

LAWRENCE "LONNIE" POMAR
O'Steen's Restaurant - St. Augustine, FL

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Interviewer: Anna Hamilton

Transcription: Deborah Lattimore, Technitype Transcripts

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Project: Minorcans of St. Augustine

[Interviewer's Note: Lonnie's wife Barbara is joins Lonnie for part of this interview; she leaves a few times for phone calls]

[00:00:00]

Anna Hamilton: This is Anna Hamilton for the Southern Foodways Alliance. Today is January 9th, it's a Friday, in 2015, and I am in the secret office back room at O'Steen's with the Pomars, and I will ask you all to introduce yourself, please.

[00:00:19]

Lonnie Pomar: Lonnie Pomar.

[00:00:21]

Anna Hamilton: And will you tell me what you do, please?

[00:00:23]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, I'm the owner/operator of O'Steen's Restaurant and have been for fifty years. *[Interviewer's note: Lonnie took over O'Steen's from the original owner, Robert O'Steen in 1982. The restaurant opened in 1964 or 1965].*

[00:00:27]

Anna Hamilton: And I'll ask the same thing for you.

[00:00:30]

Barbara Pomar: Barbara Pomar. I am Lonnie's wife.

[00:00:33]

Anna Hamilton: And will you tell me what your birthday is, too, please?

[00:00:35]

Barbara Pomar: May 29th, 1950.

[00:00:37]

Anna Hamilton: And I need to ask you the same thing.

[00:00:38]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, you know my birthday is today, January 9th, 1952. I'm sixty-three today. Thanks for reminding me. *[laughter]*

[00:00:47]

Anna Hamilton: Happy birthday. I feel awful. I had no idea, for the record, that we were scheduling an interview on your birthday.

[00:00:53]

Lonnie Pomar: That's fine.

[00:00:54]

Anna Hamilton: Oh, no. *[Laughs]* I wanted to start by asking about the history and the origins of O'Steen's.

[00:01:01]

Lonnie Pomar: Okay. Well, when I was twelve years old, I—of course, it goes back further than that, actually. Mr. and Mrs. O'Steen were good friends of my parents, Ed and Grace Pomar, and they were friends. The railroad went on strike in 1962, the Florida East Coast Railway, and my father and Mr. Osteen worked there at the Miller shops here in St. Augustine. *[Interviewer's note: the FEC strike began in January 1963]*

[00:01:26]

So when they went on strike, they thought the strike was going to be resolved relatively quickly. Well, that didn't happen. It was the longest strike in history, ten years or more. So my father, having six children, had to go to work somewhere, so he went to Jacksonville to the Seaboard Coast Line and went to work.

[00:01:45]

Mr. O'Steen and his wife tried to stick it out a little longer. She was working at a restaurant downtown that a lady named Mrs. Brunson owned. And I can't think of the name of the restaurant, I wish I could, but maybe we could look that up. But anyway, she got a lot of experience waitressing and helping Mrs. Brunson run that restaurant downtown. And Mr. O'Steen had a long history of family cooking, that his father used to cook deviled crab patties and peddle them downtown out of a wheelbarrow, if you can imagine that. But it's true.

[00:02:18]

But anyway, long story short, they decided to open a restaurant of their own, and they opened O'Steen's, I believe in April of '65. There's some question on that because I honestly can't remember if it was '64 or '65, but it doesn't really matter. We're going to celebrate it this year, so we're going to call it '65.

[00:02:39]

Anyway, that's how O'Steen's originated, and he took me in when I was twelve years old. I used to ride my bike over the bridge to come to work from North City, where I lived and grew up, and been here ever since.

[00:02:57]

Anna Hamilton: When you were twelve.

[00:02:57]

Lonnie Pomar: That's when I started, yes.

[00:03:00]

Anna Hamilton: That's a young age to start working.

[00:03:00]

Lonnie Pomar: They didn't have any labor laws by then. Didn't matter. I worked a long time, too, you know, long days, which was good. I mean, it taught me a lot.

[00:03:10]

Anna Hamilton: Why did you want to come work at O'Steen's?

[00:03:12]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, I just was looking for a job, because back then when you were young, you had to find a job, you know, if you wanted to do anything or get anything. Your parents weren't—we were basically poor, you know, with six children and one parent working. Nowadays, most everybody works; the parents, mother and father work. My mother was a stay-at-home mom and took care of us, and Dad was the only one working, so we had to go to work if we wanted to do anything or buy anything or whatever. So that's why I went to work, and I'm glad it all turned out like it did, you know. So that's it.

[interruption: change in seating arrangement]

[00:04:06]

Anna Hamilton: When you first started working here, what did you start doing?

[00:04:08]

Lonnie Pomar: Washing dishes. And the first day I came in, I almost walked out.

[00:04:13]

Anna Hamilton: Why?

[00:04:15]

Lonnie Pomar: The dishes were stacked above my head, because they opened early, you know, six a.m., to serve breakfast. They used to serve breakfast. And I said, "Oh, my lord, you know, what have I got myself into?" So anyway, I started in on it, and back then it was all hand. We didn't have a dishwasher at that time. It was all hand-wash. And that's how I started, washing dishes.

[00:04:36]

It also wasn't, you know, that busy back then. Of course, if you weren't there—I didn't come in till probably—I don't even remember what time I came in, but the dishes piled up because there was some time involved there, you know. But when it slowed back down, then I learned how to cook breakfast. And then while they were cooking breakfast, they were preparing lunch for lunchtime, so I learned that as well. And then so I was doing it all, cooking.

[00:05:08]

And I would even go out in the dining room and bus tables, you know, if I had time. They would call me out there to come bus the tables and bring them back and set them on the table and then go wash them, and in between that, cook and, you know, everything. Just learned from the bottom up, basically.

[00:05:24]

Anna Hamilton: So everybody was multitasking.

[00:05:26]

Lonnie Pomar: Absolutely. And you don't see that much nowadays. Kids, unfortunately, nowadays if you try to get them to work that hard, I think they wouldn't. We've experienced them walking out on us, you know, because we're a busy place and they have to work if they want to make it.

[00:05:42]

Anna Hamilton: Really? People have walked out?

[00:05:44]

Lonnie Pomar: Oh, absolutely.

[00:05:46]

Anna Hamilton: Not thick enough skin?

[00:05:47]

Lonnie Pomar: Exactly. *[laughs]*

[00:05:51]

Anna Hamilton: So you mentioned in the earlier days when you started working, it was open for breakfast and for lunch. Were they open for dinner too?

[00:05:57]

Lonnie Pomar: Oh, absolutely, yeah. Always open for dinner, yeah.

[00:06:00]

Anna Hamilton: So what were the hours?

[00:06:02]

Lonnie Pomar: They opened at six a.m. and closed at eight-thirty. You know, it's unusual. We still close at eight-thirty, but we don't open till eleven a.m. because we don't serve breakfast anymore. But we cut the breakfast out, and I wish I could remember the exact year we cut breakfast out, but I don't, and I apologize for that. But it was a real relief, because it was really hard, a lot of long, long hours and a lot of hard work. And when you're trying to get lunch ready and you've got to cook breakfast, if you get busy cooking breakfast, it's really hard to finish getting the lunch ready. And then there was that time when there was eleven a.m., time for lunch, and some people still wanted breakfast, and it was a mess. Hard, it was hard. *[laughs]*

[00:06:49]

Anna Hamilton: Sounds hard, just in my mind.

[00:06:51]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah, and a small kitchen to boot, you know.

[00:06:53]

Anna Hamilton: And what was the original menu or the original menus? What were they like?

[00:06:57]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, the lunches were really very similar to what they are now. I mean, we've served the same lunches from the get-go. The breakfast, you know, it was pretty much basic. You could order your eggs any way, and bacon, sausage, ham, smoked sausage, any kind of egg. I used to hate to have to fix poached eggs. It was a real pain, but we did it. But it was a real pain. Luckily, not too many people back then cared for them, so it was usually over-easy or scrambled or over-medium, whatever. But the poached eggs, oh, that was rough. But anyway, and that's the truth. I'm just telling you how it was.

[00:07:38]

And then the lunches, they were basically the same as they've been to this day. I mean, we've had a few additions, but you're talking about Monday used to be meatloaf. Of course, we're closed on Monday now, so we have meatloaf on Thursdays now occasionally, along with the spaghetti. Tuesday was beef stew and fried chicken; still to

this day, it is. Wednesday was country fried steak with mashed potatoes; still to this day it is. And we have something else with that. And we've added a few different items like shrimp-and-crab casserole or seafood casserole on Wednesday with that, and that's real popular.

[00:08:17]

My wife, Barbara, suggested shrimp salad one day, and it's been a real hit, so that's been a regular menu item now for quite some years, and it is really good. Thursday was always spaghetti and something else. Back in the day, it was liver and onions, spaghetti and liver and onions, if you can imagine that combination. But that's what it was, and people used to eat it up, man. But now liver and onions has kind of lost its appeal. I think there's not as many local people around that used to eat it, and the Yankees don't care for it that much. *[laughs]*

[00:08:57]

And then Friday was always shrimp pilau and baked chicken, and we would alternate the baked with barbecued, every third week we'd have. At first it was always shrimp pilau, and then later on we added every other week we would add shrimp creole, which is a little bit saucier and it goes over the rice, not cooked in the rice. It's a real popular item also.

[00:09:24]

Saturday was always chicken and dumplings. Had to roll out the dumplings by hand, a lot of work, good for your physique, however. It's like working out, really. So we did that, and still to this day, chicken and dumplings is every Saturday. And we would

have one other item, either ham steak or smoked sausage, along with that, and that's still the case today.

[00:09:52]

Anna Hamilton: And so how has the menu changed over the years?

[00:09:54]

Lonnie Pomar: Not a whole lot, honestly. Like I say, we've added some things like the shrimp salad, the shrimp creole. We have added like a grilled chicken salad, which was never on the menu before, and to this day, we don't really sell that many of those, but some people want that, so we added that. Our number one and most popular seller by far, and always has been and probably always will be, the fried shrimp, and that's why we haven't worried about changing the menu too much. I mean, we have added some different vegetables and different things like that, but other than that, it's basically the same as it was way back when, except for the price.

[00:10:35]

Anna Hamilton: And did you take anything off the menu that the O'Steens had on the original menus, besides breakfast?

[00:10:44]

Lonnie Pomar: No, I can't think of anything, other than the liver and onions. We haven't had that in a long time, and I don't know if we will ever really have it again, but we could. I mean, we could try, but you don't want to have something and then throw it away. That's a big waste, so we try to avoid that.

[00:11:02]

I can remember the daily special at one time was \$1.25, and we had it on a sign board, a V-shaped sign board, and we stored it out in back of the restaurant. And every day when I was here, I would drag it around to the front of the restaurant, right out in front, right over the sidewalk, basically, and it would face both ways, of course. You know, it was kind of like a sign you see around nowadays that are lit up and different, but this was just a board, you know, a piece of wood that was made into a V-shape and had two legs on it, and it had the special, had what the special was and the price. And people would come in and get it.

[00:11:46]

Anna Hamilton: What happened to the V?

[00:11:47]

Lonnie Pomar: I'm sorry?

[00:11:49]

Anna Hamilton: What happened to the V-board? Where is it now?

[00:11:50]

Lonnie Pomar: It's long gone. *[Laughs]*. We got to where we didn't need it anymore, so we got rid of it. I don't even remember when we got rid of it, but it's been gone quite a while.

[00:12:02]

Anna Hamilton: People know y'all well enough to—

[00:12:03]

Lonnie Pomar: Exactly. We don't have to advertise that way anymore. People know where we are and what we serve. I mean, we have a lot of people come in day after day for the same thing, which is our goal, basically. The repeat customers is what we want.

[00:12:18]

Anna Hamilton: And I do want to talk to you a little bit about the shrimp, because it's such a specialty here.

[interruption: Barbara leaves to take a call]

[00:12:33]

Anna Hamilton: Tell me what's so unique about shrimp here at O'Steen's.

[00:12:36]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, really what's unique about them is the quality, I believe—that's my personal opinion—and the work that goes into preparing them. We buy all the fresh shrimp we can get our hands on, and we freeze up all the fresh shrimp we can get our hands on for future use.

[00:12:54]

When we do run out of those, we try to use only the best-quality either farm-raised or wild-caught shrimp that we can buy from other places: Ecuador, Mexico, wherever we can get them. We always test them first. When we bring in a new shrimp, we test them, make sure they're up to our standards, make sure they don't have any preservatives on them, because you can taste that. It makes them spongy, mushy, they're not firm, and we won't serve them.

[00:13:24]

And the size. We serve a larger shrimp probably than most anybody around, because that's the size we think looks the best, tastes the best. Most people go for a smaller size so they can give them more, and people think they're getting more, and really they're just getting more bread.

[00:13:41]

But anyway, I think that's the key: the quality of the shrimp. And our local shrimp, to me, are the best-tasting shrimp in the world. I mean, I've had other good shrimp from other places, but these, to me, are the sweetest and the most tender, and yet

still firm when you don't put the preservative on them, and that's what we try to use the most of. And people know that, and they come for that and have for a long, long time now, you know, fifty years. So I'm very proud of that, and I think everybody that works at O'Steen's is proud of that fact.

[00:14:14]

Well, you saw the process, you know. We peel them, split them, devein them, wash them, get them ready to meal. And then the mealing process, you watched that yourself. That's quite a process itself. That's what makes it all come out—the end product come out to what it is. And if you don't do those steps and take the quality out of the product, then it won't be there. So I think that's the key, and that's what we try to do.

[00:14:45]

Anna Hamilton: And so when you say the fresh shrimp, you're referring to the shrimp that are caught off the coast here?

[00:14:50]

Lonnie Pomar: Fresh local shrimp, yes, absolutely. They're the best. The East Coast shrimp, now, they catch them all up and down the East Coast. I'm not talking about just off St. Augustine, you know. It can go as far as South Carolina, North Carolina, and on down to the Keys. But then when you get down in the Keys, you have to be careful about which shrimp. They catch a lot of pink shrimp down in the Key West area, and we don't like those either, simply because a lot of time they have too much iodine in them. And

they usually catch those at night. That was something that Felix Salvador discovered—or John Felix or Johnny, or maybe both of them together; I can't remember—back in the days when the shrimping was really gangbusters around here. When it slowed down here, they'd go down further south to fish, which they still do today, and they discovered the pink shrimp down in Key West. And of course, it was a big boon, because a lot of people don't know the difference between iodine shrimp and a non-iodine shrimp, and they still sell a lot of them.

[00:15:51]

Anna Hamilton: Why would you not want it? What is the difference?

[00:15:53]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, if you know shrimp and you eat shrimp all the time, your taster will tell you, your taste buds will tell you when you taste the iodine. Sometimes it's subtle and sometimes it's real strong. Sometimes you go, "Wow. That's strong iodine flavor," and it is. But we just don't use them.

[00:16:16]

That's the reason we don't use West Coast shrimp, same reason. They have a lot of iodine sometimes, not all the time. But sometimes the people around here'll import shrimp from the west coast, Texas or even Louisiana, and I can taste the iodine in them, and I won't buy them. But a lot of people don't know the difference and they buy them anyway. And if you cover them up with something, you really don't notice it that much.

[00:16:42]

Anna Hamilton: That's a good point. What does iodine taste like? I'm curious. I've never—I didn't realize this is what—

[00:16:47]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, have you ever eaten iodized salt?

[00:16:50]

Anna Hamilton: Yeah.

[00:16:52]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah, you probably have. If you take a little bit of that salt and taste it, it's got a real pungent flavor to it. If you eat the non-iodized, it's just salty. But it's just a real strong taste that we don't care for in our shrimp that shows up. And it really depends on the level. It can be different levels, you know. Of course, they're wild-caught animals, depends on what they're eating and where they're eating and all that. So it can change the amounts.

[00:17:19]

Anna Hamilton: That's interesting.

[00:17:20]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah.

[00:17:20]

Anna Hamilton: So if you're staying away from those shrimp, what are the kinds— what varieties do you all look for?

[00:17:25]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, we call them East Coast white shrimp, anywhere along the East Coast that you catch them. Also a lot of the farm-raised people have developed that shrimp. The East Coast white is called a *Vannamei* white variety. There's more names to them than that, but that's a shortened version of the actual name. I forget. It's Greek to me. I don't know any other way to tell you, but that's the only variety we try to buy. Actually, it's the only variety we do buy.

[00:18:01]

Anna Hamilton: OK. And I know you mentioned before sort of what's in the shrimp that's served, but will you walk me through the process of when you receive the shrimp and then they end up on the plate, one more time?

[00:18:14]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, we buy the shrimp fresh from the local seafood market. They bring them to us, and we put them in the coolers on ice. We bring them out. A lot of times we weigh them up just to make sure that we're getting the right amount, because that's important too. And then we start by peeling them with the shrimp peeler that we have. We have several shrimp peelers, and we have a little tool that we use. I'm sure you saw that. It knocks the shell loose, and then we pull it the rest of the way off, and it partially takes the vein out, and we grab that and pull it on out.

[00:18:50]

And once we've done all the shrimp that way, we take them and split them with a small knife about halfway down, and it's really—a lot of people call them butterfly, but it's not. It's really originally it was Texas style or cowboy style, because they sit up like a cowboy when they're split like that. They've got like two legs and they're sitting back. But we call it St. Augustine style because we've been doing it so long. And it makes a nice presentation.

[00:19:21]

So once we get all that done, they go back to the mealing room in the cooler, and then the mealer takes them out, prepares them in a pan with some salt and distributes that evenly, and then starts by putting them in self-rising flour, not too thick, just a light dusting of that. And then takes each shrimp individually, dips it in the batter, slaps it on the bowl—that's all part of it—puts it in the cracker meal, lightly pats it—and I mean lightly; doesn't smash it—and puts it on the pan. And then from there, the pan goes to the fryer. The fryer counts each one out and puts them in the fryer, and he cooks them till

they're just right, which it doesn't take long, a few minutes. And they go on the plate, one at a time, and out to the customer.

[00:20:15]

Anna Hamilton: And what do you serve them with?

[00:20:16]

Lonnie Pomar: We serve them with a variety of things. The standard shrimp dinner is French fries and coleslaw. The French fries go on the bottom of the plate, the shrimp go around and on top of the fries, and the coleslaw goes next to that, and the hushpuppies go on the end.

[00:20:33]

Anna Hamilton: And what about the condiments? Can you talk a little bit about the pink sauce?

[00:20:36]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, that's a homemade sauce that we make ourselves. We also make a homemade cocktail sauce that some people prefer nowadays because they're just not used to the pink. They don't know what the pink is. Usually, once they try the pink, they prefer and like that best. The pink sauce, to me, is good on everything. It's good on the

French fries; it's good on the coleslaw; it's good on the salad; it's good on anything. But that's a homemade sauce that we make, and it's really delicious.

[00:21:02]

Anna Hamilton: Are you allowed to tell me what's in it, or is that a—

[00:21:04]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, I can tell you basically what's in it. It's basically a ketchup and mayonnaise base. We use our own homemade hot sauce in it, Worcestershire, and another commercial hot sauce and horseradish.

[00:21:18]

Anna Hamilton: And the hot sauce is a Datil sauce, too, that y'all make?

[00:21:21]

Lonnie Pomar: Our hot sauce is homemade also, and it is a hot Datil pepper base with tomatoes and cider vinegar, brown sugar.

[00:21:31]

Anna Hamilton: Nice. It's delicious.

[00:21:33]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah.

[00:21:33]

Anna Hamilton: My mouth's watering just talking about it.

[00:21:35]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah. I like to mix it, and it's good. Yeah.

[00:21:38]

Anna Hamilton: And how many shrimp do you think you all go through on an average day?

[00:21:42]

Lonnie Pomar: It varies a great deal, really. When the tourists are here, and we're wall-to-wall all day long, we can go through as many as 300 pounds a day, and that's a *lot* of shrimp, a lot of preparation. That's unusual, however. I mean, we'd have to be busy from the time we opened to the time we closed, because that's a lot of shrimp. I would say on average, year-in, year-out, probably—I'm just going to say 100 pounds a day, average. That would be a good average, probably.

[00:22:15]

Anna Hamilton: How many shrimp is that, do you know?

[00:22:18]

Lonnie Pomar: Oh, goodness, well—

[00:22:19]

Anna Hamilton: I know that's a little complicated.

[00:22:20]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, it is a little complicated, but if you figure there's twenty-five shrimp to a pound, so what does that tell you?

[00:22:31]

Anna Hamilton: A lot. *[laughs]*

[00:22:32]

Lonnie Pomar: Multiply that. *[laughter]* Yeah. I mean, you know, if you multiple that times 100 pounds, that's a lot of shrimp.

[00:22:40]

Anna Hamilton: That's amazing.

[00:22:42]

Lonnie Pomar: Twenty-five thousand shrimp, isn't it? *[laughs]* Would that be right?

[Interviewer's note: 100 pounds of shrimp at twenty-five shrimp per pound is 2,500 shrimp]

[00:22:45]

Barbara Pomar: I think you are.

[00:22:47]

Anna Hamilton: Wow. That's incredible. That's a lot of people coming through and eating a lot of shrimp.

[00:22:51]

Lonnie Pomar: It is. It is. Yeah. I mean, you know, maximum. That's maximum, what I told you about the maximum, you know. The most people we can—and that's including takeouts also, so, you know, that adds to it. So we'd have a hard time getting that many people in and out of the dining room, sixty-five at a time, because that's all we seat.

[00:23:14]

Anna Hamilton: Twenty-five thousand. Well, I was talking to Mark, and he said he figured at one point he mealed somewhere around four thousand. That pales in comparison to the total, to the total everyday average of shrimp. *[laughter]*

[00:23:27]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah. Well, see, he's just here at lunchtime.

[00:23:31]

Barbara Pomar: He's not dinnertime.

[00:23:33]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah, and dinnertime, sometimes we got two or three guys mealing, sometimes.

[00:23:38]

Anna Hamilton: Gosh, they've got it down to an art.

[00:23:39]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah, oh, yeah. You have to if you're going to get it done. You'd go crazy if you didn't have a system, you know.

[00:23:45]

Anna Hamilton: Did you work as a mealer?

[00:23:47]

Lonnie Pomar: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I've done it all, believe me. *[laughs]*

[00:23:52]

Anna Hamilton: Do you—what was your favorite part of working here at O'Steen's?
Do you have a favorite role that you—

[00:23:57]

Lonnie Pomar: My favorite role is cooking. My least favorite role is managing the people. That's the hardest part to me, and always has been. I hate to have to fire somebody; I hate to have to discipline somebody; I hate to have to tell somebody they need to use deodorant, you know, that kind of thing. And that's all part of being a manager, unfortunately. And that's not the pleasant part.

[00:24:20]

But I really enjoyed the cooking, cooking the daily specials and the different vegetables, the greens, you know, cooking that all down, the old Minorcan style with the white bacon and seasonings. Yeah, I enjoyed that.

[00:24:40]

Anna Hamilton: And I'm glad you mentioned Minorcan. I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit about what is Minorcan about the menu here at O'Steen's.

[00:24:47]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, the main thing that's Minorcan about it is the Datil pepper that we use. We use that in most of our dishes. Even our beef stew, we use it, our creole, pilau, of course, all our pilaus, not just the shrimp, the chicken and the sausage and everything. Our hot sauce, it's the main ingredient, of course, gives it the flavor. The Datil flavor is just one of my favorite flavors, and anything we put it in, it has that taste. A lot of people recognize that and enjoy it as I do.

[00:25:23]

So I would say that's the only thing really that makes it a Minorcan family restaurant, menu, whatever, because other than that, we don't really have any fancy things. Like some of the Minorcan festivals have the—what do they call those little breads they make? [*Lonnie is referring to fromajardis, a Minorcan pastry*] We don't do any of that. We do make a Datil pepper cornbread occasionally, and that's an awesome, wonderful thing.

[00:25:46]

Anna Hamilton: What is that?

[00:25:47]

Lonnie Pomar: All it is, is our regular cornbread with some Datil pepper mixed in it. And that's awesome, got that Datil flavor. But sometimes it'll burn you up if you get a little too much Datil pepper in it, but it's really flavorful. I love it myself.

[00:26:01]

Anna Hamilton: That sounds good. What are the customers' reactions to the spiciness of the Datil pepper?

[00:26:07]

Lonnie Pomar: Most everybody enjoys it. However, you know—well, I don't know whether you know this or not. Datil peppers are different. They're not always going to have the same amount of heat. And I don't even know exactly why that is, but it happens. And sometimes we put too many Datil peppers, like in the clam chowder, and we get some complaints. They tell us they're going to the emergency room or something like that, because they're burning up, you know. *[laughs]*

[00:26:35]

Actually, we used to leave the Datil peppers in the chowder, the whole Datil peppers, and we had too many problems with people eating them and having a real issue, so we quit doing that. Now we grind them up real fine and just put a certain amount in there, and if you eat them, eat that part of it, you don't really—I mean, you notice the heat and the flavor, but it doesn't send you to the emergency room.

[00:27:00]

Anna Hamilton: Have you had to tone it down over the years?

[00:27:03]

Lonnie Pomar: We have, yes. I prefer it a little hotter, myself, and a true Minorcan would, but most people don't. And that's what we've come up against and that's what we've had to adjust to.

[00:27:15]

Anna Hamilton: So what you make at home is probably different than what you all make here, the recipes for things.

[00:27:19]

Lonnie Pomar: Yes, yes.

[00:27:22]

Anna Hamilton: I want to back up just a little bit, and I would like you to introduce me to the O'Steens, please.

[00:27:27]

Lonnie Pomar: The O'Steens were wonderful people. Mr. O'Steen was a big man—I think he weighed about 290 pounds when he passed away—but a great person, honest, fair, fair to everybody. Stern but fair, that's how I always described him. He was fair to everybody. And that's what I tried to model myself after with my employees because I thought that was the way it should be.

[00:27:50]

Mrs. O’Steen was a gem. She was a Yankee from Pittsburgh. And Mr. O’Steen, of course, and her were very much in love. They were great people. She was his anchor and he was hers, you know, and they were just very solid citizens. I can’t say enough about them. Just a good family, good pillars of the community.

[00:28:17]

Anna Hamilton: Do you know how they met?

[00:28:21]

Lonnie Pomar: I did, but I can’t remember, honestly. I think the O’Steens moved down here. Mr. and Mrs. Snyder. We used to call him “Pap” Snyder, “Pappy.” And I think they just met—I’m not sure where they met, but when they moved down here, they ran into each other somewhere. I really don’t remember where, honestly. I could probably find that out for you from their daughter, Karen.

[00:28:58]

Anna Hamilton: Okay.

[00:29:00]

Lonnie Pomar: But, yeah, they were good, good, solid people. They just worked hard and ran a good business, and they just were good people.

[00:29:09]

Anna Hamilton: I imagine it was risky to open a business like this in St. Augustine when they did.

[00:29:13]

Lonnie Pomar: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. I can remember way back when we first started. One week, Mr. O’Steen told me I made more than he did that week, and I think I made thirty-five dollars. *[laughs]* No joke. That’s what he told me. I said, “You kiddin’ me?”

[00:29:30]

He said, “No, I’m not kiddin’ you.” *[laughs]*

[00:29:33]

Anna Hamilton: How did they keep it going then through those—

[00:29:37]

Lonnie Pomar: Perseverance and just steady working, you know, just working hard at it. And once they got the ball rolling, though, it just got better and better for them. You know, they ended up having a good, prosperous business.

[00:29:51]

Anna Hamilton: How do you think it caught on? Was it the locals who were mainly supporting them?

[00:29:55]

Lonnie Pomar: Back then, yes, absolutely. Yeah. Once the people started coming in and eating that good home-cooked fresh food every day, daily, you know, daily specials, at that good price. And that’s what Mrs. O’Steen used to say all the time, she said, “You give people a decent meal at a decent price, they’re going to come back.” And she was absolutely correct.

[00:30:15]

Anna Hamilton: I understand that you had nicknames for them, that everybody had nicknames for them.

[00:30:19]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, Mr. O’Steen was always “the Chief,” and everybody called him that. I mean, his friends from the railroad, all his family, you know, most everybody that knew him called him “the Chief.” They just addressed him that way. And Mrs. O’Steen was always “Mrs. O.”

[00:30:37]

Anna Hamilton: “Mrs. O”?

[00:30:39]

Lonnie Pomar: “Mrs. O” back in the day, yeah. Everybody addressed her by that. Her name was Virginia. She went by Ginny, but everybody called her “Mrs. O.”

[00:30:46]

Anna Hamilton: What was his first name?

[00:30:48]

Lonnie Pomar: Robert, but he went by Bob. Some people called him Bobby, people that knew him way back. And, unfortunately, they had a son named after him but he got killed at an early age.

[00:30:58]

Anna Hamilton: Oh, shoot. Sorry about that.

[00:31:00]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah, that was a sad thing.

[00:31:02]

Anna Hamilton: How did he pass?

[00:31:03]

Lonnie Pomar: Got ran over by a school bus in their neighborhood, yeah, and my older sister was with him when it happened.

[00:31:13]

Anna Hamilton: And—but they still have a daughter, you mentioned, who's still living?

[00:31:15]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah. Karen. Karen O'Steen. Her name is Karen Murrow now. I don't think she took "O'Steen" back. Actually, she's divorced. But she worked at the restaurant also with me for years, and when we were younger, we worked together, you know, just as teenagers. We both worked there.

[00:31:33]

Anna Hamilton: And she didn't want to join the family business?

[00:31:35]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, she was part of it for a long time, yeah, and then she married a fellow and they had another restaurant. I think she's working at the school board still now. She went to work there.

[00:31:48]

Anna Hamilton: Okay. And I wanted to ask you about the location. I'm curious as to why the restaurant's here instead of closer to downtown or in downtown. I guess we are close to downtown.

[00:31:58]

Lonnie Pomar: The only reason is that's where the original location is. They bought that building from a lady that had it. Mrs. Flo McQuaig used to be a city commissioner way back in the day, and she owned a lot of property, and they end up purchasing the building from her. They just never saw any reason to move it, I guess.

[00:32:21]

Anna Hamilton: They liked that location.

[00:32:23]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah. I mean, after people started coming and they found out where it was, it was not an issue, I guess.

[00:32:29]

Anna Hamilton: And how has that space changed over the years?

[00:32:31]

Lonnie Pomar: The restaurant?

[00:32:33]

Anna Hamilton: Yeah.

[00:32:33]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, it's been added on to about five times, probably, and it's still small. So you can imagine how small it was back in the day when they first opened. It was just a very—probably, gosh, I would say maybe twenty-five seats, maybe, or thirty at the most.

[00:32:49]

Anna Hamilton: And today there's closer to—

[00:32:50]

Lonnie Pomar: Sixty-five is all we can fit in there now. And the kitchen's been added to a couple times. We added the mealing room. You saw the mealing room. We used to do all that right in that little kitchen, which was really difficult because of the mess, mainly. It went everywhere. And now we just have one room to clean up, you know.

[laughs]

[00:33:10]

Anna Hamilton: He kept it pretty clean. I could imagine trying to do that in a home kitchen and just being, like, covered in it. *[laughter]*

[00:33:16]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah, you can imagine is right. Yeah.

[00:33:22]

Anna Hamilton: How come you can't make reservations here? I'm curious about that.

[00:33:25]

Lonnie Pomar: The only reason is the size. How are you going to hold the seating for ten or fifteen minutes when you only have sixty-five seats and you've got sixty people waiting for them, you know? And if somebody walks up and walks in, you're going to have a riot on your hands. You know what I'm saying? So that's the reason. That's the only reason.

[00:33:46]

Anna Hamilton: And that's amazing, because there's such a following that people will wait for hours in line sometimes.

[00:33:52]

Lonnie Pomar: It is an amazing thing to me, and I really appreciate that, but it still amazes me, honestly. I mean, we do have people leave, and probably even more so nowadays than ever because there are so many places in St. Augustine to go. I mean, there's a lot of spinoffs of O'Steen's, even, they can go to, you know. They know they're not going to get the same exact quality food, but it'll do, so they'll go. So it still amazes me that we still have people wait a long time, and I appreciate that very much.

[00:34:23]

Anna Hamilton: What time do people start lining up for meals?

[00:34:28]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, sometimes it's as early as ten a.m., sometimes ten-thirty. You know, just depends. You probably saw today there were some people out there waiting for the—as it got close, they were sitting in their cars because it wasn't that nice a day, so as it got closer to the time, they got out. They didn't want anybody butting in front of them. *[laughs]* So that's the way.

[00:34:51]

Anna Hamilton: And what is the longest line that you've seen, the longest wait?

[00:34:55]

Lonnie Pomar: I would say three hours.

[00:34:59]

Barbara Pomar: Three hours.

[00:35:00]

Anna Hamilton: Three hours. And is there a season that the waits become longer?

[00:35:04]

Lonnie Pomar: Oh, yeah. When the height of the tourist season, like just recently, you know, right before Christmas and New Year's, it's always crazy busy because all the people are coming into town for the football games and passing through for that and whatnot. Yeah, that's one of the busier times. And in the middle of the summer sometimes, when people are at the beach, and they get tired of the beach and they head back in to eat, you know, then all of a sudden, they'll be there all at once, and that can get pretty wild.

[00:35:32]

Anna Hamilton: How is that possible? We were chatting before that you all don't really do much advertising, there's not a website, there's not a lot about the history of O'Steen's, and yet people know O'Steen's and they love O'Steen's and they come.

[00:35:46]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah. I think it's because we've been around so long, of course, and also word of mouth, you know, people just tell. And families, you know, we have the same families coming, that their parents have passed on and the kids are coming. Now they got the grandkids with them, and it's just repeat family business from years and years and years, you know. I think that's the biggest part of it, honestly. And they tell other people and they come try it, and then we got a whole other group started, you know. So that's all a good thing.

[00:36:18]

Anna Hamilton: What do you think it says about St. Augustine that a place like O'Steen's has been in business for so long?

[00:36:25]

Lonnie Pomar: I think it says that there's a good bunch of local people here, and there's a good bunch of tourist people that come back to St. Augustine over and over again, which is good for everybody. Yeah.

[00:36:42]

Anna Hamilton: Does it ever seem like too much, like too many people in the restaurant, too much of a demand?

[00:36:47]

Lonnie Pomar: I would say back when I was having to work all the time, sometimes I felt that way. Of course, now that I've taken more time off and have other people doing what I was doing, doesn't bother me so much. *[laughs]*

[00:37:06]

Anna Hamilton: Maybe I should ask some of the waitresses. *[laughter]*

[00:37:10]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah. Sometimes it gets to be a little much. Believe me, I do understand that. But, yeah, I would say you get through it. You just trudge along and get through it, and then it's okay.

[00:37:22]

Anna Hamilton: And I do want to ask you also about your sign, about your logo. Will you talk to me about the shrimp with the top hat?

[00:37:29]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, there again I have to give my wife credit for that. We didn't have a sign like that at all, you know. We just had that wrought-iron sign out on the front of the building, which is still there, by the way, that Mr. O'Steen's brother made. He was a handyman that could do anything. We have other things that he's done in the restaurant, still there. His name was John O'Steen.

[00:37:52]

The other sign, however, I was against at first. My wife kept telling me we needed a sign because people would ride by and not see the wrought-iron sign on the front. It's a small building. You could be by, you know, kind of like going through Hastings and missing the one red light there, you know. So Barbara kept telling me we needed a sign. I said, "We don't need a sign."

[00:38:19]

So anyway, she convinced me, and we had that sign made. And I actually got the logo, believe it or not, off of a shrimp box. It had that same identical shrimp on there, which is a top hat and cane and the coat that kind of went down into his tail, you know. And I just thought it was a neat-looking shrimp. I called it a fancy dressed-up shrimp, and that's exactly what it is.

[00:38:48]

Mr. Ben over at Ben's Sign Company, he drew it up first and brought it over, and we said, "Oh, no." What did that thing look like, honey? It looked like a Gila monster. The first one he brought out, he rolled it out on the floor and laid it out. I said, "What is that?" *[laughs]* I said, "That ain't gonna work." Remember that?

[00:39:14]

Barbara Pomar: Uh-huh.

[00:39:14]

Lonnie Pomar: I wish I had a picture of that. You'd laugh. But anyway, he went back to the drawing board and drew the shrimp correctly, and it turned out nice. People have loved it ever since, really. I mean, people come in and thanked me, and I said, "Don't thank me. Thank Barbara. I didn't want the darn thing." But people are appreciative of it because they could find us easier.

[00:39:39]

I can remember Mr. Louis M. What was his name, honey, that had Louis M. factory here?

[00:39:46]

Barbara Pomar: I forget what his first name was.

[00:39:48]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, anyway, he came in and personally thanked me, says, "I love your sign." He said, "People are really going to be able to find it."

[00:39:58]

I said, "Well." *[laughs]* So anyway, that's the story of the sign.

[00:40:03]

Anna Hamilton: Is there anything you want to add?

[00:40:04]

Barbara Pomar: The real story behind that is people would come—

[00:40:08]

Lonnie Pomar: Get mad.

[00:40:08]

Barbara Pomar: —after eight-thirty when we were closed, and they would be riding around for an hour and couldn't find us. So when they got here, they were all mad because we were closed. So that's why I said we needed the sign. And some of our customers—

[00:40:21]

Lonnie Pomar: They'd come in and give her a hard time.

[00:40:23]

Barbara Pomar: Some of our customers would tease me and say, "We hate that sign because now your lines are really long," because they can find us. So that was so funny.

[00:40:33]

Anna Hamilton: Do you think Mr. and Mrs. O'Steen would have liked the sign?

[00:40:35]

Lonnie Pomar: No. *[laughter]* Probably not.

[00:40:39]

Barbara Pomar: Probably not.

[00:40:40]

Lonnie Pomar: No, he didn't like too many changes, you know. But I can't say that honestly. I mean, I don't really know. I can't say whether he would or wouldn't, but probably not. *[laughs]*

[00:40:52]

Barbara Pomar: Well, we don't like a lot of change either.

[00:40:54]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah.

[00:40:55]

Anna Hamilton: Well, that's fair. You get used to it being your business.

[00:40:58]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah.

[00:40:59]

Barbara Pomar: It's like people will say to us, "Why haven't you expanded? Why don't you move somewhere bigger?" But it's just not the same. We can't keep the quality the same, and it's just different.

[00:41:10]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah. That's why we haven't done that.

[00:41:12]

Barbara Pomar: This is our home. It's been our home for a long time.

[interruption: Lonnie's phone buzzes]

[00:41:24]

Anna Hamilton: And I also want to ask a little bit about the next generation. I know you're semi-retired.

[00:41:29]

Lonnie Pomar: Right.

[00:41:31]

Anna Hamilton: And I'm wondering what the plan is or what the hopes are.

[00:41:34]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, we're hoping to be out of here, you know, within a few years, really, because we've done it long enough, obviously. But we have a good group of people coming behind us, we feel, anyway. Our son Johnny—

[interruption: sounds from the hand dryer in the bathroom]

[00:41:56]

Lonnie Pomar: Anyway, our son, Johnny Cleary, and Timmy Colee and Robert Fales, Bobby Fales, they've all worked together for us for years and years, and we're hoping that they're going to take it over and continue running it and continue doing it the way we've been doing it. We feel that they are, because they know that's the key, is keeping the quality and the consistency level where it is. And if they'll do that, I think they'll be very successful for a long time. So it's a simple operation, it's a simple formula, and yet it's a lot of hard work. So if they're willing to put the effort into it, and they know how to do it, so if they'll do it, I think they'll be very successful for years to come, and O'Steen's will continue on, and we can come back in our old age and have some good meals and be happy about it, you know. That's what we hope.

[00:42:51]

Anna Hamilton: So, I mean, their vision is pretty consistent with what O'Steen's has been under your care and under the O'Steens'—

[00:42:57]

Lonnie Pomar: Yes, absolutely. I do believe so, yes.

[00:42:59]

Barbara Pomar: They've been here a long time, too, like thirty and forty years.

[00:43:03]

Anna Hamilton: Really?

[00:43:03]

Barbara Pomar: Yes.

[00:43:04]

Lonnie Pomar: Oh, yeah, yeah.

[00:43:05]

Anna Hamilton: Are all of the employees, do they have that long of a track record here?

[00:43:08]

Lonnie Pomar: The majority, majority of them, yeah.

[00:43:12]

Anna Hamilton: Wow.

[00:43:13]

Barbara Pomar: And then the waitresses, a couple of the waitresses have been here that long.

[00:43:17]

Anna Hamilton: Really?

[00:43:17]

Barbara Pomar: Mm-hmm.

[00:43:18]

Anna Hamilton: How many employees do you have?

[00:43:20]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, part-time and full-time together, probably around thirty. Yeah.

Jackie that is working as a waitress still, her mother worked here. We called her Miss

May. Her name was May, obviously, but we called her Miss May. That went along with

“Miss O.” They all worked together. Miss May was—she was a trip. But she worked for a long, long time, and Jackie’s following in her footsteps.

[00:43:50]

Anna Hamilton: Wow.

[00:43:51]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah.

[00:43:52]

Anna Hamilton: So there’s some legacies, then, here.

[00:43:53]

Lonnie Pomar: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Yeah, most definitely. Yeah.

[00:43:56]

Anna Hamilton: What is the average length of time that the employees have worked here?

[00:44:02]

Lonnie Pomar: I’d have to get a calculator out to tell you that, but if I was going to guess, I’d say average of twenty years.

[00:44:10]

Anna Hamilton: Oh, my gosh.

[00:44:13]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah. Yeah, I know. *[laughs]*

[00:44:15]

Barbara Pomar: Some of them have worked here and then left and worked somewhere else, and come back and wanted to come back and work for us.

[00:44:22]

Anna Hamilton: That is such loyalty.

[00:44:23]

Barbara Pomar: Yes.

[00:44:25]

Anna Hamilton: I can't think of many—any places where that's true.

[00:44:30]

Lonnie Pomar: No. We try to take good care of them, treat them right. Of course, the foundation. Just like I told you before, Mr. O’Steen, I felt like he was a very fair man, and that’s what we’ve tried to be with all of them and make them part of the business, you know, and share the profits with them and everything. So that’s a big part of it.

[00:44:53]

Barbara Pomar: Yeah. They’re like family. Everybody is like family.

[00:44:57]

Anna Hamilton: Well, and I’ve heard that, even chatting to a few people this morning, they’ve said, “We all hang out together. We celebrate things together. We work together.”

[00:45:04]

Barbara Pomar: They do. Everybody does, really. It’s pretty amazing, I think.

[00:45:10]

Anna Hamilton: I think so too.

[00:45:12]

Let me just look at my notes to see if there’s something that I’m forgetting that I want to ask you about.

[00:45:19]

Barbara Pomar: I think you've covered it very well.

[00:45:22]

Anna Hamilton: I think we have too.

[00:45:24]

Barbara Pomar: I didn't know you were such a talker, honey. *[laughs]*

[00:45:29]

Lonnie Pomar: I'm not.

[00:45:30]

Anna Hamilton: It's his birthday.

[00:45:31]

Lonnie Pomar: She's forcing me. *[laughs]*

[00:45:33]

Barbara Pomar: You're doing a great job.

[00:45:35]

Anna Hamilton: I appreciate it too.

[00:45:37]

Really, my last question, what do you think that O'Steen's means to the St. Augustine community?

[00:45:43]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, that's a good question. I don't really know, honestly. We're not real involved other than through our employees' families and all. I mean, I have a lot of friends in St. Augustine, don't get me wrong, and they all know O'Steen's and know the legacy and everything, but as far as like—we're not real political, you know. We don't advertise, so we're not real popular with the paper. We're just known for what we are, you know, by people that know us. And people that don't know us, don't understand us, we don't really worry about them. We just do what we do and do it as good as we can and then let the rest fall where it may, you know.

[00:46:32]

I don't worry too much about images except about the quality and what's established at O'Steen's staying the same and being the same. So I think we're well thought of by most people in the community. I hope so. But I don't really worry about it. So I don't know what else to tell you. *[laughs]*

[00:46:58]

Anna Hamilton: I'll ask you the same question, then. What do you think O'Steen's means for this community?

[00:47:02]

Barbara Pomar: I believe the same thing: consistency, hardworking family. Basically, that's it.

[00:47:10]

Anna Hamilton: That's nice. I think you're probably right. It's interesting to think that because, I mean, it belongs to St. Augustine, but it also belongs to the tourist community, so there's a weird balance there.

[00:47:18]

Lonnie Pomar: It does. It belongs to the repeat tourist community that come back year after year. We've seen people, I mean, I don't know, thirty years or more, you know, over and over, and they always come in and say, "Hey," and always are real appreciative that we're here. It's just a good thing, you know, that they have—that's a legacy in itself, basically. So it's not just a local legacy; it's a countrywide, worldwide legacy, I guess you could say.

[00:47:50]

I get tickled people tell me they run into people all over the place, you know, like on airplanes and stuff like that, and they're saying, "Oh, you're going to St. Augustine? You got to try O'Steen's."

[00:47:59]

"Really? I know them." *[laughs]* You know, that kind—

[00:48:03]

Barbara Pomar: Well, it makes you proud. It makes you proud that we work that hard, and it's recognized.

[00:48:07]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah. That's what it's all about. Yeah.

[00:48:11]

Anna Hamilton: O'Steen's is about to either celebrate it's fiftieth or fifty-first—we're going to say fiftieth—birthday.

[00:48:16]

Lonnie Pomar: We'll call it fifty. *[laughs]*

[00:48:19]

Anna Hamilton: The official fifty. Are you all going to have any celebration of sorts for O'Steen's?

[00:48:25]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah. I've been thinking about that, and I really—I don't know what we're going to do. We're going to do something, but I don't know exactly what. We've got to do something, I think.

[00:48:32]

Barbara Pomar: I think we do.

[00:48:32]

Lonnie Pomar: But I really don't know what. If you come up with some good ideas, let me know.

[00:48:38]

Anna Hamilton: Okay.

[00:48:38]

Lonnie Pomar: I may reject them, but I'm not going to make any—

[00:48:41]

Barbara Pomar: I'll bet you she could come up with some good ideas.

[00:48:42]

Lonnie Pomar: I'm not going to make any promises to you. But we've got to do something, so we're going to come up with something.

[00:48:46]

Barbara Pomar: Maybe we should ask our customers what they would think.

[00:48:48]

Lonnie Pomar: They probably want us to go back to \$1.95 Shrimp Special.

[00:48:52]

Barbara Pomar: That's true.

[00:48:53]

Lonnie Pomar: For one day or something. Could you see that? Oh, man. *[laughs]*

[00:48:56]

Anna Hamilton: Y'all wouldn't be closing by eight-thirty. *[laughs]*

[00:48:59]

Lonnie Pomar: No. No, we wouldn't. It'd be a long day. *[laughs]*

[00:49:03]

Anna Hamilton: I do remember I need to ask you when did you take over O'Steen's from Mr. and Mrs. O'Steen.

[00:49:09]

Lonnie Pomar: 1982.

[00:49:13]

Anna Hamilton: And how did that transpire?

[00:49:15]

Lonnie Pomar: Well, we had an agreement that it wasn't written in stone or anything. Basically, honestly, Mrs. O'Steen forced him out. *[laughs]* She wanted to retire and get away from it and travel, and that's a great thing. And he did also, but he wanted to do it a little slower, you know. And she said, "Bob, you promised!" And he gritted his teeth, you know.

[00:49:41]

So anyway, we went down and made it official at the courthouse, because we never really had anything official, you know, just a handshake and a business agreement, which didn't mean too much, really. But we shook hands when we got through with that,

and he said, “Well, we were wondering what we were going to do, and we’ve done it.”

So, you know.

[00:50:04]

But even after that, he would come back. When they weren't traveling, he would come back to the restaurant, sit out at the counter and greet the people, have a cup of coffee, maybe have a little something to eat, just sit out there, and he loved it. I mean, it was his life, also, and he really loved interaction with the customers, even more so than I did. I'm not really that way that much. I mean, I know so many of them now. She's giving me the evil eye, but this is true. I know so many of them now that if I see them, I feel an obligation to go talk to them, let them know I saw them, you know, that kind of thing. But he was really that way. He was really a people person, really enjoyed telling people about his travels. He could tell a travel story better than anybody I ever knew, you know. I mean, he could describe where they'd been and what they saw, and it was really interesting and people enjoyed it. So he was really reluctant to leave.

[00:51:06]

Anna Hamilton: To pass it on?

[00:51:07]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah, yeah.

[00:51:09]

Anna Hamilton: It's nice that he had a spot to come back to, though, and—

[00:51:11]

Lonnie Pomar: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Always welcome. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

[00:51:15]

Anna Hamilton: And what were those first few years like for you during that transition?

[00:51:19]

Lonnie Pomar: Not too really terrible. I mean, I had to work hard, obviously. I felt like I had to work even harder, you know, because he was gone, and I had to prove to people that it was not going to change. Even at that, you heard people say, "Well, Bobby's not back there. It's not the same." And we had just very little of that, thank goodness. But that was the only difference. It was challenging, but not so much, because I'd been doing it already so long, you know. We were partners for twelve years.

[00:51:54]

Anna Hamilton: Oh, wow.

[00:51:56]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah.

[00:51:56]

Anna Hamilton: So you weren't just kicked into it cold.

[00:51:58]

Lonnie Pomar: No, absolutely not, no. *[laughs]*

[00:52:00]

Anna Hamilton: Barbara, I promise we're getting close to being done, but I do just want to ask you when did you start working at O'Steen's.

[00:52:06]

Barbara Pomar: I would say probably thirty years ago. I came and worked a couple days. Lonnie and I were not married at the time. And there after that, I kind of started into getting a few more days here and there.

[00:52:25]

Anna Hamilton: And what were you doing?

[00:52:27]

Barbara Pomar: Hostessing. Just the hostessing.

[00:52:29]

Lonnie Pomar: She tried waitressing once. That was a riot.

[00:52:32]

Barbara Pomar: Oh, lord, that was terrible.

[00:52:34]

Anna Hamilton: You didn't like it?

[00:52:34]

Barbara Pomar: No.

[00:52:34]

Lonnie Pomar: You ever see a waitress carrying plates and they're rattling? She was rattling them all the way out to the table. *[laughs]*

[00:52:40]

Barbara Pomar: I was shaking. I was a nervous wreck.

[00:52:43]

Lonnie Pomar: It was pretty funny. *[laughs]*

[00:52:43]

Barbara Pomar: I was a nervous wreck being a hostess too.

[00:52:45]

Lonnie Pomar: She didn't do that long. *[laughter]*

[00:52:47]

Barbara Pomar: But then you just get used to the people and, like I say, they were family. They just made you feel at home with them too.

[00:52:54]

Anna Hamilton: What drew you to O'Steen's? Why did you get a job here?

[00:52:57]

Barbara Pomar: We were neighbors and friends.

[00:53:03]

Lonnie Pomar: Just happened.

[00:53:04]

Anna Hamilton: Nice. So you all met here. Or, no, you said you were neighbors. I'm sorry.

[00:53:07]

Lonnie Pomar: Yeah, right.

[00:53:08]

Anna Hamilton: And when did you all get married?

[00:53:10]

Barbara Pomar: In 1993.

[00:53:12]

Anna Hamilton: Nice.

[00:53:14]

Barbara Pomar: June 13th, when we were on vacation.

[00:53:17]

Anna Hamilton: On vacation?

[00:53:19]

Barbara Pomar: When we closed. We couldn't go on vacation ever because we'd have to be here working.

[00:53:25]

Anna Hamilton: This is your child.

[00:53:26]

Barbara Pomar: Yes.

[00:53:26]

Lonnie Pomar: Exactly.

[00:53:29]

Barbara Pomar: So we've been married twenty-one years.

[00:53:31]

Anna Hamilton: And you still work here.

[00:53:32]

Barbara Pomar: Yes.

[00:53:33]

Anna Hamilton: Or semi-work here.

[00:53:35]

Barbara Pomar: I do all the bookwork and stuff, but not the hiring and firing and hostessing anymore.

[00:53:39]

Lonnie Pomar: Charlotte does that.

[00:53:40]

Barbara Pomar: Yes. Thank goodness, I had a great helper.

[00:53:44]

Anna Hamilton: Nice. And will you retire, too, when you all pass it on?

[00:53:47]

Barbara Pomar: Oh, yes. Most definitely. He's tried to keep me here even more than I am already, but I told him if he was leaving, I was leaving. I'm just like Mrs. O'Steen.

[laughter]

[00:53:59]

Anna Hamilton: "You promised!"

[00:54:01]

Barbara Pomar: That's right. "You promised!"

[00:54:05]

Anna Hamilton: I don't have any more questions. Is there anything that you all want to mention that I should have asked you about that I didn't?

[00:54:11]

Barbara Pomar: I don't think so.

[00:54:12]

Lonnie Pomar: I can't think of anything. We covered everything, I mean, all the help, all the people that are going to continue on. I think you got that pretty much down. So I can't think of anything else, honey.

[00:54:26]

Anna Hamilton: Good. Thanks.

[00:54:27]

Barbara Pomar: All of our children have worked here at one time or another, busing tables. Just one of them stayed, though.

[00:54:34]

Anna Hamilton: Which one?

[00:54:36]

Barbara Pomar: We're proud of all of them. John.

[00:54:38]

Anna Hamilton: Oh, okay, yeah.

[00:54:39]

Barbara Pomar: The one who will be taking over for us.

[00:54:42]

Lonnie Pomar: Carrying it on.

[00:54:43]

Barbara Pomar: Yeah.

[00:54:44]

Anna Hamilton: Wow.

[00:54:45]

Barbara Pomar: Pretty amazing.

[00:54:46]

Anna Hamilton: Yeah. Family business.

[00:54:48]

Barbara Pomar: I'm proud of this man right here. That's all I'm going to say.

[00:54:53]

Anna Hamilton: Thank you all. I really appreciate your time. Thank you. And happy birthday.

[00:54:57]

Lonnie Pomar: Thank you. You're welcome.

[00:54:57]

Anna Hamilton: Get on with the rest of your celebration.

[00:54:59]

Lonnie Pomar: *[laughs]* We're good, honey.

[00:55:00]

Barbara Pomar: So I have to go make a carrot—

[End of interview]