



Adele Boohaker
St. Elias Maronite Catholic Church
Birmingham, Alabama

Date: August 21, 2019
Location: Mrs. Boohaker's home, Pinson, AL
Interviewer: Michelle Little
Transcription: Diana Dombrowski
Length: One hour and twenty minutes
Project: Faith and Foodways

[*START INTERVIEW*]

[00:00:02.21]

Michelle L.: Okay. This is Michelle Little and I'm here interviewing Adele Boohaker. Today is August 21, 2019, and this is for the Southern Foodways Alliance Project. We're in Mrs. Boohaker's home in Pinson, Alabama. So, to start out with, will you just tell me your name and your date of birth for the record?

[00:00:27.05]

Adele B.: I am Adele Kassouf Boohaker.

[00:00:33.14]

Michelle L.: Okay. And how do you spell you Kassouf?

[00:00:35.13]

Adele B.: K-a-s-s-o-u-f, that's my maiden name.

[00:00:40.11]

Michelle L.: Great. And we've got that here on the form, okay. When were you born?

[00:00:46.19]

Adele B.: 11-12-1943.

[00:00:50.18]

Michelle L.: Okay. And where did you grow up?

[00:00:54.15]

Adele B.: I was born in Lebanon. My family came to the States when I was thirteen years old.

The reason why my family came here, my mother was born in the United States. So, after . . . and her ancestors came to the United States in the late 1800s, which was about the year of 1892. Her mother and father came, and they were here for quite a few years. When they got here, they had five children. My grandfather was sick with a . . . what they called at the time was . . . climatic asthma. He had a severe case of asthma, and the doctor that saw him at that time asked him if he had the same problem in Lebanon. He said he never had any breathing problem. So, his asthma got so severe that they just picked the family up, my grandmother, grandfather, and the five kids, and took 'em back to Lebanon. They lived there for a while, and then didn't have any problem with the sickness, but the economic situation was so bad, and the wars and rumors of wars and all that. They had a hard time makin' it. You know? Everyone at the time was havin' a hard time worldwide, but the United States was a better place than any other place in the world. So, my uncle, my oldest uncle, at that time was . . . twelve years old after they went back. Not twelve, I'm sorry, eighteen years old. And he saw that the economic situation was not gonna be good, so he told his mother and father that he was coming back to the United States. But the other kids were younger, so they stayed back. And he came to the United States. That's how it all began for us. My mother and my grandmother stayed back, and grandfather, because of his illness. But my uncle wrote back and told them that he was doing good, that he had bought a little store, a Mom and Pop-type store, small store, and was doing good; that if

his mother wanted to come back to the States and make a living and help the family, so she did come back. By herself. And the kids were left with their father and grandmother. My grandfather was ill, so he wasn't gonna come back and be sick again. So, that's what happened. My grandmother came and she was to work and help out and then send for the kids to come back. Her dream was to see her kids again. But the war broke out, and they couldn't come. It was a world war. So, she . . . she was here, separated from her kids, and wasn't able to get 'em over here. So, her life's dream was to see her kids again. So, when the war broke out, my . . . one of the oldest daughter had gotten married before the war. At that time, they used to marry early. So, she got married, but there were three kids left. And the kids that were left was my uncle that was twelve, my mother was ten, and my youngest aunt was eight years old. So, during the war, their grandmother and their father, first, dies during the war. So, the grandmother took care of them. So, when the war was over, the grandmother had died.

[00:07:08.07]

Michelle L.: Oh, my word.

[00:07:10.12]

Adele B.: So, they were left in the care—they were older, of course—they were left in the care of a aunt and kinfolks that took care of them. So, my uncle was twelve. My mother was ten, and my aunt was eight. So, my uncle that was twelve had to try to work and support his sisters. So, he couldn't go to school, and so he started workin' so he can support his two

sisters. My mother was the middle child; she was ten, so she had to learn to be a mother and cook and take care of her sister and brother.

[00:08:10.13]

Michelle L.: Wow.

[00:08:11.23]

Adele B.: I get teary eyes when I think about that.

[00:08:13.24]

Michelle L.: Of course.

[00:08:15.18]

Adele B.: Then, my aunt got to go to school because she was the youngest. So, she went to school and, of course, learned more than they could. So, after all that, and the war was over and my grandmother, my grandfather was gone, their grandmother was gone, so my grandmother sent them the money to come back to the States. So, they came back to the States. At that time, my mother—who was the middle child—was . . . eighteen. My aunt was sixteen. And my uncle was twenty. They were stair steps. So, anyway, my grandmother hadn't seen her babies since they were so young. Of course, they were thrilled and celebrated. The whole time, you know, after they came, and all the Lebanese people that had been here, the kinfolks, they just had just a great time and enjoyed it. My mother used to tell me that her mother, whenever my mother would get in kitchen and

help out, she would tell her, "I wasn't there. Who taught you how to cook?" And my aunt learned how to sew. She would tell my aunt, "Now, who taught you how to sew? How did you learn? I wasn't there for you." Anyway, she was so happy to see her kids. And they were so happy to see her after all the years they had been apart, that she died two weeks after she saw her kids.

[00:10:34.14]

Michelle L.: Oh, my gosh.

[00:10:36.28]

Adele B.: So, anyway, what happened after that—

[00:10:46.06]

Michelle L.: Sorry, that . . .

[00:10:49.13]

Adele B.: So, what happened after that was that my mother, who was the middle child, got sick with the same—she had inherited what my grandfather had, was a severe case of asthma. At that time, they didn't have the medicine and the medication, and they couldn't treat it. So . . . she stayed here for two years. Her asthma got worse. So, it was a hard decision for the brothers and the sister that were here. The doctor happened to be a Lebanese doctor, and he asked her, "Did you have any problem when you were in Lebanon?" She said, "No. Never had breathing problem." So, he said, "The only thing that's going to help you is to

go back." That was very, very hard on them, the brothers and the sister, to let go, let her go back by herself.

[00:12:24.25]

Michelle L.: Sure.

[00:12:26.06]

Adele B.: So, she did go back. And all of her family that was here. So, she went back and stayed with an aunt, and she took care of her, but her dream was always to come back to the United States because all of her family was here. Distant family was there, but not her brothers and sisters. So, she lived there. She was eighteen when she went back. She used to tell us that being young, guys started comin' to see her and court her, you know how they used to say in the olden days.

[00:13:20.27]

Michelle L.: Right.

[00:13:22.24]

Adele B.: She said, any time any guy came and showed interest in her, she always said to them—my mother was a very plain-spoken person—she would tell them, "I'm, soon as I can, I'm going back to the United States. I'm not stayin' here. My family is gone, and so, is there, and I'm goin' back." So, her dream was to come back and be with her family. We used to kid her, till my daddy came around. He came a-callin'. [Laughter] And she told him, she

said, "I'm going back. I don't . . . " You know, "I'm not gonna stay here. I'm going back to the United States. And if you think I'm rich, I came from America, that I've got money, I came back because I was sick. I did not come back because I wanted to." [Laughter] So, my daddy, God rest his soul, he just was tough and he hang in there, and they got married. So, they got married, and they had my two brothers and myself, three kids. The situation there was not any better than it is today. I mean, it's always been wars and fighting and economic situation was never real good. So, my daddy worked hard to raise his family. We didn't have much, but we had as much as everybody did in that village where we were raised. But Mother was always talkin' about comin' to the United States. This is the land of opportunity; this is the place to be. So, anyway, when my oldest brother—it was the same, almost the same story as my uncle. When my oldest brother graduated from high school, he went to get a job, and there was no goin' to college. Couldn't afford that. Get a job, and he worked at it. The man that came to him, came to pay date, couldn't pay him because of hard times. He worked, was tryin' to teach him a trade as a mechanic. So, after working for about . . . about a month as a mechanic and was hardly gettin' paid any money, he came home and told my mother. He says, "I'm out of here. I'm going to the United States." Because she was American-born, and he could come. And he was old enough to research and see if he can come to the United States. And he found out, if he comes to the United States before he's the age of twenty-one, that he could come by himself without his parents. So, he told my daddy, "Get the papers for me. I'm goin' to the United States." So, he . . . so, my mama said, "You're not goin' to the United States by yourself. We're all goin' to the United States." Well, my daddy had second thoughts. All of his brothers, all of his family, was there. He had no one here. My mother had all her family, but he had no

one here. He was makin' a livin', but not great. And all his brothers and his families, "Why do you want to go to the United States?" And blah, blah, blah. "You're here; we'll help each other out." And stuff like that. But my mother stood firm, and my brother was really the cause of it. He said, "If we don't go as a family, I'm goin' by myself." So, we picked up the family. And this was after, like, two and a half years of back and forth about comin', not comin', that type of thing. So, when we went, finally before he was twenty-one, he told my daddy, "I'm leavin'." So, anyway, we picked up and came. The whole family came. I was thirteen years old. My birthday was on the boat; my thirteenth birthday was on the boat comin' over here.

[00:18:57.03]

Michelle L.: Oh, wow.

[00:18:58.28]

Adele B.: I was an unhappy person at the age of thirteen, leaving my friends, my family. We were all in the little village, everybody knew each other. As a child, I thought my life was good. [Laughter] I was happy playin' with my friends, goin' to school, and just bein' a teenager, pre-teenager. So, I was—my brothers, they were older. My middle brother was eighteen and my oldest brother was almost twenty-one, so they were fine with it. It was a new way of life. They were fine with it. But I was very, very unhappy with it. My friends and I, we cried for days. When the official papers came, the cryin' and the boohoo-in' started. It was a sad, sad day when we left there. The whole family went in a bus from the village. My daddy came from a big family, so the whole family went with us, rented a bus, and took us

to Beirut to the airport—I mean, to the seaport. We came, of course, by boat. So, that's my life story comin' to Birmingham. [Laughter]

[00:20:38.25]

Michelle L.: Wow.

[00:20:40.08]

Adele B.: But after we got here, we had such a wonderful family. My mother had such wonderful brothers and sister that made us feel so good and so welcome, and helped us, get started. 'Course, we didn't have any money. We sold everything they had to be able to pay for the tickets to come to the United States. But if it wasn't for our wonderful family and friends that just took us in and accepted us and helped us, and my uncle was wise enough to find jobs for my daddy and for my brothers to get started so that they can make it in . . . you know, make it here. They found people that spoke Arabic. We knew French and Arabic. French was taught as a second language in Lebanon, so we knew Arabic, and then we knew a little bit of French. So, my uncle found somebody where my daddy can work; somebody that my daddy can work for and my brothers can work for. We made it in this great country of ours. [Laughter]

[00:22:18.00]

Michelle L.: Wow.

[00:22:19.11]

Adele B.: My daddy later, after bein' here ten years, he opened a little store himself. Did not know much English, 'cause he was older. He was in his late fifty. We, I had gone to school and my brothers had private tutors, and so we learned the language. My daddy knew "thank you" and that type-a thing, and he knew how to figure in his math in Arabic, and he would write, anyway, to have a restaurant of your own, a little store. He opened a barbecue place that he bought from another Lebanese guy that was sellin' his business and was goin' back to the old country.

[00:23:20.25]

Michelle L.: Wow.

[00:23:22.04]

Adele B.: The guy told him, he said, "This is a good little business. If you want it, I'll sell it to you." He sold it to him. And it was in a good location, there was a park here in Birmingham called Avondale Park and the place was across from Avondale Park. It's a real well-known area now.

[00:23:47.10]

Michelle L.: Right.

[00:23:49.17]

Adele B.: So, anyway, my daddy opened his little barbecue place there, and it had—he had beer and barbecue and hamburgers and hot dog, and the little grocery store. It wasn't a whole

lot, but it was a few things in there, and a bar and few tables there. So, and all he knew in English, he knew well, was, "thank you" and "come back." [Laughter] Of course, he knew his customers, and they knew him. He was very sweet, very . . . nice guy. And his customers loved him. He did real good in that little old store. They said the guy that had it before him didn't do the business that my father had. And it was because he was kind and he didn't speak English, and if that guy had a couple'a beers and they were maybe usin' loose language, he didn't know. [Laughter] So, they coulda been cussin' him out. [Laughter] And he would look at 'em and smile and say, "Thank you," 'cause that's all he knew what to say and how to say it. So, when a customer would walk in, he knew his customer. He knew the kind of beer they drink and they sat at this bar, and he would hand them the beer. In most cases, they would want, maybe, a hamburger or a hot dog. He'd get the hamburger started or he'll get the hot dog or he'll get the barbecue. He had the little pit and he cooked his own barbecue and made his own sauce.

[00:25:55.12]

Michelle L.: What was the name of it, the name of the restaurant?

[00:25:57.18]

Adele B.: Number One Barbecue.

[00:26:01.17]

Michelle L.: Okay. Wow.

[00:26:05.28]

Adele B.: So, he did real well. His business got to be good. My brother, my oldest brother, came—started comin' to help him. Then it wasn't enough business for . . . you know, for a young man that wants to make a future for himself.

[00:26:39.26]

Michelle L.: Right.

[00:26:41.13]

Adele B.: So, my brother decided to open his own barbecue place, not very far from my daddy's place. Get him a place of his own. By then, he was 'round, maybe, 'round thirty years old. Anyway, he bought a little hot dog place that was about, maybe, about four blocks from my father's place.

[00:27:12.09]

Michelle L.: Okay.

[00:27:14.18]

Adele B.: A small hot dog stand. And there was no place in it to wait, for customers to sit. It was like take out. I think he had a table there. So, he did real good in the hot dog stand, and the customers knew him from my daddy's place. So, that helped him get started, and was doing good. He turned, before too long, he sold his little hot dog place and rented a barbecue place that was a little bit . . . down from him. So, he rented it and had done did

real good with the barbecue place. But he didn't have beer. He had—the restaurant was big and he wanted it to be a family restaurant. So, he wasn't in competition with Daddy, but he had his own. His restaurant had a little bit more than my daddy had. He had barbecue plates and the ribs and the chicken. His place was a bigger barbecue place.

[00:28:40.21]

Michelle L.: What were the names of his hot dog stand and then the barbecue?

[00:28:47.00]

Adele B.: Coney Island was the hot dog place. And his place was T.J., his name was. T.J.'s Barbecue. And anyway, as a teenager, when my daddy first opened his place, I would go over there and help him a little bit. But I wasn't allowed to stay too long, 'cause there were people drinkin' beer. [Laughter] So, there was a library there across the street, and after school, I'd go to the library there. Anyway, that was that story. Then, going back to when we first came, we were . . . we lived . . . in Avondale at the time. We lived in a . . . a duplex house that my uncle had and let us live in it. We lived in it for a year, and after my daddy got started and got to doing good and everything, my father bought a home for us that was not too far from his barbecue place. We lived there. But when we first came, and like I said, I was the miserable teenager. [Laughter] We . . . my uncle had signed us up to learn English at the Y.M.C.A. downtown. There was a teacher that taught English to foreigners. It was once a week. I'll never forget, it was on a Thursday night. So, he had signed us up to go to this school where we'd learn English. The class probably had about, maybe, twelve people in it. They were of all ages. I was the youngest in there. I was

thirteen, of course, and the oldest person that was in there was probably in his mid-fifties learning English. So, after going to classes for two weeks, the class was for six weeks. So, after two weeks, I was catchin' on to the teachin', to her teachin'. She knew no other language. The only language she knew was English. And she was teachin' all these different nationalities English. She was a wonderful teacher.

[00:32:25.12]

Michelle L.: Wow.

[00:32:25.12]

Adele B.: All she had was a blackboard and chalk. The way she taught us, I'll never forget it. She would bring, like, an apple to school. She would say, "This is an apple." And none of us knew how to write, "This is an apple." We wrote it in our own language, like this, but when you pronounced it, it sounded like English. So, it was Arabic words, but once you pronounce them, it would sound like she's saying, "This is an apple."

[00:33:25.16]

Michelle L.: Okay.

[00:33:27.05]

Adele B.: And we would write what she wrote on the board, "This is an apple." We would write it, "This is an apple." And write it in Arabic so we would be able to pronounce it and say it. Well, it was not hard for me and my brothers to be able to write the alphabet, because

we knew French, the ABC's in French. And it's the same as the English ABC, but it was pronounced different. The words were different. But the ABC was the same in French as it was in English, so we were able to write it in English, and be able to pronounce it. So . . . and by motions, she would say, "I give you the apple." And we wrote down here, "I give you the apple." And, "You give me the apple." This is how she taught us English. We learned that. I was catchin' on real quick. And my brothers were doin' good as well, but not as good as I was, because I was younger. See, that's the difference. Even there were some guys that were older and they had come from Lebanon. They spoke Arabic. They would sit next to me so I could help them out. [Laughter] So, after a couple of weeks, the teacher asked me who's bringin' me to school. I told her, my uncle. I was catchin' on. I'd go home and I'd really wanted to know how to talk. Bein' a woman, I guess. [Laughter] So, anyway, I told them my uncle brought us. She said, "I want to see him the next time he brings y'all." So, she talked to my uncle and she told him that it was a waste of time for me to be goin' to that type of school. She said, "In my opinion, she needs to go, Adele needs to go to regular school." So, she had asked me what grade I was in when I left there, and I told her I was goin' to be in the eighth grade. So, she said, "I will write a recommendation to the teacher, to wherever you wanted to go to school, and tell them that you were too young to be in this class. That you were capable of goin' to regular school." So, she did. She wrote a note. And I went to a Catholic—which we are Catholics—we went to, my uncle took us to the nearest Catholic school which was within walking distance from our house. So, we took the note to the principal there, and of course it was a priest and nuns, in those days, ran the school. So, they took me in. They only put me back one grade. Instead of puttin' me in the eighth grade, they decided me not knowin' the language, of course

math is the same everywhere. But anyway, they put me in the seventh grade and I went on and graduated from the eighth grade, went on to high school, went on to Catholic high school here in Birmingham. It's called John Carroll High School. I graduated from there.

[00:38:02.13]

Michelle L.: Wow. Did you find a new community of friends once you got—

[00:38:06.11]

Adele B.: Oh, yeah. It was no problem. After, it took me, I would say, maybe a month. And what helped me was goin' to school and bein' a girl, likes to talk. Everybody was so acceptin'. And there was only seven of us in the class.

[00:38:30.21]

Michelle L.: Oh. [Laughter] Seven.

[00:38:31.25]

Adele B.: They had the seventh and the eighth grade in the same class.

[00:38:39.12]

Michelle L.: Oh.

[00:38:41.00]

Adele B.: So there were, I think, seven eighth graders and seven—no, I think it was six and seven. But anyway, we shared the same class the teacher taught the eighth grade. Then she moved on the seventh grade, and the eighth grade went out to play or whatever. [Laughter]

[00:39:06.29]

Michelle L.: Was it all girls?

[00:39:09.25]

Adele B.: No, no. It was mixed.

[00:39:12.18]

Michelle L.: Okay.

[00:39:14.03]

Adele B.: I had no problem. I liked sports and I got to play . . . volleyball. And no problem. There were just a couple of girls that were of Italian descent, and Albert's brother was in that class— my husband's brother was in that class.

[00:39:40.04]

Michelle L.: Oh, wow.

[00:39:42.00]

Adele B.: He helped me a lot, because we went to the same church. The church was . . . our guidance, I guess. So, I just bonded with them and . . . it was fun. It was about maybe a month after we were here, I got to be doin' just fine.

[00:40:17.24]

Michelle L.: You were okay.

[00:40:18.10]

Adele B.: I was just fine. [Laughter] And I'm still just fine.

[00:40:24.02]

Michelle L.: Now, when did you learn—tell me about how you learned how to cook.

[00:40:27.22]

Adele B.: My learnin' was from my mother. Goin' back to . . . when we came here, the sad thing about that when we got here, the night that we got here, my mother got sick with asthma. And it was a house full of family and I think everybody in Birmingham that was Lebanese must have come there. [Laughter] It was just a big party, and my mother started short breathing, started having problem the night we got here. She was warned by all the family in the old country that she might be sick, because she was sent back when she was sick with asthma. And they talked to doctors and stuff. Some of the doctors said, "Well, now you're older, then you were a teenager, maybe you would have outgrown the . . . the severe asthma problem, the breathin' problem. And after maybe havin' kids, your system

and everything has changed, you might be all right." But the family, my daddy's family, were real worried about her havin' the same illness that her father had. And sure enough, she's the only one in the family that inherited her father's illness. So, she got sick that night. Of course, then the next day, took her to the doctor, to the best doctors, and tried. She would get a little bit better. And she'd get sick again. So, she lived thirty-five years in this country after we came here and the family came here, sick with asthma. So, I learned how to cook from her, because she was sick all the time. She didn't have, you know, seasonal-type asthma, like she would get sick in the spring and have short breathin' in the spring or short breathin' in the fall. She had the type of asthma that she had it every—chronical asthma. She had it every day of her life, had to take treatments for it every day of her life. So, she died at the age of eighty-nine, and thirty-five years in this country she was sick. But she took a chance on her life to make a better life for her family and children, and I thank her every day. My brothers thank her every day. She gave up her life for us, and thank God we all have done well. Both of my brothers have married. And of course, I have. One of my brother's wives passed away a couple years ago, but my oldest brother, he's done real well. And I can say, thank God none of us ever been on welfare. Never needed anybody except God to help us and lead us. And we made it well, and here I am today, married to the most wonderful husband in the world. [Laughter] That we had met at the church, married in our church, baptized our kids in our church.

[00:44:49.20]

Michelle L.: Wow.

[00:44:51.00]

Adele B.: And I learned how to cook from my mother because she was sick and she would tell me, "Now, you do this, this way, and you do this, this way." And we do this, this way. So, that's how I learned.

[00:45:04.27]

Michelle L.: So what are some of the dishes you remember learnin' from her?

[00:45:10.15]

Adele B.: You ask. Any Lebanese dish that's there, I learned from my mother. And of course, growin' up in the church, I had my aunts in the church and uncles and my uncles' wives. So, you know, I learned from them as well as from Mama.

[00:45:37.23]

Michelle L.: Right. I read in the cookbook that there was a . . . ladies' altar society?

[00:45:48.23]

Adele B.: I'm in it today. Been the president of it quite a few times.

[00:45:52.12]

Michelle L.: And it started in maybe the [19]50s? Is that right?

[00:45:58.03]

Adele B.: That's correct. See, we came in 19 . . . we came in 1956. So, we've been here sixty-three years. So, when we came to the church that we're in today, it was a new church. And the ladies' altar society, they had formed this group of the older ladies that cooked dinners on Thursday night. So, you have it there. They cooked on Thursday nights. It was in the basement of the church. We didn't have a hall, we didn't have classrooms, anything like that; it was the church, the office, and then this area downstairs that was the basement. Very small kitchen, and very small area in the kitchen with few tables that they used to cook in that little kitchen. And serve, at these tables, they used to have it once a week on Thursdays. When I first came, I was goin' to high school. And it wasn't very far from John Carroll High School. The church was not far from there. I had some friends that went on Thursday night to help serve, serve the tables, be waitresses. [Laughter]

[00:47:58.11]

Michelle L.: Right.

[00:47:59.26]

Adele B.: And the older ladies, I had two aunts that worked with the ladies that did the cookin'. They used to do it every Thursday night, they had four different committees. The four different committees was different families. Let's say that Boohakers had this week, the Bohackles had this week, whoever was families from the church. The mother or grandmother would head this committee and have her own family come and help and do the servin' and whatever had to be done. The thing I remember as a child, that when the ladies went to cook and prepare the foods, they did not—they brought their own lunch,

they brought a sack lunch. Their own lunch from home, because it would take 'em all day long for two or three days to prepare to have the dinner on Thursday.

[00:49:13.14]

Michelle L.: Wow.

[00:49:14.27]

Adele B.: So, they would bring a sack lunch, so that way, they wouldn't have to eat from the church. Because they wanted all the money to go to the church to pay for the church. And so, when they cooked the dinners and served it on Thursday night, they would pay for their meal. Like the people that came, to pay for their own meal, because they wanted the money to go for the church fund to help finish building the church. Finish payin' for the church.

[00:50:02.19]

Michelle L.: What a service of love.

[00:50:05.16]

Adele B.: Yeah. As a child, that stuck in my mind, that this is what they're doin'. I've grown up in there, married in there, and I've told Paul and Norman and everybody in church, and I said, "I will work for this church till the day I die." And any time that they ask me to do something for the church, I'm right there, 'cause I feel like the Good Lord has been good to

us, gave me a wonderful family, and all we can do is thank Him for His goodness. So, that's my life. [Laughter]

[00:50:56.26]

Michelle L.: So, the Thursday night dinners, did people from all over the community come? Or was it mainly the church family?

[00:51:04.24]

Adele B.: That's a good question, because it started with just the church family. And if they have a friend or a neighbor, so they came with them. And, of course, everybody paid for their meals. I mean, they counted that money closely. [Laughter] So, anyway, it grew and grew and grew. It started, like I said, like three tables, maybe six to a table in that little area. And one of the things that sticks in my mind that they made, of course, the authentic Lebanese food. Everybody—they didn't do the same thing every week. They did little somethin' different so that people would try everything. Because we have so many different dishes. Everybody thinks that theirs is better than somebody else's, so they're tryin' to show out to see who can do this better than . . . You know how it is. [Laughter] So, anyway, my aunt was tellin' me who I was named after. I was named Adele after my aunt, my mother's baby sister. So, anyway, my Aunt Adele was in charge of the salad, the *tabbouleh*, if you've heard of the *tabbouleh*.

[00:52:42.28]

Michelle L.: Right.

[00:52:45.28]

Adele B.: She was in charge of the *tabbouleh*, and the *tabbouleh* takes a lot of parsley and tomatoes and onions. Anyway, you have to take the parsley, chop it up, and it takes a lot to make a bowl of *tabbouleh*. It's not like makin' a bowl of salad.

[00:53:06.08]

Michelle L.: Right.

[00:53:07.23]

Adele B.: So, one day durin' the time they were cookin', she was, of course, in charge of the *tabbouleh*. So, they had . . . the thing grew and grew and grew. So, that particular Thursday night, they had a whole bunch more than they anticipated. So, to make the *tabbouleh* stretch, they added lettuce to it. So, it was supposed—well, they had some heads of lettuce, you know, there, so to make it stretch, they added lettuce to it.

[00:53:59.24]

Michelle L.: Oh.

[00:53:59.24]

Adele B.: People thought it was good with the lettuce. [Laughter]

[00:54:03.01]

Michelle L.: Right?

[00:54:04.19]

Adele B.: So, they started adding lettuce to it, because as it grew, it would take less parsley.

[00:54:13.23]

Michelle L.: Right.

[00:54:15.08]

Adele B.: To make *tabbouleh*, and you add the lettuce to it, it makes it go further.

[00:54:19.21]

L :Right.

[00:54:21.09]

Adele B.: So, they named it *safsouf*, s-a-f . . . s-o-u-f. It's probably, there's probably a recipe for that in there. So, they named it *safsouf*, and the reason why they named him that, there is a Lebanese dish—a Lebanese salad—that's made like that. But it has more lettuce, less parsley and mint and tomatoes, and it has garbanzo beans in there. And it has cucumbers in there. It's a little bit different than this, but they called it *safsouf* because it had lettuce in there, to give it a name. So, that's where the name *safsouf* came from.

[00:55:21.15]

Michelle L.: Okay.

[00:55:23.00]

Adele B.: Another dish, they improvised and made *tabbouleh*.

[00:55:25.08]

Michelle L.: That's great. That does explain—I remember seein' in the cookbook, *The Lebanese Palate*, I saw there's the recipe with the lettuce and the regular *tabbouleh*.

[00:55:35.13]

Adele B.: Um-hm. See, this is the *tabbouleh* right here.

[00:55:36.11]

Michelle L.: Yes, yeah. That explains it, the two recipes. As more and more people started to come . . .

[00:55:44.10]

Adele B.: Yeah, yeah.

[00:55:46.02]

Michelle L.: They had to improvise.

[00:55:46.19]

Adele B.: Improvise. And it grew from that to our festival today, where we feed about six thousand people over two days' period. And we prepare for months. We start—a lot of our cookin' takes a lot of time. It's not casseroles. [Laughter] It's not somethin' you can just whip up. Everything is just done one by one. Our grape leaves, we do like, twenty, twenty-two hundred grape leaves, and each grape leaf is rolled by itself.

[00:56:31.11]

Michelle L.: Wow.

[00:56:33.06]

Adele B.: So, it takes a lot of people to get in there and do that. And it takes time. So, we start cookin' in January, and we serve in April.

[00:56:48.20]

Michelle L.: Wow.

[00:56:48.28]

Adele B.: But the only, of course, the *tabbouleh* and the things that are fresh-made is done at the last minute. But all, like the meat pies, is somethin' else. Each meat pie is done one by one. You cut it out like biscuits, and thin it out, cuff it, make it one by one. So, thank God, with God's help, we have grown. From maybe fifty people that started off with sixty-somethin years ago, to today, what it is: six thousand.

[00:57:33.20]

Michelle L.: Right. What did you think that first year of the festival? What was that like, tryin' to get ready?

[00:57:39.08]

Adele B.: Well, I'll tell you. I was not part of it the first year because we had sold our restaurant; my husband and I had a restaurant. We had sold our restaurant, and a friend of mine had a sandwich shop in Mountain Brook. She was needing a cashier. So, I told her that I would come and work for her, cashier for her. So, that was the first year the festival started, and we were there. She's a big worker for the church, as well. We were there in spirit.

[00:58:29.21]

Michelle L.: Um-hm.

[00:58:31.01]

Adele B.: So, the first festival, we were not prepared for this amount of people. [Laughter] We were prepared for a couple'a hundred people. Well, I know Paul and Anthony will know the exact amount that we sold that day. And we were gettin', callin' the church, friends of ours that were there, "How's the festival goin'?" It was a big undertakin', but we did not think that it was gonna be that big. It was our first one. So, that was the only festival that I missed. The very first one. And they did—oh, they did great, and we were all thrilled. So.

[00:59:26.08]

Michelle L.: Right. Can you tell me a little bit about the restaurant you and your husband had?

[00:59:29.28]

Adele B.: We had a barbecue place. 'Course, my husband was not in the barbecue business, but when he married me . . . [Laughter] And by the way, the barbecue sauce that we used at our restaurant, it's the same recipe that my daddy had.

[00:59:56.18]

Michelle L.: Oh.

[00:59:58.00]

Adele B.: Well, to go back, my brother—my oldest brother—when he opened his own barbecue place, Albert and I hadn't been married about a couple'a years. And Albert was a salesman for Health & Beauty Aid. My brother built his own restaurant. Well, he worked with the builder that built his own restaurant and needed somebody to go in with him to have the barbecue. The barbecue restaurant he built was a block from his old restaurant. So, the old restaurant was rented; this was his own restaurant. So, asked Albert if he'd like to go in with him in the barbecue business. Albert knew nothin' about barbecue. But my brother taught him, and they were together for twenty-four years. My brother retired, and we bought a restaurant in Center Point.

[01:01:16.28]

Michelle L.: What was it called?

[01:01:18.00]

Adele B.: Albert's.

[01:01:19.07]

Michelle L.: Albert's. Makes sense. [Laughter] So y'all, so you got in the festival game the second year, then.

[01:01:27.08]

Adele B.: Yeah. And I've been in there since then. The first year, they did the bread on the stage, which they thought would be a novelty; the Lebanese thin bread. They thought it would be an attraction, you know. So, they did it on the stage for a couple'a hours. We would sell the hot bread. And if it went well, but they had dancers on the same stage. So, to make the bread was flour and mess and everything. They would have to move all that mess; the grill that it was cooked on and the flour, it had to be swept and everything. Get it ready for the dancers to come and dance on the stage. So, we did that for a couple'a years on the stage. After that, they built a special place by the stage where it would be for bread only.

[01:02:38.16]

Michelle L.: Okay.

[01:02:40.04]

Adele B.: And we made the bread and sold it, and we were sellin' it as fast as we can make it.

Until this date, we start makin' bread, actually cookin' the bread, about eight o'clock for the workers there that's gotta work. So, they have it for breakfast, 'cause by the time the festival starts, they don't have a chance to eat.

[01:03:09.04]

Michelle L.: Right.

[01:03:10.25]

Adele B.: So, we start at eight o'clock, and it's over at nine o'clock at night. Nonstop. We have a line, people standin' up to eat the hot bread with butter or the yogurt and the mint and the olive oil. We started with two people makin' it. Now, we've got eight people to be able to accommodate everybody that comes.

[01:03:42.11]

Michelle L.: Wow.

[01:03:43.22]

Adele B.: But I'm the only one that actually throws the bread. That takes years of experience to do this. And I usually do the early mornin', the early shift, and then Albert has a cousin that had come to this country about twenty years, about fifteen years ago, I think. That she does the bread in the evening. But she also sells bread, she makes bread and sells it from home.

[01:04:22.29]

Michelle L.: Okay. Can you walk me through the process of—

[01:04:25.15]

Adele B.: Of the—

[01:04:27.21]

Michelle L.: Of the bread?

[01:04:27.25]

Adele B.: I can. It's made of . . . flour. Originally, in the olden days, where it's believed that that's the kind of bread that Jesus broke and gave it to his apostles. It's the thin, wafer-like bread. So, that's what they say the original bread was made. But the original bread was unleavened. They made in Lebanon, they made their own, grew their own wheat; made their own flour. So, flour was plentiful. And lot of people in the Middle East, you know, made that type of bread. And it was nothin' but water and flour. So, it was no salt, no leavenin', no yeast or bakin' powder or anything in it. It's just made out of water and flour. There were, they used to make it . . . and in the olden days, they cooked it on kindlin', on wood. The dome that it's cooked on, it's like an upside-down wok. They used to make a pit out of stone, whatever, put—it's called *saj*, which is the dome, metal dome—and they'll feed the fire under that dome. And you cooked your bread on top of the fire on that dome. So, but throughout the years, they began—it was . . . harder, I guess. It was chewier

because it had no leavenin' in there. It was like a thin wafer. But as human being progressed and stuff, they began to put salt in there and put leavenin' in there. So, today's bread is modern-day bread, but made the old-fashioned way. [Laughter]

[01:07:30.06]

Michelle L.: And you'd mentioned throwing it.

[01:07:31.19]

Adele B.: Um-hm.

[01:07:33.29]

Michelle L.: Can you explain that?

[01:07:35.18]

Adele B.: You make it, you make the dough to make it easy and more pliable, you have to put a little bit of yeast. Then we use self-risin' flour because it has baking powder and salt and a little touch of yeast. So, that way, the bread becomes pliable. Like the pizza bread. It's like the pizza. But made much thinner. The pizza, you throw it like this to flatten it out. Or you might, if you're real good at it, you throw it up in the air. You seen 'em on T.V., where they catch 'em up in the air. Well, this dough is close to that, but in order to make it as thin as we make it, I've got some I'll show you. In order to make it as thin as we make it, it's got to be thrown a certain way in your hand. Like . . . I'll show you.

[01:08:45.27]

Michelle L.: Okay. Demonstration on a dish towel. I like.

[01:08:54.15]

Adele B.: Yes. So, to throw it, there is a certain way. Let's imagine this is the bread and you throw it a certain way. Now, if you don't throw it just right, you're goin' to lose it. So, there a rhythm or a certain way that you must throw it in order to make it thinner. And the air is what makes it thinner.

[01:09:21.05]

Michelle L.: Okay.

[01:09:22.22]

Adele B.: And it's pliable; it's soft enough where . . . you can throw it back and forth, but you must be careful with it, 'cause you can drop it.

[01:09:36.02]

Michelle L.: Right. [Laughter]

[01:09:36.15]

Adele B.: I have given lessons at the church. A lot of people want to learn. And I've given lessons many times, but I have not succeeded . . . [Laughter] With somebody be able to do it and

do it for—they might be able to do one or two, but to do it by the hundreds, it is just . . .
you have to know what you're doin'.

[01:10:11.12]

Michelle L.: Right.

[01:10:11.12]

Adele B.: It's an art. It really is. So, that's the story on the bread.

[01:10:21.09]

Michelle L.: Did your mom teach you how to throw the bread?

[01:10:22.29]

Adele B.: Absolutely. [Laughter] I have another story with that. As a child, my mother used to make it in the old country. And it was done on a thing called *saj*, which is . . . where you cook it on. She used to do it on kindlin', you know, on wood. And I used to . . . as a child, used to feed the fire, so that she would do all the work and cook it. So, anyway, like any curious child, I used to want to learn how to do that. How do you throw that? So, she used to bribe me by tellin' me, if I would sit there and feed the fire for her to make it, that she'd let me play or throw the last one. She wouldn't give me one in the beginnin'. She used to tell me, "You have to feed the fire. I let you do the last one." So, I was able to sit there. [Laughter] Wait. When she made about a hundred of those loaves for us to have at home, for us to eat, and wait for the last ones so I could make my own. [Laughter]

[01:12:04.18]

Michelle L.: How long did it take you to learn to do it correctly?

[01:12:10.28]

Adele B.: Probably years.

[01:12:13.12]

Michelle L.: Wow.

[01:12:14.26]

Adele B.: Of course, when I grew up and we came to this country, my uncle—God rest his soul—again fixed her a place here to make bread. It was on a gas stove; it was not on . . .

[Laughter] It was on a gas stove that had the four eyes close to each other. And put the dome on it and made bread on that. So, I used to help her, and she always made it whenever I was home on Saturday from school, where I could help her because she wasn't well. So, that's when I learned. I been doin' it since then.

[01:13:08.20]

Michelle L.: Mm.

[01:13:10.09]

Adele B.: I remember when my kids were little, I had a place at our old house, and I have a place here, also, to make bread. So, when the kids were born, we lived in Crestwood. And I had—my husband had fixed me a place downstairs with the gas stove. The whole setup to make the bread. When I'd make it, I'd make it about once a week for the family to have. And the children used to play in the basement, my brother's children and my children. We lived close together, behind each other. He had three kids and I had three. They used to play together and they'd come—my sister-in-law tried to learn how, but she never mastered it. But the kids used to play together, and we'd bake that bread. The kids would playin' down there on their bikes, Tyke Bikes and all that stuff, and they would eat the bread just as fast as we were makin' it. By the time we got through makin' bread, it was half of the amount that we made, was eaten up by the kids. [Laughter]

[01:14:33.09]

Michelle L.: Oh, wow.

[01:14:35.06]

Adele B.: So, the bread goes a long way.

[01:14:38.13]

Michelle L.: Well, is there anything else about the festival that you want to talk about that I haven't thought to ask? Or about the church?

[01:14:50.06]

Adele B.: I'll tell you one thing, that it takes organization. We've had a great organizer. And a lotta commitment on a lot of people. A lot of faith. And support by our, of course, our priest. And the people dedicated, that want to preserve their heritage and believe in God, believe in our faith. That's why it has endured and has grown that long, for that many years. It just takes dedication and faith, and we have a lot of that in our parish. Thankful for that. One thing about the bread, it's real rewarding when someone comes up and tells you that they've waited the whole year to come back to the festival so they can have the hot bread. [Laughter] And the sandwich that we created after so many years is the—we call it the Laban sandwich, laban and herbs. It's very simple and very good, and it's our number one seller. Not as far as money part, but as far as the amount. I mean, I don't think anybody comes to the festival that doesn't eat one of those wraps.

[01:17:00.28]

Michelle L.: Right.

[01:17:02.15]

Adele B.: And the wrap is the hot bread. We fold it in half; it's big—I'll show you—it's a big loaf about this big, thin. We put yogurt on there, a homemade yogurt, and then on top of that, we put fresh mint and a drizzle of olive oil and wrap it. And give it to 'em. It's about that long when it's made, it's about as long as this thing. So, that is our number one seller. And it's because it's . . . authentic. It's different. It's healthy. And people just . . . they love it because it's so authentic. I was the one that suggested—at first, we used to put a little bit of butter on there. I suggested to Paul, who was the coordinator, to, let's put, let's try

somehin' different. We were well into it, maybe five or six years after we were sellin' and makin' the bread and goin' like crazy. I said, "Let's make somehin' different." I said, "As a child that was born and raised in the old country," I said, "This type of a wrap was like peanut butter and jelly sandwich to children in this country. That's what my mother and all the mothers gave their kids when they were hungry. They wanted somehin' to eat and somehin' quick, and it was handy. Everybody made their own yogurt. They made their own cheese. So, there was always yogurt at home. And always mint; if it wasn't fresh mint, it was dried mint that they had dried from the summer, and there was always olive oil." I said, "Let's try this sandwich, and see." Well, we tried that sandwich, and we—I mean, it's just taken off.

[01:19:43.23]

Michelle L.: Yeah.

[01:19:43.23]

Adele B.: People come just especially to eat that sandwich. [Laughter] It's very simple and very good. And healthy.

[01:19:53.14]

Michelle L.: It sounds delicious. Well, thank you so much.

[01:19:57.24]

Adele B.: I don't know what else I can tell you. I hope I haven't talked your head off.

[01:20:02.01]

Michelle L.: [Laughter] No, I have thoroughly enjoyed it.

[End of interview]