



Ali Zarbashi
Atlanta, Georgia

Date: September 24, 2019
Location: Bones, Atlanta, GA
Interviewer: Annemarie Anderson
Length: Forty-nine minutes
Project: Career Servers

[*START INTERVIEW*]

[00:00:01.10]

Annemarie A.: I'm gonna start off and slate the tape for us. Today is September 24, 2019. I'm at Bones in Atlanta, Georgia, with Mr. Ali Zarbashi. Would you go ahead and introduce yourself for the recorder, please?

[00:00:18.10]

Ali Z.: Yeah. My name is Ali, last name is Zarbashi. I'm a Bones server. I've been here for almost four years. I was born in Tehran, Iran, one of the countries in the Middle East. I came here when I was twenty-four years. Started going to school for a couple of years. Unfortunately, I didn't finish school. But one of my friends, one of my coworkers worked for the Ambassador restaurant, which was in the Roswell area. He brought me here, and I got a job. I been here since then. What else you want to know?

[00:01:03.23]

Annemarie A.: That's great! Well, for the record, what's your date of birth?

[00:01:07.13]

Ali Z.: Oh. May 1, 1953.

[00:01:11.02]

Annemarie A.: Perfect. So, you grew up in Tehran?

[00:01:13.07]

Ali Z.: Yeah, I grew up in Tehran, basically the center of Tehran. Then I went to school, and I finished high school, and I joined the army. Spent two years in army. That's mandatory over there, so you gotta go to the college or, if you want a job, you have to go to Army and the serve the Army. So, I knew I'm gonna come—get out of the country, so I went to the army, spent two years in the army. After that, I got a job in a Japanese company for almost twenty-one months. I worked there for twenty-one months, and then I got the student visa and I came here. I was here in Atlanta for, like, six months, because my brother was here. I stayed with him for six months and then, since I got a student visa from—I mean, what do you call . . . application from one of the universities in Tampa. So, I had to go over there. Stayed there for maybe six months or so. Then I came back here. I did go to college here for maybe two years or so, but I was working as a part-time while I was going to college. For some reason, I stopped going to college and start working full time in the restaurant business.

[00:02:46.02]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense. What was the role of food in your family? Could you talk about maybe fond food memories from your childhood?

[00:02:57.10]

Ali Z.: Well, everything my mother cooked, we ate it. [Laughter] Basically, food over there is—everything, most of the dishes they serve, it comes with rice. All kind of rices. Mix 'em

with many different spices and things, vegetables, whatever. But same here. We had fish, chicken, beef, lamb. This kind of stuff, you know. Yeah.

[00:03:23.09]

Annemarie A.: That's great. So, what were your first impressions? So, you moved to Atlanta first.

[00:03:29.07]

Ali Z.: Yeah, yeah.

[00:03:30.23]

Annemarie A.: What were your first impressions of Atlanta and the South?

[00:03:33.09]

Ali Z.: Well, Atlanta wasn't like this. Not close. I mean, I remember back then, I think the population was less than three million. And that Buckhead area you see a lot of the buildings and high rises, there was none of them here. None of them was here. When I start working here, even Bones wasn't such a restaurant back then. Because when I asked my coworkers to, "Hey, if you work—" He told me he's workin' at Bones restaurant. He told me, "I'm looking for—" I had a night job over there. So, I told him, "I want to work daytime, too, for extra money." He said, "There is a restaurant in Buckhead called Bones. Let me go to talk to them, see if they need a busboy over here." So, he came here and I think talked to the manager. They told him, "Yeah." I came here and I start my job as an

assistant waiter, as a busboy. Yeah, back then, Atlanta was . . . well, actually, before I came here, I told you I was working in the Japanese company. There was one American guy that was kind of a translator between Japanese. He knew perfect Japanese. He could speak Japanese very well. So, he was kind of a translator between Japanese and Iranian. When I told him I want to go to Atlanta, Georgia, he says, "Well, it's a big, big, village." That's what exactly he say. "Atlanta is kind of a big village." He was from Washington, D.C. Well, I came here. It wasn't a village, but it was a small city. A small city. There was nothing—not much going on here. And as far as restaurant back then, maybe three or four kind of popular restaurants back there. One of 'em was, I think it was Abbey. The other one was Coach and Six. Those restaurants are gone now. There were, like, two or three restaurants, well-known restaurants back here, back then.

[00:05:46.02]

Annemarie A.: That's really interesting. Before, where you worked before Bones, was that also a restaurant?

[00:05:53.03]

Ali Z.: My first job here in U.S., I work at the . . . Pizza Hut. Friend of mine was a cook over there. I told him, "Hey, find me a job." He said, "Okay." I got a job over there, but I couldn't read English. I couldn't speak English. So, every time—I was cook, too. Cooking pizza. So, every time he was working with me, standing next to me, I was doing good, because every time I need a question, had a question, had to ask him. Couple times he was not on the schedule, I was on the schedule by myself, and I start messing up left and

right because I couldn't read the tickets. Back then, they had a little printed ticket. People order, for example, "I need a large pizza with the pepperoni, bell pepper, mushroom." Whatever, they just tick those items. I really didn't know between—hey, how are you? I didn't even know.

[00:06:59.22]

Henri Hollis: I'm gonna get set up in this other room. I'll meet up with you guys in a minute.

[00:07:05.07]

Ali Z.: I didn't even know a difference between, for example, pepperoni and Italian sausage. So, I used to mess up a lot of pizzas. But I work maybe five or six months over there, and there was another restaurant on Roswell Road, just inside of the perimeter called Daddy's Money. One of my friend took me over there. It was kind of . . . they had steaks and seafood, this kind of stuff. I stayed there for maybe another six months or so. Then, there was another restaurant in Roswell, Roswell area, called Ambassador. Ambassador, back then, was one of the established restaurant in Atlanta. So, I went over there. I worked maybe for another year or so as a busboy. Then, it was in Ambassador when I talked to my friend for find me a job, and he brought me here. So, yeah.

[00:08:04.10]

Annemarie A.: That's great. So, what year—just for the record—what year did you move to Atlanta?

[00:08:08.23]

Ali Z.: Okay. Exactly January 16, 1978.

[00:08:12.11]

Annemarie A.: Great.

[00:08:12.26]

Ali Z.: That was exact. I always remember that day, yeah. [Laughter]

[00:08:19.01]

Annemarie A.: That's great. And what year did you start at Bones?

[00:08:22.15]

Ali Z.: When? Okay, March of . . . well, I would start March 3 of 1980.

[00:08:29.16]

Annemarie A.: You have a great memory.

[00:08:32.16]

Ali Z.: Those numbers, I always remember. I start March 3 of 1980, but back then, they just told me, "Hey, this is your job." No training, no nothing. Go do it. As a matter of fact, when I walk in to the Bones restaurant, there was another poor server. Not a server, a busboy. As I walk in, he walk out. So, they fired him, they hired me. Anyway, I worked for maybe

three weeks or so. Then, one of the managers came to me and said, "Hey, Ali. You've got to fill out the application." So, when I fill out my application, I put like—March 28. Put that date on the application. But actually, I work here March 3, start working here.

[00:09:22.03]

Annemarie A.: That's great. So, you'd had a little bit of restaurant experience before starting at Bones, but could you talk a little about—you remember the first couple of weeks that you worked here? Could you talk about, like, your experience here starting?

[00:09:37.07]

Ali Z.: I . . . as I said, I wasn't a server. I was a busboy, assistant waiter, busboy, whatever. I kind of watched those guys and what they are doing, but I really don't, I didn't do anything about serving foods or drinks or anything. I just watched those guys. As a matter of fact, when I start working here, when I start working as a server after three years working here, I had a really hard time because I didn't know food. I didn't know drinks. Drinks was my nightmare. I didn't know anything about it. I mean, I drink myself, but beer and wine and this kind of stuff. It took me a long time to get used to it. Took me a long time, yeah, to get used to the food and know the food, this kind of stuff.

[00:10:27.16]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense. How long were you a busboy or server's assistant before you became a server?

[00:10:32.21]

Ali Z.: Here?

[00:10:33.11]

Annemarie A.: Yes.

[00:10:33.11]

Ali Z.: Three years. Yeah, I work three years. The reason I ask managers to promote me to the servers was, I was bussing here one day—lunchtime. They hired guy from outside to be a server. He broke the glass in ice machine upstairs, and he just walked away. That day, I was by myself. I worked the whole year, I was the only busboy here. It was just upstairs. So, I was the only busboy. He broke the glass and he just walked away. After five minutes or so, I told him—by name, I forgot his name—I said, "Hey, you broke the glass. You gotta do something about it." I'm by myself. I just go get me a bucket of ice or something from downstairs. We had another ice machine downstairs. He kind of ignored me. Five minutes later, I asked him again. I said, "Listen, I really don't have time to get the ice. Go get the bucket of ice for me." He ignored me. The third time I ask him, he kind of pushed me aside. "Get out of my face." Then I get pissed off. I went to the manager, said, "Listen, I can't serve this ice. There's a broken ice, broken glass in the ice. We gotta dump the whole ice." I told him what happened. They didn't say anything to me. Then, I was working that night. After lunch, I came back here for dinner. It was around 9:30, 9:45 that night, I was bussing table. My general manager came to me and said, "Ali, I send the guy home." They fire the guy. A couple days later, I went to one of my favorite

manager, Ed **Rudolph**. He liked me, I liked him, too. I told him, "Hey, Ed, where you put your ad to hire servers? Do you put 'em in post office?" I was kind of joking with him. He said, "Come here, Ali. What are you trying to tell me?" I said, "Well, this is my job. I've been here three years. You're hiring people from outside, come here. The guy broke the glass in the ice machine, just walked away. It's not fair." "Okay." He told me, back then, the corporate office was exactly across the street from Bones. He said, "Ali, I want you to go, talk to—let me call Richard, ask for appointment. Go talk to him." I told him, "Ed, you make the appointment for me." "Okay." So, he called Richard. Richard Lewis, the owner. Made an appointment for me. I think a couple days later, I went over there across the street. I talked to Richard. He didn't ask me anything about, you want a job or anything. He just start talking about the business, where we're gonna go, what we're gonna do. He was talking and I was listening for, like, maybe half an hour, forty minutes or so. After forty minutes, he got up, shook my hand, said, "Ali, I'm glad you asked for a job. We love to see these things. We love to promote people to get a better job." So, that the story, how I got the job. But, after that, that was a tradition here. We didn't hire anybody, any server from outside. You gotta come here, be an assistant waiter for six months, eight months, whatever. Then people here can work you up, decide you are good enough to be a server or, no, you have to be assistant waiter for another six months. For example, you interview—Mindy [interviewer's note: Mark Mindykowski]?

[00:14:30.17]

Annemarie A.: Um-hm.

[00:14:30.19]

Ali Z.: Mindy, Joe, John, all these three people that were servers. I mean, assistant waiters, become servers here. Except David. David, they hired him as a server. But those guys, they bus tables for about six months, one year or so. Then they got the job. Yeah.

[00:14:50.29]

Annemarie A.: Joe Larson was telling me about that yesterday, about bein' voted up. Did you have to be voted up as well, or did Richard—

[00:14:56.23]

Ali Z.: I said, after I got the job, they became kind of routine, became rule of Bones. You have to be a assistant waiter before we become server, yeah.

[00:15:09.28]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense.

[00:15:10.24]

Ali Z.: Yeah, yeah. That was after me.

[00:15:10.26]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense. How did your knowledge of being a waiter's assistant or a busboy help you when you started serving here?

[00:15:23.13]

Ali Z.: Well, as I said, I used to watch people closely. They loved me. I don't know, because of my personality, whatever. I had no problem with anybody, so they helped me a lot. As I say, it wasn't easy. It was very hard, especially for me. Back then was a hostage situation, Iranian hostage situation. It was really hard. But I had a good relationship with all of them, so they help me. Every time I need something, I had a question, they helped me. That wasn't too bad, yeah.

[00:15:58.18]

Annemarie A.: Yeah. Did the political, tense political situation, kind of impact you in a negative way in your life?

[00:16:06.21]

Ali Z.: Yeah, it was hard. Yeah, I mean, it was hard. Couple times, I kind of got a little . . . what do you call, insult from our guests. But I understand, you know. I understand the situation. No, no, yeah.

[00:16:27.03]

Annemarie A.: Yeah. That's still really hard to kind of deal with.

[00:16:28.19]

Ali Z.: Yes. It was hard. It wasn't easy. It was hard. But, you know, I had to deal with it. You know, yeah.

[00:16:36.06]

Annemarie A.: I understand.

[00:16:36.06]

Ali Z.: I couldn't do anything. I couldn't change anything.

[00:16:40.28]

Annemarie A.: Yeah. Well, I was wondering—you talked about observing and watching the other waiters around you. Could you talk about some of those folks who kind of impacted you or who you learned the most from?

[00:16:55.19]

Ali Z.: They're all gone. They're all not here. Yeah, I can name 'em. Eddie Burn, we call him Fast Eddie. **Don Laneese.** The original Old Man, Phil James. They call him Old Man. **Jerry Sadnowski**, something like that. Bunch of them, they're all gone. Some of 'em are deceased, some of 'em are passed away. Yeah.

[00:17:26.03]

Annemarie A.: What were some of those things that you learned from them that helped you?

[00:17:33.03]

Ali Z.: As I said, my biggest problem was drinks. Because maybe you can take a menu home and study it, get help from here, maybe take me two or three days to learn a menu. But drinks, I had a hard time with it. It took me a while to learn.

[00:17:55.21]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense.

[00:17:56.18]

Ali Z.: Yes.

[00:17:57.24]

Annemarie A.: I was wonderin', too—well, this goes kind of to the present. Would you kind of share a typical day of work, from kind of start to finish, now?

[00:18:08.20]

Ali Z.: Right now?

[00:18:09.06]

Annemarie A.: Yeah.

[00:18:09.17]

Ali Z.: Well . . . my thing, every time we have a meeting here between 5 to 5:30, or every time I talk to the new guys here, my advice as—been here for thirty, forty years, my advice to

them is, "Hey. Get here on time, maybe five or ten minutes earlier. Get here fresh. That means, if you have to work lunch today, don't go out drinkin' night before or go party. I done it. I pay the price for it. You don't do it." Yeah, I try to help them as much as I can, try to just give 'em little inside information. That is, you are not concrete here. Nobody's concrete here. If you mess up, they may give you a little warning one or twice. Three or four time, you're out of here, no matter who you are, how long you been here. So, I give a little advice every time I can, if they come to me or if I see something, I say something. They do it to me. They help me, you know, yeah.

[00:19:22.28]

Annemarie A.: That's good.

[00:19:25.00]

Ali Z.: Yeah.

[00:19:26.12]

Annemarie A.: So, after you kind of get in at the day, what are your duties before service?

[00:19:33.12]

Ali Z.: Okay. We have—each service has a front man and back man. We have, what do you call, side work. Opening side work and closing side work. So, I don't have to look at the sheet because I know it. Lately, I just work two stations. But even when I work three, four, five station, every night different station, I knew it. But there is a book here. If you don't know

your side work, you can go look at the book and tells you, you know. Here, it's very organized, you know. Very organized. Yeah, we can do that. Or you can ask, "Hey—" Or, we can tell 'em, "Listen, you didn't do that. This is your part, part of your side work, too. You gotta do it. You gotta finish it, yeah." We talk to each other. They listen.

[Laughter]

[00:20:26.09]

Annemarie A.: Yeah, that's good. That's good. So, when Bones opens, and—[Phone rings] Do you need to take that?

[00:20:33.13]

Ali Z.: No, no, no, no, no. I was just gonna turn it off. Sorry.

[00:20:37.08]

Annemarie A.: When Bones—oh, you're fine. When Bones opens and it's showtime, could you kinda talk about that? What it's like to be on the floor?

[00:20:47.25]

Ali Z.: We are always talking about it. In the shift meeting, always. Almost every day. As I said, we have a meeting between 5 and 5:30. We usually, first ten or fifteen minutes, we have a wine tasting. Maybe three or four times a week. We taste the wine. Then, last twenty minutes or so—fifteen, twenty minutes—we always talk about this. We always say, "Hey. From start to—when you start working till your last guest leave your station, you

are on the stage." People look at you. You have to be ready. It doesn't matter what happened night before, whatever. When you come here, you have to put that face game on and be ready. Specially now with this kind of restaurant. People come here, spend money. We're expensive. I get 50% discount. I may come here twice a year. [Laughter] It's expensive! People come here, they spend money, they deserve best. They deserve the best.

[00:21:56.27]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense.

[00:21:56.29]

Ali Z.: Yeah.

[00:21:58.11]

Annemarie A.: So, when you—you guys do the team service, do you usually do front wait or back wait?

[00:22:03.14]

Ali Z.: I prefer back. I prefer back. Because I been doing this for years and—but every now and then, I work front. There is not such a back man or front man. We always say, do not cross the line, unless you have to. Let your back man, your front man, do his job. If the front man needs help or back man needs help, you help him. So, I'm a back man. I'm known as a back man. But almost every night, I take maybe two or three orders, take the

orders, because my front man—for example, tonight, I work here. We have two ten-tops, whatever. He's gonna get busy. He's gonna need to spend time with the guests, so I have to be ready to take their order. Yeah, we help each other, you know. Yeah.

[00:22:57.25]

Annemarie A.: That's good. Who do you usually work with?

[00:23:02.13]

Ali Z.: Right now, I just got two partners. I don't know. you know the name, Derrick?

[00:23:09.17]

Annemarie A.: Ah, I don't think so.

[00:23:10.10]

Ali Z.: Okay. Derrick Sharp and the other partner is Lee Barker, yeah. Two nights with Lee Barker and two nights with Derrick Sharp. I'm kind of retired. I get retirement benefit, but because I'm with kids, I got three kids, triplets—

[00:23:33.19]

Annemarie A.: Oh, wow.

[00:23:33.20]

Ali Z.: They're all in college. So, I have to work till they get out of college, because I need the insurance. They have to have insurance. To have that insurance, I have to work. But I work just four nights.

[00:23:47.09]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense.

[00:23:48.01]

Ali Z.: Well, as I said, we have rules here. Did you know anything about the Rolex? Did anybody tell you Rolex, you go Rolex after ten? After fifteen, you get something. After twenty, you get—lately it's been cash. It's good. But, as I said twenty-five though, in that book, it say, for example, once you get to 25 years of service, you can drop one or two nights. Or you can, if you get to, like, twenty years of service, you can drop one or two nights. You can do that, as long as you be—you work enough hours to keep your insurance, you can do that.

[00:24:34.12]

Annemarie A.: That's pretty nice.

[00:24:34.14]

Ali Z.: So, if I didn't have to work for insurance because of insurance, I could work two nights a week. Or even one night. Because they let me do that. They are really . . . this is different restaurant. Most restaurants, they won't let you do that. They don't care who you are, you

know, how long you spend here. But here, even I told the owners, I said, "Listen, I'm getting tired. I gotta work." She told me—you know Susan?

[00:25:06.23]

Annemarie A.: I don't know her personally, but I know of—

[00:25:07.04]

Ali Z.: They're partners.

[00:25:10.08]

Annemarie A.: Yeah.

[00:25:10.28]

Ali Z.: Susan told me, "I don't care. If you have to work one shift a month, we want you here.

We want you here." You know? Because they want you here, they want me here.

[Laughter] I no have an explanation. Most places, once you are done, no, you're out of here. But no. This place is different. That's why you see a lot of people been here for years and years and years. It's not just me, it's not just Mindy or Joe or John. A lotta people been here twenty years, twenty-three years, eighteen years, sixteen years. So, it's a lot of people, yeah.

[00:25:50.26]

Annemarie A.: That's what it seems like. It seems like it's . . . a restaurant that values the people who work here.

[00:25:57.08]

Ali Z.: Yes, yeah. Yeah. We have a lot of what are called benefits. I don't know they told you? No? We have free insurance. We had, but I think the law won't allow them to do it anymore. We have . . . 401K, which is very, very important, 401K. Because without that 401K, we couldn't save the money we saved—for example, I got it in my stock. I couldn't save that kind of money. And they match, I think the first five percent, they match half of it. Which is good. It's free money, maybe hundred dollars a week, whatever. It's free money.

[00:26:45.28]

Annemarie A.: Yeah.

[00:26:45.28]

Ali Z.: Yeah. We have these kind of benefits. That's why I think the people stay here. Even people leave this restaurant for whatever reason, some people like to go place to place. Even they'll leave but try to come back. Some of them, they want to come back. Some of them they won't let them come back, you know.

[00:27:05.20]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense. So, you've been here, you're the most senior person here now, right?

[00:27:11.07]

Ali Z.: Yeah. We had two. Unfortunately, one of them got sick. One of them had . . . diabetes, yeah. They cut his leg from knee or whatever, you know. Yeah, he was the most senior before me, but since he left five or six, eight years, so, yeah, I am the most senior waiter. Server here. Person.

[00:27:36.10]

Annemarie A.: Well, tell me, how has your job or your responsibilities, how has it kind of changed over time, if it has?

[00:27:45.01]

Ali Z.: As I said, at this restaurant, goal—it wasn't like this fifteen, twenty years ago; thirty-five. It wasn't like this at all when I start working here. It was just another restaurant. No one, no one dreamed about this restaurant's gonna be here after forty years. I think even Richard Lewis wouldn't believe it's gonna last that long, because no restaurant lasts that long here. As I said, a lot of restaurants be like—Ambassador, Mission, or Coach and Six or Abbey or whatever, they were great restaurants, but they are not here anymore. That lasted twenty years, twenty-five years, and eventually, they gone. But, as I said, this restaurant kind of . . . we don't relax here. When you start relaxing, bad things happen. We don't relax here. We come here every day, we try to do a better job. Every day. Forget

about last night; today is a fresh day. You gotta do a better job. You gotta be better than your last shift, your last day you were here. So, this is always—that's kind of a management duty, to push us, to tell us, "Hey. You are on stage. Don't worry about it. You gotta do it. You gotta do better." So, this is kind of a tradition. Even, new guys come here, we let them know that, "Hey. We work hard to get here, and we're not gonna let it go down."

[00:29:28.21]

Annemarie A.: For sure.

[00:29:29.14]

Ali Z.: Yeah.

[00:29:30.27]

Annemarie A.: I can tell that. I'm wondering, too, what—so, I'm interested, too, in kind of how you develop a relationship. And I know that this restaurant, especially, how you develop a relationship or rapport with regulars? So, people that are here a lot? Could you maybe talk just generally—you don't have to share any names—of regulars?

[00:29:56.03]

Ali Z.: Yeah. I mean, we have a lot of regular customers; a lot of regular customers. Sometimes, they sit in my station. Sometimes, I don't. Even when I'm not in my station, I'll go say hello to them. For example, even, I don't know they are here; the managers come to me

and says, they give me a little, they call it a walk-by. A little sheet. I have to sign it. It says, "Mr. So-and-so, Mr. Smith sitting on Table 10, position 2, wants you to go say hello to them." Some of them, I really don't know, but they've been here before. So, they've asked me, "Go say hello to Mr. So-and-so." So, you don't have to bother them. You just walk by. If you make eye contact, just say hello . "Hey, Mr. Smith. How you doin'?" That's it. That's all we have to say. So, establishing the relationship is very important, very important. That's why I know, we got people—I know them, they've been coming here for years and years and years and years. And, you know, it's amazing. That's—this is not the restaurant, it's a club. Most regular customers, they look at it as a club. We're going to a club. They come here to see other people. For example, Mr. Smith—Smith come here to see Mr. Jackson. He knows Mr. Jackson is here, so he'll go say hello to him now. You're gonna have a dinner together or, you know, sit next to each other. Yeah.

[00:31:32.07]

Annemarie A.: That's great. That's a—

[00:31:34.14]

Ali Z.: Yeah. And as far as having a—[Coughs] Excuse me. Call party or whatever, it happens. Some of our guests, they sit in the same table every night that they come here. For example, if Mr. Smith come here twice, three times a month, he stays, he sits here in this table. So, a person, a server who's working this section, get to know them. They know each other. I know, I waited on them last time they come here, I waited on them two months ago when he came here. I know exactly what kind of drinks they order. I know

what kind of wine they like. I know what kind of steak they want, what temperature they want. So, they feel like—they feel comfortable when they come here. And we feel comfortable, because I know them. I know what he wants or what she wants. So, it's now easy to take of them. So, that helps us. That helps, that's a big help, yeah.

[00:32:44.06]

Annemarie A.: For sure. And I was wonderin', I'm kinda interested in peoples'—the way that they do things. How do you kind of manage a table? Like when two people, or however many people come to dine, how would you kind of guide or create an experience for them?

[00:33:03.25]

Ali Z.: Okay. For example, last night I was upstairs. We had the first deuce that sat on Table 32. My front man asked him, they've been here before. They said, "No, this is our first time here." I think they were out-of-towners, too. They came here just for visit, whatever. So, after they had a cocktail, my front man offered to give them a tour of the restaurant. They said, "Okay." My front man told me, he said, "I'm gonna leave my station for, like, maybe five or ten minutes or so. Watch this station, okay?" So, he gave them a tour, tour of the whole restaurant. He took them to the wine—have you been back there?

[00:33:51.04]

Annemarie A.: Yes, I have.

[00:33:51.20]

Ali Z.: Took them to the wine store, they come here, upstairs, whatever. This kind of stuff you don't see in other restaurants. We do that. We do that here, you know.

[00:34:03.22]

Annemarie A.: That's great.

[00:34:03.22]

Ali Z.: So, next time the guy come here, he's gonna ask for him. I'll do the same thing. If I go back to Bones maybe a year or so from now, I remember that guy and how he gave me a tour or gave me a good service. I want that guy to wait on me, you know? That's why you create the—what do you call?

[00:34:25.12]

Annemarie A.: Experience?

[00:34:25.12]

Ali Z.: No, the experience. What do you call that, when people ask for you all the time? What do you call the . . .

[00:34:35.22]

Annemarie A.: Like, I know what you mean.

[00:34:38.09]

Ali Z.: Yeah. I can't say it right now, but they come to you. They always ask for you, you know.

[00:34:42.20]

Annemarie A.: Yeah.

[00:34:42.20]

Ali Z.: Call party, I'm sorry. Call party. Become your call party.

[00:34:47.19]

Annemarie A.: That's great. Well, I think this is somethin' that you mentioned: you've talked about, like, how it was so hard to kind of get into and learn drinks, but I was wondering, how do you personally—and how have you—educated yourself about food and drink?

[00:35:06.13]

Ali Z.: Well, as I said, I don't work in too many restaurant. I work here for a long, long time, and we have a very simple—very simple menu. Learning that menu wasn't too, too hard for me. I learned it, I ask my partners, my co-workers if I had a question. That wasn't too, too hard. But the trick—you never know what people ask for a drink. You never know. For example, we had a general manager here. His wife was drinking, she called it **Stasia**. Stasia was her name. The Stasia is a vodka, cranberry juice, and piece of lime. Some people call it different, she called it Stasia. So, he called for it, "Well, I want a Stasia." It's kind of odd to ask, "What is a Stasia?" So, we have people—I mean, I had a problem

with this. But eventually, I learn. I always embarrassed many times, I didn't know it. I had to go ask my co-workers. I had to write it down. I had to write it down. Made a mistake. But eventually I learn, you know. It wasn't too, too easy. No. It was my biggest . . . I don't say problem, but my biggest concern, my biggest headache in this restaurant. In restaurant business was drink, because I didn't know it.

[00:36:51.00]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense.

[00:36:48.06]

Ali Z.: Yeah, I didn't know it.

[00:36:52.10]

Annemarie A.: It would be mine, too. [Laughter] I'm curious, too, so I've kind of—from talkin' to other people—have realized that creating a dining experience and serving food is a collaborative effort between the dining room and the kitchen. Could you talk a little bit about the relationship that you and the other front of house employees have with kitchen staff?

[00:37:17.23]

Ali Z.: That's one of the reasons I work back, because I love those guys in the kitchen. They love me, too. I always . . . always kind of give them a little hard time. Not in a bad way, but a hard time. They give me a hard time, too. But we have a really good relationship with the

back. Every now and then, we make it front man or we, in the dining room, we make a mistake. We have to go back to kitchen and ask for a favor, "Listen, I need this right away." They do it for you, because of the relationship. Not just me, most people here, they have a good relationship with the back. But you have to. You have to. Because basically, they're running the show over there. But people don't realize that. Those guys are very important. Very important, you know. And yes, they work hard. They work real hard, I know it. Unfortunately, no one see those guys and how hard they work. I know. Dishwashers or cooks. Can't you imagine a hot summer in Atlanta, being standing next to the two or three broiler? It's not easy. It's not. Even we have a a/c back there, but no, it's not. Very hot. They work hard. We all have a good relationship; you have to. We won't let the new guy come here, not have a good relationship with—we let them know, it's the first thing you should do, appreciate those guys now. How hard they work.

[00:38:53.15]

Annemarie A.: That's great. How do you develop a relationship with them, if that makes sense?

[00:38:57.19]

Ali Z.: With them?

[00:38:58.14]

Annemarie A.: Yeah. How do you develop that relationship?

[00:39:01.20]

Ali Z.: Well, you know, always pat 'em on shoulder. Always call 'em by name. I'll always—if I have a little time, they have time, we joke around. You know, we are friends. How do you talk to your friend, I talk to them. They're my friends. I'm sure they think of me as a friend. So, that's really important.

[00:39:30.14]

Annemarie A.: That's great.

[00:39:30.22]

Ali Z.: Yeah. Even dishwasher come here for maybe two or three days, I try to get close to him, say hello to him. Welcome him here. That's very important, yeah.

[00:39:44.15]

Annemarie A.: Definitely. For sure. I think this is one of the questions that I've asked everyone that I've interviewed, but I was wonderin', what are your personal definitions—I'm kinda interested in peoples', after they've worked for twenty-plus years doin' this, what's your definition for service? And what's your definition for hospitality?

[00:40:09.02]

Ali Z.: Well, the server just serve the food. Hospitality, that's what, you know, they preach us to do here, and we do it here. As my wife said, "You guys go above the everything to make sure." As I said, she said, "Every time we go to Bones, they don't just serve you; they just pamper you. Like a little baby." We do that with customers, you know. Not pat them on

the shoulder, you know, but we make sure everything, we provide them everything they need, they want. If they have a question, we are honest with them. We try to guide them. Sometime, you come, you see, you talk to people come here the first time, whatever. They are kind of nervous for a first-timer. We just try to make them feel comfortable. "Hey, relax; we are here to serve you. Anything you need, just let us know." Sometime, you know, you try to take your order. You ask for temperature. If you want a steak, what kind of temperatures? "Well, I want red meat." Oh, we try to explain to them, there's a big difference between rare and medium. Very politely. There's a big difference between, for example, rare temperature and medium temperature. Just tell me, when you cut your steak, how do you want to see inside? "Well, she said, I want to just little pink." So, that's not rare. That's medium, and medium-plus, medium-well. We . . . we do these things here, and we make sure our guests here are comfortable. Even for a first time here. With this kind of menus, with this kind of prices on the menu. So, you see, sometimes, people get a little nervous. But our job is to make them, make sure they are comfortable. We are here to serve them, and we get them anything they want. Anything they want. It doesn't matter, you come here spend \$120 a deuce, or come here, spend \$1200. You're as important as these guys in here. I don't care how much they spend, they're spending money. You're as important as those people over there. So, we give them that kind of service. That's really important, you know.

[00:42:46.14]

Annemarie A.: For sure. That's really nice.

[00:42:49.17]

Ali Z.: Yeah.

[00:42:49.17]

Annemarie A.: I only have a couple more questions for you, but I was wonderin', what's the most challenging and what's the most rewarding part of your job?

[00:42:58.09]

Ali Z.: Well, we don't expect our guests to—on the way out, say, "Thank you. Thank you. You did a good job." We don't expect them to do that. We are doing our job, you know. But every now and then, you see people when they are leaving in the middle of the dining room, they give a little hug. They give you a little, shake your hand or, "Thank you." That's really nice. They don't have to do that. We don't expect them to do that. But, they do it. And that's really nice, really nice.

[00:43:34.23]

Annemarie A.: That's great.

[00:43:35.04]

Ali Z.: Yeah.

[00:43:36.03]

Annemarie A.: What about the most challenging part?

[00:43:39.26]

Ali Z.: As far as serving?

[00:43:40.17]

Annemarie A.: Yeah, anything.

[00:43:43.11]

Ali Z.: Yeah. You don't know who is sitting in your station, what kind of personality they are.

Sometime, people come here really pissed off for whatever reason. The deal went wrong. Whatever reason, you know. They're pissed. It's your job to make them comfortable, make them happy, and just give them good service. Maybe they had a bad time outside the restaurant, this restaurant, but once they are here, we gotta make sure—even they are not happy, not because of you, because of what happened outside. We're gonna make sure they are at least, they're comfortable here. They are happy here as long as they sit here, yeah.

[00:44:24.02]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense. That makes sense. It's a lot of dealin' with personality and people.

[00:44:29.16]

Ali Z.: Yeah, yeah. You know, you never know. You wait on, at least, average thirty-five to forty, thirty-three, thirty-four, thirty-five people every night. Forty different personality. That's your job, you know, to deal with all of them. Which, most of the time, 90% of the time is easy. Easy. Very easy, you know. Because we are here to help them do whatever they want. We give it to them, you know.

[00:44:57.23]

Annemarie A.: That's great. So, over the many years that you've worked here, what have been the most important lessons that you've learned?

[00:45:09.19]

Ali Z.: Personal-wise? Or about the business?

[00:45:13.05]

Annemarie A.: You know, both. How's this job taught you about being a person or about being a server?

[00:45:20.06]

Ali Z.: Be patient. Don't take a problem home. Don't bring your problem to work. I did it a couple times as a young person, as a young server. Whatever what happened last night with my wife or whatever, you know, I brought it to work. And that was a mistake. I pay the price for it. And, couple times, I take a problem—now, sometimes, you know, back then, when I was younger, I take a problem home and try to . . . dump it on my wife.

That's not fair. I try, I always tell a younger guy, "Listen. What happen here, good or bad, when you take your jacket off, leave it here. If it's bad, you gotta come back to tomorrow and deal with it with the managers, whatever, what happened. You have to explain.

Explain the situation. But don't take it home. And don't bring your problem from outside here, because it's gonna . . . it's gonna mess things up, and you're gonna pay the price by it." That's the biggest thing, you know. It took me a long time to realize not to do that, but eventually, I'm not doin' it. Couple time I went home, like twenty-some years ago—
[Coughs] Excuse me. My wife asked me about my job. I didn't say anything. She kept asking me the whole, "What happened? What was it? What was it?" I didn't answer it, so she stopped doing it. She stopped doing it. So, yeah.

[00:47:09.05]

Annemarie A.: That's great. Well, I don't have any more questions for you, but is there anything that we haven't talked about or any things that you want to share that you haven't?

[00:47:19.27]

Ali Z.: No. I mean, yeah. In last thirty-some years or so, I wait on few . . . what do you call it?

Famous people, yeah. I wait on Jimmy Carter.

[00:47:33.08]

Annemarie A.: Ooh, wow.

[00:47:35.04]

Ali Z.: Yeah, a couple times. I wait on a lot of football players, basketball players, whatever; hockey players. But the few people, I always remember them. One was Jimmy Carter. One of them was Johnny Unitas, the quarterback. Terry Bradshaw. I don't know you're gonna print that, please don't, but I wait on Terry Bradshaw about twenty-some years ago. Back then, we use our salad—we serve our salad on small plates. They call the hash brown plate. I went to the kitchen and said, "This is Terry Bradshaw, man. You got a big, green salad." So, they put the salad in big, round plates. I serve it to him. He say, "Hey, son?" I say, "Yes, sir?" "You have ketchup?" "Yes, sir." So, I brought him a bottle of ketchup. He dumped the ketchup on salad. [Laughter] That was kind of odd, yeah. Yeah, I wait on many people. Lot of good memories. [Inaudible 48:43] Clay.

[00:48:45.21]

Annemarie A.: Oh, wow.

[00:48:45.29]

Ali Z.: Yeah, yeah. Lot of people. We try to take him upstairs. He couldn't do it because he was a—what do you call it? Parkinson's Disease. He couldn't do upstairs. I wait on a . . . what do you call, a basketball player . . . what is his name. He worked for Philadelphia. He played for Philadelphia. Anyway, he said, "Oh, thank you very much. This is great." Charles Barkley. Charles Barkley. He said, "Thank you." Say, "Charles, if you want to thank somebody, go to the kitchen and thank those guys." "Oh, okay." He walked to the kitchen. Excuse my language. He said, "Hey, who fuck up my fuckin' steaks?" [Laughter] Everybody like, "Hey, Charles! How you doin'." There are a few moments that always

stay with you, yeah. Yeah. That was one of them. I got a few more, but I think, no, we better wrap it up. [Laughter]

[00:49:49.27]

Annemarie A.: Well, that's really great. Thank you so much for talking to me.

[00:49:52.12]

Ali Z.: Oh, my pleasure. My pleasure, thank you.

[00:49:54.08]

Annemarie A.: It was really fun.

[00:49:54.08]

Ali Z.: Thank you. Thanks.

[*End of interview*]