



Chasity and Nathaniel “Nate” Brown

Daddy’s Girls Bakery

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Interviewer: Stephanie Burt

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Stephanie Burt: This is Stephanie Burt, recording oral history for the Southern Foodways Alliance, on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023. We are on Reynolds Avenue in North Charleston, South Carolina, at Daddy’s Girls Bakery. I am with—

Chasity Brown: Chasity Brown.

Stephanie Burt: Chasity Brown. And, how old are you, Chasity?

Chasity Brown: I am 37 years old.

Stephanie Burt: Thirty-seven. And you are a co-owner—

Chasity Brown: Correct.

Stephanie Burt: —of this establishment. And then—

Nathaniel Brown: Nathaniel Brown.

Stephanie Burt: Yes. And how old are you, Nathaniel?

Nathaniel Brown: I’m 40 years old.

Stephanie Burt: Do you want to go by Nate, or Nathaniel?

Nathaniel Brown: I go mostly by Nate. [laughs]

Stephanie Burt: Okay, good. But we can be formal, if you want. Hold it a little bit closer? There you go. Good. Because that sound, we want to get your voice a lot.

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Y'all have owned Daddy’s Girls Bakery since—when did you open?

Chasity Brown: We opened our brick and mortar in 2021. We've been in business since 2016.

Stephanie Burt: Where were you operating before here?

Chasity Brown: We were operating first outside of our home—I’m sorry, inside of our home. And then we rented out like a commercial kitchen as well.

Stephanie Burt: Did you both bake before you were a couple?

Chasity Brown: No.

Nathaniel Brown: No, not really.

Chasity Brown: [laughs]

Nathaniel Brown: My mother used to bake when I was younger, and she would make me get in the kitchen and help her, being that I’m the oldest.

Chasity Brown: Mmhmm.

Nathaniel Brown: So I had never thought I would be a baker, as a lifestyle or a career or real profession. But, you know, the culinary gods thought differently.

Stephanie Burt: [laughs] And what about for you?

Chasity Brown: I didn’t really bake. I did some baking and cake decorating in high school, culinary arts program.

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That’s where I found the passion for cake decorating, which is what I do mostly, here.

Stephanie Burt: You have a variety of treats, and a variety of desserts. Would you consider this a—comes out of the Gullah Geechee tradition? Do you think most of your desserts start there?

Nathaniel Brown: I wouldn't say most of our desserts, but I would say our Charleston chewies reside, number one. Now I do think the Gullah Geechee spirit takes part in this. In the background, in the history of Charleston and food, I think it does have a hand in it.

Stephanie Burt: Now, where did you grow up?

Nathaniel Brown: I grew up in Charleston, South Carolina. My actual first home was on Ansonborough, 2408 Lawrence Street, which is now right across the street from where the new museum is being built.

Stephanie Burt: Yes, yes! It’s down there.

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And, when did you learn to make chewies?

Nathaniel Brown: I probably learned to make chewies about 2011, 2012.

Stephanie Burt: Okay, and who did you learn them from?

Nathaniel Brown: My Aunt Landa. My Aunt Landa, she always made it for like family functions and whatnot. So, we already started baking, and going to barber shops and beauty

salons to sell stuff. But then one Christmas I asked her for the recipe, and she gave it to me, and it was a great gift.

Stephanie Burt: Yeah! And what is her last name, Landa?

Nathaniel Brown: Yolanda Gilliard. Special shout-out to Yolanda Gilliard, my aunt. [laughs]

Stephanie Burt: [laughs]And, so you would make chewies, and then sell them at barber shops and beauty shops?

Nathaniel Brown: Yes. And at previous jobs I had, previous to this one.

Stephanie Burt: That’s great! And then, how did you decide to go in business together?

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When did baking—the culinary gods, as you say—make that decision for you?

Chasity Brown: I would say when he was in the beauty salons and beauty shops, sellin’ in the streets, and started making more money than his teaching career, that’s when we decided, “I think we can do this full time.”

Stephanie Burt: Yeah. And what did you teach?

Nathaniel Brown: I actually taught elementary school. I have a degree in early childhood education. So I taught anywhere between kindergarten and third grade.

[0:04:37]

Stephanie Burt: Wow. Okay. So, your aunt teaches you how to make chewies. Growing up, what kind of family functions did she make them for?

Nathaniel Brown: Most of the time, it’d be like holidays. Mostly like Thanksgiving or Christmas time, she would usually make it around that time.

Stephanie Burt: What gave you the idea to sell chewies in the beauty and barber shops?

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Nathaniel Brown: Well, the chewies were already—the chewies are really good. We’ve adapted it a little bit, but they were already good. And I think we already were going to the barber shops and beauty salons, because one, you have people who have extra cash there, and that’s a place to get the word of mouth, good or bad. Fortunately, we got the good. You also got like honest feedback as well, too.

Stephanie Burt: And so, you would just go and—? How did you wrap them? Tell me how it worked, if I’m sitting in the beauty salon chair and you walked in.

Nathaniel Brown: [laughs] All right, so—and this is everywhere, like bingo halls, clubs, everywhere—I would usually load up a basket. Early in the morning, we’d get up, prepare the chewies and the desserts we’re taking out, load up a basket, load the car up, and spend all day going from downtown to sometimes Summerville, just going to different locations.

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I’d come into the shop with the basket—“How y’all doin’ today? Anybody interested in some chewies? Anybody interested in some desserts?” And you know, you get a few no’s, but I look for the yeses.

Stephanie Burt: Yeah. So did you need prior permission, as you built your chewie tour?

Nathaniel Brown: At the time, I didn’t really think about it [laughs]—

Chasity Brown: [laughs]

Stephanie Burt: [laughs]

Nathaniel Brown: —honestly.

Stephanie Burt: OK, so fast forward to 2016, and you open Daddy’s Girls Bakery. Right?

Nathaniel Brown: At that point, we were in the—the shared kitchen.

Stephanie Burt: Okay, and where was that commissary?

Nathaniel Brown: That was downtown, at St. John’s Chapel.

Stephanie Burt: Okay. And you would bake there a couple days a week?

Nathaniel Brown: Yeah, probably a few days a week.

Stephanie Burt: And were the chewies always the one that sold out more?

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Nathaniel Brown: It was.

Stephanie Burt: Yeah, yeah. So, when did you find this spot? This is a historic spot. You know?

Nathaniel Brown: It is. And it is again, because we got it now. [laughs]

Stephanie Burt: [laughs]

Chasity Brown: [laughs] Yeah. We had a contract in the airport, and for about six months, we held a kiosk there. And when we were there, we were approached by a lady that worked there, about this spot. She just told us about the opportunity, and we thought it was a good idea to—it was a really good idea, good opportunity, and a good idea, to make it happen!

Stephanie Burt: So you open in '21. That’s a tough time to open.

Chasity Brown: Mmhmm.

Stephanie Burt: Right?

Nathaniel Brown: January 1<sup>st</sup> of 2021.

Stephanie Burt: Yeah, and so now, we're in 2023. How’s it going?

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Nathaniel Brown: It’s good.

Chasity Brown: It’s goin good.

Stephanie Burt: Good. Let’s get into the chewie. Now, we all know that the chewie is basically a base idea, and so there’s many variations. And people play it pretty close to the vest as far as the recipe. But if you want to share your recipe on this oral history project, we’d be open to that. So, will you tell us how you make your chewies?

Nathaniel Brown: We pretty much use the same base—I don’t know exactly what other people do, but it’s pretty much the same base, I would hope, where you have your brown sugar, eggs, flour, butter, and vanilla extract. And then if you want to do like a variation, you can do it

based off of that. But, I mean, like I said, I don’t know what other people do, I don’t know their recipe, or we just, you know, do a little Daddy’s Girls Bakery magic.

Stephanie Burt: Mmhmm. And so then, it became a signature for you, through years, and now, you've pushed that in different ways, right?

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Tell me the ways that you use chewies beyond just the traditional chewie.

Chasity Brown: So we also use our chewies to make a pound cake. We make a chewie cheesecake. We also make a chewie ice cream. We've also made a chewie butter before.

Nathaniel Brown: Fried the chewie. [laughs]

Chasity Brown: We fried it. Yeah, we fried it as well.

Stephanie Burt: Deep fry the chewie, at the fair?

Nathaniel Brown: Yeah.

Chasity Brown: Yeah. [laughs]

Stephanie Burt: Let’s start with the pound cake. How do you—? Is it the flavors of the chewie, or you actually start with chewies and mix it into the batter? Will you explain?

Chasity Brown: Yeah, so for the pound cake, we use the batter as a bottom layer, as a crust, and then we also put already baked chewie pieces on the inside of the pound cake batter and bake it.

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Stephanie Burt: Then the cheesecake. How do you make that?

Chasity Brown: That also has a chewie crust that’s already baked, and we put the baked chewies in the inside of the cheesecake batter as well, and on top.

Stephanie Burt: And then ice cream is just baked chewies?

Chasity Brown: Mhmm.

Stephanie Burt: Do you make the base or you buy?

Chasity Brown: The ice cream base? We buy it.

Stephanie Burt: Okay. And who decides the creative—will you talk to me about how you decide product development?

Nathaniel Brown: It’s a few different ways. I like to play in the kitchen, so sometimes I might come up with a idea or have some scraps or something, and put it together. The kids might come up with the idea. Or I have a friend who loves to be in the kitchen; he might come up with an idea. Or even Chasity might. Like even with the ice cream, we had some chewies one night, you add some ice cream one night, you put them together, and we had chewie ice cream!

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Stephanie Burt: I know. It’s not natural. I’m sorry.

Nathaniel Brown: [laughs] I gotcha.

Stephanie Burt: [laughs] Okay, so chewie ice cream. Now, what do people come in for?

Can you talk to me about the reaction of people coming into the bakery and how that has shifted

since you first started selling chewies or when you were a kid and making them? Let’s talk about how chewies are in the collective imagination now, is kind of what I’m talkin’ about.

Chasity Brown: A lot of our customers come in here just for chewies. Like if anything, they come straight to the case, and it’s like, “I want some chewies.” With or without nuts. I don’t know.

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Nathaniel Brown: With the chewies, I think it is kind of a “if you know you know” type of thing. So like we’ve actually introduced a lot of people *to* chewies. We actually have a chewie cam and everything.

Stephanie Burt: You have—wait, wait, but wait. Let’s—let’s pause there. You have a chewie *cam*.

Nathaniel Brown: Yes. And I [laughs]—I have footage of like when we’re here, at the market, or wherever we go, I record people—because we always pass out samples. That’s the trick, too. We also pass out samples and let them try it. Then we get the head jerk—“Oh my gosh! Oh! You gotta try this!” I love gettin that on camera, cause it happens often, you know?

Stephanie Burt: Mmhmm. And so you get the chewie cam. What is it? You wear a GoPro, or—?

Nathaniel Brown: No, I have a—I record—like we’ll ask them for permission to record, and I can edit it, with the chewie cam.

Stephanie Burt: That’s great. And where did you grow up, Chasity?

Chasity Brown: I grew up partially Alabama and also Tennessee. Grew up in—seven girl [sp]—

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Stephanie Burt: And when did you first have a chewie?

Chasity Brown: I first had a chewie after I married Nate. [laughs]

Stephanie Burt: Tell me about that experience.

Chasity Brown: It was really good. I kept on hearing about the chewies, prior, and I was like, “Okay, what is a chewie? What is a chewie?” Because I always heard about ‘em. Then I finally tried em, and I was like, “Oh my god, I see what the fuss is about. They are really good.”

Stephanie Burt: Now, is it always pecans for y'all?

Nathaniel Brown: No, we actually use raw walnuts for the most part. We do make ‘em original without anything for people who don’t like nuts. But we use raw walnuts in ours for the most part.

Stephanie Burt: Okay, so that’s a variation, too.

Nathaniel Brown: It is.

Stephanie Burt: Yeah. And when you mix it into the other ingredients, is it the one with nuts, or one without? Like into the pound cake and the cheesecake.

Chasity Brown: Yeah, it’s without.

Stephanie Burt: It’s without.

Chasity Brown: We do have a nut ice cream, though. We do like a candied walnut in the ice cream. [laughs]

Nathaniel Brown: [laughs]

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Stephanie Burt: What? I don’t know what just happened there. Okay. I have to concentrate, because candied walnuts right now—oh my goodness.

Nathaniel Brown: [laughs]

Stephanie Burt: So about how many—can you talk to me about volume? How many days a week are you open? How much chewies you feel are a percentage of your business? How many pans you make? You know, walk me through some volumes so we get a sense of how much you're selling.

Chasity Brown: Yeah. So we're open from Wednesday to Saturday. We usually start baking on Tuesday—well, we bake—I’m sorry, he bakes chewies every day, pretty much, sometimes twice a day. And a batch is about, what, ten pans?

Nathaniel Brown: Yeah. So on average, we make about 80 pans a week. Eighty to a hundred pans a week, just depending on what we have going on.

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Stephanie Burt: Wow. Wow. And how long do they take to bake?

Nathaniel Brown: From start to finish, from start to cooling, probably about an hour.

Stephanie Burt: And they do have to cool?

Nathaniel Brown: They do. They definitely do.

Stephanie Burt: Yeah. Because otherwise, they'll fall apart, too.

Nathaniel Brown: Right.

Stephanie Burt: What kind of equipment do you use back there, for baking the chewies?

Nathaniel Brown: Right now, I have—I can’t remember how many quarts the mixer is, but it’s a nice size counter mixer, industrial mixer. When we first started, we was actually doing it by hand, and then we went to the hand mixer, then went to the small KitchenAid, and then we went to the industrial KitchenAid. So now we're up to a big boy now. And I actually have another one in storage that we don’t have space for.

Stephanie Burt: You bake it in the oven, and then how do you cut and package it?

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Chasity Brown: We cut them in about an inch-by-inch squares. We package them by the dozen, in just usually little plastic clamshell containers. We do ship them as well, and we use some—I forgot what’s it called—the—what’s the packaging we ship ‘em in?

Nathaniel Brown: The vacuum seal?

Chasity Brown: Yeah, vacuum seal them, and then use white boxes to ship them.

Stephanie Burt: Okay. Why do you think this dessert has caught on?

Nathaniel Brown: It has been actually a—well, lemme go way back. So, as I grew up, there *was* one—you had like people selling it out of their houses here and there. There was one shop called Wigfall [sp] that was downtown across from Burke High School. They still have a name as having good chewies, as well.

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I think there was kind of a resurgence after—and I don’t want to sound cocky, and it might just be a coincidence—but I think once we started going to the barber shops and beauty salons and clubs and churches, and doing Tecklenburg, being at Tecklenburg’s inauguration, and everywhere else that we’ve been, all the festivals and farmer’s markets, I think the trend started to pick up.

Stephanie Burt: And of course the chewie cam.

Nathaniel Brown: And the chewie cam, too.

Stephanie Burt: [laughs]

Nathaniel Brown: That’s fairly new, though. [laughs]

Stephanie Burt: What is the name of that place again? Is it still in existence?

Nathaniel Brown: No, it’s not. It closed *years* ago.

Stephanie Burt: Okay. And it was called the Wigfall [sp]?

Nathaniel Brown: It was called Wigfall’s [sp]. It was like a corner store. They had like sandwiches and stuff like that. Little, small—kind of like a sweet shop.

Stephanie Burt: Your aunt, what does she think about this?

Nathaniel Brown: She’s proud. She’s very proud. She still comes and supports and gets some goodies herself.

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Stephanie Burt: Yeah? So let’s talk a little bit about the bakery. Who is the bakery named after?

Chasity Brown: We named the bakery after our girls. We have four girls. We have one son, but the girls—I mean, I’m sorry, the son came after the name. We have a 16-year-old, a set of twins that are 11, and a set of twins that are nine.

Stephanie Burt: Wow. Okay. So can we hear all of their names, please?

Chasity Brown: Yes. We have Mackenzie [sp], Liliana [sp], Leila [sp], Ava [sp], and Nathaniel.

Stephanie Burt: Wow. Two sets of twins. Congratulations!

Chasity Brown: Thank you! [laughs]

Nathaniel Brown: [laughs]

Stephanie Burt: What else would you like to say about chewies, or your role in this revival, or actually commercialization of this dessert?

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Nathaniel Brown: I’m proud of it. I’m proud of the success and the journey that we’ve had thus far. I’m glad that we could be inspiration to others. Hopefully one day when they look in the

history books and maybe with this interview as well, they have us as the chewie man and the chewie lady [laughs], who made it an important part of American culture if not world culture, and represented for Charleston, South Carolina well.

Stephanie Burt: Nate, I want to ask you, since you really based leaving the teaching profession on chewies, did you ever do any research or ask anybody about the history of chewies? And what did you learn?

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Nathaniel Brown: It’s funny you say that. We’re actually in the process of trying to find that out now. Because I’m curious myself, to know where it came from. I don’t know if it came from the slaves, the former slaves, when they just made do out of the simple ingredients. I don’t know. I’m actually trying to figure that out, too.

Stephanie Burt: Okay. Great.

[End]