



Joseph “Joe” and Prinisa Benavides

Royse City, TX

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Cynthia Torres: I'll start by my name is Cynthia Torres. The date is May 26th, 2022. We're in Royse City, Texas, and I am speaking with— would you like to . . . ?

Joe Benavides: Joseph or Joe Benavides .

Prinisa Benavides: And Prinisa Benavides .

Cynthia Torres: Wonderful. And could you talk a little bit about who you are and where you fit into this family tree? Your mom is married to my cousin Oscar.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. I think I met Oscar probably when I was about fourteen, fifteen years old. Took in four kids who weren't his, and he's been a great man. I was living in Mansfield. Him and my mom decided to move in together I think around [19]97, [19]98 and I moved down, been in Garland since then. But he basically raised us, raising me at fifteen, sixteen years old, my little sister I think at the time was probably five or six.

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And been a great dude. Good to my mom. Now that he has what . . . ?

Prinisa Benavides: How many grandchildren? We gave at least three. [Laughter] How many total?

Joe Benavides: Eight grandchildren. Yeah. So obviously a wonderful grandpa. But yeah, been here ever since then. If it wasn't for him wouldn't never left Mansfield.

Cynthia Torres: Well, that's wonderful.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. In Mansfield there was a house full of thirteen people. My mom, us four, my aunt and uncle, their four kids, and my grandma and grandpa. And at that time it was a big house to us, but I don't think it was that big now you look back at it. But he got us out of there.

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. How many actual bedrooms. Was it just two?

Joe Benavides: It's three bedrooms. So we made a living room and a dining room into a bedroom, so yeah.

Prinisa Benavides: A lot of people.

Joe Benavides: A lot of people.

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We lived next to the pig farm, right next door. So the smells during the summer weren't that attractive.

Cynthia Torres: Yeah, I can imagine.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. It was fun, though, growing up, trying to find stuff to do. We were surrounded by nothing but, I think, fifteen acres of woods, trees. And so we'd just go spend the summers in the woods hunting down snakes, catching spiders, messing around in the creek.

Yeah. It was a good experience growing up there and then seeing something different, moving down to Garland into the city, into a house nicer than what we grew up in. And then Oscar showed us a different way of life than what we had back then, so it was awesome.

Cynthia Torres: What were some of those major differences?

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Joe Benavides: Growing up out there, again, with that many people in one household there was a lot of fights. Pantries weren't full all the time. It was mostly a lot of noodles, a lot of tacos and eggs. Whatever ground beef we had you had to share it between thirteen people. Grew up on spaghetti, and I think that's where my passion for macaroni comes from 'cause I could eat macaroni like nothin' 'cause I love macaroni. That's pretty much what we grew up on, and my mom working two jobs, one in the morning, one at night, and then having to be home until she got off the next day. And then, depending on my aunt or my grandma to feed us at times when she wasn't there. But my mom, as soon as she would have time for us, she would take us out to eat or make us something to eat.

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It was a struggle back then. We didn't have a whole lot. We shared clothes. We were a majority of the time basically just— not raising ourselves but by ourselves trying to find stuff to do, and not always having food to put in our stomach, or worry about the gas getting cut off, no water, fighting with the cousins. And then moving down here, my mom met Oscar, we had all that. We still fought amongst each other with the siblings, but we had food in the pantry. We didn't have to worry about lights or water getting cut off. We had AC and we'd never had AC in the Mansfield house. Everybody was fighting over fans back then. But it had AC and just a nicer house. There weren't holes in the wall. The roof wasn't caving in. There weren't holes in the floor. We didn't have rats running through our house. It was different.

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He showed us a different life and showed us you didn't have to struggle to get to where you wanted to be. And he helped us out a lot.

Cynthia Torres: And as far as when the kitchen or the pantry was full and everything, did things changes in how you thought about your meals and about food and things?

Joe Benavides: It took a while. I told my mom— and it upset her when I told her this— 'cause I would go back and forth between Garland and Mansfield. You know, fifteen-year-old teenage boy not wanting to leave his friends— and I would be in Mansfield a majority of the year and I would come back home, and I would tell her, I'd say, "I feel like I have a hole in my stomach." I just couldn't never get full. I was just always trying to find something to eat down there. But we'd come down here I didn't have to worry about that. I can make whatever we wanted to eat. My mom made sure that we ate, and we had enough food for all that.

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We didn't have to worry about, oh, just get a little small bowl and make sure there's enough for everybody. There's always enough for everybody to eat.

Cynthia Torres: How did that, moving away from extreme poverty, how did that change your perspective about opportunities and possibilities just in yourself?

Joe Benavides: It was a struggle at first because you become accustomed to a certain way and then trying to become accustomed to a different way, it's, like, this is not how we grew up. I'm used to this way. I'm trying to think. Sorry. Can you repeat the question?

Cynthia Torres: Yeah.

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Just folks coming out of poverty and coming back into where you have enough, where you're no longer worried about just meeting those basic needs, it can change people.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. I was definitely very appreciative of, I guess, the world now. When you see something different and you're not having to fight for your next meal you become appreciative to what's in front of you now. It was a lot nicer. We never disrespected people but it's a different respect when you become, okay, no one's out there to get you. No one's there to take your next meal away. It's a different lifestyle.

Prinisa Benavides: And I guess, too, would it be even like seeing that you can come out of it.

Joe Benavides: Yeah, you can. Yeah, definitely coming out of it—

Prinisa Benavides: Like, what that would be like.

Joe Benavides: Living in Mansfield we thought that was just going to be our life and there wasn't no hanging in and finish school or plan for college or what's your future gonna look like.

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It's, like, let's just survive today. And then, coming down to Garland and Oscar put that in our heads, hey, you need to make sure you graduate and then find you a job. Plan for the future.

What are you gonna do the next five years, ten years? And that's how I started planning my life.

It was, like, okay, this is what I want to do by the time I'm twenty-one, twenty-five. Even

meeting Prinisa, she helped me keep a lot of things together. Because I had to leave my path,

leave how we grew up, leave that alone and then realize, hey, this is who we are now. We don't have to have that no more.

Cynthia Torres: But coming from where you just ate what you had to eat and then moving into a place where you had more choices, did your culinary interests change or what you wanted or your ideas about experimenting with different kinds of foods change?

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Joe Benavides: My culinary experience didn't start till later in life and that's when she started going to nursing school. So having the three kids, we worked days and she had a full-time job. So did I. And she started nursing school. So right after work Monday through Saturday or Tuesday through Saturday she was going straight to school right after work so it would just be me and the kids. And being a young family and having three kids— I think our oldest boy was probably eight at the time, then we had Alex who's six, and Avi's probably— she's in preschool— we ate ramen and spaghetti and Hamburger Helper the whole time. And then I eventually got tired of eating noodles. I was, like, “We gotta figure something out.”

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And it's funny 'cause we didn't have Wi-Fi or internet at that time so I would just try to see if I could get a connection somewhere via the neighbor's connection, and I started looking up recipes to do stuff. Say let's make some Cajun pasta or let's make something that's not what we been eating for the last two years. And then, again, we struggled too, being a small family and having our own rental property. I think Oscar gave me a grill, actually, so I started putting steaks on there, started putting fajitas. I learned how to make rice. Calling my mom, “Hey, how do I

make refried beans?” or “How do I make a pot of beans?” “How long should I cook chicken for? I don’t want to get sick.” That type of stuff. And yeah, really it just started there. So I had to feed the kids, obviously, so it was I want to eat meals and Hamburger Helper was getting old.

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And our pantry was full of Hamburger Helper and spaghetti. That’s ‘cause it’s the easiest thing to make for three little kids.

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. And especially I’m in and out of the house. I’m not there to make anything else. And the kids were very lucky and fortunate because they had a wide variety of foods. They were able to eat Mexican food and seafood and our food that we would have at home with my mom and stuff. And so they had a good palate of interest. And so for Joseph I know it was hard whenever I— he was doing everything. And so for those few years eggs and pasta was getting old. [Laughter] He said, “I gotta figure out how to make some other things.” And then I’m, like, “Wow. This stuff’s pretty good.” I was, like, “You can keep making food.” [Laughter]

Joe Benavides: Yeah. That’s pretty much where it kinda started. It wasn’t anything fancy.

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It was just basic hamburgers and steaks, fish, fried chicken. We never did any of that growing up and so when I started doing it I know we had a more variety of food to choose from. Hey, you know what? This weekend let’s make fried catfish. Let’s do fried chicken. Hey, we have some people coming over. Let’s throw some steaks on the grill. And at that time, I used to have steaks

that are well done. Not anymore. They're medium-rare and that's the only way to go with a steak.

Cynthia Torres: Yeah. How do you know when you put something on the grill and you're cooking it, and how do you know when it's, like, oh, okay, now I've arrived at something?

Joe Benavides: So back then when I first started grilling, if I put a steak on the grill I would cut it open and see how well done it was. We don't want any pink. Now, I've done it so many times I know, okay, I'm gonna cook hers a little bit longer 'cause she likes it a little done. Mine I'm cooking maybe four to six minutes and I know it's done.

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And it's just by look at it. I can look at anything now, okay, it's done, it's ready to go. Again, back then, I'm cutting open chicken to make sure it's not pink inside or cutting open the steaks, splitting open the hamburgers just to make sure they're well done. And now it's just, like, you can tell after doing it so long, yeah, we're good to go after about six minutes.

Cynthia Torres: And what about seasonings and that kind of thing?

Joe Benavides: Seasoning? I do make my own seasonings. A lot of it was store-bought but I've got so many recipes in a notebook, like how to make wing sauce, brisket rubs, pork rubs. You name it, I have a recipe for it. And it's all about your taste. Like me, I don't like a lot of salt. My wife and one of my sons loves salt. I'm just scared of salt because there's no coming back from it. Once you put too much that's it, it's over. [Laughter]

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So seasonings, yeah, every meat has its particular seasoning for itself. There's one seasoning— if I'm cooking salmon I'm putting steak seasoning on it 'cause I just feel like that's just a better flavor for it.

Prinisa Benavides: And he does have a really good— especially not going to an actual culinary school and to get that, what pairs well and how those chefs know what to throw on it, he's kinda got that knack where you've bought those sauces and those seasonings and then he'll take out what he doesn't like or add something or start mixing things together and see what goes with those meats. And yeah, all his seasoning for the meats that he smokes, it's all his personal seasonings. It's not anything that he's going and buying. A lot of times it's combinations of things and taking things out and just remixing it.

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I would never know how to do that part. I know what I like but I don't know how to create that, that's for sure. [Laughter]

Cynthia Torres: So you moved from the Hamburger Helper and everything, and the spaghetti with your kids and your family and then you started making these prepared meals and things that you're creating yourself and you're getting creative with the way you present meals to your family. How did that make you feel?

Joe Benavides: Oh, I love it 'cause there's always that saying, like, if you want to make somebody happy you feed 'em. And I'm my own worst critic. If I'm not gonna eat it I'm not gonna serve it to you. And that's just something I always stood by. But yeah, preparing it for someone else and knowing that they love my food, I'm happy. It makes me happy. And like she

said before, I don't give myself enough credit and I don't pat myself on the back, I'm just, like, okay, cool.

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It's, like, uh, you like it? Yes? No? I'd rather someone tell me they don't like it than lie to me and say that they did, 'cause then I can go back and fix what I messed up. I'd rather go fix it than you just tell me, oh, yeah, it was good, and it wasn't. 'Cause they'll just go tell somebody else, yeah, it's not that good. Well, should've said something. I would've made you something else or fixed it and let you try it again. But yeah, I love feeding people.

Cynthia Torres: Did it change how your family gathered around food rather than just the Hamburger Helper and, like, oh, Hamburger Helper again? Were people happier?

Joe Benavides: Once my friends found out that I could really cook and not just have, like, a backyard grill and have some friends over and throw some fajitas on there, yeah, we had more parties than we needed to.

Prinisa Benavides: [Laughter] They all showed up for the food.

Joe Benavides: Yeah.

Prinisa Benavides: And even the kids, they enjoyed it.

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And with our boys getting older and things like that everybody has different work schedules. And especially if we get a day where we're all home together, oh, is Dad gonna cook? They can't wait for him to make food because it's a full meal. And they'd rather have that than go to

the store, go buy food or anything because that freshness, that home cooking is what they love. And I love watching him because we can have a great— like the other night we sold out at an event. That’s great and all. We made our money, and everybody gave us compliments, but when you get those people that’ll come back and take time out of their day just to come back and say, “You know what? Let me tell you—” I think he had a great compliment that just made his day. We were doing an event, and this was a personal chef. And she came back to him and said, “I’m a chef. I actually cook all over the world. I travel. I try all different cuisines and everything and I have to tell you by far your food is amazing!”

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She says, “That macaroni with the brisket on top.” She says, “I don’t know what you got here but you got something.” And she even came back another time and touched base with him and said, “Hey, I’ve even went and tried other places. I can’t find this.” She said, “I have to tell you, wonderful job.” That made his weekend. And to see him get that from somebody that’s in the culinary world, somebody that’s been highly trained, somebody that has been through and traveled and had a big food palate, I guess you can say, to really enjoy something he created I think it was just amazing to see him take that compliment.

Joe Benavides: Yeah.

Prinisa Benavides: I think that meant more than however much we made in a day by far, for sure.

Cynthia Torres: You’re a lot more than where you started.

Prinisa Benavides: Oh, yeah. [Laughter]

Cynthia Torres: You've made a real life for yourself from food.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. Yeah.

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Cynthia Torres: Talk about your business. How did you move to, okay, I'm cooking from my family, they're enjoying it and friends and to—

Joe Benavides: Yeah. Well, then I just thought about something as we're talking. My first experience of actually cooking something and selling it was the wings. I would make wings for everybody. And that's where I would come up with— have all my different sauces. But I would do that just on the side while I had a full-time job. It was just make wings and then everybody, “Oh, make me some wings,” or “Can I buy some wings from you?” Especially her mom, I think every weekend I made wings for her, and as hot as they could be for her, too. She loves the spicy wing sauce that I had. But yeah, I started with the wings for sure, and was working a full-time job. Her mom had a neighbor. His name's Mr. Dan and I think he went to the University of Mississippi, too.

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Dan Robert [sp]. I call him Dan Robert, but he says Robert. He had brought over a pork shoulder. He lived right behind her mother. And I ain't ever seen a pork shoulder before. I would visit these chain barbecue restaurants and just order pulled pork not knowing what it actually looked like before it was pulled apart. And it had black bark on it, probably about as black as this microphone. And he started pulling it apart and just the smell and it's, like, “What is that?” He's, like, “It's a shoulder.” So I'd never had one. He had me try it and I was, like, “You have to show

me how to do this.” And he’s, like, “Okay. Yeah.” And he had the Creole accent. I wish I can mimic that, but I can’t. He’s, like, “Yeah. Whenever you want, just let me know.” Well, he ended up moving back to Louisiana and so I would spend hours on the phone with him just talking about, hey, how would I cook a shoulder?

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How would I cook a brisket or ribs and whatnot? And then, also doing my own research, a lot of YouTube channels, a lot of reading barbecue books at the house. But he told me, “Start with a pork shoulder ‘cause you can’t mess it up. The only way to mess it up is to burn it if your fire’s too hot, but you can’t mess up a pork shoulder.” So I started with that. And then I think it took me about a year before I started with briskets. And probably like the first three briskets were horrible. At that time I thought they were good but going back and thinking about it they were probably the worst thing I ever made.

Prinisa Benavides: [Laughter] Definitely in comparison now.

Joe Benavides: Yeah, compared to now.

Prinisa Benavides: We look at the pictures and, like, oh, wow. We were proud of that?

Joe Benavides: Yeah, exactly. So I started getting better and better at it, started with a little small char-griller that I found on Marketplace for a hundred bucks.

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And it had an offset smoker on it, so I started with that. I think my first brisket where I thought it was good enough to have people try we had a thing— maybe the Cowboys were playing or

something, we had a party— and had some friends that really liked it. It was, like, you should consider selling barbecue. So, huh, it sparked something in there ‘cause I was, like, I’m gonna do this. And I had been at my job, I think, about ten years at that time, maybe eight, and that’s all I kept thinking about. So every weekend, every day I had off I was putting something in that smoker to get better at it. And eventually when I thought it was time I was, like, I think I want to sell barbecue.

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So me and her had a discussion about it and I think— wasn’t Nathan about to graduate or something?

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. While he was still working his full-time job and whenever people would say, “Oh, you should sell this. You’ve really got something here.” And we would talk. He goes, “Do you think?” And I said, “Well, try it.” So on the weekends on the side he would sell barbecue. And it was just, like, friends and family. And then they would have it for their parties and then friends and families. And before you knew it it was like a weekend event where we would sell as much food as we could. And he enjoyed it more and more and more. And then, it was the year that Nathan was graduating from— it was his senior year when you finally decided—

Joe Benavides: Like, four months before he graduated I said, “I think I want to do this full time.” She goes, “No, we can’t afford it. Nathan’s about to graduate. We have to prepare him for school, college.” And I was, like, “Okay.” And then I just had a bad week at work that day. We went on vacation. I was, like, “I’m not going back.” I was, like, “I want to do this full time.” And

I asked her, I said, “Give me six months. If it doesn’t work out in six months I’ll go back to work.”

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Six months— we’re in year five now?

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. And so it was kind of— when he told me, he says, “Babe, I just can’t do this anymore.” I said, “You know what?” I was, like, “Okay. We’ll go for it.” I said, “You took a back seat for me to go to nursing school and live out my dream so now it’s my turn.” I said, “We’ll figure it out.” And we did. We decided, okay, well, we’ll try it for six months. What’s the worst? He’s, like, “I can always work.” I’m, like, “True.” So we just started with catering and that actually took off really well, the catering.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. Started with catering. This was before I had my smoker that’s on a trailer. Again, I just had the char-griller on the back. It would’ve fit two briskets maybe. And again, we just went on vacation, spent a lot of money on vacation. And got my first catering job and I had two hundred dollars to do it. And I was, like, gotta make it work. But at that time briskets were \$1.29 at the time compared to the \$5 they are now.

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And so I was able to feed about fifty people with two hundred dollars. And when I got that deposit from the catering job that was about eight hundred dollars. I was, like, yeah, we’re gonna keep doing this.

Cynthia Torres: Yeah.

Joe Benavides: So I liked the profit margin at that time. Now we gotta raise prices. And then we eventually got the trailer smoker. I convinced her, I was, like, we gotta spend the money to get—I want to do this on the side of the road. Just catering— catering was going good but I was, like, I want to get known.

Prinisa Benavides: And that was a big investment. It wasn't cheap for sure. Especially we'd been kind of funding it all ourselves. I was still working full-time, he was doing the catering full-time, and so anytime that I had outside of work I would just pick up with him. We just kept it within the family. And if the kids could help they helped.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. And this Texas heat . . . [Laughter]

Prinisa Benavides: It was hot.

Joe Benavides: So we sold food at— a buddy of ours has a tire shop in Garland and he allowed us to set up on their property.

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We did that for about a year and then we started doing events around town, so basically little popups. And then, one summer about two years ago—

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah, at least two years.

Joe Benavides: Yeah, about two years ago— no, this happened during the pandemic so, yeah, we're out on the side on my buddy's property and it's probably about 110 degrees outside. And I told her, I was, like, "We can't do this anymore. It's just too hot."

Prinisa Benavides: No. It was so hot.

Joe Benavides: And we weren't as busy as we expected to be because of the pandemic, but we still had to try to make a living. So talked to her, said, "We have to get a food truck. I think that's the only way we're gonna make this happen." I was, like, "I do not want to go back to work. I don't want to fail of what I started." And that's what I felt like; if I went back to work that means I failed.

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And she's, like, "All right." Couldn't afford it at all because there were things going on. She was working as much as she could, and people weren't buying food because they were scared of getting near anyone.

Prinisa Benavides: Well, and that was the thing, the catering had taken off. So once you started to do it full time we were booking out almost six months. We didn't think that that was such a big deal, we just thought we needed to book out further. So we actually were doing really well and steady, enough for him to keep it up.

Joe Benavides: Yeah, that's right. And then, as soon as COVID hit, we were booked out six months, everything was gone within twenty-four hours. March 6th of 2020, my phone, emails was ding, ding, ding, cancel, cancel, cancel, cancel. Everything was canceled on May 6th at probably around one o'clock. My phone just started dinging. That's when Texas pretty much shut down.

Prinisa Benavides: And we had talks, maybe a couple months before he was really pushing me, he said, "You know what? You need to come help me full time. We're too busy." He's, like, "We can do this. I know if I had you with me we can double what we're doing."

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He goes, “Right now, ‘cause I’m a one-man show,” except on the weekends when I was available. And I said, “Well, I don't know. I don't know. Let’s just wait. Let’s just wait.” And then COVID hit, and it was gone. So thank God at least I was still working for a little bit, and then that’s when the conversation, “What do we do now?” That’s how the food truck really got born at that point because people weren’t entertaining and everybody at work, they couldn’t do that anymore. Now it was, like, maybe ten to twenty people, if even that much, and they wanted something outside. Well, the only way to be able to do that to where we were safe, and they were safe was a food truck.

Joe Benavides: Yeah.

Prinisa Benavides: And so it wasn’t the right time. We were scared because it was a big investment, but we had no other option. Like he said, he didn’t want to go back to a warehouse job that he’s been doing for all his life.

Joe Benavides: Yep. And with the food truck we got back to where we were before COVID.

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People were more comfortable coming out and getting served food, walking up to the windows, not having to touch your hands or whatever. ‘Cause all these places that were restaurants started doing carryout or drive-through only. So it was pretty much we were drive-through only. And the pandemic helped, especially the food truck industry, helped them out a lot. And if it wasn’t for the pandemic we probably wouldn’t be in this position. Probably would’ve still been in my trailer or on the side of the road with my smoker.

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. ‘Cause the food truck was always in our future, it just wasn’t at that point. We wanted to be more financially stable before we made another big investment because we didn’t know how that was gonna look, either. And actually, with the food truck— ‘cause with my work schedule it changed a little bit. I was only going to work maybe two, three days because it was healthcare. They didn’t have all of us there. So then I could actually help him operate the truck.

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So once we started getting busier with the truck I pulled back to at least part time so I could help with the business, as well. And that was big, too, ‘cause then we could take on even more jobs. So it’s been good.

Joe Benavides: Once a lot of our customers found out that we had a food truck we had a lot more opportunity. And then we started getting booked everywhere. And Rockwall is probably our number one area that we have a food truck at because they enjoy our food. And Rockwall is a— how do you say . . . ?

Prinisa Benavides: Well, they’ve been a huge support. They definitely embraced us, and they’ve been such a great community where everybody that’s had our food has just kinda passed along and passed it along to where truly we’re definitely one of the names for barbecue in this area. It’s wonderful.

Cynthia Torres: Yeah. What’s the name of your business?

Joe Benavides: Joe’s Backyard BBQ.

Cynthia Torres: What's on your menu?

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Joe Benavides: Oh, man. Well, when we do small events we'll have, like, a four-item menu, like sandwiches, nachos, our macaroni, of course. That probably will never leave the menu. And then we'll do some tacos.

Prinisa Benavides: He keeps it pretty traditional. When we have our big events where he can actually really spread his wings and kinda show his skill we've done— you've done your beef ribs and racks of ribs and briskets and shoulders.

Joe Benavides: When we're more able to do our full menu, that's when I'm, like, okay, it's go time. And when we do our smaller events, and our customers have certain budgets then we do our smaller menu for them. So you get a four-item menu but, yeah, our full menu, everything's on there. Our Texas twinkies are a big hit. Those are cream cheese, brisket stuffed jalapeños wrapped in bacon. And our macaroni, again.

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But we have no complaints on any of our food. Knock on wood, no one has ever complained about our food. [Laughter] But yeah, I love it when we get to do a full menu, we do our big events.

Cynthia Torres: Are there any tastes that are on your menu, any foods or anything that kind of relate to you growing up or a style— I think there are lots of different kinds of barbecue but I'm not a barbecue expert.

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. He's definitely a Texas-style barbecue, for sure.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. Definitely Texas, traditional. Texas is well known for their briskets and that's pretty much I think where the barbecue started with Texas is the briskets and obviously all the cattle we have here.

Prinisa Benavides: And that's definitely his signature. He gets a lot of compliments on that brisket for sure. He's mastered that brisket. [Laughter] And that's a big thing for Texas is brisket.

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Joe Benavides: Then we have plenty of people that said they've tried the best of the best barbecue and I'm up there with everybody else, just random people we've never met. Got a guy that mentioned a few other well-known barbecue places out in East Texas, you know, down near San Antonio. He's, like, "Man, you got something going on." He goes, "You're up there with these guys." He was, like, "I give you title to first place with this person or up in the top five with these people." I don't take compliments well. I'm just kinda, like, oh, okay, start blushing and stuff.

Prinisa Benavides: [Laughter]

Joe Benavides: So like I said, people like my food, but definitely my briskets is the one thing I am mostly proud of because that one took me a while to master. And once I got to exactly where I needed it that was it.

0:33:57

Cynthia Torres: And are your kids involved in the cooking or anything or learning or have their own—

Prinisa Benavides: Whenever we first started the business we did have them on there quite a bit. And we both talked about it, ‘cause they were getting older, and they were getting into college years, and we said, you know, whenever they can help, great, we’ll pull them on and have them help. But at the same time we were kinda scared to stifle them to where that’s— especially these formative years only being on the truck. So if they have the time and they’re without their normal jobs— we said, “Get regular jobs, too. If you can help us, great, but we don’t want to pigeonhole you where you don’t get that experience of working other places.” So just—what was that when we did that event— I think Wednesday? Thursday?

Joe Benavides: Yesterday.

Prinisa Benavides: I’ve lost track of days. Yesterday. [Laughter] Our sleep schedule is kinda crazy. Yesterday our son was available so he was able to get out there and help us. And actually Alex is our one that kind of has taken an interest in culinary. So he cooks for us at times, and he’s kinda picked that up watching Joe.

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When they were all small, though, he definitely had them out on the grills. ‘Cause we talked about that actually with the questions that you gave, and we said, “Yeah. You remember that time where you had all the kids out?” And Joe was showing them how to grill and how to kind of prep the food and things like that. So they did get a little bit of hands-on, and they would help on the truck for sure.

Joe Benavides: Yeah.

Cynthia Torres: Do you spend time with your kids teaching them how to cook and helping them be a part of—

Joe Benavides: When they want to. As they got older it's kinda more of them doing their own thing. And it's, like, if they're there they'll help out. But I'm also one of those, the kitchen's mine.

Prinisa Benavides: Once he's in the mode.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. I say, "Okay, you gotta do it like this. Well, you know what? Just get out of the kitchen." It takes me a lot to allow someone to help me in doing anything with the grill, prepping the meat.

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'Cause it's kinda like I have a method and I'm always—I won't say I do a hundred miles an hour but I'm always in a go mode and so I want stuff done pretty quick. And again, once I get my method down it's, like, okay, now you're slowing me down. It's not a bad thing. They'll help but it's more, like, okay, go get the grill ready while I do the meat. But we have pictures of when my daughter was younger, I think the boys, too, with me showing them how to cut up the briskets and stuff and put the stuff on the grill. Yeah, we spent time with them but, again, as they got older they kinda just did their own thing. They're working, you know, their friends. My daughter, all she wants to do is draw so she doesn't really care about what's going on as long as we feed her.

Prinisa Benavides: [Laughter] But she's very particular about her food, though.

Joe Benavides: Yeah.

Prinisa Benavides: And that's one thing— even with Alex— he's our middle son who's kinda picking up on the culinary side of it— he enjoys cooking quite a bit— if he's making something and Joe's not home he's always gonna call him or text him.

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“Okay, Dad, what would you do? How do you normally do this?” And so they do definitely, more than I think he realizes, kind of rely on him for those things and their interest in that part of it. And when it comes to my daughter, she may not be on the creative side of creating the food but she's very particular about her food. She likes well cooked food and very tasteful food. And she loves her sushi and her salmon and her fish. Yeah, she's pretty particular. [Laughter]

Joe Benavides: A funny story about her now that you say that. My daughter likes her steaks the way I do; they have to run a little bit. And her grandma, which is Prinisa's mom, asked her if she wanted a steak but her mom wanted to take her to Chili's or something for steak.

Prinisa Benavides: Oh, they ran out of time to make it at home or something. She said, “Oh, how about we just take you to Chili's? We'll go get steak there.”

0:38:00

Joe Benavides: And so, yeah, she offered to take her to Chili's. She's, like, no, she's not going to Chili's for steak. So she made it for her at home at her house. So she goes, “Yeah, Avi said she likes my steak.” And I was, like, no, she didn't. So I'm thinking in my head. So I text my

daughter, “Hey, I heard you had steak with Grandma.” “I did.” “Did you like it?” She was, like, “Yeah, it was good.” I said, “Was it like mine good or . . .?” She was, like, “Oh, no, not like yours.” She goes, “Yours is way better.”

Prinisa Benavides: [Laughter]

Joe Benavides: So I know my daughter and I know how her grandma cooks those steaks. She cooks them well done. It’s still edible but that medium-rare you can’t go wrong with at all.

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. You definitely elevated her tastes.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. Even the lamb that—I’ll cook a leg of lamb or throw it on the smoker and it’s pretty high heat when you cook those. Same thing. It has to be medium rare, the only way to eat it.

0:38:57

Cynthia Torres: You talked about your kids having diverse palates and you talked about the food that you had in your family.

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. So Joseph and I met actually in [19]98 when he moved down with Abby and Oscar.

Cynthia Torres: Um-hm.

Prinisa Benavides: And so at that time Joseph’s food palate was just from home and things. I’m originally from South Africa and my family moved here when I was roughly about three years old, and I kept going back till roughly seven years old until I was here permanently. And so that’s when Joseph got exposed to the South African Indian food, which was like Indian food

here, but it had some of the African spices mixed with it. So that was a completely different world, and we did a lot of seafood 'cause we were right off the coast. And we did a lot of spices and completely different food culture for sure. And even for barbecue, I didn't know what barbecue was when I came to The States. We had our version of it, but we grew up on lamb, not beef.

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So getting used to beef being our primary here was different for me. And lamb was definitely different for him. And so, over the years, it took him some time, but he started getting introduced to our foods and trying it. And even with the family, Oscar and Abby, they got to try a lot of the foods. And they're really great with my mom, and the families kind of just meshed. We were very grateful and lucky that everything just went kind of smooth. And so as I was learning about the Mexican culture from his mom and their foods, he was getting to learn on my side the South African Indian cuisine and the seafood that we ate. And so I think with that our kids grew up in two households with a variety of foods. So they got to early on— we were eating seafood and things very little. And so I just raised the kids the same way. Seafood was always part of it and things like that.

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And we always grilled. Just like Joseph I never saw a pork shoulder before. That was my first time to see that. I had the normal barbecue food chains and I think I even remember my dad buying the brisket in a bucket from the store. We didn't know what that was. So when you have somebody make it, especially when Joseph started cooking, I didn't know I loved barbecue. I

never liked it at the stores, but when he started making it I'm like, "If this is barbecue I like it." And I told all his customers all the time— they'll come up to the window and I said, "I don't even eat barbecue, but I'll eat this barbecue." And it's just the right amount of smoke. It just has so many flavors in it. And I think with him talking to Mr. Dan and kind of getting that mentorship and learning that you can make your own spices and everything, I think that's just opened the floodgates for him. I think he took everything that we've been exposed to and just started creating—

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Joe Benavides: I'll just say when we first met it probably took me— again, I don't think I ever met a Indian person, and then didn't try Indian food. And it took me about two years before I would even touch anything that they made. I would get invited for dinner, I was at Burger King getting me a hamburger and I was sitting on the counters waiting for them to get done. 'Cause I was more traditional American food or Tex-Mex, Mexican food. That's all I ate. And probably about two years I remember I tried lamb curry for the first time and was so mad at myself that I didn't eat this before.

Prinisa Benavides: [Laughter] And I said, "See, I told you."

Joe Benavides: And now it's just like whatever her mom makes is amazing. I'm not even a seafood type person. I really don't care for shrimp unless her mom's making it. There's different flavors of curry that they have and the spices— I love spicy food.

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I regretted missing out for the first two years, 'cause I should've done this before.

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. And for us culturally some of the questions he was looking at today, I was thinking, like, wow, I didn't realize how much food played a part because my upbringing was completely different as his. We are definitely night and day on every level.

Joe Benavides: Um-hm.

Prinisa Benavides: So it was always, I don't care if it was a good day, a bad day, or you're happy or sad or you just show up, there was food present for all of that. And so that was something that was definitely intertwined into our relationship with our kids because everything was food. I'm always, like, well, what are we gonna eat? Don't we have to have this? We need to have this? And variety. I was on the other spectrum of you had this for dinner but maybe you had two or three dishes for dinner and then had a salad and whatever to go with it. Which obviously we scaled all that down as we were raising our own family because that's just too much food, first of all. But yeah, I think it kind of meshed our two worlds.

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So kind of changed how we perceived food even for our kids. Every celebration always had a meal, of course, and every big moment was always celebrated at a meal or at the table. So I think definitely for our kids we kind of brought that about.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. At her mom's house you're going there to eat, and it's like when we were growing up we could have a salad for dinner and then we're okay. We're fine. And with one of those stories is I had brought her over for dinner when we first met, and we haven't ate all day. And she's expecting a full meal, probably mashed potatoes and chicken fried steak, 'cause that's what she loves.

Prinisa Benavides: [Laughter]

Joe Benavides: Well, we ate salad. We had a chicken salad. And so she's waiting.

Prinisa Benavides: Well, I ate it. It was really good. I enjoyed it. I was, like, okay . . .

Joe Benavides: "So what are we eating next?" I was, like, "That was it. That's dinner." She was, like, "Unh-uh." She went home and— [Laughter]

0:45:01

Prinisa Benavides: Finished eating. [Laughter]

Joe Benavides: — finished eating. But her culture is way different. They grew up, like, there was probably two to four pots of food for dinner just about every night.

Prinisa Benavides: And that was a culture shock, too, was for me food was hot food. So having a cold salad like a chicken salad, it is filling but I guess 'cause it wasn't hot to me I felt like, oh, I guess that was the appetizer for the meal where that was, no, that's the meal. And so that was another cultural thing that I had to kind of learn about moving here. But yeah, that was a funny story. That was one of my first times ever eating dinner with him while we were dating and things. I was, like, oh, wait . . . Oh, okay. Where'd everybody go? Are we done? [Laughter]

Joe Benavides: Yeah, we're done. [Laughter]

Prinisa Benavides: So that was kinda funny. And I never had enchiladas before.

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I never had fideo. I was never introduced to any of these staple Hispanic meals. And then, Abby is an amazing cook. And so I never ate enchiladas unless she made ‘em. I was, like, you’re gonna have to learn how to make that. So he would make that. He’d make Indian food. He would learn from my mom, too.

Joe Benavides: I did learn how to make Indian food.

Prinisa Benavides: Oh, yeah. And it is a little different, of course, here. But yeah, I get the spices from my mom, and we’ll make stuff at home.

Cynthia Torres: Are any of those spices kind of carried over into your barbecue?

Prinisa Benavides: We dabbled a little bit.

Joe Benavides: I tried it a little bit with chicken which chicken you can pretty much put any seasoning on it and it’s gonna taste good. I thought about doing it with the brisket. I was terrified of doing it, especially with the price of briskets now. I don’t know if I want to mess up an eighty-dollar brisket just to experiment. But I have here and there.

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With fish I will do it, put it in some batter or something. If I want spicy catfish or something I’ll throw some curry in there.

Cynthia Torres: I think before the interview you mentioned a little bit earlier that you do barbecue for your business but then you’ve stopped eating it at home.

Joe Benavides: Oh, yeah. When I first started barbecue and cooking ribs, brisket, pork we were having it just about every night and I guess the more I cooked the less we ate ‘cause we got tired

of it. And it was just, like, ugh, I don't want to eat barbecue again. I don't want to eat ribs again. At this point I'd rather have Hamburger Helper.

Prinisa Benavides: [Laughter] Yeah. It's almost like a big turnaround, right? It's like we're back to again where we started.

Joe Benavides: When we're in the food truck we'll snack but we're preparing to eat after we get out of that food truck.

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As we're cutting up briskets or preparing food we'll taste and make sure it came out right, but in the food truck we'll make a little taco or a little bit of macaroni, but just to keep something in our belly. And right after that we're at a restaurant.

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah, but it is hard to find a restaurant where you're really happy. Now definitely if we are buying food we're trying to go somewhere where it's as fresh as possible. And I think that's the biggest takeaway that I think is a comparison with his food is that when people eat his food it's fresh. You're getting as close to coming right off the smoker as you can get. They're not getting food that's been sitting. They're not getting these mass-produced briskets that have been sitting. Everything is custom from him. Everything is, like he said, unless it's good enough for him to eat he's not gonna serve it. And that's true. He'll throw it away in a heartbeat.

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He doesn't care how much it is. Especially with the style that I've noticed I think that makes him stand out from other places is he's really kept true to simple barbecue. That backyard barbecue, I think that reason that name kinda even started is because he's, like, you know what? Good Texas barbecue you don't need all this extra . . .

Joe Benavides: Injections and extra . . .

Prinisa Benavides: All these things to it. He keeps it pretty simple and traditional, and I think that's the key.

Joe Benavides: Making barbecue can become really easy if you have patience and for someone like myself that doesn't have a lot of patience I have patience for this. And I think anybody can do it. You just gotta take your time. I don't think you need all this injections and special rubs or just certain techniques like a lot of these guys do.

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Which you can, you do injections. A lot of people that inject their briskets or pork shoulders they're competitors and that's what the judges in the competition is actually looking for. But I don't care for that method. But there's doing it a traditional way as I feel like you can't go wrong with it. And the backyard style, people use charcoal or just with a mixture of wood. That's the most traditional Texas way is to do that.

Prinisa Benavides: And I think some of the things that come up with people who have tried our food, they're, like, "Man, this is just good ol' barbecue." And I think when they say "good ol' barbecue" what that means to me is just like if they were making it at home. Just what they're used to, like a comfort, a comfort food.

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And I think that's kind of really a signature on what makes him stand out, his food versus other barbecue that you try is that it just has that distinct— to me like a comfort food. It's a known taste. It's a familiarity with people that they just feel like this is just that good ol' Texas barbecue like you would get it at home at a cookout.

Joe Benavides: Yeah.

Cynthia Torres: That really is an amazing story going from food as a basic need to making food for comfort, and enough, like, in abundance to feed other people.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. I've never thought of it like that, but yeah.

Prinisa Benavides: I didn't think about that either. What a transition. Yeah, it truly is.

Joe Benavides: Yeah.

Prinisa Benavides: I mean, now you're feeding the masses. We've been in events, three thousand, four thousand people that we're feeding at a time. Not just us, of course. There's multiple vendors. But he's truly feeding the masses now.

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Cynthia Torres: Good food, really quality food, well thought out and well cared for.

Joe Benavides: Oh, yeah, for sure.

Prinisa Benavides: He definitely puts his heart into it. It is a passion, for sure. [Laughter]

Joe Benavides: I'm one of those people if you're gonna do something you do it a hundred percent. You go full throttle with it and if you really get it done you do it right. Yeah. And with barbecue you just can't, I'd say, half-ass it. And if you do it's just not gonna come out right. You'll get something undercooked or it's gonna be too tough or it's gonna be burnt. And so that's why the passion has to be there for barbecuing. You can do it on the side or just for fun, but if you're going to be a hundred percent in it as for a business, you gotta make sure you have the patience for it.

Prinisa Benavides: Which I do want to say something about that. He said that he has no patience. He's not lying. He really doesn't have patience. He's one of the few people I know that has a very short patience.

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And so when he started enjoying smoking barbecue— 'cause it's hours. A brisket can take what?

Joe Benavides: Eighteen hours.

Prinisa Benavides: Eighteen hours at times for sure. And so a lot of sleepless nights. Especially when we have multiple jobs coming up a lot of sleepless nights. And when he thought about it, I said, "How about do it as a hobby first? Let's see if you like doing this. Let's see if you like making this amount of food at a time. Let's just see." Because I know my husband and I said, "You don't have any patience. How in the world . . ." I wouldn't have patience for this. It's a lot. He enjoys it. It's a slow method. It really takes a lot of your time and it really takes a lot of your effort and the prepping. It's not like of you were, okay, I want to make this for dinner, and it

takes an hour. This is something that's, like, a two-day event just to be able to feed people that next day and have it that fresh.

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So I have a lot of respect and admiration to him to watch him do this because it's been a labor of love for sure.

Joe Benavides: I guess it's 'cause it's one of those things I know people appreciate it instead of like the nine to five you always had that boss that you could do so much, and he still don't appreciate you. Well, with this everybody appreciates it, and it makes me happy. I don't have to worry about— I was a supervisor at a warehouse so I'd have to worry about my general manager coming at me, how come this guy didn't do that? How come they didn't do this? How come they called in? Or why aren't you at work today? I don't have to worry about any of that anymore. I only worry about what I'm doing, it makes me happy, I love doing it. I can go four days with five hours of sleep and I'm still happy that I'm doing what I love to do.

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I may be drained but I'm still happy.

Cynthia Torres: Being raised with such diverse kinds of food and everything and you working together as a family to start your business and to do this and overcome these challenges and everything, what do you hope your kids are getting out of this, the message? What are they learning from all this? 'Cause you've really overcome quite a . . .

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. I would hope that they would see that it doesn't matter if you know exactly what you want to do in life right out the gate. It could be something you stumble upon. But as long as you have a passion and love for something that you want to do anything's possible. And I hope that they see that working hard and working as a family you can really accomplish a lot. And that you need each other. You need your family.

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You need the support system. We've had two amazing sides of the family that have been there every step of the way, Oscar and Abby's side and my side. Everybody has been so supportive in rallying behind us, and we needed that support. We needed that, "Hey, you guys, y'all got this. Keep going." It's a lot of hard work but I hope they see hard work can pay off and that truly anything's possible. They know our story. As they're getting older they're learning more and more. We didn't have much starting out and we didn't always know what we were doing but we just kept working at it.

Joe Benavides: Definitely didn't know what we were doing, especially starting a business. A lot of research by myself or by ourselves. Yeah, it paid off. Yeah, with the kids what I always tell them is, like, dude, if this goes as far as having a restaurant it's y'all's at the end of the day.

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But hopefully they will find out what they love to do. I found out seven years ago that I can cook, or I know how to do barbecue. And I wish I would've known ten years ago because I'd been a lot younger then, I could enjoy it a little bit longer. But I tell them that all the time, just

find something you think you're good at, go for it, do it a hundred percent. If you fail you fail. If it's meant to be you'll succeed.

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. And we're right behind them.

Joe Benavides: Yeah.

Prinisa Benavides: Hopefully if they take a shine to it, want to continue it, great. If they don't that's fine, too. But yeah, find your passion, whatever fills your heart and makes you happy. And just be there to support each other and help each other through it.

Joe Benavides: Our oldest, Nathan, he's definitely one of those that wants to start his own business, but you gotta have the passion to do it.

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He's working somewhere in Dallas right now and I think he's trying to find time to get to that point to do— he loves photography, so he wants to be able to do that or T-shirt designs.

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. Fashion's a big thing for him.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. Fashion and photography is a big thing for him.

Prinisa Benavides: So he's trying to find his niche, too. [Laughter]

Cynthia Torres: Well, if people want to find you, if people want to find Joe's Backyard BBQ, how do they do that?

Joe Benavides: Well, we are looking for a permanent location right now. It's kinda hard with all these regulations and red tape you gotta go through. Really just through our Facebook page. We post on there wherever we're gonna be. We stay majority in Rockwall.

Prinisa Benavides: But we go all over.

Joe Benavides: Yeah, we go all over and do events. We did an event in Terrell. I've gone to Greenville, Commerce.

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Trying to move my way towards Fort Worth or Arlington and Mansfield. There's a few events out there. But yeah, just pretty much on our Facebook page we post all our events and where we're gonna be at. Most of 'em, about 90 percent of 'em are open to the public.

Prinisa Benavides: Yeah. Facebook, Instagram. We're trying to get our Twitter up and going and even trying to get a website that's up and going, too, for people to be able to find us there. And he's actually serviced some pretty big companies in the area, too.

Joe Benavides: I've done Perot Museum, Amazon.

Prinisa Benavides: Perot Museum, Amazon.

Joe Benavides: Lockheed.

Prinisa Benavides: And Raytheon.

Joe Benavides: Raytheon was recent.

Prinisa Benavides: What was that other one? I think we did Blue Cross Blue Shield, Baylor Scott & White, Presbyterian Hospital, Medical City of Dallas, as well.

Joe Benavides: Um-hm. Done a lot of hospitals.

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That's where my catering got started at was throughout all the hospitals. It was Baylor Scott & White was one of the ones where I got started. It was [**a Seattle rep** 1:00:13] that got me started with Baylor.

Cynthia Torres: What are your hopes for the future?

Joe Benavides: If I can't get a restaurant definitely another food truck or somewhere just a lot that we can have a food truck parked at and just be there full time. Because I want to be able to do my full menu every single day. With most of these events, so we're not wasting food, we keep the menus pretty short.

Prinisa Benavides: Or for their budget. So we have to kind of change up what we can offer. But that's when he has the most fun is when he can pull out everything, the ribs, and the sausage and the brisket and pork, and do all the fun stuff that he likes to do. All the sides.

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Joe Benavides: I have it in my head probably within the next five years I want to get a brick and mortar if it's possible, which I think it is. Just a different goal to set. I think once we get that then I know that we are a hundred percent made it to where I needed to be in life, and I'll be good.

Cynthia Torres: Very nice. Well, I want to thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the interview and telling me your story, both of you.

Prinisa Benavides: Oh, thank you.

Joe Benavides: Um-hm.

Cynthia Torres: Do you have anything else you want to add or . . . ?

Joe Benavides: I think that pretty much covered up all my bullet points.

Prinisa Benavides: [Laughter] No, we're just grateful, I think, for all the support of the family and friends and the people that have kinda joined in.

Joe Benavides: Yeah.

Prinisa Benavides: We've met a lot of people along the way and through all the different events and all the new supporters and people that follow us everywhere. We have people that wherever we set up they'll show up and they'll buy food.

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And we're really just grateful for the community that's kind of surrounded us and supported us definitely and all the family for sure.

Joe Benavides: Yeah, same. I just thank everybody and thank you for letting us do this.

Cynthia Torres: Yeah.

Joe Benavides: It was a different experience. I remember when you called I was, like, uh, I don't know if I want to do this.

Prinisa Benavides: [Laughter] Welcome opportunity, for sure.

Joe Benavides: Yeah. Definitely different opportunity.

Cynthia Torres: Very nice.

Joe Benavides: So maybe we'll have some people from up there come and visit me. [Laughter]

Cynthia Torres: I hope so. I do. Well, I'm gonna go ahead and end. Okay?

Joe Benavides: Um-hm. Yeah.

Cynthia Torres: All right.

[End]