



**Lori DeVine**

**Birmingham, Alabama**

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Interviewer: Michelle Little

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Project: Career Servers

**Michelle Little:** Today is January 31<sup>st</sup> of 2020, and this is Michelle Little, and I'm here with Lori DeVine at the Sweet Tea Restaurant in Birmingham, Alabama, and this is for the Southern Foodways Alliance Career Servers Project.

Lori, to get started, will you just tell me your full name and when you were born?

[0:00:23.2]

**Lori DeVine:** Lori DeVine, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1961.

[0:00:29.9]

**Michelle Little:** All right. And where were you born and where'd you grow up?

[0:00:34.1]

**Lori DeVine:** I was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, and I grew up for the next twelve years in different states. My adoptive parents were in the Navy, so I grew up in California, Guam, Key West, Alabama, and California again, so different places.

[0:00:52.6]

**Michelle Little:** Wow! Did you like moving around like that?

[0:00:54.8]

**Lori DeVine:** I really did, I really did, because I really like the water. Being in Birmingham away from the water's been hard.

[0:01:00.6]

**Michelle Little:** I bet. [Laughter]

[0:01:01.6]

**Lori DeVine:** I like the water. But it was very cultured, it was very different, it was very—I think it had a lot to do with who I am and how I relate to people, because it was never—you know, it was just multicultural for me. So it was really good.

[0:01:21.8]

**Michelle Little:** Did you have any siblings?

[0:01:24.2]

**Lori DeVine:** I have two brothers, two younger brothers. I have two half-brothers and two younger brothers. My two adoptive brothers are here, which I grew up with, and then I have two brothers that are in California now that are my half-brothers.

[0:01:36.1]

**Michelle Little:** And so what do you remember about—what was the place you were in the longest when you were growing up?

[0:01:48.0]

**Lori DeVine:** In Key West.

[0:01:48.8]

**Michelle Little:** How long were you there?

[0:01:50.3]

**Lori DeVine:** Almost two years.

[0:01:51.1]

**Michelle Little:** Oh, that was the longest, two years? [Laughter]

[0:01:53.4]

**Lori DeVine:** That was the longest, yes. [Laughter] That was the longest growing up, yeah. I mean, when my dad retired from the Navy, I was thirteen, so from the time I was thirteen, we moved back to Birmingham, and from thirteen to eighteen, until I got married, nineteen, until I got married I lived here. So maybe I guess that was the longest growing up, but Key West was the longest that I had been before then.

[0:02:17.0]

**Michelle Little:** So at thirteen you moved here to Birmingham.

[0:02:19.9]

**Lori DeVine:** Yes, yes.

[0:02:20.7]

**Michelle Little:** And what brought your family here?

[0:02:22.4]

**Lori DeVine:** He retired, and his mother lived here, and my grandfather had just passed away, and so that left her here by herself. So he was actually going to have to do another tour in Vietnam, and so he went ahead and took his twenty years instead of going back to Vietnam.

[0:02:36.0]

**Michelle Little:** Wow.

[0:02:37.3]

**Lori DeVine:** So he went ahead and retired, so we moved here and went to work for the post office.

[0:02:44.9]

**Michelle Little:** And who did the cooking in your family when you were growing up?

[0:02:48.5]

**Lori DeVine:** My dad, my dad. My mother cooked, but my dad was the cook.

[0:02:52.7]

**Michelle Little:** What were some of your favorite things that he cooked?

[0:02:56.2]

**Lori DeVine:** Really, pound cake.

[0:02:57.8]

**Michelle Little:** Ooh!

[0:02:58.0]

**Lori DeVine:** He could make a pound cake that was—and he made cinnamon rolls, which he later used in the restaurant that he owned. He was also the lead chef in the Navy.

[0:03:08.3]

**Michelle Little:** Oh, wow! [Laughter] So tell me a little about—so he opened a restaurant here in Birmingham?

[0:03:16.2]

**Lori DeVine:** That's how I got to Birmingham, yes.

[0:03:18.3]

**Michelle Little:** Can you tell me a little bit about that restaurant?

[0:03:21.2]

**Lori DeVine:** Yeah, I can tell you about that restaurant. After he retired from the military, he went to work and put twenty years in at the post office. My uncle who lived here also, his brother, was an optometrist here, and he retired. So the two of them thought that they would get a restaurant. They would buy a restaurant that they could just hang out at. I guess they wanted to hang out.

But, anyway, I was living in Gadsden at that time because my husband then was from Gadsden. We had moved back from Texas to Gadsden, so I was in Gadsden, which is an hour away. He asked me if I could come help him a couple of days a week. I was already working at a grill at the courthouse with my mother-in-law at the time. So I said, “Okay, I can give you two days. I’ll drive back and forth.” It’s an hour drive here and an hour drive back, but, you know. The restaurant was open till 2:00 o’clock in the afternoon. That was fine. I could get off work and go get my kids from school.

So I came down there and did that for about a month, and then my uncle passed, so then my dad couldn’t do it by himself, so then it became a full-time job. And then I drove back and forth for six days for the next twelve, thirteen years.

[0:04:35.3]

**Michelle Little:** Wow.

[0:04:37.2]

**Lori DeVine:** So he sold the restaurant after about two years, and sold it to Courtney, and I stayed. Then Courtney sold it to a man, and he ended up really basically closing it down.

[0:04:49.9]

**Michelle Little:** All right. So we're talking about Courtney's that—

[0:04:54.0]

**Lori DeVine:** Right here at Sixth and 24<sup>th</sup>, yeah.

[0:04:56.2]

**Michelle Little:** So what was the original name?

[0:04:59.4]

**Lori DeVine:** Connie's. When my dad owned it, it was Connie's. Before then, it was Pit Grill. Pit Grill was like—yeah. In between that, it was Country Kitchen, if you want to know the whole background.

[0:05:17.2]

**Michelle Little:** Oh, yeah, I do. I do. I want to know the whole thing. [Laughter]

[0:05:19.8]

**Lori DeVine:** Okay. Well, then before it was Pit Grill, it was a Laundromat. [Laughter]  
Just in case you want to know.

[0:05:29.0]

**Michelle Little:** That's awesome. Okay. So tell me about just a typical day you working at that restaurant. What was your day like there?

[0:05:40.0]

**Lori DeVine:** I came in—I would leave Gadsden at 4:30. I would get to work at 5:30. I would come in, set up for breakfast. We always had a group of men that came in. There was about six to eight of them that always came in before we opened and sat down and had their coffee, and then they ordered. Then we did breakfast, which breakfast to me is like it's really the best thing about a restaurant that you could have, is a breakfast. It's the best people. It's the best—it's just the best all around. It is really—I just can't explain it to you, but breakfast in that restaurant was like inviting family over every morning, every single morning. So it was quite an experience. It was one that I will treasure forever.

Then we would have had that and wait on customers and, you know, you'd learn new customers. Then we'd go into lunch, which lunch was from 11:00 to 2:00, and it was full service, and we had ninety-three seats, and we just ran them through. But they were family. They would repeat, even lunch. Courtney's was a breakfast and lunch. It was like a Cheers for fast food—I mean for meat and three. It really was.

Then we'd close up, and I'd leave by 2:30, 3:00 o'clock and get home, and pick my kids up, and do my mom thing.

[0:07:08.6]

**Michelle Little:** So like a real regular crowd then, yeah.

[0:07:14.2]

**Lori DeVine:** Very, very. I mean, even now, even here, I've been at Sweet Tea for ten years, and I will have, "There's the Courtney lady." I didn't even really have a name. Some of them thought I was Courtney. They just called me Courtney, I mean, you know. I have one man that comes in, calls me Lisa. He's always called me Lisa. He called me Lisa at Courtney's. He called me Lisa when I worked at Da Vinci's, and he calls me Lisa here. So I've just always been Lisa.

[0:07:40.4]

**Michelle Little:** You just go with it? [Laughter]

[0:07:42.9]

**Lori DeVine:** I just go with it. I answer to it. But, yeah, a lot of customers, a lot of family. I was there the longest. I was there for almost twenty years.

[0:07:53.1]

**Michelle Little:** Wow! So how many people worked there?

[0:07:57.8]

**Lori DeVine:** There was—one, two, three, four—five in the back. There was four waitresses, two busboys, two cashiers, and a hostess, Courtney. So that was it.

[0:08:10.7]

**Michelle Little:** Okay. Wow. Okay, I want to go back a little bit. So when you were growing up, did you think about what you wanted to do as a career, and what did you think I want to do when I grow up? Or *did* you think about it?

[0:08:32.1]

**Lori DeVine:** I really didn't.

[0:08:33.1]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah, I mean, some people don't.

[0:08:34.5]

**Lori DeVine:** I really didn't have any goal to do whatever. I was really just kind of winging it day by day. That's who I was. I was just—you know. My mother always used to say, "She's always by the seat of her pants. Who knows what she's going to do?" And that was really it. Sometimes I thought about being a nurse, but then no. Then sometimes I thought about—I think the problem is, is that when I was fifteen years old, I went to work for a summer in a restaurant, and I have been in a restaurant ever since in some—I worked at a Pizitz McRae's for like three years, but it's been restaurants all the other time. I think I just thought that I could make all the money in the world being in a restaurant. I didn't need college for that. [Laughter] I didn't need any further education.

[0:09:27.4]

**Michelle Little:** So what was that very first restaurant?

[0:09:30.6]

**Lori DeVine:** That was Ollie's in North Birmingham.

[0:09:32.9]

**Michelle Little:** Ollie's, yes.

[0:09:35.0]

**Lori DeVine:** It was Ollie's in North Birmingham. Then after, I had to go back to school. Then for the next year, I got a job working at Captain D's at Eastwood Mall and got a job working at Great American Hamburger, which was in Eastwood Mall, so I worked two jobs.

So then I went for three months at college and failed out of it because I played for three months. I played harder than I worked. Really, I have to say this, because this is my dad's favorite story to tell the whole world. I flunked swimming, literally. So we're at—I can't remember if it was Christmas or something, because I'd come home Thanksgiving, you know. I completely failed out. And he's sitting around there, and he goes, "Yep," he goes, "I really thought the only way you could fail swimming was to drown, but she's still here." [Laughter] That was his favorite story, so I had to tell that one for him.

[0:10:30.9]

**Michelle Little:** I love that, yes. [Laughter]

[0:10:32.0]

**Lori DeVine:** You have to drown to fail swimming. No, I managed to do it and live.

[Laughter] But, anyway, and then I came back home and went to work for Captain D's, where I met my husband. We got married and I worked there. I worked for Captain D's for almost seven years.

[0:10:46.9]

**Michelle Little:** So was he a customer or a coworker?

[0:10:50.1]

**Lori DeVine:** No, he was actually the training supervisor, and I was just a little lowly person that worked there, and then we got married. He was a supervisor in Texas, we moved to Texas, and I was a dining room supervisor. So that was my first management part. So then we were out there. We had children.

So after we left Texas—we lived there for about five years. After we left Texas, we moved back to Gadsden where he was from, his family was from, and basically started over, started over, and that's when I went to work for McRae's. But I wasn't happy there. I'm not really happy with—I don't know if it's corporate or it's just that it's—I don't know. It's like—how do I say it? If you do a good job, then you should be compensated for it. I truly believe that. There shouldn't be a goal here or there shouldn't be a level that you have to reach or this that you have to do. If you do a good job, then you should be taken care of. That should get you—especially, you know, I have good work ethic, good everything. Well, that wasn't how the case—that's not how it is with

corporate. If you don't make them money, then they don't pay you money. No matter if you're behind the scenes doing anything else, that doesn't really matter.

My ex-husband's mother bought into the Courthouse Grill in Etowah County and went to work there, and so I went to work for her, and that's when I was back in the restaurant, and I was serving and waiting tables and cooking. I can't cook, but I was helping her cook. She could cook. Then I was working there when my dad called me and asked me to help him.

[0:12:43.1]

**Michelle Little:** So who do you feel like really taught you what you know about serving?

[0:12:52.7]

**Lori DeVine:** Her name was Betty Tinker. She worked with me at Connie's. She was there when I went to Connie's. I really didn't have the confidence, I don't think, to be like full service, you know. At the Courthouse Grill, you knew everybody, everybody knew everybody. It was—you know. But it's like go out there and just say, "Hey, hey," you know, it was kind of scary at first. It was kind of scary at first. What if I drop something? What if I spill something? Because it's full service, you know. You take it to them. She carried four plates up her arm, seventeen glasses. I mean, she was incredible. She wasn't but five-foot. She was just as spirited as spirited can be. But she put me out there every afternoon from 1:00 to 2:00 until I built up enough confidence to be as good as she was. So, yeah, it was her. I got to give her her due.

[0:13:52.6]

**Michelle Little:** What was the hardest thing to learn?

[0:14:02.8]

**Lori DeVine:** That you can't really always take care of the customer, you really can't, because some customers make it to where you can't. They make it to where you can't. I think that was the hardest thing that, you know, you try to do for a customer and then there just comes a point where you have to basically say, "I'm sorry. I can't help you." You know? And that's hard for me, because I always feel like we should go and go and go. But the world is not that kind of place anymore. So I think that was the hardest thing.

There's really nothing hard about being a waitress. You know, if you belong in a family or you have children or you're in a relationship, if you deal with somebody that you love and care about, that's being a waitress. It's all wrapped up in one. I tried to think about what could you say about what is a waitress, and everything that I said about being a waitress was the same thing about a mother or about being a sister or about being a daughter. It's actually caring about the people that you're in front of. You know, it's like wanting them to be happy. You want to get to know them. You know, I want to make sure that their day's just happy because they came here. There really wasn't a hard thing about being a waitress. You just had to be nice, you had to be good, you had to care. You care, it just all falls into part.

I know there's a lot of restaurants where it is, like, very demanding, and if there's somebody over your shoulder, you know, and I have been very fortunate not to work in that kind of place. I've been very fortunate that I've had the ability to be able to be a

server and take care of my customers and use my judgment, and I've been allowed to do that. So I think that maybe that makes the difference, because I hear of other waitresses who are going, "Oh, he just berates me," or, "They just treat us terrible," and duh, duh, duh. I didn't get that. [Laughter] I didn't get that road. So it was just a little different. So it really wasn't—I can't say that there's a hard thing about being a waitress.

[0:16:08.0]

**Michelle Little:** How do you do it when you're maybe not having a great day?

[0:16:13.2]

**Lori DeVine:** That's part of being a mother, you know what? Because it doesn't matter. It does not matter. There are customers that, like I said, the breakfast customers that I had, they were family. They could tell if something was off or something wasn't right or something wasn't as cheery, and they might ask. But when you service people, that's not what they're looking for. You know, they're not looking for something—I don't feel like—how do I say it? You know, when my dad passed, that was the hardest thing about it. I went into work that day at that restaurant, and he had already gone there, and he had passed the day before. I mean, we'd already had that. And I went back in there, and I didn't really want anybody to ask me about it. But I wanted to be there because I was around people that I knew cared.

So you just have to put on that front. You just have to do it. You just have to go in there. And, you know, they don't come to—nobody—I don't go anywhere where I want somebody to go, "Oh, I'm having such a bad day," because that's just not who you get to

be. You don't get to be that. You got to be Superwoman all the time. You have to learn how to put that persona on. It's—I don't know. You just can't show it. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. You have to learn. You have to learn that that's not the time or the place. Maybe that's it. There's a time and a place, but that's not the time or the place. Your customers—I don't know. If you care about your customers, you're not going to do it to them anyway. You're going to show them the best of everything. You're going to want the best for them.

[0:18:07.3]

**Michelle Little:** How have you seen, or have you seen, any change in customers in the last years?

[0:18:15.2]

**Lori DeVine:** Yes, yes.

[0:18:18.1]

**Michelle Little:** What have you noticed?

[0:18:24.5]

**Lori DeVine:** There's some that before I go to the table, I honestly have to pray. They're very angry. The *world* is angry. The world is angry, and they come in here angry, and, you know, it's no matter how hard you try, there's some that they're just angry, and there's nothing you can do about it but try. You try. That's all you can do is try. But

that's the world. The world's out to get something that's not—you know. They want to, you say, "dine and dash," or they want something for nothing, or they want to eat it all and they want to say it's not any good, you know. They want to post stuff on Facebook or Yelp or whatever that hurts your business, and it's not true, and there's actually nothing in the world you can do about it.

It's very sad how hurtful people have become. I guess that's it, how hurtful. And the people coming into—you know, I want to say it's just the customers. It's not the customers. The people that come for jobs are the same way. There's no work ethic, there's no compassion, there's no understanding, there's no patience. There's—I don't know. It's a very vicious—being in customer service now is like a 180-degree turn.

[0:19:45.1]

**Michelle Little:** When do you think you started to see a shift, or, I mean, has it been just so gradual?

[0:19:52.0]

**Lori DeVine:** When I worked at Courtney's, everybody was basically family, very—you know, there wasn't any of this. We had a couple that would come in that would—you know, they would try to push the button or make a remark or be—you know. But really never. I can think of maybe in all those years, we had to call the police on one person, and that's because they were actually mentally unstable.

Then when I went to work at Da Vinci's, it was like an area of people that had grown up and knew each other, so there was no—but when I came back downtown after

being gone for two years, yeah, it was a big change, real huge change. It was not—I mean, people were angry. I mean, employees were yelling back and forth, which I would never. I mean, they were kids, but it was just really crazy.

[0:20:49.6]

**Michelle Little:** So Courtney's had a pretty tight-knit group of customers.

[0:20:54.5]

**Lori DeVine:** And employees.

[0:20:56.3]

**Michelle Little:** And employees, yeah.

[0:20:57.0]

**Lori DeVine:** Every employee that had been there had—the youngest one that had been there had already been there five years.

[0:21:01.4]

**Michelle Little:** Wow.

[0:21:02.1]

**Lori DeVine:** The rest of them were anywhere from ten to twenty-five years.

[0:21:04.4]

**Michelle Little:** Wow. And then you were at Da Vinci's—

[0:21:06.9]

**Lori DeVine:** For two years.

[0:21:08.3]

**Michelle Little:** And that was about a decade ago?

[0:21:10.2]

**Lori DeVine:** That was ten years ago.

[0:21:11.9]

**Michelle Little:** And Da Vinci's is in Homewood?

[0:21:16.1]

**Lori DeVine:** Homewood, yes, yes. And, actually, when Courtney's closed, I didn't know how to do anything else. I didn't know how to go anywhere else and work, and I had just been working part-time at night. So I asked them, I said, "I need something now full-time," because I had just recently been divorced. So I was really out there going, "Okay, this is not good."

So, anyway, he gave me a job and, I mean, I learned how to bartend. I learned what pizza was. I learned what pesto was. I had not a clue. I mean, you know, they were

really—like I said, once again, I was very lucky to be surrounded by people that cared about people. I have never worked for somebody that didn't care about you as a person or made sure that you were okay. I mean, that's been really good.

But then when I got offered the job down here, I mean, they asked me to come down here, and I didn't want to, I didn't want to. But when Courtney's closed, I wasn't able to say goodbye to a lot of people. A lot of my customers, I'd had no way to get in touch with them. He closed the door on—we were open Saturday, and he closed the door.

[0:22:22.7]

**Michelle Little:** And y'all didn't know?

[0:22:24.1]

**Lori DeVine:** No, no, no. Horrible, horrible, horrible, horrible. It was like a hundred times a death, really a hundred times a death. There were so many people that I had no way to even get in touch with.

So I came in here and talked to the guy that was here, and I walked in here and I probably met fifteen people from Courtney's, you know, and I thought, "Well, maybe this is where I want to come back. Maybe I do. Maybe I do want to end my cycle," you know, back where I came from, basically. And it's been good. I've been able to connect with a lot of people. It's a little different here. It's not Courtney's. The workforce is just different. It's hard to find—I mean, we've got a crew now that's half of our crew is good and the—I mean stable. I don't mean good or bad; I mean stable. And the other half is not yet. But we're getting there. We're getting there.

[0:23:23.4]

**Michelle Little:** So Courtney's, did it have a cafeteria line like this, or was it come out to the table?

[0:23:30.0]

**Lori DeVine:** We took a ticket. We came to the table, took your order, and then turned it in, and then carried it back to the table. So it was more full service.

[0:23:38.4]

**Michelle Little:** But it was a meat and three type, so y'all would have—

[0:23:42.5]

**Lori DeVine:** It was meat and three. Yes, it was breakfast, lunch, right.

[0:23:45.0]

**Michelle Little:** And here at Sweet Tea, is it all everybody goes through?

[0:23:49.0]

**Lori DeVine:** It's all cafeteria style, and it's just lunch and dinner, yeah.

[0:23:53.7]

**Michelle Little:** But you do have some people that come in here that used to come in—

[0:24:00.4]

**Lori DeVine:** Come in Courtney's, and I also have customers that come in here that are now regulars that I've picked up from them coming in here, that I've met here. So, yeah, it's been a lot, a lot. I've seen kids. Actually I've got one customer now that comes in here that was a child when he was eating at Courtney's.

[0:24:20.8]

**Michelle Little:** Oh, my word.

[0:24:22.1]

**Lori DeVine:** And he works downtown, so he comes in. I actually knew him before he was born. [Laughter] I know. Then you really feel old. Then you really feel old.

[0:24:43.9]

**Michelle Little:** I lost my train of thought. I'm so sorry. [Laughter]

[0:24:45.3]

**Lori DeVine:** That's okay.

[0:24:48.6]

**Michelle Little:** [Laughter] So what industry are the people that come in here mostly? I mean, is it people from UAB?

[0:24:54.8]

**Lori DeVine:** Yes, we have UAB people, we have students, we have a lot of middle-class workers, we have a lot of office workers, and we have a lot of patients that come in from different areas of the hospital, whether it be heart, cancer, whatever. After they've gone to their doctor and they've sat there for six hours, they come in here and eat, starving. Starving. So we have a lot of that. We have a lot of that. Had some of that at Courtney's, but not as much because usually, you know, we closed at 2:00. But here, usually from about 1:00 to 5:00 is people that have been at the doctor all day, and they come in and eat, and they're—yeah.

[0:25:41.5]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah, that make sense, because, I mean, they're very close to the hospital.

[0:25:45.9]

**Lori DeVine:** Yes.

[0:25:47.1]

**Michelle Little:** And to have a parking lot this size downtown.

[0:25:49.6]

**Lori DeVine:** We have one of the bigger lots. Us and Fish Market have one of the bigger lots. Well, Ted's is pretty big, too, but their size of their restaurant is small, so they don't have as many seats as we do.

[0:26:02.4]

**Michelle Little:** Right, right. I mean, this is a big—I had no idea how big the inside of this place is. [Laughter] How many seats is this?

[0:26:11.0]

**Lori DeVine:** There's 171 seats.

[0:26:13.8]

**Michelle Little:** Okay. Wow. All right. So at lunch are y'all—I mean—

[0:26:18.1]

**Lori DeVine:** This part doesn't usually fill up. We use this for like if you have a big group or you want to be separated. But the dining room usually fills up, yeah. It fills up, and, yeah, from 11:30 to about 1:30 we stay, sometimes till 3:30. It just really—there's no judging it. There's no judging it. There's no certain day that you're going to just be slammed and one certain day you're not. It's hit and miss every day. It's hit and miss. They've opened up so many restaurants around here right now getting ready for the—my thinking on it, they're getting ready for the—

[0:26:54.2]

**Michelle Little:** Games.

[0:26:55.7]

**Lori DeVine:** —arena and the games to come in. So all these chains have bought little bitty parts of buildings and put a restaurant in it, thinking that they're going to do it. Well, you know, when you don't have any extra income of people to Birmingham but you open up all these businesses, then it's going to take away from everybody. So we're holding our own right now, waiting for time to go, because, you know, it's just like with any other industry, you just level yourself out, you go with the flow, you work with what you got, and you just stay positive that it's going to be okay. While, I mean, other restaurants are closing, but we're holding our own.

[0:27:40.1]

**Michelle Little:** And what is the history of Sweet Tea? When did this open?

[0:27:44.8]

**Lori DeVine:** Sweet Tea was in 2011. Okay, 2011, that August. And I actually got here in—what is this, 2020? So it's been nine years—this'll be ten years. The man that built this, Chris Tomaras, he's Greek. He emigrated from Greece to Birmingham. He started working at Michael's as a dishwasher, met his wife. But Mr. Tomaras invented the gyro, the mechanism that the gyro's on. He invented it, patented it, went to Chicago, manufactured it, and made millions.

His wife that he married here has two children and they're from here. Actually, the builder of this building was Mike Winstead, his stepson. He built this building. This was his gift back to the City of Birmingham for giving to him when he emigrated here. This was his gift back, to provide a restaurant to give jobs to people of Birmingham, to be appreciative of what he became and where he started. But he passed away in October. It's been three years. This year will be four years. And his stepson, Mike Winstead, owns it now. So, still in their family, but that's the background for it.

[0:29:15.6]

**Michelle Little:** So how many staff are here?

[0:29:18.6]

**Lori DeVine:** We have eighteen. We have eighteen on staff and a general manager and the owner, so twenty.

[0:29:25.1]

**Michelle Little:** And what's a typical day like here for you? I know we talked about Courtney's, but—

[0:29:35.8]

**Lori DeVine:** I get here at 8:00 o'clock. When I first came here, one thing I've learned as a server, you want to be able to work whatever you want to work, because that's how you make the money. So over time here, even at Courtney's, I would be what they call a key

manager. In other words, I could open or close and take care of anything that went on in the restaurant. I was responsible. Sometimes Courtney would go out of town, I would open and close. Okay.

I came here and eventually between general managers leaving, not leaving, because it's very hard—I don't know in your profession, but in the restaurant profession it is very hard to find somebody that can pass a drug test, period. Period. So I was just one of the lucky ones. I can pass a hair test. [Laughter] That's one thing I've had on my side, but it worked out to my advantage. Because when they didn't have anybody and they needed somebody, I was able to be a server on salary, I do what they ask of me, and I get to work on the floor as much as I want. So they don't have to pay me for all that I do, but that's how it works. I get a salary, I serve when I want, I do the extra work too.

[0:31:07.2]

**Michelle Little:** But then if you get to work on the floor, then you also get some tips.

[0:31:10.9]

**Lori DeVine:** I get tips, oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I learned a long time ago, the one good thing about being a waitress is is you really are in charge of your money. You can come in and be in a cranky mood and not make anything, or you can come in and be a hustler and do the best you can, and expect—I mean, and do better.

Anyway, and so, see, I was going to go off on another subject.

[0:31:39.1]

**Michelle Little:** Go, go on. Go for it. [Laughter]

[0:31:41.0]

**Lori DeVine:** You know, too many times, waitresses chase the money instead of taking care of the customer. They're more concerned—you know, I've always been very, very blessed that I couldn't tell you today who tipped me and who didn't tip me. I don't have a clue, wouldn't know it unless they handed it to me in my hand, because I go to every table to give them the best service. I do my best to give them the best service. If I get tipped, okay. If I don't, I don't. You know? But I'm going to the next table. Like that other table just tipped me \$100, and it works. It has worked for me. It has worked for me. I can honestly say I've been around waitresses that, you know, "You didn't tip me. Well, I hope your transmission falls out." Two days later, their transmission falls out of their car. [Laughter] I learned that karma's a big part of being a waitress, you know. You don't wish anything on anybody. But, yeah, that's been very key to my success, I feel like, I feel like.

[0:32:56.8]

**Michelle Little:** So do you think tipping changed any when more people started using debit cards and people maybe had less cash on them? Or did you see any shift when—

[0:33:14.8]

**Lori DeVine:** No, not really.

[0:33:17.3]

**Michelle Little:** What about when smoking in restaurants ceased?

[0:33:24.6]

**Lori DeVine:** That was rough. We lost a lot of customers when Courtney—I mean, you know, Courtney had the restaurant ban, and she went—at that time, it was by choice, so she kind of provided half the restaurant smoking, half the restaurant not smoking. Okay. And it was okay, but a lot of the customers felt like you chose one group of customer over another customer, so it caused a problem. So for that short time, it caused a problem. I think that on pretty days, it hurts inside businesses that don't have patios, because the smokers will go to a place that has a patio. I think that it caused a lot of people to make patios, which, you know, that's all fine and good. But I can't really say. I think that the changeover for a little while was rough, but the customers ended up coming back. They're coming back.

[0:34:22.1]

**Michelle Little:** So when they split the restaurant, was it just that the wait staff had to decided which—if they were going to wait on the smokers or the—

[0:34:31.1]

**Lori DeVine:** No, unfortunately, unfortunately, at Courtney's there was four sections and there was four waitresses, and we had our sections. We had our sections, and that was our sections. So mine and Ruth's side was the side that got cut out of smoking. Yeah, we had

nonsmoking on our side and it was smoking on the other side, because it was by the dish room, which was by a door, which that was a little bit more breezy, I guess you could say.

[0:35:01.1]

**Michelle Little:** So you just maybe lost some of your regulars?

[0:35:03.3]

**Lori DeVine:** Yeah. I mean, they would wave from across the [unclear]. [Laughter] But, yeah, it was a little rough there to start with, but I think a lot of the employees, it was hard on a lot of the employees because they stopped being onsite. Like, you know, the waitresses that smoked would be outside while their customers weren't being taken care of. So I feel like it hurt customer service a little bit, maybe a little bit, or it might have hurt their customer service. I mean, on my side it wasn't smoking, so wasn't nothing to do. My customers were good. But, yeah, I think that was about the only thing that I saw that was any different about the nonsmoking thing.

[0:35:46.1]

**Michelle Little:** Is there anything else that sort of shifted the flow of restaurant—you know, other than smoking? Was there anything else over the years that was a big change? Maybe in the way y'all took down orders?

[0:35:59.8]

**Lori DeVine:** Technology-wise, I think it's become more technology-wise, which is good for businesses. It's not so much easier on the employees, because there's a lot of elder employees that don't do computer. They don't do the MICROS. We didn't use MICROS at Courtney's. We had just one of those you put the amount in there and rang it up. Here, I had to learn how to do a POS and I had to learn how to ring a ticket up. You learned how to relearn everything. Now it seems like it's easy, but for people that's coming in, it is hard. It is harder for them. It's harder on the older part of the group that's not been around it.

[0:36:45.1]

**Michelle Little:** What is MICROS?

[0:36:47.0]

**Lori DeVine:** MICROS is like a point of sale. It's your inventory control; it's your ticket control; it's your money control. It basically keeps an audit on everything in a restaurant, so it's much easier from a management point of view. So, I mean, I'm good with it. I can look and see the money flow at any time of the day if I needed to. Keeps people honest, and in restaurant business, that's kind of important. You have to keep people honest, like probably in any business. But in restaurant business, with as much money that comes and goes, honesty is—it's hard to find. And we're very blessed here.

[0:37:35.8]

**Michelle Little:** So you've done some management and some, I mean—

[0:37:41.7]

**Lori DeVine:** Yes.

[0:37:43.8]

**Michelle Little:** And do you do some management here as well?

[0:37:49.3]

**Lori DeVine:** Yes.

[0:37:50.6]

**Michelle Little:** So what—I mean, do you like that part of—

[0:37:54.6]

**Lori DeVine:** No, I don't.

[0:37:55.5]

**Michelle Little:** Okay. [Laughter] What are some of the drawbacks maybe of having to do management tasks?

[0:38:08.3]

**Lori DeVine:** Because being a server and being on the floor and being part of the working part, I get what they're saying, but at the same time, being in the management

part, I totally get what they're saying, because while you deal with employees over here, the management part of it is trying to keep employees in a job. Okay. They see it from one side, and it's this side over here, and you always feel like you're trying to play fix-it person. I mean, I'm trying to make you understand where they're coming from, I'm trying to give you insight into what they're talking about, but they each have their own view, and you're just kind of in the middle.

It's the hardest part for me, the hardest part of being in management, is that this new—the people now, they just—I was taught when you go into a job, you learn to do everything and you *be* the best at everything. These kids that come in here now, and adults, younger adults that come in here now, you don't do anything more than what you have to do. You don't go out—you don't do special. If they ask you to do something, you tell them you want a raise. “Oh, I'm not doing that. That's not my job.” There's not one book in here that says “Job Description,” not one. In other words, when I hire you, it's going to be—I'm going to tell you upfront, I might tell you to wash dishes today and do the parking lot tomorrow and cook the next day. They don't get that. They totally—back to the angry part, and everybody's angry. Everybody's, “I'm not going to do that. No, I'm not doing it. I don't have to come to work today. I'm not going to come to work.”

I've had—never. It's just been mind-blowing, mind-blowing. I called one person up and I said, “Why aren't you here?”

And he goes, “Well, I thought you'd know I wasn't going to be here if I wasn't there.”

“Okay, yeah, I got that part of it right here.”

I had a girl—I’ve had—I mean, I’ve put my faith and trust in people and been totally wrong and *totally* heartbroken. That’s the hardest. That has been the hardest for me, is to totally be betrayed and to believe in somebody so much and think that they’re going to be the person that you want them to be, and then they’re not. That’s hard. That’s really hard.

If I was just a waitress, I wouldn’t care. And that’s the part about being a manager, that you don’t always have the luxury of being able to do—you can’t always care like that. You have to be able to care about the business and understand that, you know, this is business. Yes, it is business. No, I’m sorry you can’t have five plates to take home to your family because you have no money. It’s not our food. This isn’t Walmart. [Laughter] No, you can’t take stuff out the back door. You know? I can’t turn a blind eye to that, no matter what your situation is.

And people actually expect you to do that. They really do. They really do. “Well, you know what kind of position I’m in right now.”

“I’m sorry. That doesn’t give you the right to take stuff out of the restaurant that’s not yours.” It’s hard. That’s the hard part of management, you know, I mean besides—I’m not just—I can say *this* off the record, right? I can say I don’t want this on the record, right?

**[0:42:10.1]**

**Michelle Little:** If you want me to go off the record, we can turn it off. But if we’re recording, it’s on the record. [Laughter]

[0:42:15.4]

**Lori DeVine:** Then I'm going to leave it on. It's just a whole different group of people.

It's a whole group of people.

[0:42:22.1]

**Michelle Little:** So about just making a living doing this, and, I mean, please don't feel that you've got to tell me anything that you don't want to, but, I mean, I know some things that I've heard people talk about whether or not they can get health insurance. I mean, how have you dealt with some of those things?

[0:42:44.3]

**Lori DeVine:** Two-thirteen an hour is a drawback all the way around. You can't get a loan, you can't get a house, you can barely get a car. Anything that has to do with credit is—you can start at eighteen, and you might at seventy have a 700, making 2.13 an hour. They just don't bank on it. Nobody wants to reach out there and give you a chance on that. It's almost impossible. So that's hard.

Healthcare is *ridiculous, ridiculous*, because if I'm off a week, that means I make *no* money. There's no guarantee, there's no guarantee as a waitress that I'm going to have money to pay for health insurance that doesn't even cover everything. I mean, it's incredibly backward. You know, healthcare—being a person right now, being a waitress, it's impossible to get a lot of stuff that most people get every day of the week. I mean, you know, if I needed a payday loan, guess what I get. A hundred dollars. That's going to do what? Feed me for the week? You know, people, they can't—while they say servers

make such big money, they don't realize that we tip everybody out. Our money, it's not what everybody thinks it is. I work on the floor ten hours a day. I mean, in order for me to make \$10 an hour, I have to make \$100 guaranteed every day. There's no guarantee that that happens. So, no, you can't—being a waitress is the one thing you cannot budget. You can't say, "Okay, yeah, I can depend on this much this week." You can't. You don't know. You don't know if you get sick. If you get sick, there's no sick days.

[0:44:42.7]

**Michelle Little:** So how have you found ways to make—I mean, you've made it this far.

[Laughter]

[0:44:47.6]

**Lori DeVine:** Yeah. I made it to this age, yes.

[0:44:49.9]

**Michelle Little:** How have you made it work?

[0:44:51.6]

**Lori DeVine:** Truthfully, I have no money. This is going to be so funny. People are going to laugh. You're going to read it. On Sunday, I put all my money in my drawer through the week, and I don't touch it. I leave myself \$20, and that's what I live on. Then at the end of the week, I deposit every bit of it. Then I've been able to put money up. I mean, you know, there's been highs and there's been lows. And I go on vacation. I do do

for my kids. I actually take care of one of my children still. It's been rough. I mean, you know, I can't say—I mean, I'm a paycheck away from being in trouble, just like anybody else. But it has been a good job.

See, that's the one thing I can say about being a waitress. I've been just so blessed by customers. I mean, you know, every Christmas everybody struggles and, "I don't know if I'm going to make it." My customers, they just all the time come through. It's like I'll get a gift certificate for \$100, or I get this. I mean, you know, it's what you put into your people. There's waitresses here that [unclear]. There's one here. She goes, "Hi, my name's Sandra. I'll be your server today." Then she goes off, gets your drink, comes back and, "Can I get you anything else? Bye." That's not—I don't even know what—that's just no more than a drive-thru to me.

But then you've got me and Melissa. It's just how we were taught. "Hey, how you doin'?" "How was your week?" "How was your week" means somebody's going to answer you. They're going to say, "Oh, it's good." "It's bad."

"How are you?"

"Fine."

"How's your week?"

"Oh, well, you know, it's going all right," da, da, da, da. It's just a whole different way.

Did I get off the question? I think I did.

[0:46:51.0]

**Michelle Little:** No, no.

[0:46:52.2]

**Lori DeVine:** What was the question? [Laughter]

[0:46:53.5]

**Michelle Little:** You were just talking about how you've made ends meet over the years.

[0:46:57.1]

**Lori DeVine:** It has been—yeah. Being a waitress has worked for me. The only part about being a waitress that hasn't worked for me is that I have no—when I retire, no 401(k), no retirement. All I have is what little bit I've saved. That's it. And waitresses put their bodies through incredible stress, strain, every day, every day. There's just so much that goes wrong on people that are on their feet, constantly moving, constantly bending, constantly doing, constantly being called, constantly—I mean, it's like—it's incredible. It's truly incredible.

[0:47:44.8]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah, that was the next thing I was going to ask, just the physical, the physicality of this over the—I mean, the total number of years you've been doing this.

[0:47:53.2]

**Lori DeVine:** Today I probably put—this has been the most ridiculous—this has been the most unbelievable thing I've ever thought. The very first time I wore one of these—

[0:48:08.3]

**Michelle Little:** Oh, yeah, the Fitbit.

[0:48:08.9]

**Lori DeVine:** —I got 10,000 steps today.

[0:48:10.4]

**Michelle Little:** Ten thousand steps today.

[0:48:11.5]

**Lori DeVine:** So far, 10,000.

[0:48:14.9]

**Michelle Little:** [Laughter] And it's just 3:00 o'clock.

[0:48:17.8]

**Lori DeVine:** I mean, my little Fitbit says, "Hoo, you're good. Hoo, you're good. Hoo, you're good." Yeah. On a day where I'm here till 8:00 o'clock, it can be 19,000 steps. Yeah.

[0:48:31.3]

**Michelle Little:** Man!

[0:48:33.1]

**Lori DeVine:** But I'm not physically 100 percent, you know. I'm not. And I have nothing to fall back on, and that's probably the scariest thing in the world. I don't want to be one of those mothers that's living in my son's backyard. [Laughter] I probably will be. But there's no retirement. There's no retirement. If you do work in a corporate situation, I mean, then, yeah, there is 401(k) and there is this, but, gosh, such a tradeoff. It's such a tradeoff because corporate, I mean, it's just so—for 2.13 an hour, they want you to do a ten-dollar-an-hour job.

I feel like a lot of waitresses nowadays are being overabused in some of the positions that I hear, some of the things that I hear. Yeah. I mean, like, you've got your waitress cleaning the bathrooms? Really? Really? That's part of their side work? Really? I mean, I guess maybe I'm old-school, but I don't feel like a lady should have to clean the public bathroom unless she's housekeeping and that's what she wants to do. Your waitresses is the front of your business. It's the make or break. I mean, yes, the food does come right, but you know what? A waitress can take a bad situation and they turn it totally 100 percent around. They can make somebody want to come back to your restaurant. Yes, your food does have to be good. I bank that. But your building could be rundown and dilapidated, and if your waitress is on her job and doing her thing, they're going to come back to your building. Courtney's didn't change something for the whole time I was there. They never even painted it. Twenty years it looked the same inside and out. *Nobody* noticed it. Nobody said anything. Nobody. It's just that the inside, the group that was in there made the difference.

It's just—I don't know. I just feel like the waitresses nowadays, from what I hear, thank God I haven't had to do it, but from what I hear and what I understand, it's rough. It's rough. They're doing a lot for their 2.13 an hour.

[0:50:57.5]

**Michelle Little:** What do you tell new waitresses now? I mean, what's your advice to them?

[0:51:04.0]

**Lori DeVine:** The new waitresses that we have here, there's four of us, but there's three of us that work every day of the week, and that's me and Melissa and Jodi. Jodi's new. Jodi started working with me a long time ago as the cashier, and she's left and come back and left and come back, just done different things. She's young, you know. She wanted to try doing different things. So she came back as a waitress, and I think that she's always had a good personality so, you know, that's not something you have to teach them. But I do have to explain to her that it isn't about the money. The money will come if you do your part. You don't want to be one of those waitresses that says, "Oh, she's got twelve tables and I've got five." You know, you take your five tables, and you make your five tables the best. You know, you can't look at what somebody else has once—it just takes just misses. It's just horrible.

And that is a big problem with the waitresses. The waitresses go into a situation, a new situation where older waitresses have been there, and they think the older waitresses are being mean. No, they're not being mean. You just have to make your own. You learn

to make your own customers. You make your regulars. But standing there watching everybody else is not going to make your own regulars. You got to get out there and you got to talk to them. You got to find out how they are. You got to read their expressions. You got to see that they're having a bad day. Ask, you know. You got to overhear a conversation, it's their birthday. "Oh, it's your birthday," you know. You have to be everything to everybody, truthfully, and that's how you make your money. It's not about the dollar, because they don't have to tip you. They don't have to. That's one thing waitresses don't understand. You do not *have* to be tipped. So I tell them, I said, "If you want your money to be what you want it to be, then you start taking care of your customers and don't worry about the money part of it, and it comes." So that's my only advice to new ones.

[0:53:13.0]

**Michelle Little:** And to get comfortable shoes? What's the shoe secret?

[0:53:21.3]

**Lori DeVine:** You know, I'm going to tell you. Alegria is the shoe secret. I worked at Courtney's, I worked in tennis shoes that I had to buy about every three months, and I would go through tennis shoes every three months. And it didn't matter if you paid \$100 for them or whatever, you bought good shoes, tennis shoes do not last. Somebody, once I got here, one of the other girls that used to work at Courtney's was working here, and she had bought a pair of the Alegrias because she had developed a problem with her foot

every time when—it would hurt her. So, anyway, he told her to get those. She got them and she loved them. She said, “You need to get a pair.”

So I went and got a pair, and I haven’t worn anything since, not to work in. They are worth every bit of it, and, yes, you do—I do not [demonstrates]—I do not have a bad back; I do not have bad hips; I do not have bad knees; I do not have bad legs. I can actually handle a twelve-hour day and not have to sit down. So saying all that, I truly believe these shoes are like 100 percent of that. [Laughter] Because I don’t eat good, I don’t sleep good, and so it can’t be because of that.

[0:54:38.1]

**Michelle Little:** Do you get to take—I mean, like do you just have a few minutes to eat lunch during the days or not?

[0:54:45.8]

**Lori DeVine:** I have never learned to eat sitting down. I don’t do it, didn’t do it at home. I don’t.

[0:54:54.2]

**Michelle Little:** Wow!

[0:54:53.4]

**Lori DeVine:** If I sit down to eat, it’s for a second. I don’t eat hot food. I nibble. I made a salad yesterday, I got it all fixed up, got the cheese, the dressing, got everything, and had

seven people in line, and it sat there for another hour. I came over here and ate three bites of it, and that was it. And that's what I ate yesterday until I got home and ate some crackers. [Laughter] I mean, you just—I've been around food for so long and it's just—I don't know how people work in it all their lives and eat. I really don't.

[0:55:29.5]

**Michelle Little:** So even when you get home at night, you eat—

[0:55:35.5]

**Lori DeVine:** I'll eat like a tomato sandwich or bag of potato chips. [Laughter] Like last night, I ate Ritz Crackers because I just didn't want anything. You've been around it. You *definitely* don't want to cook it. I'm not going to cook anything after being around it all day. I'm not.

[0:55:51.1]

**Michelle Little:** Do you go out to eat?

[0:55:55.9]

**Lori DeVine:** I've just started recently going out to eat because my kids have gotten more active. My sons, they'll come to Birmingham and want to go out to eat, so I have started going out to different places. But usually, no, I don't. Like, if I can't go through a drive-thru and pick it up and take it to the house, then I don't. I'm never there at the house, so I always want to *get* to the house. I always want to get home. Always that's my

thing. When I get here, oh, okay, I'm ready to go home. But, no, I don't. I've just started eating out recently. I mean, a big thing we'd go to—I think some of the restaurants I've been to, I've been to Buffalo Wild Wings. I've been to Superior Grill. There's a little Mexican restaurant, Maya's, I've been to. Besides, I mean, I've, like, one time been to Red Lobster. But that's about it.

[0:56:52.0]

**Michelle Little:** And when you go to these places now, are you able to relax or are you thinking about the staff there and kind of the inner work—or are you kind of thinking, watching the tables there?

[0:57:04.2]

**Lori DeVine:** I do watch. I do watch. I really do. I really watch, and, I mean, I see—like this Buffalo Wild Wings, the very first time I went in there, I thought, “I'm not ever going back.” The waitress really didn't say anything. I mean, she was expressionless. I mean, I'm not saying you have to come to the table and be, you know, Mary Poppins, but, you know, “Well, what do you think about the—?”

My grandson, who is old enough to drink, ordered a beer, and so his beer was empty, and he goes, “Well, I keep thinking she's going to come back.” She didn't come back, she didn't come back, she didn't come back. So I kind of said—well, she walked by, I said, “Ma'am,” I said, “he would like another beer.”

She didn't say, “Oh, I'm so sorry,” or, “Oh, okay.” She goes [demonstrates] and turned around and walked off and got it, did not open her mouth.

So I'm like looking at my son, my grandson, going, "Did you say something to her? Did you get her mad before I got here? I mean, you know, should we leave?"

[Laughter]

He goes, "No, that's how she was the minute she came to our table. She hasn't spoke to us at all."

So, anyway, did I tip her? Yes. Because I'm one thing above all, one thing above all I have taught my family and I truly believe in, is I'm going to tip you. I'm going to tip you simply because I know you make 2.13 an hour.

But then we went in the other day and, I mean, the server in there was like 100 percent everything. I asked for it, there. There. Saw it, there. Saw it, there. I had two of my grandchildren, right on top of it, napkins, straws, this, that, and the other. So then when we got ready to leave, I paid for it and my daughter-in-law gave the tip, and so he put mine on the card, and so she tipped him \$20.

He goes, "Oh, you want this twenty on there?"

And we said, "No, that's yours." You actually would have thought we gave him \$100. He was really that overwhelmed by a twenty-dollar bill. And I thought, "You earned every bit of that. Every single bit of that you earned, in my opinion."

So I guess I do critique. Do I look at people's restaurant and go, "Ew"? Do I critique their food? No. If I don't like it, do I ask them to fix it? Yes. If they do, great. No, I'm not that kind. I guess there's just too much understanding there. There's too much understanding of what goes on behind the lines that not every day's going to be perfect. Things are going to happen. We understand it. Fine, just fix it, and we're good,

instead of, “Oh, this is horrible.” No, horrible is the little child that got shot last night, you know. This is food. Really? This is food. So, anyway.

[0:59:57.3]

**Michelle Little:** Well, is there anything that I haven’t asked you that you want to talk about, or is there anything that you just wish people knew about what you do?

[1:00:07.6]

**Lori DeVine:** I think that I wish people knew that every waitress, everybody’s—how am I saying this? Everybody is a human being, you know. When you sit down at a table, don’t look down at this is somebody that’s beneath you. That’s kind of old-fashioned, but it’s not. But they still—like, customers are very rude, extremely rude. If you’re sitting at a table with four men and you walk up to a table and say, “Hi, what can I get you to drink?” and they do not break conversation to answer you, I think that’s extremely rude, but it happens all the time.

I think that customers need to realize, you know, they do, they need to realize that a server is trying to do their job. They’ve got other tables to wait on. They’re not the only table. They’re not the only person in the building. We want you to feel like you’re the only person in the building, but you have to understand there’s other people that we have to wait on, too, and that we do do our best and we’re not perfect. We are going to forget something for you on accident, you know. It’s going to happen. It’s going to happen. We don’t want it to happen. We’re going to fix it, you know. Be understanding.

It's like I feel like there's—I always tell them, I said, “If people put more PUT in their life, it's patience, understanding, and tolerance.” If they learned that, the world could be so much simpler, so much simpler. I'm going to understand that you're saying your prayer and I'm not going to interrupt you. I'm going to be patient to wait on you. I'm going to be tolerant of the fact that I think you should have waited till I got your drinks to say your prayer. [Laughter] And I'm going to be nice enough not to say anything, you know.

But, I mean, you know what I'm saying? So I think people are very critical of people nowadays, and they're not—like I said, there's just no understanding or patience, tolerance. I mean, you know, it's all about me, it's all about me, while a waitress has to be all about everybody.

I wouldn't trade it. I think sometimes I wished I could have been something else. I'm probably not going to feel this way when I have to retire and I don't have any money put up, but there's just been too much good, too much good being a waitress, being a server. I have been able to learn things about life. I've been able to have people show compassion. I've been able to show compassion. I've been able to see the good in people, see the good, see good things. I've seen miracles. Honest to God, I can tell you I have seen living, walking miracles that I would have never seen if I was in some office or I would have never seen if I had taken another position. I don't know. There's just been so much out there.

I saw a couple come in here, they came in one night—and I can't hardly tell this story without crying—but you could tell there was something on their mind. They just looked beat down. They got in a booth and they got their food, and they were just sitting

there. And I went to the table and I waited on them, and I asked them how they were, and I could tell they were horrible. It was just they were awful. And I'm like going, "Are y'all just having a bad night?" I said, "Here, let me get you some dessert or something."

Their daughter had just been born, and she was born with her lungs had not inflated, and they told her that they were going to be on a vent for the rest of her life if she lived. Now, this couple came in at least two to three nights a week for the next six months. Six months they were at Children's Hospital. Six months turned into two years, two years at different parts, to where they were told that she was never going to be of quality of life, never going to be off the vent, never, never, never.

A year ago, she walked in the restaurant without her little vent. She's behind, she's small, but she looked up at me, and when I said, "Hi, Emma Kate," she said, "Hi, Miss Lori."

[1:04:51.5]

**Michelle Little:** Oh, my gosh.

[1:04:53.5]

**Lori DeVine:** *That* is worth millions. It's worth millions. Nobody can *ever* give me that. I would have *never* been in any other job and them give me that, that she can come in here, and she was going to die and not going to live, and she walked up, "Hi, Miss Lori." So, yeah, I wouldn't trade that for the world.

I wouldn't trade the fact that my kids have grown up working just as hard as I do, and they have the kindness and the understanding, and they go out into a restaurant and

they know how to be respectful and treat a customer good. Or the people that come in here, I've had people come in here that were going to have liver transplants and they got it and they quit coming in, and then they came in just to tell me they weren't coming in anymore. I mean, it's incredible. It's incredible. So that's a miracle.

I had a lady come in that Parkinson disease that 100 percent was cured. Nobody knows why. These are just some of the few things. I've seen children grow up to be wonderful human beings. I've buried customers, I've married, been to weddings for customers, I mean, I've been at hospitals with births for customers. I just don't see any kind of life that would have given me that. So, yeah.

[1:06:23.2]

**Michelle Little:** Well, thank you for sharing all this.

[1:06:25.5]

**Lori DeVine:** You're very welcome. I wasn't going to—I mean, that's really one of the few very beautiful things, but every time she comes in here, I just think, "That's a miracle, and I got to witness it. I got to witness it."

[1:06:42.2]

**Michelle Little:** Well, thank you.

[End of interview]