Natasha Gaskill
Pastry Chef
Savannah, Georgia
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Interviewer: Kelly Spivey
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Kelly Spivey: This is Kelly Spivey. It's Tuesday, December 8th, 2020. I'm in Memphis, Tennessee, and I'm interviewing Natasha Gaskill in Savannah, Georgia.

How are you?

[00:00:17]

Natasha Gaskill: I'm hanging in there, trying my hardest. [Laughter]

[00:00:25]

Kelly Spivey: Can you tell me your full name and the date you were born and where you were born?

[00:00:30]

Natasha Gaskill: Sure. It's Natasha Kester Gaskill, and I was born in San Diego, California, January 11th, 1977.

[00:00:51]

Kelly Spivey: And when did you move to Savannah?

[00:00:54]

Natasha Gaskill: Moved to Savannah in 2001.

[00:01:02]

Kelly Spivey: And are you married?

[00:01:03]

Natasha Gaskill: I am. I am married to Nathan Gaskill.

[00:01:09]

Kelly Spivey: And do you have any kids?

[00:01:10]

Natasha Gaskill: We have two boys. We have Aidan, who is nineteen, and Morgan, who's seventeen.

[00:01:19]

Kelly Spivey: So I want to start a little bit by just talking about cooking and baking when you were growing up. Do you remember if your mom or grandma or any other—anyone, really, in your family did a lot of baking?

[00:00:00]

Natasha Gaskill: My dad. My mom was raised in India and London, and she was an only child of this kind of fabulous woman, and they didn't cook. Like neither one of them cooked, and she grew up incredibly privileged. Her grandfather was in the British Army, and they were stationed in Calcutta. So my dad did the majority of the cooking, and it was kind of, you know, I was born in [19]77, it was on the back side of like, everybody had sourdough starters, you know, it was this like end of the energy crisis, and, you

know, he fancied himself a little bit of a homesteader. So where we lived, we had land and we had, you know, geese and chickens and he always had a garden. He was always messing around with bread, you know. Like when he was in the military, he was always cooking for everybody. And as he took different jobs over the years, he always worked kind of shift work and refinery work, and he always just fancied himself the, you know, resident chef.

[00:02:58]

Kelly Spivey: And what was his name?

[00:02:59]

Natasha Gaskill: Herbert Kester.

[00:03:03]

Kelly Spivey: And what was your mom's name?

[00:03:05]

Natasha Gaskill: Hyacinth Kripspaine. [Laughter] She's very fancy. [Laughter]

[00:03:17]

Kelly Spivey: Did you do any cooking with your dad, or baking?

[00:03:22]

Natasha Gaskill: I mean, I did do a lot of baking with him. I was one of five kids, and so I think—you know, my older brother is a chef in Seattle, and I just think we did a lot of fending for ourselves, you know, because he was three of five, I was four of five, my mom didn't really like cooking, so you kind of figured out how to feed yourself, you know, like there's a lot of fancying-up Top Ramen. [Laughter] Where Mark and I would grab a bunch—you know, like a bunch of celery and carrots and weird lunchmeat and all of this stuff, and make food for yourself all the time, or it was the opposite, because we grew up so rurally, like the part of Washington that we grew up in, lived the majority of my childhood in Whatcom County, which is north of Seattle in Bellingham, Washington. Ferndale, Washington, is really the town.

[Interruption. Dog barking]

[00:04:48]

Natasha Gaskill: So it was just like we would do—so the house that I grew up on was in the middle of the woods. My grandmother lived—my mama's mom, she lived in front of us. She lived on a five-acre parcel in front of us, and then we lived in this back five acres that you had to drive down this like quarter-of-a-mile driveway, primarily wooded on both sides, and the house was in the woods. So it would be either you were making yourself—like food for yourself inside or I literally would take a packet of dried oatmeal and put it in my back pocket and not come back, you know, till dinnertime [Laughter], and just tried to make myself scarce for the day and just be out in the woods.

So my food parts—I feel like all of my food started—like my preferences started from this really, like, practicality sense, you know, and then I think with my mom being raised in India and my dad - my dad was in the military and traveled the world - and maybe also just the era of them, it's like we just were exposed to all sorts of different types of food, you know. We had dal and rice multiple times in a week because it's cheap and my mom, you know- it's comfort food for her, the same way people would make mac and cheese down here. But I didn't do a lot of cooking at home, you know. I feel like I didn't really start baking until- really till I left the house and was on my own.

[00:06:29]

Kelly Spivey: And when did you leave?

[00:06:33]

Natasha Gaskill: Left when I was eighteen, went to school. I went to- we moved down to Seattle, which would be like the big city, from Bellingham, so Nathan and I- Nathan and I have been together since high school, like we've known each other, we've been together since our sophomore year in high school, and so we moved to Seattle together, went to school. He was trying to- he was just kind of starting doing EMT stuff, you know, and I was going to a junior college there, and then- and it felt like we lived there for so long and we really didn't. I think we only lived there like two years, but it feels like we lived there a whole lifetime, but we were there for two years. And then Nathan wanted to go back up to Whatcom County because he had an opportunity to get some experience as a firefighter up there, and so I was like, "I'll just transfer back to Western

Washington University," which is where I ended up going to school. So then we moved back up there and we were there for like, you know, two years, basically, before we moved to—

[00:07:41]

Kelly Spivey: And what'd you go to school for?

[00:07:43]

Natasha Gaskill: Women's Studies and Poli Sci, with this intention of going to law school, and then had this realization that I was going to be stuck in an office. [Laughter] My job was going to be tied to a desk, and while, you know, I was so naïve and so attracted to the idea of, being part of some kind of social movement and social change, that I weirdly thought I was just going to always be in some protest, and largely didn't understand, you know, the work really happens from your desk. And at twenty—I guess I was twenty-one at the time, I just—it didn't seem like a path that I wanted to continue on, or at least for that type of career.

[00:08:37]

Kelly Spivey: So you wanted to be more like physically involved in things.

[00:08:41]

Natasha Gaskill: I think so. I think I like got really, you know, like when you're in school and- you understand this because you're doing this right now, too, but how you

get really wrapped up in the ideals of something and the idea of what the job is versus the actual job, and so, you know, and I think all of us that have grown up, you know, largely privileged and white, you don't think about- you just think everything's going to work out exactly how you want it [Laughter] because there hasn't really been a lot of obstacles to tell you you couldn't do something that way. So I think I was a little spoiled, you know, I was a bit of a spoiled shit about it and thought I was going to have this fabulous sort of, you know, Gloria Steinem story, weird- you know, and then it was like I realized that I didn't want to do that - I didn't think I could do that type of job. And then Nathan was thinking about trying to test out of state. He was trying to become a firefighter, and on the West Coast it's nuts. It was nuts at the time. You would test, and it wasn't even for physical jobs; it was for spots on a list. And so he tested in King County. The last time he tested in King County, it was- I think it was something like seven or eight spots on the hiring list, and it was something like 4,000 people showed up for the written test. So it was so hard to do it, so he was like, "What do you think about testing out of state?" And I was like, "As long as we're coastal, I think I can do it, you know. I'd be happy to like—." We didn't have kids, and it was, it sounded like a fun adventure, new experiences, and I was like, "Yeah, let's go for it." And Savannah was the first place he tested, and so we came down here and it was Christmastime, it was December, so all the squares were decorated, so beautiful. We were leaving Seattle, which was probably at the time like, you know, just cold enough- or Bellingham, actually, but same thing - just cold enough not to be snowing. You know what I mean? It's 39 degrees and raining every day. The last month that we lived- because we made the decision to move in a February, but the last month we lived in Washington, for Whatcom County that January, there was like

nine hours of sunlight for the whole month. [Laughter] And it just always was this really low cloud coverage. It just felt oppressive and you just were constantly cold and just never seeing sunlight, and it was a little miserable. So when the opportunity arose to move, we were very charmed by Savannah. So then we took the job and we had to get down here. I think we had like thirteen days to get down here, and so we took the job, and then we found out the next day that I was pregnant with Aidan, and then we were like, "Okay." And at that point, we'd been together since we were sixteen years old, right? So it was like, "Are we going to like go down to Savannah and then plan a wedding and bring everybody down here and—?" Because I think if we had stayed in Washington, we wouldn't have gotten married, you know. At the time, I think we could've had jobs that would have supported domestic partners and stuff like that, but I was so terrified about what the political scene was going to be down here, like was I going to be covered under insurance if we were not married, you know, and so how would we have this baby, and then what was that going to feel like for me to be an unmarried mother in the South? You know, I had all of the stereotypes in my head of what it was going to be like down here, you know, and I was scared. We were going to be together anyways, so then it was like, "All right. Well, let's just get married here." So we threw a wedding together in like three days. [Laughter] And then Nathan came down to- I closed our apartment up, and Nathan came down here to Savannah to try to find an apartment, which was so different in 2000 than what it is today, you know. You had all this stuff—we'd look online, right, for places, and you wouldn't understand why this one apartment was $300 and it's—so this one's on Price [Street] and it's $300, but this other one on Price [Street] is like $1,100, you know, or whatever it was. It was so wild. So he ended up coming down. He just had

to come down and physically lay eyes on it, and it felt a little like, you know, this frickin' nativity story [Laughter] of him being down, trying to find a goddamn apartment with his pregnant, you know, just-wife, and we couldn't find shit. We literally couldn't find anything. And then we found this place downtown, because we didn't know any neighborhoods. All we knew was the downtown historic district, and we found this house that's on Chippewa Square behind McDonough's. [Laughter] And she used to own La—what the hell? What was that place called? Il Pasticcio. Her name was Floriana, she's fucking fabulous, so amazing. Her and Pino [Venetico] had just been divorced. She had this whole gigantic house that was like the whole block, and so she and her two kids lived on the top floor, Nathan and I rented the middle floor, and then it was, I don't know, just an apartment that you could just come in - Nathan's parents used to rent it all the time - that was furnished. And then the bottom floor was like a weird kitchen store. So we lived there and it was great, and we had all this money because we used to go up to Alaska to work during the summers, and so Nathan just told her, "Listen, we'll pay for like rent in cash for the next six months right now," because everything downtown was like $1,000 twenty years ago. So it was like, "If we give you all this money right now, will you drop it to $600? And here's all the cash for it." So she did that, and it was great. It was a great experience of moving to Savannah and living right on Chippewa Square. We didn't know about St. Patrick's Day. [Laughter] We moved here March 1st, and the parade goes all around that square, and we were sleeping with the windows open because that's what we were accustomed to, you know, in Washington, and at 5:00 o'clock, 4:30, 5:00 o'clock, I just heard all this noise, and I was like, "I think there's a bunch of people in the square." [Laughter] And Nathan went outside, looked, and he's like, "There's *so* many people in

the square. There's people everywhere." And I was like, "What is going on?" And Nathan literally went down to the square and asked somebody. [Laughter] Like, "What's happening?" [Laughter] They looked at him like he was crazy, and they were like, "No, it's St. Patrick's Day." And Nathan's—he came back up and he was like, "I guess they have a parade." He's like, "They're all setting up for the parade." And I was like, "What?" [Laughter] "They do what here?" He's like, "Yeah, they have a St. Patrick's Day parade here," not realizing it was everything, you know.

[00:16:19]

Kelly Spivey: Was that 4:00 in the morning?

[00:16:20]

Natasha Gaskill: Yeah. [Laughter]

[00:16:23]

Kelly Spivey: That's what I assumed, just from my own experience of— [Laughter]

[00:16:27]

Natasha Gaskill: Where we just were shocked of like, "What the hell." And then we were shocked at 4:00 a.m. Then when the parade actually started, we were like, "What in the world?" And then when the parade's over and you just see the level of inebriation amongst a whole sea of people all different ages, it was quite an education. I feel like the

first year of it, I just was like, "I cannot. I cannot." [Laughter] And not even being prudish, but just being like, "This is *wild*, wild that this is like this."

[00:17:01]

Kelly Spivey: I was going to ask if you had a culture shock coming from Washington to Georgia. [Laughter]

[00:17:06]

Natasha Gaskill: That would be it. I feel like that was one of the first ones, and then I feel like politically it was so different, you know. Like Whatcom County, I mean, Nader was a real running option, you know. People where I grew up, like the Green Party was a thriving party, and I moved down here and it was during George Bush—you know, George Bush was president, and people would—you'd be in conversations with people, and it was also kind of weird, too, because the only—it was the first time in my life that I hadn't worked or been in school, and then I was also pregnant, so it was like you didn't have the social lubricant of going out to bars and meeting people, so my only access to people was through the fire department, which was great. I met lots of really wonderful people, but it also is very different. It's quasi-military, you know, it's pretty fraternal, and couldn't be further from the group of people I would have been exposed to in Washington, given what my discipline was there, you know. It was like, I didn't hang out with any men. [Laughter] I hung out with my brother and Nathan, and, you know, my brother, I literally was just like this—I was that stereotype. I had a shaved head and a nose ring and didn't shave my armpits and just was, you know, all of that stuff, and my

brother would always—when anybody would ask me, "Oh, Natasha, what are you going to school for?" and I'd go, "Oh, Women's Studies," and he's like, "They know. They know what you're going to school for. They see you. There's no surprises here." [Laughter] He's like, "It'd be a surprise if you said you were going into international business, the way you look, but like, no, they know that you're doing Women's Studies." [Laughter] So, yeah. But I'd be in conversations with people down here those first few years and they would say things to me like, "You know what I mean?" And I'd be like, "No." [Laughter], "I don't." I mean, there was a lot of assumptions made, I think. There's a lot of assumptions made that I was the same, even though I was from a different area, and a lot of weird racial stuff, you know. I felt like people said weird race stuff to me all the time because I was white, and I just was shocked. I remember being—we were at a party or something, and there was this person I didn't know, but she was going on and on and on about how there were so many Mexicans now that lived in Savannah, and just kind of being genuine—like generally awful, around it, like was just racist, period. And so she kept going for a while, and then I was like, "Hey, I just want to stop you for a second before you go any further, because I'm Mexican and you're starting to offend me." And so she was like, "Whoa! I'm so sorry," and backed up, backed up, backed up. And then I was like, "Oh, I'm just kidding. I'm not Mexican." [Laughter] "But it would suck if I was, right? Like don't fuckin' talk like that. You don't know who you're talking to at any given time, and even if I'm not Hispanic, I don't need to listen to your nonsense. I don't need to hear this. I don't want to hear this, you know." And it was kind of—again, Savannah was a different place twenty years ago. I feel like it was—I mean, it's not that

much different racially. I think it's just everybody's a lot more closeted about their stuff now, you know.

[00:20:50]

Kelly Spivey: That's interesting you think people are—the attitudes are the same, but they're just less vocal about it?

[00:20:56]

Natasha Gaskill: I think so. I mean, I feel like it's just as self-segregating as it was when I got here. I mean, I think that there's a group of people—like I feel like there's a downtown set of people who have moved here from someplace else, and I think that they have, maybe have—like the racial lines are a little more blurry because either they're young and they're here for SCAD and all of that stuff, but I feel like there's a lot of old Savannah that is just exactly how Savannah has always been, and, you know, they're still scared about going downtown. You know, when I tell anybody I live in Ardsley Park, which couldn't be more safe, they're still concerned that like, "Isn't the crime so bad in Ardsley Park?" And I'm like, "No, the crime is not bad in Ardsley Park. [Laughter] I really don't know what you're talking about." So I think it's still totally there, and I feel like I run in these two circles of being employed at The Grey and everything that that means, and then being also a part of, you know, this—I mean, and the fire department's certainly not like that at all, either, you know, but I think it's like I still have enough of the—like a foot into the first world we lived in when we moved here, that, you know, a lot of people that grow up here have a lot of weird racial stuff, and it does definitely feel

self-segregating in that way down here, but there's a lot of people, because I've heard a lot of things on both sides, you know, from my black friends and my white friends, that there's a lot of assumptions being made about how other people live and not a lot of, I don't know, temperance of being—feeling like you can just express whatever you want whenever you want it, you know, if you feel safe.

[00:22:53]

Kelly Spivey: Yeah. So you moved to Savannah in 2001, right? And when was Aidan born?

[00:23:05]

Natasha Gaskill: He was born in 2001.

[00:23:07]

Kelly Spivey: Okay.

[00:23:07]

Natasha Gaskill: Yeah, and it was like we moved here, he was born. His birthday's October 9th, and so we moved down here and I was just about to have him when 9/11 happened, and like—Kelly, I'm sorry. Chunk's being a nightmare. I'm going to have to go. I have to go let him out really quick.

[00:23:31]

Kelly Spivey: Yeah, no problem. I'll pause it.

[00:23:31]

Natasha Gaskill: Okay, give me one second.

[Begin Track 2]

[00:23:46]

Natasha Gaskill: All right, we're back on?

[00:23:48]

Kelly Spivey: We are back on. The dog has been taken care of.

[00:23:52]

Natasha Gaskill: Dog's [unclear]. I know. I'm sure he's coming back in to interrupt us in a moment. [Laughter]

[00:23:59]

Kelly Spivey: That's okay.

[00:23:59]

Natasha Gaskill: Okay. So, oh, I was saying about Aidan and 9/11. Yeah, so I was eight months pregnant, and it was like I was up in the morning and watching TV, watching

like—and weirdly watching something like "Good Morning, America," something I don't watch, but I just was, I was up, and they went to like the first tower being hit, like it already happened, and they didn't know what it was at that time because no one knew it was a plane. And as they were showing it, the second plane came in and hit the other tower, and I literally thought we were going to have World War III. I didn't know—you know, it was like as soon as it happened, I called my mom, I called Nathan's mom, because they were on the West Coast. They were asleep. And so I called them, and I was like, "We're under attack." [Laughter] "You got to get on TV and see what's happening." And we were trying to figure out what we were going to do. I couldn't fly, and like were we going to go back, were we going to just get in our cars and drive home, and all of the stuff. Then as it was continuing on, it calmed down, obviously, from the morning, of the level of alarm of like, "God, like we're so far away from our families, and I'm about to have this baby." Yeah, like just felt so overwhelmed with emotions and, you know, fueled with just massive amounts of hormone and all this stuff, you know, that I was terrified, totally terrified, and it just kind of added to—I was already a little terrified, you know, just about being down here at that point, because I think by the time Aidan was being born, it was like—not that the charm had worn off, because I still—Savannah's so beautiful, I mean, it's such a beautiful city, but I think we no longer at that point—we didn't live downtown. We had moved out to the Isle of Hope, starting to feel a little isolated, you know. Nathan would be gone for twenty-four hours at a time because of his job, and I just was a little—I think the reality probably is a common theme over and over again, to be honest, in my life, where it's like I build things up in this way where it's like everything's the idyllic version of something. Oh, here's Chunk. [Laughter] Then when I

have this kind of crashing down of, "Oh, shit. What have I done? How am I navigating this?" You know.

[00:26:50]

Kelly Spivey: I feel like Chunk punctuated that perfectly. [Laughter]

[00:26:53]

Natasha Gaskill: He did. He found his bone outside, so he like literally raced in here, not to miss a moment of the story. [Laughter] Like, "Oh, getting' to the good part." [Laughter] Oh, Chunky, you're great and kind of a nightmare. [Laughter] Yeah, so, I mean, it was a wild first year here, I felt like, such a wild first year.

[00:27:22]

Kelly Spivey: So how did you get involved—how did you start cooking? [Laughter]

[00:27:28]

Natasha Gaskill: I know. It's so weird, because I'm just trying to think, like Nathan's mom is a really great cook, and she had—Nathan's family has a lot of traditions and, you know, a lot of it is surrounding food, you know, so she grew up in a restaurant family. Her dad owned this diner in Bellingham, Washington, that was kind of like *the* family restaurant where everybody went to, and she grew up in that atmosphere, and I think it wasn't a great—she didn't have a great family. She had a pretty abusive upbringing, but the one solace that she had of growing up was there was a lot of pomp and circumstance

around food, and it being there for celebratory reasons and comfort reasons and joy and a way that you brought people together, and I think that Nathan and I, obviously, have been together for so long, that was really impactful on me as a fifteen-year-old, you know, and a sixteen-year-old going over to their house, of how joyful she was about food, you know. So I think then when I had Aidan, you know, and you're trying to recreate—or not even recreate, but you're trying to come up with what your own traditions were, you know, like my family didn't have a lot of traditions like that, you know, and I think that's when I started cooking. And I was home, you know, and so I was like—I've always been interested in farming and gardening and those kind of things, like of growing up how I did. I always really enjoyed that part of it, and I think, you know, that it made sense food-wise. So I would just kind of mess around with stuff at home and try to make dinner, you know, and I was a newly—I was newly domestic. It wasn't something I ever put a lot of value on, like of even what I wanted to do workwise, you know. So it was like I found myself in this—the complete antithesis of where I thought I was going, you know. I was literally this young mother, I was twenty-three years old, staying at home, completely isolated, no intentions of going and getting a job, didn't really know what I was going to do, very much reliant on my husband for all things, you know. All my social needs were being met that way as well. And I think it gave me something that was like, I could focus on that was, you know—I mean, not solely mine, because it was definitely something I was sharing with the two of them, but I think it was a thing that I, you know, was doing to fill my day that wasn't just taking—tending a baby, you know? Because I had never really held a newborn before Aidan, so it was like—and then I didn't have family here to tell you you were doing it all right or all wrong, you know. So I just kind of was just

figuring shit out all the time, you know, and then you would be—Aidan didn't sleep, he was a really terrible sleeper, so I just think I was up all the time and looking—and it's so funny because it's such a different world now because it's not even like you would be on your phone. You know what I mean? Like perusing websites or something. I just think I would get lots of magazines and I would just sit and, you know, I would nurse him and I would look at cookbooks and magazines. And I think that's how I started. I mean, that's how I started cooking. And then when Nathan's mom would come down, we would—or it'd be stuff like I'd ask her, "Nathan wants these sugar cookies that you used to make. Can you send me the recipe for the sugar cookies?" You know. And then I just kind of largely—I think that portion was just largely self-taught, you know. And then I got to the spot where Aidan was not a baby anymore, right, and was able to not feel so housebound, and then I started a recycling company because there wasn't any recycling in Savannah, you know, and Nathan and—it was funny, because Nathan and three of his firefighter friends were trying to think of—because firefighters don't get paid anything, you know, especially when you're first starting out. We'd find those old—recently we cleaned out our attic. We found all the old W-2s. [Laughter] It was just like, oh, my god, thank god we worked in Alaska all those years and had money in our accounts, because I don't know—I think the first year we were here, we made something like $21,000, and we both lived off of that. I mean, granted we were pulling from our savings, but it was like we didn't make any money. I totally got waylaid on what was—what were we initially talking about? Like that—I got [unclear].

[00:32:39]

Kelly Spivey: We were talking about cooking, and then you said you started a recycling company. What was the name of it?

[00:32:46]

Natasha Gaskill: It was called Rare Earth Recycling.

[00:32:49]

Kelly Spivey: I feel like I remember that from—because I had moved to Savannah in 2002, so—

[00:32:55]

Natasha Gaskill: Yeah. And there wasn't any—there wasn't municipal recycling, but there wasn't any curbside recycling privately either, and so Nathan and three of his friends were talking about trying to start this business, not the recycling business, but they were going to start some kind of side gig, like they were either going to paint houses or then they were like, "Oh, no, we're going to do irrigation." And I kept telling them, "You guys should do recycling. There's nobody doing recycling. I go to the recycling center and I see all these people dragging their stuff there. They would totally pay for somebody to pick that up." And they did not do it. They ended up starting this irrigation company, but I started this recycling company and had no contingency plan if it was successful, and it like—I went from doing it for fifteen people I knew from the recycling center and a couple of people around town, and then the paper picked it up and I went from like fifteen people and then it was on all the news channels, to having over 400

customers in about eight weeks. And it was—and I didn't have any—I mean, I literally didn't have any plans around if it was successful, how we were going to do it. I literally was going with Aidan in my hiking backpack [Laughter], like a hiking carrier, and he was on my back, I mean, going in the hot-ass summer and picking up people's recycling and throwing it in the back of my truck. And then it was—and I would take him off, and it had a kickstand [Laughter], I would just stand him there if I had to do sorting of any sort, or if it was getting too heavy, and it's just—I can't even believe we did it like that. Then we ended up buying an old U-Haul truck and getting it retrofitted inside to be a recycling truck. And I did it for a long time. I ran that business, I mean, I wish I knew the years of it, like offhand, but I mean, I want to say I started it in 2003 or 2004, and I did it up till when I was working at Lulu's. So, I mean, I think I sold everything off, like I ended up selling it to somebody in the county in 2011, but the city started the recycling program, and we kind of helped them with that. Here comes one of the kids.

[Interruption]

[00:35:33]

Natasha Gaskill: And so we helped the city a little bit with the starts of the conversations around municipal recycling and then it felt like at that time—I mean, this was probably like 2008, this was right before like recession, and it felt like the writing was on the wall that the county was going to be soon to follow. Pratt, which was a large sanitation company, had moved to Savannah and they had this facility, you know, out in the industrial part of Savannah, like on Highway 17, and it felt like, you know, they were

here in town, they were paying people by the pound for the recyclables and the materials, so it just felt like the writing was on the wall that this wasn't going to be a job that I was going to do any longer because this—as it shouldn't really, you know, the cities and counties were going to start picking it up. So I went to culinary school, because at that point, I mean, it was honestly [Laughter] as simple as that. It was like at that point I was- I was well versed enough in baking and cooking because I was doing all of it for myself, you know, at home, and then it was like, well, what else would I like to do? And it's- and I really enjoyed it and it felt creative and it felt physical, I liked the physical part of moving my body, and so I was like, "Yeah, let's do this." And the hours made sense for me to do baking and pastry because I couldn't really work restaurant hours and it wasn't out of not wanting to work- work savory or a desire to be so inspired by, you know, baking and pastry. It wasn't necessarily that. It really was the practicality of the hours suited our lifestyle, and I could, you know, do that in the mornings and then still be available for the kids the rest of the day. And that's what I did. And they didn't have a baking and pastry program when I went. I went to Savannah Tech, and at the time, it was just the culinary program, so I took all of the baking and pastry classes that they had, and then I did a few special projects with Chef Jean [-Yves Vendeville], who ran the program, you know, but was a master baker. I mean, and I don't know, I haven't gone through- I don't know what their program is like now, but I felt like it was actually pretty decent, you know. I feel like the experiences that I had with Chef Jean felt- I guess from being on the other side of hiring students, you know, now, that there's such huge holes in their knowledge or their education base is so on antiquated things that people don't really do anymore, you know, it's pretty infrequent in any of the restaurants that are here in

Savannah where you're going to have to brunoise potatoes, and I guess it's a great skill to have, you know, but I don't think they—in the period of time where they have to do it, there's not enough time to become an expert on it, you know. So, I mean, I don't think—my on-the-job experience is, you know, head and shoulders above any level of expertise that garnered to me in culinary school, you know. It was fun, I'm glad I did it, but it didn't really- you know. I don't think I used anything that I learned there [Laughter] in the same way like the actual on-job experience that I've done. Then I went to Lulu's after that.

[00:39:07]

Kelly Spivey: So you went to culinary school. What years were you at Savannah Tech?

[00:39:11]

Natasha Gaskill: I think I was at Savannah Tech- I'd have to actually pull it, but I want to say that that was- I went to Savannah Tech, I want to say like 2006-2007? Something like that. I got hired—or maybe it was like 2008-2009. I feel like- when did you leave Lulu's? I mean, you and I overlapped, basically. Like you were just leaving Lulu's when I took the job. I think it's 2010.

[00:39:43]

Kelly Spivey: I think I left in 2010, because I think I started at Lulu's in 2007.

[00:39:50]

Natasha Gaskill: Okay. And so you think you left December 2010 or December 2009?

[00:39:56]

Kelly Spivey: Hmm. I think it was 2010. I'm like you. I was like, I don't know. That was like eighty years ago.

[00:40:06]

Natasha Gaskill: [glitch in recording] on the actual year, but it's like around that time. Then I literally was just at a crafting party, kind of like a Stitch 'n Bitch thing, and Rebecca [Radovich. Co-owner of Lulu's] was there and I was saying something about like, you know, I couldn't take any more classes, basically, I was kind of at the end of that line and I didn't know where I was going to work, basically. And she was like, "Oh, our pastry chef just left. Do you want to work at Lulu's?" And I was like, "Yeah." And I knew Rebecca for years, you know, of just Savannah people, you know, just how small Savannah is. So then I took that job, and that was when it was in the little tiny kitchen in the back of the bar, and worked there and made my way over to—I helped them open the second location and we shared that space with Minette Rushing, which is—was a huge influence on me, probably my first mentor baking-wise, because I feel like up to that point- I mean, that's not true. Susan, Nathan's mom, was definitely my first mentor on actually physically being in the kitchen with somebody, and she's not a baker. She's the first person to say- you know, she sent me pictures of her pie this year, and she was [Laughter]- where she was just like, "Oh, my god, this is embarrassing." [Laughter] So that's totally not her deal, but she was the first person that, you know, really made me

understand the importance of food, its role in a family, you know. And then with Minette, I think she was the first person that I worked with that just believed in my talent so much, you know- and just was so nurturing and so encouraging to, you know, to try different things and to- because she's this- I mean, she's a renowned sugar flower artist, right? So she makes these insane gum-paste flowers, and people would pay- like her classes were something like $2,800, something insane, like something I never would have had the money to do, nor would I have ever spent the money on it, you know. And her wedding cake classes, and because we shared that space, because she was in the kitchen one day a week and then she was in her studio, which was the second half of that kitchen, the remainder of the week, so we were off on Mondays and then she would teach these classes. And she literally let me attend every one of those classes for free and just was- you know, she was like the end of her- not the end of her career, but she was phasing out of being the volume she was at and moving it back into her home and kind of retiring, you know, in some aspect, retiring that type of business. And, you know, she's just an incredible person, and she was probably the first person that was like, "You should be doing this for yourself, you're talented and you're smart and you can figure out- ," you know. And she had this little place in- so she lives out on Burnside Island, which is the county, and so she had this little place there that was attached to her garage, this little studio, and that's where she did all of her baking and that's where she decorated the cakes, and she was having this thriving wedding cake business, basically, charging upwards of $10,000 for wedding cakes and stuff. Insane, right? So then I was like, "I can do that, you know." We had this shed in our backyard, and I was like, "I mean, if she has that, I mean, we can just convert that into a commercial space." And the part that was

really funny was when we bought the house that we're still in today, it was before any of the house market went crazy. It was probably the last year before that, so you could still afford houses. I mean, we are so outpriced in our neighborhood now, we'd never be able to afford a house in this neighborhood. Granted, our house is tiny. It's like 1,100 square feet, but we were kind of desperate to find a place at that point. We were staying, at that point, out at Tybee. We had given up our house, the house we were renting in Isle of Hope, because we were buying a house in Parkside. That fell through, so our landlord, one of her best friends had this condo out on the back river in Tybee, so they were letting us stay out there while we were trying to find a house. So we found this place and we couldn't afford it even then, and we just told our real estate agent, "Listen, don't negotiate with them. Just tell them this is all the money we have, because this is all the money that we have, and see if they'll accept it." We didn't realize, but they were going through this *brutal* divorce, and so we offered them like $60,000 less than what they were asking for the house, and they accepted it because they needed to be done with each other, and he was living in the shed. [Laughter] So the shed had water, it had Internet, it had a phone line, it had cable, it had electricity, it had a heater and air conditioning out there, so a lot of the stuff was already in the space, and it was half the size, so he literally put this fake wall that got—not a partition wall, because it definitely went all the way to the top, and so then half of his—his lawn mower and the rakes and all that stuff. There was a back door to the shed was back there, and then the front door was—I mean, that whole space, when it's open now, is 16-by-11 feet, and so he was living in like 8 feet-by-5.5 feet because he hated her and she hated him so much, and they just literally couldn't be inside this 1,000 square feet together, but he'd rather be in the little, you know, 50

square feet. [Laughter] It's a very important point, because it's literally made it so that this could even happen for me. So we just started clearing that building out, you know. We cleared it out, we reoriented where there was a front door that was really little that we put the door on the side with French doors so that I could move speed racks in and out of it, and, you know, had a direct line to the lane so that I could load up my van for wedding cakes and all the stuff, and we just proceeded to go through all of the motions, right? Didn't get a permit, didn't even think about getting a permit, because we just weren't changing the footprint of the building, we just thought it was making these improvements, right? So we went through all of that, and then it came time to like get my commercial license, and we contacted the state, basically, the Department of Agriculture, and she was like—she came out, she did the visit, the inspection, passed everything, and then she was like, "I just need your CO and then we can do this." And I was like, "Oh, what's a CO?" And she was like, "Your certificate of occupancy." I was like, "Oh, I don't have one of those." And she was like, "Well, where's your permitting for the building?" And I was like, "We didn't do any permitting. We just made it." So she was like, "All right. Well—." [Laughter] She's like, "Here's what needs to happen. You have to—." She's like, "You don't have zoning appropriate for this?" And I was like, "Nope." And so she was like, "All right." And she probably could have fined us, she probably could have done this in a really punitive way, but she totally didn't. Her name is Maggie Rickenbaker. She's a freakin' saint. Oh, you know Maggie?

[00:47:08]

Kelly Spivey: Well, she inspected, when I had the Chocolate Lab, she was my Department of Agriculture and she was the same way with me, where she would, you know, "You need to change that light bulb, and I know you're gonna do it." [00:48:34]

Natasha Gaskill: Yeah. Yes, yes. But, god, I mean, I think of all the horror stories I've heard of other people opening culinary—restaurants or bakeries or whatever, and the nightmares that they tell me, and I didn't have that experience, I have to say. I felt like the city actually was really great with me, because we just mea culpa'd everything, like we petitioned MPC to change the zoning for this neighborhood, and I got up there and they were—I mean, and granted, all of our neighbors were totally fine with it. Nobody had an issue with it, and I just kind of explained what I was doing, that I was going to be doing wedding cakes back there, it's no different than any artist studio in any of these other areas through Savannah, and, you know, guests aren't coming back there, I'm not servicing customers in that area, it's just really a workspace for me, so they approved it, and it had never happened before. I think it set precedence in terms of the fact that it's now on the books that somebody has a commercial kitchen in a residential area where I know that other people who have contacted me since then have said they've used it in MPC, like, well, A Squad Bake Shop operated this way, and so it set precedence. And then we started. Then I had to figure out how we were going to get the CO. [Laughter] And so then at that point, I contacted—the guy's name is Jason Carangelo and he's the head of zoning, and so I started talking to him about it, and once we changed the zoning and we were considered a commercial establishment, we fell under the same laws as any other commercial building, and then we were required to have a handicap-accessible

bathroom, even though we were never going to service one person. If somebody needed handicap accessibility, they wouldn't even really be able to get to my backyard because we don't have a driveway. It was craziness. And the building, like I said, it's 11 feet-by-16 feet, so if we would have had to put in a handicap-accessible bathroom plus the buffer room from the kitchen, that's the whole building. And so I'd call and he was just like, "I'm sorry, I don't make the code. I have to enforce the code." And I just kept saying, "You can't be the end-all on this. Like you cannot be the last person. This doesn't make any sense. I just know if you guys would come out here and lay eyes on this, you would see it differently, you know, you're looking at this like this is some restaurant that I'm going to be having all these guests in, and that's not what's happening. It's literally an artist's studio. That's how you should think of it. It's just an artist's studio." And so he was—and I eventually convinced them, and so it was him and all of the four zoning heads came out, so it was the electrical engineer, the structural engineer, a plumbing person, like a plumbing engineer, and then Jason, and they came out and I was just trying to kind of charm them into doing what I wanted them to do, basically, at that point, because I didn't have a- I mean, because we didn't have anything, and at that point, I had mea culpa'd, like, "Yeah, we didn't pull permits because we thought we were just laying new tile and putting in a sink, you know. I didn't know that I had to pull permits, you know." And he was like, "Well, did you change the electricity out here?" And I'm like, "Well, yeah, we did do that." [Laughter] He was like, "Okay, well, like that kind of stuff." So they had to inspect all those things, and it was all fine. We didn't do- Nathan did some of the work as far as, you know, putting the window in and the doors, but everything else was done by an electrician or a plumber or a whomever, right? And so he

was—Jason was walking around and looking at it, and he said to me, he's like, "You know," he's like, "I get it, and this is all done beautifully and it's totally legit," he's like, "but I don't know how we get around this. This is the hanging point of me giving you a CO. You have to have handicap-accessible bathroom. That's just baseline of it." And so then I was like, "All right." And I'm like, "And who can I petition past you?" And he's like, "You can take it up with the state, but then you'd be changing code, basically." And he was like, "And if this would've been two years ago, you wouldn't have needed it. You would have gotten grandfathered in in a different way." And he's like, "But now this is now the code." And so then we were talking, and I was like, "Well, all right. It was great meeting you guys. So I'll take it up with the state, I guess." And they were leaving, and then he had asked me, he was like, "So why was all this stuff in here?" He's like, "So how did you—?" And I was like, "The guy that we bought this house from lived out here." I go, "They were going through this divorce," and I told him the same story I just told you. And he goes, "Oh. So someone *lived* in this space?" And I go, "Yeah." And he's like, "Oh, well, then it's an assumed CO of one person." And he called Maggie Rickenbaker and said that he couldn't write it on paper, but if she was fine with it being a verbal agreement, that it has a CO, and she was fine with it and he was fine with it, and I'm sure it's not legal probably at some level, but it was legal, and that's how it came to be, and that's how A Squad happened. And then that's the building. [Laughter] And it was the most bizarre, roundabout story of, you know, of just like I just never kind of stopped talking. [Laughter]

[00:54:30]

Kelly Spivey: But, I mean, that's the kind of thing that I feel like if you're opening a business, you need to hear those things because it does seem so rigid and so—and there's no real guide to what to do or what order to do things in or how to do it or—

[00:54:50]

Natasha Gaskill: Yeah, and it does feel insurmountable. It feels like you can't do it, like everything is—especially when you're super small, you don't have an investor, you know, you don't have Hugh Acheson, who's backing you [Laughter] to make your pizza dreams come true. That was a little tour of the living room [laughter] while I get my computer charging. So, yeah, I mean, it was such a—I found my experience with the city, and granted, my husband works for the city, but not in that capacity at that time, I just found them all to be not accommodating, that isn't the right word, but I feel like they were equally invested in me being successful. They wanted me to be successful. I didn't feel like they put up unnecessary hurdles that were just literally like you just have to jump over this because you have to jump over it, you know. I felt like everybody that I dealt with was really invested in this working for me, you know, and trying to figure out ways and trying to be creative, yeah. And then I did A Squad for a long time, you know, and it was so great because it was the first—it was just so solely mine, I guess, you know, and I was so proud of it, that I had navigated all of those systems to bring it to existence, you know, to begin with, and, you know, I just kind of slowly but surely beat this little path for myself, and grew an audience. And we started off—well, I started out just doing really just wedding cakes, you know, which is incredibly lucrative, but I'm such a perfectionist that it was making me crazy, you know, because I'd be out there obsessing

about something. I'd call Nathan out there. I'd be like, "Does that look straight to you?" And he'd be like, "Yes." And I'd be like, "No, it's not." [Laughter] And he's like, "You are the only person that sees that that—it is straight." He's like, "If we take this level to it," he's like, "it is straight, but," he's like, "you're so obsessing about this," that it's kind of the thing I told you before this convo started, it's like when you actually sat down and thought of- figured out what your hourly wage was, it was like I was making something ridiculous, something like five bucks an hour doing wedding cakes because of the amount of attention I was focusing on it, you know. And it didn't mean that you weren't getting paid well, you know. The first wedding that I did kind of out of the gate was this huge wedding where it was a $15,000 bill for the wedding cake and the dessert table, and so you were like, "Wow!" I mean, that first job funded a lot of my equipment, you know, for there. It bought my oven, you know, because I took the job without having anything in there, because, you know, you book out nine months prior, so I took it and I took that job and I still worked for Lulu's and I hadn't even quit yet, you know, but knew that that was kind of- that we were in the process of building that space and just, you know, when I saw the opportunity and was introduced to this woman Jean, I was like, "I'm gonna do this," you know, and just used all that money to fund basically, you know, for lack of better, furnishing that place, you know? And then I had probably three years of just doing weddings, and I feel like it's a high burnout rate on weddings, because it's so stressful.

[00:58:58]

Kelly Spivey: Did Minette—did you talk to her a lot during that time? Did she help you?

[00:59:01]

Natasha Gaskill: Yep, and she still does. She still is a sounding board for me often, because I feel like navigating through restaurants as a woman is challenging, which is kind of a dumb statement. [Laughter] It's kind of a "duh" statement, like of course it is. It's really hard to find safe havens in this industry because even if you want it to be different, right, we all have kind of come up under the same massive patriarchy within restaurants, right? The hierarchy is so male and it's so gross male, it's not even—it's like the worst part of guys, you know, and it's—and then what's happened is I feel like there's a little Stockholm Syndrome in that, too, where a lot of the women who have received any level of accolades, they've adopted a lot of those practices because that's what they've associated with success and that's how you have to maintain power and all of that. And Minette was just soft and generous and encouraging and inclusive and all of these things that I hadn't really ever seen amongst- in restaurants, you know. I mean, Lulu's was all women that worked there, and that definitely wasn't the culture there, you know. Like Janine [Finn. Co-owner of Lulu's] and Rebecca definitely trailblazed something for themselves, but it was for themselves. They were not inclusive about, you know, the conversations we're having now, obviously, about ownership of intellectual property and what we all bring to the table, you know. We all bring stuff. It's not- I can't wait for that old guard to die, that everything is under an executive chef or the owner of the restaurant. I mean, it's got to die out at some point in time. It feels like right now, with the current climate that we're in, people discussing it and having these conversations, that no one's created shit. You know what I mean? We don't live in vacuums. You're influenced by all sorts of things, and we're all on our phones 24/7 and

we're all pulling recipes from all over the place. No one is making anything, you know? And I just felt like with Minette, she just was—I mean, the fact that she would let me take those classes and never viewed me as somebody who could put her out of business, you know, just was literally like, "How can I help you? How can I make you good at what you do? Who can introduce you to?" You know? She- one of her best friends is- do you know who Ron Ben-Israel is? That's one of her best friends. And so he came down to co-teach a class with her. [Laughter] Because they all did all this wedding cake shit together in the [19]90s. Minette used to be on- when Food Network first started, she was on all these cake challenges and all this stuff, and she stopped doing it when it started to be mean, and she was- and the producers would literally come up to you and be like, "Oh, well, so-and-so from, you know, Curate Bakery said that your gum-paste flower is - roses - they're really chunky," or something, you know. [Laughter] Just to incite some level of drama. And, I mean, and she literally invited me to take this class, and the class with him was like $5,000, and she invited me to come and take this class, let me go for free, introduced me with him, hung out with them for the weekend, and just was, I mean, so lovely, I mean, and really is hands down probably the most influential person management-wise for me that I've definitely emulated how I try to manage people, because I know how much I would do for that woman. You know what I mean? And not because I was afraid of her or that I was wanting to impress her. It's just that she literally- she led with such- she leads with such grace that you *want* to do things for her. You *want* to make her workload lighter, and you're constantly trying to make intelligent decisions of how did you finish your stuff as quickly as possible so that you could go and assist her and work with her, you know? And I just felt like that was the- I mean, that we all, who

are in leadership positions in kitchens, especially women, that you want- I mean, I want these young pastry cooks underneath me to feel that way about me, you know, that they felt like you had this opportunity, that somebody saw who you were and wasn't constantly trying to, you know, apply gentle constant pressure to you in a way where you were going to get to the point where you were going to break, you know? And so that she was very- just such a giving person, such a giving person, and I feel like as I've navigated my career since just working for myself, I mean, I'm always texting her, even if it's nothing more than talking shit. You know what I mean? Even if it's nothing more than reaching out to her and go like, "You will *not* believe who I just saw." [Laughter] But, yeah, she was incredible. She is incredible. And so, yeah, and she'd give me work all the time. She didn't- I was no threat to her. You know what I mean? She does wedding cakes for freakin' Justin Bieber when he got married down here. [Laughter] And so it's like she wasn't concerned about that I was going to come in and take her throne. She was happy to- if it was a job that she wasn't willing to do or didn't have time to do or whatever, she was the first person to- I mean, she really helped me build that business.

[01:05:38]

Kelly Spivey: Did you only do wedding cakes or did you transition into other things with A Squad?

[01:05:44]

Natasha Gaskill: So I did wedding cakes and then I started transitioning, because it was too stressful, too high stress, and then I started doing desserts for restaurants and then I

did donuts all over town, basically, and that was just this fun exercise really with social media, you know, and kind of wanting to do that, doing it because it was fun, and this instant gratification kind of was the opposite work from wedding cakes, where you're working on something for a whole week. This was like you worked on something for, you know, a few hours and you saw it from start to end, and it was out your door, delivered, and it was fun. I mean, it was like I put- no one would really know what flavors I had available, and I just would post that morning, and then I had a couple of places that were wanting to carry it. So then I worked- you know, so I'd get up crazy early, start dough, fry them all in a little just like a tabletop fryer, not like a FryDaddy, it was a double one, but it was still small. I mean, I still was doing hundreds of donuts every morning and just would be this mad dash to the clock to get them delivered to the places, because, you know, at one point I was probably delivering to like seven different places in the mornings. And then I just would say, "This is what I have," and then people would go and then they would Instagram it and tag it, and then be like, "Oh, they're all sold out over here," and, you know, and it was just like this really fun- it was really fun, and it didn't-

[01:07:23]

Kelly Spivey: And you didn't have any help? It was just you?

[01:07:26]

Natasha Gaskill: Heather [Babb] used to work, come on Wednesdays and help me. [Laughter] So it was, yeah, so Heather, who I worked with at Lulu's, who is a mutual

friend of us, obviously, and she was just doing—she was vet teching at that point, you know, working at the animal hospital, and still wanted to keep her, you know, foot in the door of baking still because she had done it for so long. She'd left Lulu's, but I think she missed it, and I desperately needed an extra set of hands, and so, yeah. And then I also was weirdly making churros too. [Laughter] I was honestly- it was such a hustle. You know what I mean? It was such- I mean, you know this from the chocolate thing. You were just constantly hustling and trying to figure out how you made some money. And so Bull Street Taco had just opened up and he had reached out to me, wanting to have these churros, and I just couldn't keep up with the production for that. I literally used a sausage press. We'd make these *huge* vats of churro dough, and then Heather would sit there and crank the sausage with the star tip and cut them, and we would place them in the freezer, and then we would—because he would go through like 300 churros, 400 churros every week. And so Heather came in on Wednesdays to do basically prep work for me, she would help me with all my prep, and it was my only day off a week that I had, was on Wednesdays. So she would work Wednesdays and I'd take the day off. So she was my help. Then when I was doing wedding cakes, I oftentimes would enlist some teenager to- because the boys were at that point, you know, Aidan would help deliver with me and help me lift the cakes. Nathan helped with that. But, yeah, primarily the majority of the work was me just doing it. And then I started doing more desserts for restaurants, you know, and I was doing both things, and I guess I probably feel like the biggest account at that point was Atlantic. I was doing a lot of work for Atlantic, and it was kind of more of like a partnership, and so that was kind of my bread and butter, I feel like that's what I was really- like a lot of my money was coming from, was from Atlantic, because that

kitchen was like a postage stamp, it was so tiny. So they didn't have any space for any baking to happen there. Lauren [Teague] was doing bread, which always was a little shocking to me how she was- but she just was there all day long, every day, you know. So she'd get in there and basically use the dining room as like a production, and she'd do all the bread and let all of it rest out there, you know. So just crazy. I mean, it's just crazy what we do [Laughter], basically what everybody does to make it work. And so then Lauren was there making changes. Lauren was leaving Atlantic. I think they were kind of hitting- I mean, they're not in business any longer, and I think they were kind of hitting a little bit of a financial snafu at that point in time, and so they were wanting to make changes, and some of the changes I wasn't comfortable with, you know, they wanted to bring things in from multiple places, and I just was—felt like that could be confusing and-

[01:11:03]

Kelly Spivey: You mean bring desserts in?

[01:11:05]

Natasha Gaskill: Yeah, yeah, and so maybe, you know, using some stuff from, you know, the big truck places, like Food Service America, and then maybe just have one of my desserts coming in, and it was like that seems confusing and like a recipe for disaster. I don't want somebody mistaking some disgusting cheesecake that they got from Sysco with something that I've made, you know? So at that point, it was on—I mean, out of necessity, like I needed, you know—Nathan gets very freaked out financially. He's a very

much- he loves getting paid every two weeks and you know exactly what's going to happen. So the wedding cake also was a little bit of a stressor because you would have this huge influx of money because you'd take all these contracts on and you hadn't paid for anything yet, and so then the closer it got to wedding season, the less money you would have because you're having to purchase all the ingredients. So you'd go from, you know, this influx of $25,000 to when it got close to the actual wedding season before you were starting to do your contracts for the next one, you know, your bank account might go down to under $1,000. And that level of up and down is easy for me because I just feel like it comes in and it goes out and it comes in, and I trust in the process, then I trust that there's just going to be another contract, you know. There's always going to be a way to get some money in my account. Nathan does not feel that way. It makes him very—you know, he would be obsessively checking accounts, you know, of like, "Oh, god, we're down to this," you know. So Aidan was starting high school, he was going to a private school, which was a weird position that we were in because it wasn't something that I thought we would be. I thought we would always just send the kids to public school, but the school system here in Savannah is very complicated and they have all these weird schools within the system, you know, they have a great art school, that's a great academic school as well, but you have to have a reason to go there, and I have two sporty kids that [Laughter] are pretty typical boys. They didn't have a reason to go to Savannah Arts [Academy]. So then it was a matter of figuring out what we were—then what district we were to go to was Savannah High, that like they're not on that trajectory either, and it's unfortunate that that's the case of the public school system here, where academically that wasn't going to be- it wasn't going to be the rigor that they needed to get into any

college, basically. So we found ourselves in this spot where we were going to pay for a private school, and this up-and-down business wasn't going to make it. It wasn't going to make it for our marriage, it wasn't going to make it where- you know, it wasn't going to make it, you know. It was just an unnecessary stress. And that just coincided with Husk opening in Savannah. And then also, you know, so it was monetarily based, but then also, too, it was intriguing, the idea of working for Sean Brock intrigued me. I had only really worked for these small places, so there's a part of it, too, where it was me wanting to sort of test my mettle and see- I felt like I was up to the challenge, but I didn't really have any true proof that I could do it in this high-caliber kitchen, you know, with a bunch of really well—and they were, all these very well-trained people with high pedigrees coming from all of these southern institutions.

[01:14:59]

Kelly Spivey: Yeah, and a restaurant kitchen is so different than a bakery, like the producing. Yeah.

[01:15:06]

Natasha Gaskill: Completely. And gearing up for service, right? I wasn't ever privy to that at Lulu's. We were out of there well before bar staff got there, right? And it wasn't like that. Like it was a bar, first and foremost, that sold desserts, but there wasn't this crazy rush or this crazy crescendo into gearing up for service, you know. It's a totally different beast.

[01:15:32]

Kelly Spivey: And you didn't have to think about plating.

[01:15:34]

Natasha Gaskill: No. No, beforehand, no. Exactly. They just were cutting and serving, you know? Yeah, and so it was a totally different animal now, because then it was—and also, too, comparatively to how I was dropping off wholesale desserts, you know, because I was at that time, too, when I was doing it on my own, I was providing pies for The Grey and Collins Quarter and Atlantic and Smith Brothers, but they were still whole desserts that I was dropping off, and then they were figuring out garnish and doing whatever they were going to do with it.

And it is different to think about plating and how do you—so if you've only done baking where you're just making pies and everything is all together in one thing, there's a level of dissection that has to happen so that you have things to put on the plate, but that it still makes sense that, you know—because there's nothing worse than having some garnish that's on the side that you're just kind of like, "What is this? This doesn't even make sense." Or worse, it makes it sweet, you know, it turns this perfectly composed piece of cake or pie into something cloyingly sweet because it didn't need it to begin with; I just have to put it on the plate to make it look right, you know?

So it was figuring out that dance of how do I either take apart something and recognize, okay, so if I know that this needs a highly spiced item normally that would be interior to this, how do I pull it off of there and then what do I turn it into? What else does it need? Okay, does it need texture? Do I turn this now into this external crumble? And

then if it's going to be an external crumble, do I then hone into a grain that's involved with this so that it—you know. You start from one spot and then, you know, you kind of, I guess, brainstorming it out, you know, of figuring out what makes the most sense for these dishes.

And then, too, it's not like you're—I mean, this is a really—this is a fine dining restaurant, you know, that has a reputation and that people are really excited about coming to Savannah. Sean Brock was just—you know, and is - he really is the—it was a great experience working for him. The kitchen was surprising to me a little, that was a very dude-heavy bro-heavy kitchen. That was a shock. I mean, and I was older than everybody, you know. I was—I'm forty-three now, you know, so I was almost forty. I think I was thirty-nine when I took that job, had kids, was totally in a different spot in my life, I don't party, you know, I don't go out to bars, I keep baker's hours, and I feel like I was really well received in there. I don't think I had any—when I left, it was totally in good standing with everybody. I went through a slew of chefs in the six months I was there. It was literally I think we went through three chefs in six months when I was there, because it was so tumultuous at that point in time.

And right after I left was the time where Sean—and that's when Sean Brock left the Neighborhood Dining Group, and so it was a bit of a wild ride there, but it didn't scare me off, though. I totally loved it. I loved the energy of the restaurant kitchen, I liked—and I liked all those guys, but it just was a little—I'm trying to be diplomatic about it, because [Laughter] it just was—I mean, it was so crazy because it was like you were sort of invisible a little bit, you know, where it was like—I remember this one morning. The way they set up their kitchens were—I mean, it wasn't true brigade, but it

was brigade, basically, and the butcher and the A.M. sous was the prep sous, and those were the two people who would open the building, and they ran the shift in the morning till the CDC got there later in the afternoon.

But the butcher, I remember this one morning, it was him by himself, he's the only dude in the room, and there's like five women in there, a prep team and myself, and he's blasting 2 Live Crew, and it's totally filthy. And again I feel like I sound like such a prude, and I so am not a prude, but it was just one of those things where you're looking around going—you don't even really like this music. You know what I mean? There's nothing to really like here. But it is really offensive for me to be working and hearing those lyrics and there to be no sense of acknowledgement, that you don't recognize the fact you're sitting here listening to—you know exactly what the lyrics are. You know what I mean? Like with all these women around you, and no one's into it. You're the only person who's wanting to listen to this for some reason. It just felt really super privileged, you know, on his part, of just, just being completely unaware, you know, just oblivious to how gross, what kind of tone he was setting, you know, and he was already kind of an asshole anyways, right? And this just added to the assholeness of him. [Laughter] But you just were like, "Oh, my god. Turn that off."

And I remember going over to him, and I was like, "Hey, check your audience. No one wants to listen to this."

And then he was like, "Oh, totally," and then turned it off, but it was just like why would you think anybody—why would you even put it on? And that was kind of a lot of that. It was a lot of dudes getting together and, you know, messing with hydrocolloids and just, you know, "How do we meat-glue this shit together?" and just all this stuff

where it couldn't be further away from what I wanted to eat, and it was just like I would listen to it and just be like, "Gross." They'd be so into it, like, "Yeah, Brandon [Chonko] dropped off a hog, and then we took the tenderloin and meat-glued it to this other—." [Laughter] Just going, "But why? I mean, who wants that?" And it just felt really dominant. You know what I mean? I felt like this—like this beautiful hog that Brandon had raised just hadn't been, you know, tortured enough at this point. [Laughter] Like, you know, we really needed to show full, you know, submission to these guys, and I just—I didn't like the style of cooking, I think, ultimately. The style of cooking did not speak to me in the way that I thought it was going to, you know?

And then I was there and Mashama Bailey reached out to me, because we were friendly. I used to make pies for The Grey, and she reached out to me, asking if I knew anybody who wanted to be the pastry chef at The Grey, they were letting go of their pastry chef, and so I said, "Well, I don't know of anybody, but I might want to do it."

And so she was like, "All right, cool. Let's take a meeting." And took a meeting, I mean, and she's the dream, you know, she's so charming and she's so talented, and really was a breath of fresh air, to be honest, after Husk and the group of men that worked there, that it felt like, ah! This is exactly what I was looking for at Husk. I just didn't realize that it already existed in Savannah, you know. The Grey had been around, you know. At that point, they had been—I think I came on when they had been open for, you know, two and a half years or three years. I guess that's right, because I think we just did our five-year anniversary—well, I don't know. It's 2020. 2020 feels like seven years have happened.

[01:23:59]

Kelly Spivey: I think it was 2014 that they opened?

[01:24:04]

Natasha Gaskill: Okay. That's when you started?

[01:24:06]

Kelly Spivey: Um—

[01:24:10]

Natasha Gaskill: I know. I think it's not, though. I mean, I don't know, because I feel like—I think this year will be six years, 2020, because I feel like I was there at the end of last year where they did their five-year—where we did like a five-year toast.

[01:24:25]

Kelly Spivey: Yeah. I'm trying to—

[01:24:26]

Natasha Gaskill: [glitch in recording] what it was when it opened.

[01:24:41]

Kelly Spivey: 2014, says— [Laughter]

[01:24:43]

Natasha Gaskill: Oh, nice. Okay, 2014 is when they opened, and so, yeah, so they probably were open in like—so this would've been 2017? I've been there for three years. Is that right? 2018, I think, is when I came on, and I'll be there three years this July coming up in 2021. I think that's right. I'm super bad with these dates, but whatever, right?

But, yeah, so I had taken this meeting with her. They were talking about opening up the Market, but the Market was still at least a year out at that point, and, yeah, so I took this meeting with her and then I ended up doing a tasting for her and John O. at John O.'s house, and—

[Interruption]

[01:25:52]

Natasha Gaskill: Yeah, so I did this tasting and I took the job, and I've been there since whatever, 2017 or 2018 it's been now. And then we opened the Market and I've been, you know, running production in both spaces with two different teams.

[Interruption]

[01:26:16]

Natasha Gaskill: So, you know, it's kind of started off where I had to sort of fight for my position a little bit, like I think I thought I was being hired as the pastry chef without any questions asked around it, and then I think another woman who worked there, who

worked under the previous pastry chef, I think she thought she was being promoted to being a pastry chef. So it was kind of a rocky start, and it's great, I mean, we have no hard feelings against each other now, but it was tough when I first started, because she was very resentful of me coming in and very unclear of what was happening, and I think because of just mostly probably maturation of me being so much older than her and me being a bit of a control freak, and the systems at The Grey when I first got there were really loose, you know.

There wasn't [Laughter]—they didn't—I mean, really for the most part, at Husk it was a little loose, too, but they did have—at Husk, Katy Keefe was acting as executive pastry chef. I don't think they ever gave her that title, but that is exactly what she was, and she set up all those programs, you know, as they did that expansion, and I went up and worked with her at McCrady's, and, like, she's a badass and she really is very organized, really understands the pertinent information, how to get that information to her team in a way that they can walk up and look at something and, you know, there's no dry-erase boards happening where you're just making a list. [Laughter] You know? It's like you know how many fucking guests there are that night. You know there's allergies. You know that you've got two vegans coming in that are VIPs. She's another person I would say—and I'm not close with her at all. I worked there for such a short amount of time, but definitely really left an imprint on how to work in a professional kitchen, and for the guys around you too. They were all terrified of her at McCrady's, and she was helpful and also really stern and tough, you know. She was awesome. She is awesome.

So when I came to—I know how I operated in my own space, and even when I was at Lulu's, I felt like I was constantly trying to like massage it in a way where it made

sense that it was a little bit more organized and you understood what you needed to do on a broader weekly basis instead of a fire-drill basis of every day like, “Oh, god! Chocolate suspension! Strawberry suspension cakes!” [Laughter] And all the things. “Oh, shit! We didn’t start the flourless chocolate cake early enough!” You know, all of that. So it was like I’d already been sort of honing my own organizational skills.

That really came in handy when I started at The Grey, because there wasn’t anything there and I don’t know if that was because the pastry chef prior took everything or if it was just literally there just wasn’t anything really there. I know all the operations that we use now in both spaces are based off of these initial sheets and production sheets and prep sheets and, you know, maybe just from working by myself for so long, I’m such an over-communicator because I know exactly in my head how I think it should go, and so, you know, trying to get all that information to somebody else, you know, of—of this is exactly how we’re going to do this, and I think, too, working for yourself—and I’m sure you can totally corroborate this—you figure out really fast that your time is money, and so you figure out fast ways to do things and figure out what is the most efficient way to get through your day and starting, you know, passive projects while you’re doing active projects so that you are hammering down this prep list as quickly as possible so your day was done, you know, and that you weren’t tolling away for like seventeen hours, that you could drop it down to a manageable twelve hours for your day. I think that was, you know, at The Grey was something that hadn’t been happening at that point in time.

So then I came in and then we, you know, kind of started there at the pastry program at The Grey and getting a level of organization around that, and then we started

the Market and then I was running those programs in a way where they were interactive and contingent upon one another so that I knew if I was working production at The Grey, that certain amount of production things would still be happening at The Grey Market that would be in support for service, and, you know, how does that make sense in a way that feels, you know, that everybody feels supportive—or not supportive, rather; support*ed* and understands what the greater picture is, because if you're at the Market all day and you're not ever walking into the building at The Grey and you're making things that are going to be plated, how do you make those connections and feel a sense of ownership about the product that you're making that is integral to the success of the sister restaurant, you know? So we did that.

Then we started—you know, since then, I feel like all of—as we've kind of built these other systems and these other revenues of income through the Market, is it's been a different muscle that's been flexed, you know. It hasn't been—I mean, there's still all of the creative aspects of it, and the, you know, being able to sort of—I mean, it's not really new, because I was doing it before when it was my own place, but really having this opportunity, you know, to really purchase things from vendors, from small suppliers of, you know, to be able to place an order for, $600 of chocolate from Condor, you know, I wouldn't have been able to really do that in my own place, and not that it makes it less special, but it does make you feel really integral to this food system, of like, you know, Mary at Three Sisters and purchasing produce from her, and talking to her about stuff you're hoping that you're going to be able to do come the fall, and having her plant specific things for you, I mean, that wouldn't have happened in any other capacity in the city besides The Grey, you know, for me

And it's just been so—I mean, it's been such an incredible creative experience and then such a cerebral—really crunching numbers and trying to really make the hours count, because it's like there's never enough hours, you know. I could honestly work twenty hours every day and it still be stuff that I'm leaving, you know, at the end of the day that I have to pick up the next day. So it's like, you know, it's this insurmountable mountain sometimes of work, and I feel like I'm just forever—I just feel like it's this nut that I'm trying to crack, you know, like I feel like there's some riddle around it of, oh, if you do it this direction or we do it this order or if now, you know, all of these items are going to go to savory and then with that extra time—you know, like it's just all of these puzzle pieces that you're moving around to figure out what's the actual fit here.

[01:34:11]

Kelly Spivey: It's funny, because it feels like you're—like when you're part of a bigger organization, you have the resources to, like you said, effect some kind of change in the food system, but you don't have the time.

[01:34:28]

Natasha Gaskill: Exactly.

[01:34:28]

Kelly Spivey: And when you're doing it for yourself, it feels more valuable, maybe? Because it's for yourself, but you can't—you don't have the capital to do what is—

[Laughter]

[01:34:44]

Natasha Gaskill: Exactly.

[01:34:45]

Kelly Spivey: Like where's the sweet spot between— [Laughter]

[01:34:48]

Natasha Gaskill: I don't know. I feel like—and that's the struggle, right? Like I feel like that's kind of where especially—I feel after COVID, I mean, this year has been very grounding in so many ways, I mean, because I think where we were at or where I was at was just this 100-mile-an-hour sprint, you know, and you're sprinting through a marathon, you know, and you can feel it, you can feel it in your lungs and you can feel it in the level of adrenaline that is like pulsing through your system at all points, and this heightened sense of just everything is at an 11.

And then it's like COVID happened and everything got shut down, and then you had this opportunity to pause, and now through this pause, where - as we're getting back to this sort of hyper speed and, you know, the opportunities are there, there's all these different things coming towards you of how you can spend your time - that you hadn't questioned if that's even how you want to spend your time anymore. So you're now in this spot of reflection or caught between reflection and needing to move forward [Laughter], where you're like, "No, the bus is going. Come on. Like what's going on? What are you doing? Where are you going? Are you going to be here? Are you doing

this?" And I feel very, at this moment in time, where I've hit a little—I've hiccupped and I'm like is this still what I want to do, you know?

It's like it's easy to get caught up in the fever of it all and like the excitement and, god, was it a year last year for The Grey. You know what I mean? Mashama won the James Beard Award, we were noted as one of the fifty best restaurants in the world, you know. It just was one—"Chef's Table"—one accolade after another accolade after another accolade, and it's really easy to get swept up into all that. And then the work doesn't feel like the work's that much, you know, but it still is taxing and your body still feels it, and I think with this pause, it's like my body doesn't want to go back to that level of running any longer. I can't sprint this marathon any longer, so it's like now I'm trying to figure out, you know, if I'm pivoting again, you know, if there's a different pivot here, and if this was this, you know, beautiful affair but is now, you know—I know. Nice eye roll. [Laughter]

But if that's what it was, you know, and now it's like, okay, so I guess it's you're always just kind of looking up and working up, you know, and I feel like maybe I don't want to go that way anymore. Maybe it isn't a trajectory up anymore. Maybe there's a level of stabilizing at this point and feeling grounded and maybe learning to love what I actually do again, you know, and not be so hung up on the next thing that we're, you know, working towards, and that's my motivator. I would really love to fall in love with baking again.

[01:38:11]

Kelly Spivey: Do you still—is A Squad technically still around or—

[01:38:16]

Natasha Gaskill: No. It was defunct. We turned that into [Laughter] a mother-in-law cottage now. [Laughter] We sold all of the pieces. Yeah, we sold everything out of there. Yeah, it was kind of funny, too, because the other—I had this mixer, this 40-quart mixer out there that was the original mixer at Cafe Metropole that was the restaurant before The Grey, because I'm good friends with Clara [Fishel] and Steve who used to own Metropole, and I had bought that mixer from Tom Stephenson, and, yeah, and that was a weird thing to let go of in a weird way because it's like I work in that prep kitchen so much upstairs, and I know, you know, like I had asked Tom like where did it live and stuff, and, you know, I think people—I don't even know if people know the story that there was like a cult restaurant in that existing building, you know, it was a Greyhound station, but, I mean, John O., when he bought that building, I mean, it had just in the last decade been a restaurant, you know, that if you talk to Savannahians, is just freaking revered in this way because it was a bit of a shooting star that burnt out real quick, you know.

So, yeah, when I was breaking apart my space in the back, it did feel kind of, you know, a little poetic in terms of the fact that this mixer has, you know, been in this one space and that we kind of traded spots and it came to my kitchen and I went to his kitchen, and like, you know. [Laughter] And it's—and then that was the weirdest part, like the weirdest piece of equipment that I got rid of, of feeling some level of attachment, even though I was kind of done with that space, you know, at that period of time because I was really so very excited about what my future was, you know, and it was just this

isn't—I'm not here anymore. I'm going to just—we're going to turn this into a space for when my parents come and Nathan's parents come.

So, yeah, it's totally defunct at this point. There's nothing out there any longer. There's not even the plumbing where Nathan just literally patched over all of the plumbing where the triple-sink was, because we had to adjust where the footprint of the bed and stuff like that. So it's like there's 220 volts still in the wall for the [Laughter] convection oven. That's pretty much it. It's the only, you know, the only clue that there was a kitchen out there before.

[01:41:01]

Kelly Spivey: Wow. Do you know who has that mixer now?

[01:41:05]

Natasha Gaskill: Yeah. Anthony [Debreceny] at Collins Quarter, because they were going to open a bakery and I think they put a pause on that as well, but he bought it from me. He bought it from me drunk off of Facebook one night. [Laughter]

[01:41:22]

Kelly Spivey: I love that it has this like—like this mixer has its own little life in Savannah. It's like—

[01:41:25]

Natasha Gaskill: It needs its own Instagram account. [laughter]

[01:41:33]

Kelly Spivey: Oh, my god.

[01:41:35]

Natasha Gaskill: Now it's in that side building at Collins Quarters. Just, I mean, and who knows, like maybe if I go do my own thing or whatever, I'll reach out to Anthony and ask him if he still has it. I mean, and it's so funny, because I don't even want that type of mixer, right? you know? But it's, you know, it's like I think about any kind of—because I will say the other thing that was really cool about this—like about coming on to The Grey is learning totally different skills, not even just the—I mean, the plating stuff, obviously, but with the Market, because we had a whole bread program and I had never—I'd done bread like, you know, I can make a loaf of bread and bake it in a Dutch oven in my kitchen. You know what I mean? But I'd never done it at all commercially, had never done it in any true production fashion. I'd only made *a* loaf of bread, you know? And so while my dad had, you know, kept the sourdough starter and all of that kind of stuff over the course of my life, I didn't ever make bread with him before, you know, or use that said starter for anything.

And Matt Molinari is who they hired to start in that space and to start the bread program there, and he is from Staten Island and then he worked for Eataly and then he was out in L.A. for a while working for a small baker out there, and then he was friends with John O.'s niece, and so he got the job, and he's not there any longer, but it was—I mean, it was good, like it was good to learn from—he definitely knows his stuff, and so it

was great to learn from somebody, you know, who knew how to make bread in that way, you know, and was kind of—it was cool that he was bicoastal and had this opportunity to work with, you know, different grains and different—I mean, bread's so specific to region and styles, and so he was kind of figuring it out down here, too, because the protein content is so different in wheat down here, and the humidity, you know, it was a struggle, you know. He had such a struggle because he was used to being in these dry places, and you're like, you know [Laughter], you're literally in this place where it's even now, because we have a really thriving laminating program at the Market that I'm super proud of because I busted my ass to get it right because it was so hard. It was so hard down here to get them, to get croissants to behave how you wanted them to behave, and I remember Matt and I kind of talking it out, and him just going, "I don't understand. Like this is the hydration that I would use like in L.A."

And I'm like, "Babe, it is 90 percent humidity." You know what I mean? Like, You know what I mean?, I mean, I don't even know what the natural hydration of your flour is before you even touch it with water, you know. That's indetectable (sic) of just feel and eyesight, but these are all old buildings, and I don't care how climate-controlled they are, they're not climate-controlled at all, and if flour's main function in life is just absorbing water, your dough is radically different every day and it really takes this level of expertise to feel it and see how it's behaving as this living organism, and it's the same thing with the dough for croissants. That's why it's the hardest thing to teach somebody else, too, you know. Same thing with pie dough. I mean, there's no different there either, you know.

[01:45:12]

Kelly Spivey: Or biscuits.

[01:45:13]

Natasha Gaskill: Or biscuits.

[01:45:16]

Kelly Spivey: It's like all in the feel of it.

[01:45:17]

Natasha Gaskill: Yeah, and so you have—and especially like when you're dealing with young pastry chefs who really want this formula, you know, they had heard their whole life that baking is science. Oh, it's science, it's scientific, and you just have to be so exacting, and they've got their micro scale and all of the stuff, and you're going, "That is true. There is an element of that that is totally true, but the other truth of it is, is it's also intuitive and the only way you build that level of expertise and build your own intuition is just doing it and messing it up and then doing it again and messing it up in a different way."

And, you know, I literally learned how to bake croissants by over-proofing croissants. Probably for every one time it worked out, it was probably three or four times I over-proofed them, because it was like I would take them to the point where it's, "Okay, is this ready? Is this ready? Is this ready? Oh, shit, it's over-proofed." [Laughter] you know? And then it got to the point where you literally saw that the way that they moved

when you shook them to recognizing there it is. And you can't really—there's no way to quantify that, and there's no way to identify that except for taking somebody by their arm and going, "See? See? And then like let's leave two out and let it go twenty minutes longer. We'll bake these ones and then let's leave these two out and see what happens, and then we'll bake those." You know? And then they identify—they make the connections for themselves of how to make it happen.

Was this the most rambling interview? Okay. [Laughter]

[01:46:58]

Kelly Spivey: No, no, no. I was going to say I feel like I could talk all day about this, but obviously like there is a time limit. [laughter] So the last thing that I'll ask you is if there is anything that I haven't asked you or anything that you wanted to add.

[01:47:17]

Natasha Gaskill: Hmm. I don't—I mean, I don't know. I guess, well, I think I'd like to—well, I'd like to touch on the fact that I think in the South, when we were talking about the original topic here of monetizing, women monetizing baking in the South, I think that it's interesting because I think the South really reveres the home baker in a way that doesn't exist in the rest of the country, you know? And some of it is a little folkloric, I think, you know, kind of like the same thing around barbecue. I think there's—and I think there's parts of it that are nice and there's parts of those things that are silly, but I think the best bakers in the South are literally people in their homes, you know, and I don't know how—you know, I guess how I was monetizing it before, you know, was

kind of like was this level of homage to the—and I'm not from the South, mind you, but of the women down here, you know, of how I know so many people who have side hustles in baking, you know, who literally are like, "Oh, I'm an engineer, but during Thanksgiving, I'll make pies and sell them at the church," or something like that, you know. I've never been any other place where baking is really integral to the culture. You know what I mean? Like kind of the same way where Susan, you know, the way that she found joy in—and intersected it into family life, you know, like that was her only joyful memories as a child and wanted to recreate that, just feels like that's kind of just part of the history here, you know, and I don't know if it's like of a level of so much without, you know, that you're creating stuff that gives you joy.

Because I feel like, you know, pie dough is so simple in its actual ingredients, you know, where it's just flour and butter and water and a little salt and sugar if you have it, kind of thing, and that seems so base, right? But then it's like all of this level of like we were talking about, this expertise and paying attention and setting intention around it and being conscious about the ingredients that you're using and feeling it and all of these things that are infinitely complicated, and I just feel like that is exactly what it feels like living in the South. It seems so basic and it seems so simple, but I've never been around more complicated people in my whole entire life, you know? [Laughter] Like navigating through it in the most wonderful ways and in the most frustrating ways, you know? It's just a very beautiful, complicated puzzle down here that feels like there's some simple answer around it, but it's just, you know—I love that I have been able to kind of make this happen, and I don't know that it would have happened in another place the same way, you know? That it wouldn't have been—I don't know that I could have made this

happen in Seattle, you know, or San Francisco. I don't know that—and I guess that I don't know those people, but I don't know if being a home baker has the same sort of relevance, you know, or—because I feel like I take people—I hire people all the time who don't have restaurant experience and don't have a culinary degree, but they just bake, you know? And I hire them for the Market all the time, and they always work out to be better than the people who have come through a million different restaurants or are coming fresh out of culinary school and have this expectation, you know? So I think that's—did you feel like that when—don't you feel like it's even different than in New Orleans, like in the cities where they have this culinary sort of legacy, they want you to be a chef and not a cook or not a baker?

[01:51:53]

Kelly Spivey: Yeah. I mean, like on a personal level, I always struggled with that because I didn't go to culinary school, so it was like I don't feel like I'm "allowed"—like with air quotes—to call myself a chef, but I don't know—I'm not a baker. Like I don't really know where I fall. [Laughter]

[01:52:11]

Natasha Gaskill: You ran a program. I mean, I think that makes you a chef.

[01:52:15]

Kelly Spivey: [Laughter]

[01:52:17]

Natasha Gaskill: You know what I mean?

[01:52:17]

Kelly Spivey: Yeah, but I do think I agree with what you're saying about like the South. It's just part of the DNA somehow.

[01:52:24]

Natasha Gaskill: Totally, totally. I mean, I feel like—and not even really for women. I just think across the board I feel like I work with all these young men who are from the South who are always telling me about how to make biscuits, and I'm always like, "Stay in your lane." [Laughter] "I didn't ask you, Raymond. I understand your grandmother makes the best biscuits, but if you're not going to tell me what it is about the biscuits that are the best, keep it to yourself." [Laughter]

[01:52:59]

Kelly Spivey: All right. I'm going to stop recording. Thank you, by the way.

[01:53:04]

Natasha Gaskill: This is awesome.

[End of interview]