*.

LP: Thank you. And so, you've mentioned a couple of times that, kind of, Pok-e-Jo's is in the tradition of, of Texas barbecue. And, uh, so, could you kind of maybe describe what you see is kind of the tradition of Texas barbecue or what's special about Texas barbecue?

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DH: I'm not sure if my perspective is the correct one. But Texas barbecue seems to be, or people in Texas seem to really appreciate the taste of the meats and the taste of what they were cooked on. If you go to like southern states or you go to other places, a lot of the barbecue is based on the sauces and the basting processes that they use. Well, Texas barbecue typically does not have sauce on it. It's typically cooked dry, with just your dry seasonings. Occasionally, there will be a light mop towards the end of the cooking process, but you're really kind of trying to limit the amount of sauce on something while it's being cooked. Sauce is usually as a side or, or kind of dribbled on the top of it towards, you know, when it's time to serve it. Most people seem to just like the pure, you know, pure taste of the smoked meats. And that's, that's what we try to stick to.

LP: And do you have a particular, um, favorite meal here at Pok-e-Jo's whenever you, um, whenever you eat at one of the restaurants, or a couple of favorite meals, a couple of your favorite meats or favorite sides?

DH: Well, it's all really good, but if I had to say what my favorites were it's the—I absolutely love our sausage. We actually have that made here locally. And it's a—it's an all-beef version. I guess, kind of like the Elgin sausage—sausages, but we think ours has a unique flavor and profile. Um, our brisket, there's one end of the brisket that comes out underneath what we call the cap of the brisket, which is where the fatty part is. And when you trim that off, there's the tip underneath that. And there's about, I don't know, a quarter of the brisket that I would call just the premium part. And that piece of the brisket has got to be my favorite thing to eat in the restaurant. And so, whenever I walk up there, I say, "I want that end right down there" *[Laughs]*.

LP: And any of the sides that are your particular favorite?

DH: Oh gosh, you've got to go with the baked potato casserole and the, uh, I really like our macaroni and cheese too. I guess that goes back to my childhood or something. I don't know.

LP: And just going back to the sausage for a minute. Could you tell us sort of what is unique about the flavor of your sausage?

DH: Well, it's got a real spicy flavor profile. And the, the grind of the meat is—uh, it's a real lean sausage. A lot of sausages have a lot of fat and fillers and stuff. And ours is 100 percent beef. And, you know, as the percentage of—of the sausage—it's—you know, eighty or ninety percent of it is solid meat. So it, you know, it's almost like they put hamburger into a sausage casing. And then it's got a real spicy, kind of, bite to it, which, you know, makes it really good.

LP: OK. Thank you. So, um, you, you told us some about the history of Pok-e-Jo's over, um, the past few decades now, what do you see—twenty-nine years. What do you see as the future of Pok-e-Jo's?

DH: Well, you know, we're not real, I guess, complex business people. We—we just want to keep feeding folks, and, and making fans for our, you know, our food and our products. Our expansion has typically been, uh, slow. You know, about every two or three years we'll start looking for another location. And typically we've gone into an existing restaurant space that somebody else, um, you know, either left behind or couldn't make a go of it. That will probably be continued—continue to be our growth strategy. We'll keep looking in different parts of Austin. We think there's plenty of room for more Pok-e-Jo's. A lot more neighborhoods, I think, that we could service and make our barbecue more accessible. And then the catering, you know, the sky is kind of the limit there. It just depends, you know, how many people we can introduce to that—that service that we give. I mean, there's, there's lots of people eating barbecue every day or fajitas or something in this town and we are grateful we get our share of it.

LP: And have you ever thought about expanding beyond, uh, the greater Austin area?

DH: We've thought about it. Uh, and—and our take on that is someday, if one of our, you know, in-town managers had an interest, perhaps, and you know, if they were from another town—say they were from Dallas, or Houston, or San Antonio, or something and they had an interest maybe

in doing a franchise situation, we would probably be, uh, really excited about helping, you know, someone who had been with us that had an interest in doing something like that.

LP: And, um, what is the, kind of, I guess, geographical range of your catering business? How far away, uh, have you done catering jobs?

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DH: Oh gosh, we—we'll, we've absolutely will probably go anywhere anyone asks us to go. The farthest we've probably ever gone will be Dallas or south Texas down towards Goliad [Texas] that kind of area. So, you know, a couple of hundred miles. And we regularly go, uh, you know, 100 miles from Austin. We do a lot of stuff in Burnet [Texas]. We do stuff at Southwest Texas [State University]. We do stuff, up, you know, around Temple [Texas] and, um, you know, pretty much, you know, anywhere what I'd call the central Texas region.

LP: And you mentioned that you had different managers at your different restaurants. Could you just talk a little bit about the—the kind of structure—the organizational structure of Pok-e-Jo's?

DH: We've got—the way we try to run our stores is with the general manager. And then we typically like to have two assistants to three assistant managers. And then we've got—at most of our stores, we have a kitchen manager, um, as well. And then, you know, they have their typical hourly staff members that—that fill the spots and do everything else.

LP: And when I talked to you on the phone and when I've talked to some of the folks in your office, they've mentioned that you're in and out a lot and you've mentioned that you're around at the different locations. So, what is your typical work day like, if there is a typical workday?

DH: I'd call it driving a big circle. I mean, myself, both myself and my partner, we—we typically just start at one of the stores and kind of work our way around, you know, as—as the day dictates or catering dictates or whatever. I personally spend a lot of time at our Round Rock location because that's where we do our full service out of. I'll usually start my day at that particular location. And then I also take care of most of our—or oversee most of our bookkeeping and administrative stuff at our office. We've got, you know, individuals that work there and do most of the work, but that's my, I guess, I look over that particular part of our business.

LP: And where is your headquarters, your office headquarters located?

DH: We're in a, we—we share an old, kind of, an old house on a piece of property near our Parmer Lane location.

LP: So, is there anything else that you'd like to share about Pok-e-Jo's or about your own involvement or general thoughts on Texas barbecue? Anything?

DH: The only thought I have is that people don't eat enough Texas barbecue, and I think they should eat some every day.

LP: OK. Great. Thank you very much. This has been Lisa Powell interviewing Danny Haberman on the thirtieth of August 2007, at the Pok-e-Jo's location in the Hancock Center at 1000 East Forty-first Street in Austin, Texas.

[END]

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