

**Jay Nix and Justin Kennedy
Parkway Bakery & Tavern – New Orleans, LA**

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Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is Monday, April 20, 2015. I'm at Parkway Bakery & Tavern with Jay Nix and Justin Kennedy, who are the guys who run this place, and I'd like to ask both of you to introduce yourselves, if you wouldn't mind telling us your full name and, in your own words, what your occupation is.

[00:02:47]

Justin Kennedy: My name's Justin Kennedy, Justin William Barksdale Kennedy. My mama and my daddy both wanted a piece of the name in me so I'm stuck with it. So my title is—I basically started out as a dishwasher here twelve years ago, and now I still wash dishes, but on top of that I'm a manager, the chef, the plumber, just everything. You know, family business, you got to do everything to make it run, so just one of the family employees, is what I say.

[00:03:24]

Jay Nix: Jay Nix. Also James Thomas Nix, Jr. I bought Parkway Bakery in '94; let it sit empty for ten years. Basically the customers asked me, "What are you going to do with it?" I said, "I'm not quite sure." They said, "Well, we know what you're going to do with it. You're going to open the darn thing." So ten years later I got the guts, the time, and the money and opened it, and it's been a wild success.

[00:04:06]

SR: I would say. Can I get you to tell us your birthdates and where you were born and grew up?

[00:04:14]

JK: I was born on a chilly day, November 4, 1984. I'm thirty years old, and I was born in a small town about an hour away from here called Biloxi, Mississippi.

[00:04:30]

JN: And I was born at Hotel Dieu on Tulane Avenue. May 10, 1951, and I'll be sixty-four next month.

[00:04:41]

SR: So you were still a teenager when you started working here.

[00:04:45]

JK: Yeah. I was actually younger than that because Jay opened it up when I'd just graduated high school, but before then I used to come over here on the weekends, and he had bought Parkway in '94 but he bought it to protect his property. See, he lived right next door, and he bought when the old guys put it up for sale and he made it a tool shed for his construction business. So, Uncle Jay, he was always the fun family member to hang out with, and New Orleans was just so big. It was a big city to a guy from small-town Biloxi, you know, so I'd come over here on the weekends and work with him. And I'd go in this place that's called Parkway Bakery, but it was a tool shed back then, and we'd get saws and hammers off the wall and go to the job site. One thing I remember, just like he said, all them old-timers would say, "Man, you need to open that place back up." It was something very special back in the '40s and '50s. And then eventually he did, and I'm still working with him.

[00:05:41]

SR: So, Jay, when you say that all the customers used to tell you that you needed to open this place back up, who do you mean? People in the neighborhood?

[00:05:51]

JN: What happened was, I lived next door in this two-story raised double, and no one knew where Hagan Street was because Hagan used to be Jeff Davis [Jefferson Davis Parkway], and then they changed Hagan to Jeff Davis and just in midstream cut it in half, and it goes from

Jeff Davis—no one could find Hagan. I'd say, "Well what about American Can [Company]?" [They would say], "No, we still don't know where Hagan is." [So I would say,] "What about the brake tag station? What about the foot of Bayou St. John? What about, what about?" No. Last resort: "What about Parkway?" [Then they would say,] "Parkway Bakery! Why didn't you say that to begin with? We know right where you are." So then I'm getting some kind of sense that something was going on there.

[00:06:39]

So for about ten years everywhere I went, like Home Depot or to a restaurant, I'd check out and I'd say, "You ever heard of Parkway?" At least fifty percent of the time when I said "Parkway" they would answer "Bakery," so I knew that I had a captive audience and I went for it. And, you know, it's those two magical words. It's name recognition. "Jay's Grill" or "Jay's Po-Boy Shop" would not have made it.

[00:07:11]

SR: I'm going to ask one technical question and then get to some of the history of Parkway Bakery. How are you all related? You said "uncle."

[00:07:21]

JK: Yeah. Jay right here is my mother's brother, so he's as uncle as uncles can get.

[00:07:30]

SR: What's your mother's name?

[00:07:32]

JK: Eileen, and she also works here. She runs the books and signs the checks and keeps everybody in shape.

[00:07:40]

SR: Now, Jay, can you tell us a little bit about the Parkway Bakery before you owned it, the history of the place?

[00:07:49]

JN: Well, I know that—. I pinned down the building to around 1911. I know that around 1904 it was a vacant lot, and then this gentleman, Charles Goering, who was a German baker, he built the building somewhere—. I pinned it around 1911, but I'll probably get it closer through time. He had another bakery in another part of town he either rented or leased or something, but he built Parkway Bakery and he was here from 1911 to 1922, which is a pretty short period of time. Then he sold it to the Timothys—Bubby, Jake, and Marie. Timothy, Sr. had it, and when he passed he left it to his three children, the two brothers and a daughter, and they ran it until I bought it in '95. So basically Parkway fed American Can, and American Can in its heyday had 1,500 employees. They ran twenty-four hours a day, they made 5,000 cans a minute. So, one day American Can closed. It went out of business, American Can.

[00:09:33]

SR: When? Like around what decade would that have been?

[00:09:36]

JN: It would have been in the '70s. Of course also in the '70s we had a May flood, one of the first big flash floods in New Orleans. And the cast iron faces—which were the oven maker's signature, the cast iron ornamental fronts—would get red hot, and the flood waters came up and touched them and they broke like a hot glass in cold water. Once the fronts broke they started buying bread from Leidenheimer [Baking Company] because they weren't of the kind to fix things, or paint things, or do routine maintenance, or worry about deferred maintenance. They liked to go to the racetrack, and I think that most people who go to racetrack lose, so I think that

sort of kept them in a bad mood most of the time. So they really had to come to Parkway to make sandwiches to try and recoup their losings. So it was like, [*Irritable tone of voice*] “What do you want?” Now I believe that was what that was all about. It was like: “We don’t enjoy making sandwiches, we enjoy going to the track, but we wish we won, so here we are, back again, trying to make more track money.” That may be way off, and I’m sure that their wives would not like me to say that, but. So then I bought it from them.

[00:11:14]

SR: Were you ever a customer here?

[00:11:16]

JN: No. Actually I grew up in Riverbend, so I was [geared toward] College Inn and I was Lefant’s. I did have a girlfriend, Brenda Taylor, whose mother worked in a little grocery on the corner, right catty-corner—no, right adjacent to—Easton Park. And we used to come by and stop at the grocery, and every time I’d turn this corner I noticed it was busy, but I didn’t have any sense of what it was. It was Parkway Bakery. That was in like ’64.

[00:11:54]

SR: But when you bought it—. I’m just trying to pin down the facts. So when you bought it, was it operating?

[00:12:02]

JN: No. What happened was it was in such bad shape, and years and years and years—. People would come by every year, the old crew at City Hall, and they’d say, “Bubby, you got to freshen this place up.” So he’d throw a coat of paint on everything. It didn’t matter what was on the walls, he’d just paint over it. It could be a sneeze, it could be cobweb, it could be a swatted fly. He just whitewashed it and they just let him keep going. It went on forever. Then one day

this little articulate black lady came in and she said, “Mr. Timothy, you’re going to have to clean up your place. The file is thick. We’re going to give you a list of mandatory repairs and we’re going to have to give you a little fine.” And she said, “I’ll be back.” So she came back about a month later and she said, “Mr. Timothy, here’s your list of mandatory repairs and here’s the fine.” And he says, “How long do I have to do these repairs and pay this fine?” And she said, “I’ll be back Labor Day.” [He said,] [Smacks the table] “Good. I’ll be closed Labor Day.” He closed. [Laughs]

[00:13:18]

SR: I’m interested because—. A lot of this information’s on your —not all of it, not that good story. How did you get all this historical information?

[00:13:31]

JN: Customers. They come in with stories that are unbelievable. Like, there was a little black and white TV up in the high part by this old window fan that used to turn. Of course they went to the track every week, so they got their clothes dry-cleaned. And so they never cleaned the TV screen of grease or dirt or anything, and fry oil, you know mist; they would just take the cellophane from their dry cleaning and they would tape it over the screen, and every week they’d change the cellophane. [Laughs] That’s customer stories. There’s thousands of them.

[00:14:12]

JK: Oh, yeah. We got this one guy that comes into the place, and he’s probably eighty-five years—. No, he’s actually—. His name’s Francis. He’s actually about ninety-two. He just made ninety-two last week. He always gets a roast beef with so much mayo on it, it’s absolutely insane. We just make it the best we can, because no one’s ever going to put as much mayo as he wants on it, so he just asks for it on the side now, extra on the side. He said he came here once in

the '50s for the first time and he walks into the place and his buddy—. This was a man's joint, you know. The Timothy family really made the legend of Parkway Bakery. They were characters. It was their way or the highway. And you better know what you want, too. If there was a line and you didn't know what you want, they'd skip over you: "Next! Come back when you're ready to order, son."

[00:15:02]

Anyways, Francis comes in for the first time, his buddy takes him in, and he wants a roast beef. He heard they got one of the best roast beefs around. So his buddy says, "Bubby, this is my friend, Francis. It's his first time. He wants to get a po-boy from you." [Bubby says,] "Hi, Francis. What do you want?" He says, "A roast beef. Give me a roast beef with extra mayo. I love mayo." He said, "All right," and went back there, started making it. And these guys, they were big, burly. One of them, Bubby, he was a big, burly guy. Jake was the smaller one. And they'd wear these sleeveless t-shirts while they were making your sandwich. Then they'd have a cigarette in their mouth with half the cigarette be nothing but ash hanging over the sandwich. We've got pictures of this, so it ain't just talk. Then they got a guy in there drinking beer while he's making your sandwich. It was a kick place, you know?

[00:15:55]

Anyways, he's making his sandwich, and they had a paint stick. They always had a gallon jug of Blue Plate mayo, but they put it on there with a paint stick. And they'd leave it out, you know, just out in the open, and that's how they did it. They'd take that paint stick and slap it on there. So he's slapping the mayo on, and then Francis said he did a mistake. He said, "Make sure you put extra mayo on it." Oh, now he offended the old guy, you know. He turns around and gives him a look, and he hits that slab of bread once and he goes back in with that paint stick,

scrapes the bottom, hits it again, and looks at him and takes a third one and goes in and hits it again and again, wraps it up, just mayo coming out of it: “Here’s your goddamn sandwich, extra mayo.” And now he gets it every time and he’s ninety-two years old. Go figure that. That was like sixty years ago, you know?

[00:16:55]

JN: I think he called him, “Hey, Pops, make sure you put extra mayo on it, you hear?”

[00:17:00]

JK: Those guys, they were like in *Seinfeld*, like the Soup Nazis? You know, I wouldn’t call them that, but they were like—. You know, there’s one guy—. This is a different guy. He doesn’t know the guy with the mayo story; another old guy. He said they hated onions. He’d come in and he said, “I want a ham and cheese with onion on it.” [And they said,] “We ain’t got no f-in’ onions. Go get your own.” They’d cuss him out.

[00:17:23]

JN: “If you want onion on your sandwich go home and make your own damn sandwich.”

[00:17:27]

JK: Yeah, but they’d say it in more vulgar language than that.

[00:17:30]

JN: Another great story: when you’d order—. Imagine there’s six people in line and one guy orders a hamburger: “I want a hamburger, and let me tell you what I want on it.” [He would say,] “Don’t tell me what you want on it.” And he’s like, “Okay.” He’d throw on a hamburger. Next guy: “I want an oyster fried and I want—.” [Again he’d say,] “Don’t tell me what you want on it.” And he’s like, “Okay.” Next guy: “Hot sausage, and I want mus—.” [He would say,] “I said I don’t want nobody to tell me what you want on it.” So then, he didn’t write anything down

so he couldn't remember it, so after the hamburger was cooked and he put it on the French bread, he'd say, "Now, what you want on it?" And that was his way of getting it without having to remember it. But he wouldn't explain that to you. He'd say, "I don't want to know what you want on it. Don't tell me." He'd wait. When the hot sausage was ready and the oysters were fried and they were on the sandwich: "Now, what you want on it?" But he wouldn't explain it.

[Laughs]

[00:18:36]

SR: Does anybody say that the sandwiches were good? I'm curious as to why—

[00:18:42]

JK: Oh, they were the—.

[00:18:43]

SR: —they stayed open forever.

[00:18:44]

JK: They were the best in the city. They were the best in the city. The place had a little character to it, of course. It was a sign of the times. This place wasn't the only place that was rough like that, you know. I mean there was a bunch of places in New Orleans like that back then. I mean of course the board of health wouldn't stand for that today, but I mean back then there was no board of health, you know? It's like if you served good food, you know, you had good food—and this place, I mean it jammed out oysters and combination sandwiches. Combination was ham and Swiss grilled. They jammed those out. We got a picture on the wall from 1929 of two guys sitting outside eating a combination sandwich. And they made their own bread.

[00:19:31]

One story, there was a—. Fury, John Fury. They owned Fury's over there in Metairie. Anyways, his family's been in the restaurant business for years. They had the Bounty on the West End and they had Corrine's right here in Mid-City, back in the '50s and '60s, and it was an Italian restaurant. Well anyways, John and his uncle, Manuel—and this was when John was a boy. This fellow's about sixty years old now. When he was a little kid, him and his uncle, Manuel—. Everybody used to get bread from Parkway for their restaurant. So he'd come over here with his Uncle Manuel, goes inside, and [he'd say,] "Bubby, I need a bag of French bread." [Bubby said,] "Look, the French bread's not ready yet. It's proofed in the back, Manny. Go back there and just cook it yourself. The oven's hot." So he goes back there and he said he watched his Uncle Manuel turn it in those old fire brick ovens, and he said it was the neatest thing back there baking bread. He went out there with the hot bread and went over to Bubby and said, "All right, Bubby, we got it ready." And he charged him full price for it. *[Laughs]* I mean, that's just the kind of guys they were, you know?

[00:20:36]

But this was a great place, and we're telling you some of the funny stories we heard, but it's an institution. The locals, I mean they knew what to expect. They knew, you know, some things have to suffer to get that great sandwich, and it was a special place. I mean, I have people—. I'm thirty years old, so I've been here since I was eighteen years old. I've heard so many great stories about this place, and so many people love this place. It's more than something tastebuds can describe. It's more than a sandwich. It's a way of life to people. It's just generation after generation of somewhere to go and feel comfortable, and when Jay reopened that up I never would have known that we would be part of that same thing of keeping Parkway going. It's an

amazing thing, and we're making stories now. We're making good ones and we're making—.

We probably got some crazy stories about us, too. You know, that's life.

[00:21:41]

JN: I think what happened in the beginning, since it was such a—. It had been closed for ten years; it went back to 1911. When we opened, all the old-timers came back. So normally when there's a new place, usually the young kids get it and then the old-timers maybe will try it, but it went just the opposite. The old-timers all came. It was all grey hairs and older people, and then young people were saying, "How did they get here before us, and how did we miss out on it?" Now it's absolutely every person God created comes through here every day. It's unbelievable.

[00:22:27]

SR: Can you talk a little bit about that: When you decided that you were going to open it, first of all, was there any particular inspiration? Or you just got worn down by the requests? And then, how you decided what your menu would be like? I don't think you'd been in the food business before, so how did you develop recipes and that kind of thing?

[00:22:49]

JN: Well, what happened was I moved to Hagan Avenue and I owned this two-story double—they call it a basement double—and I renovated it, and it was beautiful. I loved living there. Then, of course I told you the story that nobody could find me and when I said the word "Parkway," they said, "Bakery. We know where you are now." So Parkway closed and went up for sale, so I'm of course worried it's going to be an all-night liquor store. So in the shower one day I said, well, maybe I can buy it and keep it from becoming something unattractive, because if

somebody buys it and makes an all-night liquor store then I'm going to have to move, and I just renovated my house. So basically, I bought Parkway to save my house.

[00:23:41]

Ten years go by. I've heard so many stories about Parkway Bakery that it's like you're nuts if you don't reopen it. Of course we knew everything about the restaurant business because we were on—. We thought because we were on the other side—the customer side of the bar and of the restaurant—that, well, yeah, we know what's going on. We eat in restaurants all the time; we go to bars all the time. So, Bubby was trying to sell it. I think he was asking \$78,000, and a bunch of people looked at it. So I went and saw him. I said, "Bubby, I'd like to buy it." So we agreed on a price of \$45,000. I was going to give him \$10,000 cash and he was going to owner-finance the balance, \$451.12 a month for ten years. So, fine, and I had to write one check to him and one check to his brother.

[00:24:51]

So at the sale—. Now, Bubby was a grizzly bear in public but he was really a teddy bear in private, but he was still big and intimidating and grumpy. He was the Sandwich Nazi. So I looked him in the eyes, I had a little shake in me, I said, "Bubby, can I have the name?" [He said,] "You want the goddamn name? I don't give a shit. Give me a pen." I said, "Well, would you sign the contract?" [He said,] "Yeah, I'll just sign the contract." I got the property for \$45,000; he gave me the name for free. That was the million-dollar two words. Each word today is worth half a billion apiece. Back then it was worth a half a million apiece, each word, and he was like—. He knew I was going to do good.

[00:25:46]

So, ten years later I start the renovation. I'd just done [Restaurant] Indigo for Cynthia Reeves, and that was like a tune-up for me, so I like practiced on her. I wasn't solely, but I was involved.

[00:26:01]

SR: Can you just say, for the record, what Indigo was?

[00:26:04]

JN: Indigo was a fine-dining restaurant on Bayou Road. It was attached to a bed and breakfast, and the lady who owned it had three acres, plush acres of property, and she was a great, great visionary, but it just didn't make it. She had a guy named Randy Lewis, she had a guy named Gerard Marais, and the guy who's running Galatoire's right now, he was there too. She didn't make it. So anyway, I'm opening Parkway Bakery; I run out of money. Guess what I had to do? Remember I bought that to save this? I had to sell that to save this, and that's the way life is, right?

[00:26:54]

SR: What's "that," just because people are going to be listening?

[00:26:56]

JN: I had to sell my house to save Parkway, when I bought Parkway to save my house originally. But it was the best move I ever made.

[00:27:08]

SR: So you don't own the basement—. Is it a basement double? Is that what you called that?

[00:27:13]

JN: Basement double.

[00:27:14]

SR: Yeah. You don't own that anymore.

[00:27:16]

JN: I sold it to the veterinarian across the street. So then that's pretty much how it went, and then we had—. My banker had not really had a successful restaurant in his folder, and I said, "Thanks for taking a chance on me." He says, "Don't thank me because I'll just take your property if you don't make it." And we're still friends today, but he meant every word. And that's the way it is in the restaurant business.

[00:27:48]

So we had twelve sandwiches when we opened, and of course Angus Lind did the story, "No Guts, No Gravy," and it's like people came to see: "Parkway's reopened? I got to go see." My first customer: "What kind of sandwich do you want?" He said, "Roast beef, stupid. What do you think?" So we got the roast beef right and we got the name. If we'd have missed on either one of those two things, we probably wouldn't have made it because they came to Parkway and they first ordered the roast beef. That was their measuring stick. They didn't order hot sausage, hamburgers, oyster, shrimp; it was that roast beef they measured us by. So, if we had got the roast beef right and hadn't got the name it wouldn't have worked, and if we got the name and missed on the roast beef it wouldn't have worked.

[00:28:51]

SR: How did you get the roast beef right? Tell me about that process a little bit.

[00:28:56]

JN: We can salivate my mother's pot roast after Mass on Sunday with the brown-and-serve rolls, the mashed potatoes, green peas, or rice and string beans. We can just—. My family,

my sisters, we can just bring that taste up, so we start cooking until we taste it. And after about the sixth cook-off—. We'd sit at the table and we'd all taste it: "Eh, that's not it. It's just not it." Then we went, "It's it! It's it!" It was that taste. It was that—. I mean, you could probably salivate something from your childhood and make it. Well, that's what we did. We don't plug it with garlic, we don't smother it in onions; it's truly whatever the meat drips, just that natural meat flavor. So if you grew up with it just reeking of garlic and reeking of onion, people think our roast beef is bland and it doesn't have any taste, but really it's the true taste. It's the taste of the meat and the drippings. It's that chuck roast that's got the collagen and the connective tissues, it all melts together and tenderizes. You throw the fat away or you give it to people who make deer sausage because they have no fat and they need fat. You could actually recycle the fat off the gravy.

[00:30:37]

But yeah, it's a magical—. Oh, one other thing is that the bar doors used to open in, and of course the back door to the bar opens out, and in the winter the wind would blow and the front doors would open very slow and close and then the back door would open very slow and close. Do you remember that? That was Bubby coming through. So, because of the wind and taking the heat out, we switched the doors to where they open out. Now the wind holds them shut, and I don't know what Bubby's doing. *[Laughs]*

[00:31:19]

SR: I have so many questions, but one of them was: So Bubby's not alive anymore, I take it? You mentioned his wife and maybe his brother's wife. Do any of their family members come here and eat?

[00:31:29]

JN: They do. They do. Rose got angry because Bubby didn't ask anyone; he just sold the property, and he gave the name away. Even his brother, Jake, who had to sign off—Jake didn't say much, and Bubby was the big talker. The reason why Jake didn't say much was because every time he'd say something, Bubby would say, "Shut up!" So he never really talked much. So when Bubby said, "I'm selling the property," he didn't say anything. So, [somebody said] the word "roach beef," related to Parkway. I was speaking to somebody and I said, "Off the record, don't print this. Some people used to call it 'roach beef.'" Because at one point somebody told me a story that Bubby was carving the roast on the table and without missing a beat, big cockroach crawling on the table, he [*Sound effect*]. He just wiped it off, and most customers didn't even catch it, you know. She printed, or he printed, in *The Times-Picayune* that I called it "roach beef," and Rose called and got the answering machine—or maybe she got me and I tried to talk my way out of it—but she was already mad though because Bubby gave it away.

[00:33:04]

SR: So, Justin, you were part of these cook-offs when they were developing the roast beef recipe, it sounds like?

[00:33:14]

JK: Yeah.

[00:33:15]

SR: You were around then?

[00:33:16]

JK: Yeah.

[00:33:16]

SR: So it's interesting to me: you didn't go for the old Parkway recipe; you went for your family recipe. But that was good with the old-timers, because that's how a lot of people made pot roast?

[00:33:29]

JN: Yeah. Pot roast was in the—. I don't know if it was Magnalite back then, but pot roast was pretty generic. It still—you can still find it today, you know. It's almost like peanut butter and jelly. The thing that people can't get right with the pot roast is the gravy. Anybody can cook the pot roast, but they can't get the gravy right. So, getting the gravy—.

[00:33:58]

SR: How do you guys get it right?

[00:33:59]

JN: We use the drippings. Of course we use some beef broth. We put a little bit of flour in there and we use some mushroom soup and we sort of—. We don't really roux it; we just sort of thicken it. But I'd say that it's fifty percent drippings.

[00:34:30]

JK: We use seasonings and certain spices, and we still use a little onion, a little garlic. We just don't, you know, make that the star of the show. Like a lot of Italian joints, they just garlic it away. I mean garlic's delicious, but we like you to be eating—. When you're eating a roast beef, you're eating a beef sandwich. You know, not beef camouflaged in garlic.

[00:34:58]

But, yeah, Jay and them started cooking and I was tasting it since day one. And the thing is, you don't have to be a world-renowned chef to run a sandwich shop. You know what you like to eat, so the main thing is just use real ingredients, use things you actually have to wash your

hands and cook them. You know, cook from scratch, make everything from scratch, and then make sure everything's fresh. That's the key to having a good sandwich, and Jay had that in mind from the beginning: I'm not going to buy premade roast beef; I'm not going to buy potato salad from Sysco; I'm not going to buy foreign product, like foreign seafood. We're getting everything here local, we're going to have to cook everything, we're making everything from scratch, the little things we make, and that'll show. That'll show when the people come, and it did. It did so much, [and I would even say] it's probably the most popular po-boy shop in the city right now, just by seeing the customers that come through here. It's just amazing.

[00:36:02]

SR: Well, can you tell us a little bit about your volume? Do you know how many customers you get a week or how much gravy you go through or how many pounds of beef you serve?

[00:36:12]

JK: Yeah, we probably do about—. We're knocking on a ton a week of roast beef. We're probably doing 1,500, 1,800 pounds of beef a week. Of course we probably go through—. The gallons of gravy, we go through about fifty gallons of gravy a week, and we probably serve on average—you know, some days a little less, some days a little more; I would say we average about 1,000 people a day.

[00:36:39]

JN: How many buckets of pickles?

[00:36:42]

JK: Five-gallon pickle buckets, we probably go through about—. Well, we fry pickles too, so for sandwiches you probably go through about ten gallons of pickles a day. On the mayo,

we probably go through about eight gallons of mayonnaise a day. It's absolutely—you know, it's amazing, but that's all we do. We do one thing. And we go through a lot of bread; we probably go through about 250 loaves of bread, and each loaf makes about six sandwiches. [Brief interruption]

[00:37:14]

So we do one thing and we do it well. If you [want] a plate lunch, there's plenty of other places to get a plate lunch. If you want meatball and spaghetti, there's plenty of Italian places to get that. We do one thing and we do it well. We do a po-boy, and that's the thing: if you want a po-boy, go to Parkway. That's why we have the slogan, "Parkway for poor boys." And we don't say it with a p-o, we say it with a p-o-o-r, because when it originated in 1929, that is the real true name of it. So, credit to Jay, he got that on board and just about five years ago we started calling them "poor boys" and changed all the branding on the building, how we say it. But you still pronounce it—. I still pronounce it "po," because it's just like a hyphen—just like people say, you know, "Where y' at?" It's kind of a Louisiana-New Orleans thing. But it is "poor boy," because it started in hard times and that's what it was named after.

[00:38:21]

SR: You're being pretty modest about your, you know, you "just make a po-boy." But one thing I wanted to ask about was, if memory serves, you had a pretty basic menu when you opened. Can you talk about what your menu was when you opened, and then I think that Justin has been in part responsible for some of the more specialty po-boys that you've had over the years. Talk about that progression a little bit.

[00:38:52]

JN: Well, first of all, I'd like to describe a poor boy, and it starts off with fresh, made-the-same-day Leidenheimer bread, which is like potato-chip crust with cotton candy inside. So you take that bread and you toast it, then you put ice-cold mayo, ice-cold tomatoes, ice-cold lettuce, ice-cold pickle, hot roast beef, and melted Swiss. Then you close that up and you wrap it up, and when the customer gets it they unwrap it like—it's like opening a present. Then they always lift up the bread and look in there, a lot of times. Then they close it. Then, if you can imagine taking that first bite, their teeth break through that potato-chip crust, they go through that cotton candy, they hit that ice-cold mayo, lettuce, tomato, pickle, hot roast beef and melted Swiss; then they close their mouth and pull away, and then all those flavors are like united and like all tasting separate and together at the same time. That's it. That's the poor boy.

[00:40:25]

SR: I am so hungry right now. [*Laughs*]

[00:40:28]

JN: That's the poor boy. So it's an easy sell when you make it fresh like that and they taste all that hot and cold mixed up. And at the same time it's all in one big bite, but it's all separate at the same time, so.

[00:40:44]

SR: What do you do if somebody doesn't want it dressed?

[00:40:48]

JN: Well, we do it any kind of way. Justin can speak to that. There's people who come in, and—what's the craziest combination anybody's ever asked for? You just let them have it.

[00:41:00]

JK: I mean, people get—. I pretty much—. If they have a dollar in their pocket, you know, they can order whatever they want. I’m going to make it happen. I’ve had people get roast beef with chili on it, you know. “Who the hell does that,” you’re saying to yourself. But hey, show me the money, you know, we’ll make it happen.

[00:41:19]

But, yeah, like Jay said, he started off with about seven sandwiches—or we started off. I’ve been there since the first day. It was just ham, turkey, roast beef, oyster, shrimp, catfish, maybe we had a club. And we had some French fries and bread pudding. That was about it. And potato salad. Through the years it’s more of just getting—you know, we could still have those same few things and still be doing just fine, but I think it’s more of a personal thing. I mean, you’re there every day and you’re working; you get bored, so you want to do something different. So we start bringing in different types of sausages and different seafood items, and before long we have about twenty sandwiches on the menu. And we’re still a sandwich shop; we just have different—. We have some fun ones. We have one called a surf and turf that’s a shrimp and roast beef mix. We do our own corned beef here, and we have a good corned beef po-boy, a Reuben po-boy, which is a crazy hybrid of North and South, you know. We have a good Reuben, and we make great homemade chili. We make rum cake, a knock-the-tongue-out-your-mouth banana pudding from scratch, and we still do the bread pudding.

[00:42:33]

We do all kind of fun things here, but everything fits in the realm of the restaurant, everything that we sell. It’s not like we’re going to break out and do a taco or something like that, which would probably sell too. But I did for a while do wild sandwiches, whatever special of the day. On Monday we had a red bean po-boy, and I’d take the nose of the bread and hollow

it out and fill it up like an ice cream cone with red beans and sausage and ham. I did that for a while. And we had a Cuban sandwich for a while. We had a hamburger steak with smothered onions and gravy on it. We had daily fun specials, and I mean there's a million of them.

[00:43:15]

JN: We had a shepherd's pie poor boy.

[00:43:16]

JK: Yeah, we had a shepherd's pie one. That was one of my first nutty ones, just like a shepherd's pie with mashed potatoes and gravy and green peas, and it was on a po-boy and people just loved it. But we kind of stepped out of doing the crazy things and we're just doing—. We take the fun things we want and just put them right on the menu and it's—. We're popular. Jay wants me—. Right now we're working on a coleslaw, something just to get a down-home coleslaw that we want to do. And Jay wants to do a sandwich called the Lone Eagle that I haven't really gotten into messing with yet, but it's basically like a patty melt. You take a big piece of white bread, you grill turkey on it. It's simple: white bread, mayo on both sides of the bread, grilled turkey, and you put bacon on the turkey, put the bacon and turkey on white bread with the mayo, then you cover the whole sandwich with cheddar cheese, okay, and then you put it in the broiler, melt the cheese over the sandwich, and then you cut it on a bias. It's called the Lone Eagle, named after Charles Lindbergh. Jay used to get this sandwich at the old College Inn back in the old days when Emile Rufin ran the place.

[00:44:38]

Anyways, after you melt this cheese over this sandwich, you cut it and turn the two sides and it actually looks like an airplane. There's like a fuselage and then you have—. And it's basically cheddar, white bread, mayo, bacon, and home-cooked turkey. I mean, you can just taste

the ingredients. It's simple. It's simple and good and that's what we run on, things that are simple. They're simple ingredients but when you go in, like the turkey, we cook our turkey from scratch. I mean we go out there and we kill the bird, we pluck the bird. [Laughs] We raise it. No, I'm just kidding. But we do roast the turkey, which is a dying art. People just buy it ready to go; put it on the slicer. We roast our beef and we make our own corned beef. Most of our products we just do from scratch. They're simple things, but a lot of people, it's much easier for them to just buy it from one of those big Sysco companies and put it on a plate and say, "Hey." That's why we have the line we have, because people know the difference, you know?

[00:45:45]

SR: I've read a little bit about how you developed your corned beef. You went and cooked with someone up in New York?

[00:45:51]

JK: I got an old Jewish guy that works with me. His name's Michael Tannen. Him and his brother are very well known in this city. His brother's Bob Tannen. Anyways, Mike is a longtime New Yorker, born and raised in Brooklyn, Coney Island. And I wanted to put corned beef on the menu, because there's an old menu in the bar from Parkway, a big chalkboard, and it has old things: liver cheese, luncheon meat, tongue, bologna —all these things. I'm like, "Man, I want to bring one of these things back." And I'm thinking, looking down the line, "What's going to work?" I tried bologna. I thought bologna would go good. I like bologna. Didn't go. I tried tongue. Tongue didn't go. I tried liver cheese. I'm crazy about liver cheese. It didn't go. The young people don't know about that. I don't know. It's just—. I need to bring that back. I need to push that a little more.

[00:46:43]

But the corned beef, you know, would sell, and it was like a buy-and-cut corned beef. And I went to New York and I had so much better, and I was wondering how they did it. I went up to New York two or three times, and my buddy, Mike, who works here, Jewish fellow, told me which delis to go to and watch and ask for this guy. He knew them all, you know. He's in the clique. I went over there and eventually I thought I had the moxie to have it down, and I went back here and we started doing it and, man, we got some of the best corned beef in the city. I tell you what, I'll go against the Track [Liuzza's by the Track] any day—you know, on their corned beef sandwiches. It's good stuff, and we steam it. That's the key. I mean, we boil our corned beef and then we roast it to get it tender; we chill it, slice it, then we steam it to-order. That's the kicker. You got to steam that meat so it's nice and moist when you put it on the sandwich—it don't dry out. A lot of people take that corned beef down here and they'll put it on the flat grill and heat it up, and it turns into bacon. It dries it out.

[00:47:46]

JN: I have a good story about—. Justin started doing a Cuban sandwich, and of course we have a small grill in the kitchen and the flat grill—. The Cuban sandwich got so popular that we actually had to put a grill on the sidewalk outside, underneath the awning on Hagan, and they had to do Cubans by walkie-talkie and we had to run meat up and down the handicapped ramp. It was like it clogged the wheel so bad. And then one day the fire marshal, who's a great customer here, he just put a little bug in my ear. He said, “You know what, you're not supposed to have an open flame over a lean-to. I'm not telling you you can't make your Cubans; I'm just telling you that you're not supposed to do that.” So, we didn't tell the public, but we had to just like—how many Cubans a day? Fifty, 100?

[00:48:47]

JK: Oh, we'd do about 350 of these Cubans a day. It was crazy.

[00:48:51]

JN: We had to pull the plug on it because it was clogging the wheel. We couldn't get out the hamburgers and the rest of the stuff, and when you offer the public something, be very careful because you do not want to take it back. They don't like that. We had to take it back.

[00:49:09]

SR: You know, that was sort of a problem in my household when the Thanksgiving sandwich didn't appear every Thursday—or whatever day you were doing it at one point.

[00:49:21]

JK: Yeah, that's another one too. That's a perfect example. That one's crazy. So, the Cuban, we'll bring the Cuban back one day, but we need a little more kitchen space, basically. It outgrew its britches, it outgrew the kitchen, and we couldn't cook outside so we had to stop it. But that's one I really love. We play Spanish music in the restaurant and people come from all over. [Restaurant critic] Brett Anderson even actually went to Cuba, and he said our Cuban sandwiches are better than the ones in Cuba. I got a kick out of that. But we will bring that back one day I'm sure. But that Thanksgiving, yeah. That one's even nuttier because we only do it during the holiday season. We used to do it on Thursday because Thanksgiving is Thursday. But I was thinking, you know, we're closed on Thanksgiving so people can't get it, but they can get it the day before, which is a Wednesday, and hold it for Thursday. You see what I'm saying? So if you're by yourself, if you don't have a family, you can come into our place, get a sandwich, put it in the refrigerator until the next day, put it in the oven, and have your Thanksgiving meal.

[00:50:21]

SR: Can you describe that one?

[00:50:23]

JK: So basically it's everything on your Thanksgiving feast on French bread. We make all our stuffing and our dressing from scratch; cranberry sauce is done in-house. We take—. Now, this is why it was just—. The gravy and the turkey's all done in-house, just like your big-legged, skin-on, Thanksgiving turkey. Crispy skin. But this was what was so hard to contain and this is why it's—. I love to do it and I love when I'm not doing it because, you know, customers can't understand how much work goes into this. And when we run out, oh, man. Because it's only one day a week. So we have about eight ovens in the back cooking 24/7, okay. And what do they cook? Roast beef. That's what we're known for. So during Thanksgiving time we're closed one day a week, and that one day a week is Tuesday. So what am I doing Tuesday? All those eight ovens are full of turkeys. I can only fit about twenty-five or thirty turkeys in there, and that's what I do. I cook as much turkey as I can in one day and the next day I sell them.

[00:51:34]

JN: Thirty?

[00:51:35]

JK: Thirty. Thirty twenty-pound birds, so just do the math. What's that, 500 pounds of turkey—something like that?

[00:51:41]

JN: Yeah, six.

[00:51:42]

JK: Six hundred pounds. So when that's out it's out, and that's all I can do. You can't go back in the back and just pull another bird out, you know. You got to cook them. That's what I wish, and there's nothing I can do about that, and we only do it—. We can't do it every day

because we need the space for roast. It's just one of those things that it's so great and it's so delicious and it's so popular, but I can't do any more until we get—. We'd need a bigger facility. So it's one of those things; we're just going to keep it like that. If you don't get here early enough, you don't get out of work till 6:00, well, fine. You ain't never going to get one, because we run out about 2:00 or 3:00. So skip school, skip work, and come get it, because I'm doing as much as I can to make the Thanksgiving po-boy, and that's all there is.

[00:52:37]

But it's a beautiful thing. I mean it's really—. When that first cold snap comes through, probably around late September, early October, people start calling: "When's it happening? When's the Thanksgiving happening?" Because I always change it up. But it's Wednesday. It's every Wednesday in the month of November, okay, and that's four Wednesdays. I even did it about two or three—. I even go into mid-December lately, you know. It's always going to be a mystery when I shut it down. For sure every Wednesday in November, but I had so many people who didn't get it I said, "Okay, I'll keep on serving it until the luster dies." After Thanksgiving Day the luster starts to go. When it doesn't sell out, that's when I stop. That's a good way to say it: when it doesn't sell out, that's when I stop serving it.

[00:53:26]

SR: I'm going to put it on the calendar [*Laughs*] now. Justin, I read—maybe even on the website—that you worked here during college. What did you study in college?

[00:53:35]

JK: Oh, I went to college—. I moved over here from Biloxi, and my thing was I was going to work here part-time and go to school full-time for business administration and go on and do my life, you know. But this place, it grabbed a hold of me, and it's not really the food,

you know. If I wasn't here I wouldn't be going to open up or go work at some restaurant downtown and be the next great chef. That is not me. I like the people that come here. You know, you go to certain restaurants, those fancy restaurants downtown. Nothing wrong with them. It just is what it is. You got fancy people because that's who can afford it, right? You go to the corner store right here on Orleans [Avenue] and Hagan, you don't see no fancy people in there. You see a little bit more people with less money, because that's what they can afford. A po-boy shop—Eight to eighty, crippled to crazy," that's what Jay says. You got all walks of life that come through here. You'll have a man with a \$500 suit rubbing elbows with a near-homeless person and eating the same damn sandwich, you know. That's why I like it. You get some characters. You'll see New Orleans here; you don't even have to leave the block. I live here, I'm here for weeks at a time, but I don't need to go nowhere to get my New Orleans fix because I'm right in the heart of it.

[00:54:47]

But anyways, I was going to school, and I didn't know what the hell I was doing. I was a kid. I was washing dishes and I'd work 11:00 to close. That's when we were open, 11:00 to 11:00 seven days a week. We were open some long hours. Now we're open 11:00 to 10:00 six days a week and closed one day. But anyways, I was going to school at Nunez at first because I had to get my residency. My main school I wanted to go to was UNO. So I went to Nunez in Chalmette for a semester and, hey, that was a story in itself. I'm glad I got the chance to do that because those are some great folks and interesting folks and I'm glad I got a chance to mix with them for a semester in college.

[00:55:28]

[Then I went over to UNO] after I got my residency, and I graduated in '03, so this is August of '05, and that's when the storm [Hurricane Katrina] hit. You know, we had managers. We had hired a manager, Kevin, to run the place, and he taught me a lot. And a couple of guys that I started with the first day are still here now, and they taught me a bunch. So much that when the storm hit I transferred to Southern Miss. I was trying to study and I couldn't because we left this place, and I called Jay, and Jay had just got back into town, and he said, "Justin, don't come down here." And he was beat up from just all the stress of getting all the loans and putting the money into it, and then a year and a half later he's got to start from scratch. And everyone had that story. It wasn't just us. Jay says, "You know what, I think I'm going to pack it in." He said, "Justin, just keep your schooling. Parkway, we got a bunch of insurance money that's going to come in." Who knew what his plan was.

[00:56:39]

But one day I—. I lost my truck so I bought a little motorcycle. You know, I was a little eighteen-year-old snotty-nosed kid, wanted to be a rebel, so I had a little motorcycle and I said, "You know what? I'm going to ride down to New Orleans." There's no gas stations when you get down here, so in Hattiesburg I got about ten gallons of gas and I strapped them to the back seat, where the passenger would ride, and I ran down here. I remember it was the eeriest thing. I came at nighttime, and you go over the high rise coming into the city and you just see all the bridge lights, all the city lights—looks beautiful, right? There was nothing. I mean no cars in the road; nothing but my motorcycle lights. It was crazy, and there was a lot of bugs around back then and the smell was different. It was just wild. I came here and saw the place and I'm like, "You know what? I don't need to be in no classroom. I need to be right here." And I started working on it, and Jay started working on it, and we got it back going and we opened up in

December of that year—reopened. And we just reopened serving Zapp's potato chips and roast beef sandwiches. We had a cleaned-out kitchen, maybe we had a stove in there or something, and that's all we started [with]. And there might have been 150 people living in this area when we opened up, but when we opened up—. I mean, I got the newspaper clipping. There was probably about 5,000 on this corner. It was like a block party. It was wild.

[00:58:03]

But basically I went to school for business administration, but I don't have a paper degree per se, right? I didn't finish in a college, but you couldn't take a college kid and teach him about this corner, you know. So, that's what I figured. I figured you couldn't pay me the money to learn Parkway Bakery and send me off to a school. I've learned it all right here, from the back office to the making the food to dealing with customers, dealing with the public, with people skills. I mean, it's a beautiful thing. I'm glad that it worked out that way. So I'll say I don't have a college degree with pride, you know, and I am not going back. [*Laughs*]

[00:58:48]

SR: Jay, I remember back then you saying to the media and to me at one point that you wouldn't have reopened without Justin after Katrina.

[00:59:03]

JN: No, I wouldn't have. I actually—. We had four FEMA trailers here. I was in one, Justin was in one. When we first got back—. All our seafood we'd put in the freezer, and we were hoping that it would be frozen solid when we got back, and it may have been, but what happened was: as it thawed out, the bottom thawed out, the pile fell over and knocked the door open and it all fell on the floor. And when we got back there was two-week-old seafood on the floor. I'm like in the FEMA trailer on my pity pot. Justin's out there, by himself, scooping up

stuff that God didn't create. [Laughs] After a while I said, "I got to go help that guy." So I went out there and helped him and I sort of got motivated and I said, "You know what? I think we can pull it off."

[01:00:11]

But one of the weirdest things was, right before the storm, about three weeks—. I bought a bunch of equipment when we first opened. Not only was it the wrong equipment; it was in the wrong place. So we were running up and down and making ten and twenty steps when it could have been two, and I said, "You know, if I had my way I'd throw all this stuff on the street and I'd buy brand new." And when Katrina came, we got our second chance. We threw all that stuff on the street, we bought the correct equipment, we put it in the correct places, and we all became basketball players, pivoting on one foot in that kitchen. And sometimes it's sixteen people in there and they're doing a Russian dance, talking Czechoslovakian, and no one can understand what's going on. When the customers look in there it's a beautiful thing, but they don't want to be any part of it. But it is. It's like a—.

[01:01:21]

JK: Oh, it's madness. We call it organized chaos. It's amazing how much—. I mean, you're talking about feeding over 1,000 people a day in eleven hours—you know, ten, eleven hours feeding 1,000 people. There's probably—. It's four or five people making sandwiches all day long, but there's probably about twelve to thirteen in there helping them out. One guy, all his job is—. We make it simple with the employees, too. I mean, your job, it's like an assembly line. One guy comes in; he's the bread guy. He cuts the bread, he toasts the bread. He doesn't touch anything else but the bread all day long. Four or five people, all they do is make sandwiches, you know. Two guys in the back, they expedite. They put all the orders together and call them on the

intercom. That's what I usually do, kind of keep it organized. You got one guy that fries all the seafood. You got one guy that slices all the tomatoes and all the vegetables every day and keeps all the meat sliced, and in the back you got a guy making all the desserts and potato salad and all the roast beef. It's just constantly—and over time it's like—. And I was just thinking about that: how wild it's been in the past. We finally got to the point where everything's like, you know, we feel like we got it down and we're looking forward to the next step. And the next step's a call-in kitchen. We're putting a second kitchen in here so we can take big to-go orders and catering orders and stuff like that.

[01:02:53]

JN: Really, it's a crazy thing: the busier we are the better we are at Parkway Bakery. And that doesn't sound correct, but when you slow down and you have gaps in the tickets, it gives the kitchen people opportunity to get into a conversation and then the tickets get missed. So, when you're in the zone and you're going at it, that's when you're like a rapid fire machine gun and you're just reflex. So normally in a week we'll do 3,000, 3,300 register rings in six days. That's not sandwiches; that's just somebody coming up and ordering. During the six days of Mardi Gras we did 7,000 register rings. So I'm telling the staff at the staff meeting: "You know what? I'm watching these numbers and I'm looking at these. Man, I feel y'all's pain." I said, "I don't know how you humanly pull it off." Guess what they say? "You know, it really wasn't that bad." The busier you are, I think the better you are in the restaurant business. When you're just—.

[01:04:11]

JK: Well, the food comes out better.

[01:04:13]

JN: You're banging out hamburgers. You don't even think about it. You're just driving that nail in the ground.

[01:04:18]

JK: I think if we ever have any—. You know, we're not perfect. I mean, if I was perfect I'd be Jesus Christ or someone like that—some higher power. But we make mistakes, and every time someone comes back and says, "Hey, my sandwich was cold," or, "This wasn't right," 99.9 percent of the time it's when we're slow. Someone toasts the bread and they're not paying [attention] and they toast it too early while a hamburger's cooking or something and the bread gets hard. Or someone drops shrimp and they drop a little more than they should've for an order so it sits up for about fifteen minutes until the next one comes in and they try to use it or something and it doesn't come—. What I'm saying is, the best sandwich you're going to get at Parkway: when you see that line out the door, out into the street, that's when we're making our best—.

[End file one; 01:05:06]

[00:00:00]

SR: All right, so we paused for a minute to get some new batteries, and I realized that we've been talking for an hour, which is a long time to keep you all here and I will try to—. I still have some questions, though, and I will try to consolidate them as much as I can. Just a factual thing, because we moved on from Katrina, but I wanted to sort of pin down: Did this restaurant flood?

[00:00:29]

JN: Yes. We got chest-deep water in the bar, and in the upper part in the rear we got waist-deep.

[00:00:38]

SR: That's pretty profound, which makes me think about a lot of the ephemera and the memorabilia that you have on the walls. I wanted to ask you about that anyway. Did the water touch any of that stuff? I mean, I know you've been collecting that stuff for a long time.

[00:00:57]

JN: Actually, water didn't touch it. The building was totally wainscoted, and of course all the memorabilia had to be at least four- or five-foot high because the customers were sitting in the lower section and they'd be beating it up and knocking it off the wall. I had a friend with a teeny helicopter, his name's George, and it was so small that if either person weighed over 200 pounds he had to drop fuel. The [cockpit] was like the size of a front seat of a Volkswagen. So he flew me in, and I came and opened all the windows and left and it aired the place out. There was not a stitch of mildew. And of course we did the normal treatments to get it up and going. Then I went and got all the wet money out of all the registers. Of course it was all ones and fives and tens. It was thousands of dollars. I went back to Folsom. He had a big barn with an attic in it, and I laid all the money out. First I tried to dry it in the microwave, but it was too slow. Because the bank wouldn't take it wet. So I laid it all out in the top section of the barn on a hot day and it all dried up and I picked it all up and cashed it in.

[00:02:22]

SR: Those are the stories, the little stories of Katrina, that you don't even think about. Can you talk a little bit about your memorabilia? I think that Thomas might have you take him on a tour of the memorabilia, so you don't have to go into huge detail, but you have such a great collection of stuff in there.

[00:02:41]

JN: Actually, we have probably five or ten times that, and, when I started buying memorabilia, for about a year—. I'm obsessive-compulsive, and the older I get the more I like old stuff, so I bought a bunch of stuff. We're actually getting ready to bring some more stuff out. But I once thought that I would do a memorabilia museum somewhere on the property and display the rest of it, but we're about to go through tons of it, and it is a great collection. A lot of times customers who love Parkway and who love the old days, they bring us stuff. We got a K&B [drugstore] basket up on top of that freezer right there that I think someone brought us, and they bring us Krauss [department store] and [D.H.] Holmes [department store] and K&B bags and old beer cans. And we probably have 1,000 bottles around the top of every room, and I'm still collecting stuff. We're about to put something up in the bar that is an old cord board [from] Falstaff Brewery that they would give out to the black bars in town, and you can see where it stayed on the wall so long, probably back in the '50s, that it had like roach holes in it where they ate through the cord board and it's all torn up. But it's two beautiful, '50s-setting, black ladies pouring beer. And it's hard to explain, but I think one of the ladies is this black lady like Leslie Uggams or—there was another one—Diahann Carroll, back when she was like a teenager.

[00:04:46]

So, the memorabilia—. Someone gave me that Woolworth sign that's over the kitchen window, and that came from Canal Street. In one of my past lives I had an automotive degree. When I went to get some brake shoes at this warehouse, I'm bumping on this sign and I look down and it's that sign. I said, "What are you going to do with that sign?" He said, "I don't know. It's been sitting there for years." I said, "Well I want to put it in Parkway Bakery." [He said,] "Parkway Bakery! Take it." It's up there now.

[00:05:25]

JK: Yeah, a lot of these people, like more than—. Jay started buying all this memorabilia to get it started, but fifty percent of it, half of it's definitely donated from the customers. You got the whole city that comes here and sees all these old things, and then they have this cool old like Regal or Dixie Beer sign, or whatever have you, that they can't enjoy because it's cooped up in their house. And maybe it was at Grandma's or Mom's or Dad's, so what they do is they give it to us, we hang it up, and then they bring all their friends and family and [tell them they gave it to us.] That's all the time, and sometimes things might get knocked off the wall and we have to like put it away until we get it reframed or something. Oh, man, don't let it be one of them customers that give you one of those things. They'll come in to bring their friends: "Hey! What happened to my picture from Warren Easton the band back in the '40s? You didn't like it?" I say, "No, man. It's right here. [*Laughs*] It fell down." But half of the things here, it's like the public's museum, you know. They put their own little things on the wall to give it to us and they come bring their friends and brag about it.

[00:06:35]

JN: We have an original menu from the House of Lee, and Lee comes in here and eats. Some kind of way it got shuffled, and I thought that I'd hang it from the air conditioning vent in the men's bathroom and when the vent was on it would spin. He was mad: "Why did you put me in the bathroom?"

[00:06:56]

JK: Is it still in there?

[00:06:58]

JN: It's still in there.

[00:07:00]

SR: Do you have a favorite piece, either one of you?

[00:07:04]

JN: I would say—. Gee whiz. I would say that one of my favorite pieces is an Old Grand-Dad bottle. It's about twenty-four inches tall, about six inches wide. It's actually the true Old Grand-Dad, and it's probably back from twenty years old, thirty years old. But I used to drink Old Grand-Dad, and people ask me why I don't drink it anymore. I said, "Because I started to look like the man on the bottle."

[00:07:39]

JK: My favorite piece, it's about a six-foot-by-five-foot—. It's a nice picture; it's not a poster. Big, hard copy of a packed Tulane stadium, aerial view. It's in the bar. That thing held, what, over 60,000 people? Yeah. It was amazing. And this thing's packed, and you look around and everyone talks about this picture. I've had people offer to buy it from us. It's just an amazing view of like, you know, football back in the '30s and '40s. And you see this packed—with, say, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety-thousand people in the stadium, and you look around it and there's no parking. It's in the middle of a neighborhood. One of these old guys, his name's Al Stubbs, he lives on Calhoun Street, and he comes here all the time—he was telling me a story: "Yeah, yeah." He was telling me about that: "You know, when it was packed like that, I'd skip school on the days it was packed like that and I'd walk around with a sign that said, 'Parking Two Dollars.'" He'd walk in front of people's driveways while they were at work and he'd park—because there was no parking. So he'd walk in front, like it was his yard, and fill up everybody's yards and driveways in the neighborhood and he'd make a couple hundred bucks a game. It was a kick. So that's why, you know: I heard a good story that went with it. But that's my favorite piece.

[00:09:05]

SR: Where did you get that one?

[00:09:07]

JK: Jay got that one.

[00:09:08]

JN: When I was doing house repair, I worked my way up from working with slum landlords to working for judges and doctors on St. Charles Avenue. So I was working for this attorney and I had to move his bed to paint his bedroom, and that was behind his headboard. It had been there about eight years, he said. I said, "What are you doing with that?" He said, "You want it?" I said, "Yeah." [He said,] "What are you going to do with it?" I said, "I'm going to hang it in Parkway." He said, "You better keep it there too, because I'm going to make sure." So I'm sure he still comes in and makes sure it's still up there.

[00:09:44]

SR: Jay, have you quit your day job?

[00:09:47]

JN: I quit visiting my day job as much. You talking about Parkway?

[00:09:54]

SR: No, I actually was talking about your contracting job.

[00:09:58]

JN: No, actually I pulled the windshields out of my motor home today because there was a leak and something's getting rusty. But I still like to—. I'm real, real heavy on maintenance and deferred maintenance. And the problem with deferred maintenance, something little breaks and then you have a hundred little things that are broken. It's a major thing. It's like, who's

going to tackle a hundred little things? We get them one by one. As they break, we fix them, and if you deal with small things you never have a big thing. We do that real well around here. Something's always broken, and it's like the bills. We get a bill in today, we pay for it and mail it tomorrow. When something breaks today, we fix it tomorrow. We had two full-time guys working, eighty hours a week, for years around here, and now we're down to one guy who works on Tuesdays when we're closed.

[00:11:09]

But we do not let things break and not fix them. And a lot of people in the restaurant business, [say] the kitchen manager wants a shelf over the sandwich unit: "I'm not giving them a shelf! They can do something." Give them a shelf. For God's sake, they need some place to hold those sandwiches until the expediter—. I mean, give them whatever they want. They know. It's only going to make things more efficient and make them go home joyful instead of hateful, and if they go home joyful their family's joyful. If they go home hateful, when they open the door everybody shuts up because Daddy's home, or Mama's home. And when he wakes up in the morning he's hateful because he's got to go back to work and everybody's tense in the house, so it spreads. When someone hates their job, it spreads. From the time they go home until the time they come back, the whole family's affected. So we got some joyful staff here. We really do, and it feels good, and the trick was don't have fifty people minimum wage; have thirty-five people at a living wage. The payroll's the same and everybody's happy.

[00:12:31]

SR: Is that how many employees you have, about thirty-five?

[00:12:35]

JN: Yeah. We had fifty at one spot.

[00:12:37]

JK: Yeah, and then one thing: Jay hired—. You know, we didn't know anything about the business, so we hired a kitchen manager and we hired a lady. I don't know if she was—. She gave you counsel on what you needed to do. Jay knew more about it. But anyways, she'd say, "Pay your people dirt nothing. They can go somewhere else and get a job if they don't like it." She was real rough, you know. "Pay them minimum wage going in. You can always rotate people." And you know, the cost of losing somebody is—. It's off the charts. You lose somebody and you bring someone else in, you got to train them. They're extra on the schedule because you got to train them, you can't throw them right in, and then something else comes good and they go run to that. You're constantly turning people. And some restaurants live by that. You know, turn them and burn them, pay them nothing. But it's like here, you know, I guarantee you there is not a sandwich shop in this city that pays—and I'm not going to go [on the record] and tell you what I pay my people, but we pay them good. We pay them better than a lot of chefs get paid around here and all they do is make sandwiches. But it's not just making sandwiches. They are warriors in there, you know? I mean, they put the work in so they deserve to get paid every bit that they get on their checks.

[00:14:00]

So, we have a small staff. I was telling Jay, I can't remember the last time that we've had to hire somebody. I mean, it's at least been a year, and that's never the case. It's always a revolving door in the restaurant business, but people love it here and they're family and they stay a while. I actually did hire two people this last month, and these two people that I hired, guess who they were? People that I fired two years ago. You know, not for—. I let them go for maybe not showing up on time or something just minuscule, but they went out there and they saw, "Hey,

I had a good thing going at the sandwich shop.” And they come back, and guess what? They’re some of my best people. You know, and then you don’t have to train them. [Laughs]

[00:14:50]

So it’s great, and everybody—when you got forty different people working and they got forty different attitudes and forty different lives and personalities, you really got to hire kind of a motley crew. You really got to hire different folks. You can’t hire all the same people who listen to all the same music, who watch the same old TV shows and watch all the same sports games. We got people from the neighborhood that work here, we got college students, you got people from New York. We got all different types of people, so it’s like, the way they gel, it’s not through personal lives. They gel through camaraderie at their job, and that’s what I kind of base on. I don’t hire the same, you know, ten or twelve types of folks. It’s always a different group working. It’s strange. It’s hard to explain, but it’s working.

[00:15:50]

SR: I get it.

[00:15:50]

JN: Let me say something on that real quick. I was scared to death when I opened Parkway because actually I couldn’t make the first payroll, but I had a signing bonus on video poker. It wasn’t due until they set the machines in place, which weren’t in place, so I went to the video poker guys and I said, “Look, I can’t make payroll. Can I have half of that \$10,000 bonus, even though the machines aren’t in place?” He let me have it. And the second payroll, “Can I have the other five?” He let me have it. But the girl who I hid behind to open Parkway, she said, “If you pay anybody more than six dollars an hour you’ll be closed in ninety days.” And I believed every word she said, and it was probably true at the time because we weren’t high-

volume and we were stumbling with everything. That's what we did for a long time, and it's like, we came out of it, but I believed that was true back then. That was ten years ago.

[00:16:58]

JK: Yeah. I'll go ahead and say it, because you said, right there, paying six people and all the different types of people we had through here, it was a nightmare. That's what makes a—. Your employees make your business. They make your business and, I'll tell you, walking through the door, not knowing anything, I'd rather hire someone who doesn't know anything than someone with a lot of background because they want to run it the way they want to run it. But someone comes through here that doesn't know anything: they're getting eleven bucks an hour. That's just walking in, eleven bucks an hour. You pay your employees, the money's going to come back to you because they're going to work for you. And I understand some places can't afford that, but if you can afford it and you're just stuffing it in your pockets and not giving it back to your employees, it will come back and bite you in the ass. I firmly believe that.

[00:17:53]

JN: One more thing: we love our customers, but we love our employees more than the customers. And I'll say it, because the customers know without the employees we have no customers. So our people are number one, and that's not a reflection on our customers; just that we've got to have our people and they got to love us. So we love our customers, but we love our employees more.

[00:18:17]

SR: I really respect that philosophy. You all have a lot of other family members who work here too, huh?

[00:18:23]

JK: Yeah. My brother works here, my older brother, and my little sister works—. My little sister runs the bar, she's the bar manager. My mom does the books, Jay plays owner, and my brother runs the kitchen with myself.

[00:18:42]

JN: Here's what I say: Justin's the boss, I'm the owner. The boss has to do all the dirty work. What's the owner do? He just walks around the restaurant and says, "Hi, my name's Jay. I'm the owner." That's my job. [Laughs]

[00:18:55]

SR: I have a feeling there's a little bit more to it than that.

[00:18:59]

JK: Not much.

[00:19:00]

SR: [Laughs]

[00:19:00]

JK: But he deserves it. He's put his time in. He's worked—.

[00:19:04]

JN: I know the numbers.

[00:19:05]

JK: Oh, yeah. He gets up and he goes into the system and looks at all the sales and numbers and labor, and he'll tell you things. You know, because he's looking from a bird's-eye view. He's looking down on what's going on, and he'll tell you things by looking at the numbers that you wouldn't know by being slap in the middle of the restaurant because you're around chaos. And he'll say, "Justin, you might want to pick up somebody, or drop someone on

Wednesday nights. It looks like the labor's a little high." And you look at it and he's right. So it is, it's a beautiful thing. Between us running it and Jay watching the numbers, we have it totally on lockdown. It's a great—. And this family can work together. A lot of families, you can't get them at Thanksgiving dinner together, you know, and this family just gels so nice.

[00:19:53]

SR: Jay, earlier when you were talking about opening the restaurant, you kept saying "we." Did you mean your family members? Like, who was with you at the very beginning?

[00:20:02]

JN: Actually, it was just Justin and myself.

[00:20:05]

SR: Okay.

[00:20:06]

JN: I think that—.

[00:20:09]

JK: Everyone else came after the storm.

[00:20:12]

JN: Nancy?

[00:20:13]

JK: Nancy—.

[00:20:14]

JN: Was before the storm.

[00:20:15]

JK: Nancy came right before the storm, yep.

[00:20:18]

JN: So it was Justin, my sister, Nancy, and myself. And just people, strangers to us. And then after the storm, my sister, Eileen, who lived in Biloxi, and her son, Johnny, and her daughter, Catherine. New Orleans had its architecture; it was just wet. Biloxi didn't have any architecture. It just had vacant land. She used to get in her car and drive along the coast to work every morning and enjoy the water on one side and the beautiful stately homes on the other. Well, when she started driving to work, the water was still there but it was like bombed out. So she was going to go to Austin. She fled New Orleans when she was a teenager. I didn't think she'd ever come back. I told my sister, Dale, I said, "Eileen's thinking about going to San Antonio or Houston. I might ask her if she wants to come work at Parkway Bakery." And I asked her and she didn't even hardly hesitate. She said, "Yeah!" Just like—. It was a surprise to all of us that—.

[00:21:38]

JK: That she moved.

[00:21:40]

JN: That she moved. [*Laughs*]

[00:21:41]

SR: That's your mother.

[00:21:43]

JN: She was a diehard—

[00:21:43]

JK: Yeah.

[00:21:44]

JN: —Biloxian.

[00:21:45]

JK: And that's the—. I don't know what we did without her. She is a force to be reckoned with, that woman. She runs that office like—. Pays the bills. All our vendors who we buy from, they love us because she's on top of it, you know. And if they come with a dispute, saying, "We didn't get this check," or this or that, oh, she's on it. She gets offended: "You got that!" and she'll pull out the book. But she runs everything with an iron fist, and the thing about that office, you can have the most successful front of the house with the food going out, and you got packed customers, but you don't got the proper person counting the money and writing the checks and doing the payroll and cutting the bills and taxes and everything—. The office is just as important, or even more important, than the actual function of the restaurant, because if you don't know how to organize that, it'll all go down the tubes.

[00:22:37]

JN: I'll say something about that. A lot of the people you hear in the restaurant [business], or any business: "Man, I made four million last year." Or, "I made a million and a half last year." You know, I want to ask them: "I don't want to know how much you made. How much did you manage?" It's really how you manage the money, and, on or off the record, here's where Eileen and all her children come from: work ethic. She raised four kids—they were all barely waist-high—by herself. She worked for the church Monday through Friday doing bookwork 8:00 to 5:00. On weekends she ran bingo on Saturday and Sunday for the church—that was her second job. On weekends she cleaned people's kitchens and baths—that was her third job. And after work Monday through Friday she dressed dead bodies for fifty dollars apiece and held wakes. So—

[00:23:43]

JK: She was nuts. [*Laughs*]

[00:23:44]

JN: —that's what she did, and raised four young kids. And she did that for a decade, and she does that here, but she has one job and she's her own boss. But she makes me tired, just looking at her. And I was a workaholic too, but I'm in recovery. She will never be in recovery.

[*Laughs*]

[00:24:07]

JK: She likes to work. I mean she'll work in here until the day she can't work no more. That's just who she is.

[00:24:12]

JN: And she'll prove you wrong most of the time.

[00:24:15]

JK: Yeah.

[00:24:16]

SR: That's great. I'd love to meet her sometime. A different topic: y'all have been involved in the po-boy festival, the Po-Boy Preservation Festival, and you had a really funny-sounding sandwich this past year.

[00:24:33]

JK: Yeah. We did one that was a—. I know the one you're talking about. We did one that was a French dip, and we roasted about six cow legs—and it's the whole upper thigh all the way down; it looks like a big drumstick—and we had a carving station, and that was a big kick. Then the one you're talking about, we called it the Babymaker, and it's basically—. Mahony's

Po-Boy shop does a kick called the Peacemaker, and it's basically oysters, bacon, and cheese—cheddar cheese. A guy came to my restaurant, or our restaurant; a guy came in here I'd say about a year ago and, you know, he was getting bored with the same old thing, so he said, "I want an oyster po-boy." And he said, "Throw cheddar cheese—." That's the grand thing about here: you can make your own thing. We'll just charge you for it. You can make whatever you want. [He said,] "Give me an oyster po-boy and put some cheddar cheese on there. Throw some bacon on it. You know what? You got rémoulade?" [We said,] "Yeah, we got rémoulade." [He said,] "Put some rémoulade. Smother it in rémoulade sauce." And it looked damn good. I'm like, "Wow, this thing is so good-looking." I wanted to—. Liz Reyes with Fox 8, she calls me up from time to time and wants me to come up there, and she says, "What's your new thing? What's a new sandwich you got coming out? You can come on the noon show and show me." I said, "Well, there's this cool one. I don't have a name for it, but this guy made it up and I can come show you on the show what it is."

[00:26:03]

I did that on the noon show, just to explain to people you can make what you want. It doesn't have to be the same things on the menu. Come and just make your own sandwich. She said, "What are we going to call this?" I'm thinking, you know, well I've heard it called a Peacemaker, and she had me on live television: "What are you going to call this?" So my mind went real fast, like a racehorse, and I just said, "Oysters are an aphrodisiac. Let's call it the Babymaker." [Laughs] And it kicked. I remember, "We're going to call this the Babymaker." And the way she looked at me, like I was crazy, and somehow it just kicked off and it's actually—. It's not on the menu, and I don't put it on the menu because it's just so—. It's an expensive sandwich. Oysters are like a delicacy nowadays. They're really high, they're hard to

get; we got them two or three days a week over here. And I don't put it on the menu because an oyster sandwich is like sixteen bucks, and then when you put bacon on it and then cheese and all that, it's like eighteen, nineteen dollars for a sandwich. I don't like to advertise we have it, but if you want it and you know about it and you ask for it, yeah. We'll make it for you. Because I know that's what you want. But I'm not going to advertise a twenty-dollar sandwich on the menu.

[00:27:19]

It's so funny that you said that. A guy, his name's Adam Richman—he does the TV show *Man v. Food*—he actually came to Parkway last year to do a new show about things off the menu. And I showed him that sandwich, and this upcoming Wednesday he debuts his show, and the Babymaker—. So I'm curious to see how many people—this is a worldwide show; it's a big show—how many people are going to come in and ask for the Babymaker now, now that it's like one of those things you ask [for] that's off the menu. It's probably a good thing I kept it off the menu so when he came I had something to tell him about. And it's going to go good. It's a good sandwich; it's just a lot of dinero.

[00:28:01]

SR: Are you always involved in the Po-Boy Festival?

[00:28:05]

JK: Yeah. We've been involved pretty much every year. We've backed off serving a year or two and just did a sponsorship. Or one year I was grand marshal and they dressed me up in a monkey suit and I was like the main judge and everything. You felt like you were mayor for a day, you know? It was fun. So we did that. But yeah, we're involved every single year, and I feel like—. You know, we used to go out there and be all, we want to have the biggest show

because we're like one of the—. You know, I think it was more me, young kid. As you get older you realize you can make the same wage with just a smaller set-up. And we used to go out there with all kind of crazy stuff. But now, like last year, I think last year was my favorite year at the Po-Boy Festival. We had a small set-up where we had two fun sandwiches and we sold better than we ever have in the past. It was amazing. We used to close down the whole restaurant and bring all the staff over there, so people who would want to come here, your regular old-timers who can give a rat's ass about the Po-Boy Fest—pardon my language, but there are a lot of people that don't want to go there. They just want to get their regular po-boy on Sunday. They don't know nothing about the Po-Boy [Festival]. We're closed; they're mad at us.

[00:29:31]

So now half the staff stays here and half the staff goes to the fest, and we knock it out. But we never go out there to the Po-Boy Fest to make money. We pretty much, even though we sold the best last year, we might have lost a couple thousand dollars because we go out there and we sell those oysters—. You know, the Babymaker was like seven bucks versus over here it would be fifteen bucks. We go out there and we write it off as advertising and give people a good deal on a good product and sell a couple thousand of them so the next week they'll come here and help us out. We help them out at the Po-Boy Fest so they can help us out the rest of the year.

[00:30:10]

JN: Right. Here's what happened. Originally in the Po-Boy Fest they'd say, "What are you going to charge for your poor boy?" I said, "Well, two dollars." And because it was a young organization they let us do it. Then the next year they said, "You can't charge two dollars anymore. It's not fair to everyone else." So then we didn't. And then the next year they made everybody do a two-dollar sampler, okay. So, one year we literally, like a movie set, rented

trucks and brought everything out the kitchen and put it in exactly the same place so that when they reached for the tape or reached for the butcher paper, it was there. It wasn't all in new spots. We had like six registers and we were like—. And then we shut down here. Well, last Po-Boy Fest, we did 100 gallons of oysters at seventy dollars a gallon. That's seven thousand. We made ten grand; seven grand was oysters. And of course we had the roast, we had all the employees.

[Laughs]

[00:31:24]

JK: We had eight cow legs. You actually lose paper money for a day, but you gain it back. You got to invest. You got to invest if you want to make money, but the funny thing is I don't even bring—. I kind of outsource the Po-Boy Fest to different people. The same crew's been actually running my—. When it was forty people, half the staff would just run around and cut up and we'd trade out. Now it's just like six or seven people that come there to work. We take a few people from the restaurant, maybe about three or four, and the rest of them are about four or five guys from other restaurants that are closed on Sunday. And one in particular restaurant has four or five guys, and they've been doing it the last three years with me. They know they're signed on every year. It's the guys from Charlie's Steakhouse. So this is the oldest po-boy shop in the city, so the crew from the oldest steakhouse in the city—they're closed on Sundays, so they come help me out. And they put Parkway shirts on, and I let them wear their Charlie's if they want to, you know. But it's fun because, you know, you get the same old people working with you every day; to go to an event like that, you need a jump-start because it's really—. Not only are you setting up; you're cleaning up at the end of the night. It's about a sixteen-hour day, so you need people that—. It's great because those guys are looking forward to it, and then my few staff members are looking forward to working with them because we have so

much fun. And you don't even know: the sixteen-hour day goes by like that, and you make money.

[00:32:58]

SR: That's a great partnership. Did you all, by chance, know Michael Mizell-Nelson, the historian? He was instrumental in starting that festival. That's okay. I just realized what time it is. I'm going to ask you each one more question, and then you can let me know if there's anything you want to add, but what is your favorite po-boy? What do you eat?

[00:33:22]

JN: My favorite poor boy is—. Because I was a contractor and, you know, it's hot in the summer; it was that cold Chisesi ham, cold cheese, cold lettuce, tomato, pickle and mayo on French bread. Because you could eat it, it was refreshing; it was light, like a salad on bread; you could go back to work. A roast beef poor boy, forget it. You just couldn't do it. But my first poor boy was a hamburger poor boy at Schweikart's Drugstore, which is where the Basil Leaf is now. But that cold ham and cheese is really a classic.

[00:34:08]

JK: Yeah, with Swiss. It has to be Swiss. Swiss cheese, right?

[00:34:12]

JN: Yeah, Swiss.

[00:34:14]

SR: You remember your first po-boy?

[00:34:16]

JN: Yeah, it was across the street, Schweikart's Drugstore, corner of Jeannette [Street] and Carrollton [Avenue], across the street from my family home where I was raised, and it was a

hamburger poor boy. For most people it wasn't a hamburger poor boy. I loved hamburger poor boys. I didn't know anything about roast beef poor boys, shrimp, anything. It was like, "Poor boy? Yeah, that's a hamburger." That's all I knew.

[00:34:47]

SR: That was unfair. That was two questions. I said one more question. Thank you.

[00:34:52]

JN: I got to say one more thing before y'all go, okay? When you look at the restaurant—and this goes for any restaurant, especially for this one—the customer's looking at a fine watch. It's a beautiful thing. It's only got like three hands on it. It's got a little hand, a big hand, and maybe a swift hand. And it's a beautiful thing, but it's so simple, really nothing to it. You take that fine watch and you pop the back off, and that's the restaurant business. You see all that stuff going on, synchronized in beautiful order. Then you have all those jewels in there too: that's your employees, all those jewels. That's all of us. Really that's—. The customer sees it as, "Man, they make a lot of sandwiches there." But they don't look in the back of that watch. That's the real deal.

[00:35:48]

SR: Thank you. That's beautiful. Your favorite po-boy?

[00:35:54]

JK: Mine's a—. You know, I was thinking: it's two. It's roast—. Mine's a shrimp. I love a good Gulf fried shrimp po-boy. You know, fresh with the mayo, and I like a little ketchup and hot sauce on it, sometimes. I won't do it to the whole thing; maybe I'll do it to the last three bites or something, just to get it a little different taste out of it. But a good shrimp po-boy is the best, and that was my first one I remember. I mean, I grew up in Biloxi and po-boys are a big thing

over there. I feel like Biloxi to the west, all the way to New Orleans, and maybe south about thirty miles, should all be its own state. It's the same type of folks, you know? If you go twenty minutes north of Biloxi you're in the rest of the South. Same in New Orleans: you go twenty minutes north, you go the Northshore, you're in the rest of the South. And it's not my downing it, but it's just the way it is. Where I'm from, from Biloxi down to New Orleans, everybody has the same walk, the same talk. I think it's something to do with the coastal cities. I don't know. It's like the coastal way of life and the fishermen and stuff like that.

[00:37:10]

But my first one was a—. It's a restaurant that's closed now; it's called Mary's Drive-in. It was on Division Street in Biloxi, and my dad used to take me in there to get a shrimp po-boy. But they used to press them, and they still do. I'll call somebody out that gets a pressed po-boy, because I really don't like to do it over here. We don't have any presses. We're not built for that, but sometimes I'll do it if I have the time. But anyways, if someone asks for pressed, I'll go up to them and say, "You're from the coast, ain't you? Yeah, you're from Biloxi or the Mississippi Gulf." [They'll say,] "How'd you know?" I say, "Because you get your sandwiches pressed. We don't do that over here. I'm from Biloxi, okay? Lose it." I'll give them a hard time.

[00:37:51]

But anyways, a good shrimp po-boy, in my mind—and I love the roast beef, but—. And I don't eat a shrimp po-boy every day, but if I get a craving it's for a shrimp. You know, and I love a good shrimp po-boy. [Laughs] I mean, that's what it is.

[00:38:11]

JN: That's our top-seller, shrimp poor boy. We were known for roast beef, but after the BP oil spill [the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010]. Shrimp took over because people thought

they were going to go out of existence. And also Obama came in and he ate a shrimp poor boy. So I tell people, “If you think you might want to be President one day, you might want to eat a shrimp, because that’s what Obama ate.”

[00:38:37]

SR: Did he eat that by choice? Is that what he ordered, or is that what you served him?

[00:38:42]

JN: It was the—

[00:38:43]

JK: He ordered it.

[00:38:43]

JN: —fifth anniversary of—. No.

[00:38:46]

JK: It was the fifth anniversary of Katrina.

[00:38:48]

JN: And it was the oil spill.

[00:38:49]

JK: But that’s when that—.

[00:38:50]

JN: And the oil spill.

[00:38:52]

JK: Yeah, that damn oil spill, you know, it really messed up a lot of people down here, and given that—. Most of the fishing was still fine. The parts where there was oysters and where there was shrimp wasn’t affected, and the media was blowing that stuff up—. It was candy in

their hands. They were blowing it up so much. If you lived in New York and you used to get truckloads of Gulf shrimp up to your seafood restaurant—because it's the best shrimp, hands down. I know no one can debate that. Gulf seafood is the best seafood around. It has a certain flavor to it; it's just the way it is. And those Northern people used to get truckloads of it, but then after they see all that stuff on the TV, the media makes the whole Gulf of Mexico look like a cesspool, and they're like, "We don't want that shrimp." So the sales—they stopped buying it from up there. Then we actually had too much shrimp down here and we were putting it in freezers. There wasn't enough people to consume all the bounty of the Gulf down here.

[00:40:00]

So, you know what? I don't get into politics. I won't say nothing about Obama or what I think about politics, good or bad, but I'll tell you one thing. I will say one thing on the record, that, whatever your politics, you like the guy, you don't like the guy, let me tell you this: for people in south Louisiana, while all that media was going on—. He did. He could have had any other sandwich, but I think there's a reason he picked the shrimp po-boy: to say, "Look, I'm the president of the free world. If it's good enough for me, you damn sure can eat it." And it's back. I mean, it's back. The sales are back bigger than they've ever been before.

[00:40:39]

JN: One thing on the seafood. A good fisherman who was in the business, made his livelihood on catching fish and stuff, he said he felt sorry for the oysters because all the rest of the seafood life could swim away but the oysters just had to sit there and suck it up. And they're still sitting there and sucking it up. That's why the oysters have never really got back on top, because they couldn't run. That's sad.

[00:41:17]

SR: That is sad. I never thought of it that way.

[00:41:20]

JN: The crabs swim away. The shrimp, the fish, every organism. But the Gulf is back ninety-five percent, not from anything that anybody did but from Mother Nature—had bacteria that ate the oil. And it's ninety-five percent clean, the Gulf. Not from all the efforts of BP, all the clean-up. It was Mother Nature had some bacteria that loved that oil. It's unbelievable.

[00:41:53]

SR: Earlier I was hungry for roast beef, and now I think I have to order a shrimp.

[Laughs]

[00:42:01]

JK: Get a surf and turf.

[00:42:03]

JN: Or get three shrimp and dip them in roast beef gravy and just get those two tastes. That's all you got to do. Get whatever sandwich you want. Get three shrimp and dip them in roast beef gravy and eat them, and you think, "Roast beef gravy and fried shrimp? That's not going to work."

[00:42:24]

SR: Oh no, that sounds good.

[00:42:25]

JN: Oh, man, it's good.

[00:42:26]

SR: This is officially my final question: How many people order the gravy po-boy? I love that you have a gravy po-boy on the menu, but I always wonder who orders that.

[00:42:38]

JK: I'll put my personal two cents in, and I'll give it to Jay. I personally, as I'm making sandwiches and giving them to people, I can't stand making that one because it's like, come on. I mean, you're coming here; you got to give me something—. I got to be proud, you know. I got to be proud when I make it for you. I got to feel like I've given you something. But they just want a piece of French bread with lettuce and tomato on it, and mayo, dressed, with a little bit of roast beef gravy and debris on it. That's what it is, and it sells, and we sell a lot of them, and I'll let Jay explain to you why. I mean, it makes perfect sense.

[00:43:10]

JN: Well, a lady asked me for one. I had a customer who said, "In the '50s our parents used to bring us to Parkway in the station wagon and fold all the seats down. Seven of us would get on the platform back there. We'd go to Parkway; my dad would go in; he'd come out with a roast beef poor boy and three gravy poor boys." And they would pass the three gravies to the back and the kids would eat them, and when the parents finished the roast beef poor boy they would pass the paper back to the kids with the droppings of the meat on it. And that's a real—. It's like, "This is what we can afford." My contractor, who helped me put Parkway together, his name was Axel. He's a gruff old German guy, sort of like Bubby, and he said, "You know, Jay, I take my family out to eat a meal every weekend, but when things get tight we don't go out to have a meal; we just go get sandwiches." And boy, that rang a bell so hard in my brain that, no matter what, sandwiches are like, when you're at your worst you get a sandwich, you know? So he was saying, "We still go out, but we only get sandwiches." You're still going out to eat, but it's not a meal. It's not like a plate.

[00:44:39]

JK: Right. And about that gravy po-boy: I've asked people, "Why do you like them?" And this old lady gets one and she says, "You know what? I love that roast beef taste, but it's just too much meat you put on it. It's too sloppy. I just like the taste of the gravy and a little debris on the lettuce and tomato and mayo." And it's light. You feel like you ate a roast beef but it's not as heavy; it won't weigh you down. Yeah, you eat a roast beef, forget about it. You're done. But the gravy po-boy, you can keep on kickin'. And it's cheap. It's dirt-cheap. So if you're having hard times and you want something good in your gut, I mean it is a good meal. It is a full meal.

[00:45:17]

JN: We have a lettuce and tomato poor boy, partly for the critics and the food people. A lot of times they get a range on your sandwiches. You know, five-fifty to fifteen dollars. So we put a two-dollar lettuce and tomato sandwich on so they can make that low range as well as the high range. And we sell those, too. I actually had one yesterday: lettuce and tomato dressed on wheat, untoasted.

[00:45:52]

SR: Untoasted?

[00:45:54]

JN: It's got to be dressed, because if you don't say "dressed" they won't add the pickle. So it's a lettuce and tomato, dressed. That way you get the mayo and the pickle. [*Laughs*]

[00:46:08]

SR: All right, I said I was officially done. I'm officially done. Thank you both so much for your time.

[00:46:14]

JN: You can see we enjoy it.

[00:46:15]

SR: Oh, well—

[00:46:17]

JN: We're full of it.

[00:46:17]

SR: —not as much as I did.

[00:46:19]

JN: We're full of it.

[00:46:20]

JK: We definitely are full of it. [*Laughs*]

[00:46:22]

JN: What about God's Golden Pond and the—

[00:46:34]

JK: That's for the camera.

[00:46:34]

JN: —deliciousness?

[00:46:35]

JK: That's for the camera, though. I say all kind of—.

[00:46:38]

JN: The deliciousness—what was it I told you, the—?

[00:46:41]

SR: The exceptional deliciousness?

[00:46:42]

JN: No, it was something about an arsonist. The—. Now you can't even think about it.

[00:46:49]

JK: I know what it is.

[00:46:49]

JN: That's the accelerant for deliciousness.

[00:46:51]

JK: Right.

[00:46:52]

JN: And God's Golden Pond, and I'm full of it.

[00:46:55]

JK: Well that's part of being—. When you go on TV shows, I kind of change into a different person, a different character. You know, I pull all my library of old sayings from all these old cats that work in the kitchen with me from over the years. You get all walks of life that work there and they all have crazy sayings and things that I keep in my memory bank, and when a TV show comes on—. That's why we've done so many. I mean, we've probably done twenty of them Food Network shows, and that's why. You go on there, you got a chance to just have fun and cut up. I do it every time, and that's what Jay's talking about. I'll say things and they're like, "What the hell did that guy just say?"

[00:47:31]

JN: One of the writers said, "Justin, can I say I said that?"

[00:47:36]

JK: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We had one of the hosts, he—. I said some things, and he said, “Cut.” And he said, “Justin, can we do the same thing again, man? I don’t want to—but can I say that? That just sounds so good.” I’m like, “Yeah, you can say it, man. I don’t care.” So we did it again and he said it, and that’s how they aired it. Bastard. [Laughs]

[00:47:59]

JK: Right.

[00:48:02]

SR: That is classic. All right.

[00:48:05]

JK: All right.

[00:48:06]

SR: Thanks.

[00:48:07]

JN: Cut! [*Laughter*]

[00:48:08]

SR: I could just keep talking to you guys, but I won’t.

[00:48:18]

END OF INTERVIEW

