

Mitchell Moore
Campbell's Bakery - Jackson, MS

Date: March 19, 2014
Location: Campbell's Bakery - Jackson, MS
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 1 hour 5 minutes
Project: Jackson, MS Oral History Trail

[Begin Mitchell Moore — Campbell's Bakery]

00:00:00

Rien Fertel: All right; this is Rien Fertel for the Southern Foodways Alliance. I'm in Jackson, Mississippi. It is March the 19th, [2014], a Wednesday morning, just after 10:00 a.m., and I'm at Campbell's Bakery with the owner, Mr. Mitchell Moore. And I'm going to have him introduce himself, please.

00:00:22

Mitchell Moore: Good morning. My name is Mitchell Moore. I was born January 17, 1973 and I'm the owner of Campbell's Bakery.

00:00:29

RF: Where were you born? Where are you from?

00:00:32

MM: In Jackson; I'm from Jackson originally. I lived here almost, you know, I don't even know how long, until I was in my twenties, until I got ready to go off to college. So I moved away in '94 and went down to [University of] Southern [Mississippi] and then on and on.

00:00:49

RF: What neighborhood in Jackson did you grow up in?

00:00:51

MM: Actually south of Jackson; I grew up in a—what at the time was not even a town and now it's called Byram and I went to Byram High School, which has now been completely razed to the ground and replaced by I think a Burger King and a Newk's, so such is life. But, you know, I grew up in Byram and went to Byram High School and went to Hines Community College in Raymond and so that's where I spent my growing up years.

00:01:18

RF: Were either of your parents, were any family members in any sort of restaurant business or cooking industry or business?

00:01:27

MM: No, not at all. My mom, she cooked every day of my life, and we had supper at the dinner table every night and it was something that she had made. It was never a box of anything or a mix of anything. And that's kind of where my love of cooking came from. I had an Easy Bake Oven when I was three years old. I was fascinated by it then. I'm fascinated by it now, so—but no. My dad is a pharmacist. My mom was a housekeeper or a house—she kept our house. She was—what's the word I'm looking for?

00:02:01

RF: She raised the family.

00:02:03

MM: Yeah; she raised the family and then when my brother went to college in '88, she went to college and went back to college to get her degree in nursing, which is what she had quit in order to raise the kids. And then she became a nurse and she did that for the next, whatever, fifteen years, so—.

00:02:19

RF: When she was cooking those dinners at home for the family did you ever work alongside her in the kitchen? Did she kind of incorporate you, you know, into helping?

00:02:28

MM: Yeah; yeah, very much. That was—if we had, you know—she would want us to— originally I think it was our way to get out of setting the table because if I was helping her with the cooking then she would say, “Hey, Montie come help set the table,” because I was in the kitchen. So I think I might have kind of weaseled my way in that way, but eventually if we had family over and all of the guys would be outside, you know, talking about football or whatever, and I'm all for football but I would rather be in the kitchen helping mom or I'd rather be at the grill grilling or, you know, wherever the cooking was being done that's where I wanted to be and not in the living room and not outside. I wanted to be cooking.

00:03:08

RF: And Montie that was your nickname?

00:03:10

MM: No; that's my brother.

00:03:10

RF: Oh, that's your brother; okay. And before we get into the history of Campbell's Bakery itself, it does predate you. It's an old bakery. Do you remember your earliest memories of this place? Did you ever come here as a family or as a kid or a teenager?

00:03:25

MM: I don't—my very first birthday cake came from here. We lived two streets down on Taylor Street and my mom—we were in the process of moving out to Byram, where I grew up, and so she wasn't able to cook a birthday cake because the kitchen was packed up and whatnot. So she walked down the street, ordered a cake from here, and so that was my first birthday cake. I don't have a memory of that obviously, but my memories of this place really came from my—probably my twenties and they aren't necessarily that pleasant. It wasn't—it was a teeny tiny little place back then and it wasn't my cup of tea as far as the food went and that type of thing. So not necessarily the greatest memories for me; I'm one of the few in Jackson though. Everybody else that comes in talks about, “Oh, I used to come here when I was a kid, walked down the street from school, bring in my nickel,” or whatever it is so, you know—.

00:04:25

RF: Well we'll touch on that when we kind of go through the years of what you know about the bakery. Do you know what kind of—I'm guessing it was your first birthday when you turned one and do you remember what kind of cake it was or—?

00:04:35

MM: No; my mom doesn't remember. I asked and she said, "Most likely it was just a white cake with vanilla icing." She said that it wasn't until I got a little bit older that I gravitated towards chocolate, which is now my kind of obsession in life, so—.

00:04:51

RF: Okay; so chocolate is your thing? All right; so and are there any pictures of you and that cake?

00:04:56

MM: Not that I know of. There's a picture of me with my Easy Bake Oven and I'm—you can see I'm very intent. I'm very focused on what I'm mixing into that little bowl or whatever, but and there probably is a picture of that cake but I'd have to ask my mom. She might could find something.

00:05:14

RF: So just—I didn't grow up in a house with an Easy Bake Oven. Do they actually bake, like they—?

00:05:20

MM: Oh yeah; of course. It at the time it was an old incandescent light bulb, which as you know could put off a ton of heat. I mean we all got burned as a kid trying to unscrew a hot light bulb, so and they really when you put it into a teeny tiny little box and you put a cake mix underneath it that's plenty heat to, you know, to cook that into a kind of a cupcake, so yeah, yeah, very much so.

00:05:46

RF: And you would use cake mixes or cupcake mixes that you bought from the store, Duncan Hines or whatever?

00:05:52

MM: Yeah; or they actually had some that came with the Easy Bake Over and then they had some that were nowadays we call it branded. Some were branded Easy Bake Oven mixes because they were really tiny little packages with tiny amounts of like one tablespoon of water, one teaspoon of oil and so you could make it in teeny tiny little bits.

00:06:12

RF: Huh. Do they still make them?

00:06:14

MM: Yeah; but I haven't—but they're no longer because of the safety they're no longer using the incandescent bulb, so I don't know what the actual heating element is and from what I've heard they don't cook nearly as good because they just don't have the heat that they used to, for safety reasons.

00:06:29

RF: Okay; and do you have children and when they're of the age do you want them to have one?

00:06:35

MM: Yeah; yeah I've got—I've got a daughter. She is twenty-two months and, yeah, I'd love for her to have an Easy Bake Oven, absolutely. Yeah; I'd love it.

00:06:45

RF: All right; I think that's great. All right; so how far back does this bakery go? What's the—do we have a kind of origin date, when was it founded?

00:06:53

MM: Yeah; March of 1962. Louis Campbell—L-o-u-i-s—Louis Campbell, he was a cook or a baker, I don't know, but he was in the Army and he apparently got out in '45. And right down the street is a McDade's Grocery Store; it used to be a Jitney Jungle back in the '40s. And so he got a job there as their baker, and so he was probably nineteen, twenty years old at the time and had just gotten out of the Army and, you know, that was his job. And so he got a job at a local grocery store doing that very thing. And he kept doing that from '45 until a few years later. Nobody knows exactly when but he left there and he opened up his own bakery down the sidewalk in that same shopping center.

00:07:50

And that did really well. And then in '62 for whatever reason he moved into this location. And the pizza ovens—we've got pizza ovens in the back because at the time he couldn't get, you know, any type of bakery oven and so there was what's called a Shakey's Pizza, which is now the Post Office right down the street, and that's where Shakey's Pizza was and they were closing or getting new ovens—nobody remembers, and so he bought their ovens and they moved them in and put them in place and they're now in the back and that's what we use to this day, so—.

00:08:29

RF: To bake everything?

00:08:30

MM: To bake everything; yeah. They're all baked in these ovens from the '50s, these pizza—these deck ovens from the '50s.

00:08:35

RF: Interesting; are they American made? Where—what is the brand name of—?

00:08:40

MM: Blodgett—B-l-o-d-g-e-t-t—is the name brand. I'm guessing if it was in the '50s and it was a deck oven it was made in America; yeah.

00:08:48

RF: Have you heard of other bakeries using pizza ovens to cook cakes, cookies, everything?

00:08:54

MM: No, no; I wouldn't do it if I—if they weren't already here and they weren't already in position and right now they're—the door that used to be on the back was one of the roll up type doors, like in a warehouse, and there's a loading dock in the back as well. But that has since been replaced with a regular door and the wall has been walled in so we couldn't get them out now if we wanted to. They are six-feet wide and five-feet deep and six-feet tall and so they're massive.

00:09:27

RF: And what do they mean for actual baking? Is it more difficult? Is it easier? Does it keep heat better? What does that mean for the process?

00:09:36

MM: It just means that it had to change. It's not better or worse necessarily; it's a little bit worse because we can't cook—in a regular oven you would stack pans very closely and you could probably fit ten, twenty pans in the oven, but we can only put two in side-by-side. Now we have multiple ovens so we can cook four and then I've got two on the other side so I can cook eight, but still eight is not twenty. And so, yeah; there's a practical problem there. Plus think of a normal cake, or what you know of a normal cake, you may know nothing, but everybody can kind of imagine the cake rises and then it produces what's called a crown. It crowns on the top and then you have to cut that crown off to make it flat and then you dump it out onto a rack and you cut it in half and then you ice in the middle and then you put icing all around it.

00:10:26

We can't do that. Our oven clearance is too small so the cake can't rise. I can't allow the cake to rise too much. Otherwise, the top will burn. And so what we do is I had to adjust all of

the formulas that I use so that they rise flat. They produce a different type of rise. And so we bake single layers of cake and then we take one layer ice it, and put another layer on top, but those two layers are baked separately just because of how the ovens work and the fact that we can't allow it to get too high. We can't bake anything too high in that oven, so—.

00:11:04

RF: How do you create those—so the cakes don't crown at all?

00:11:09

MM: They don't; no.

00:11:10

RF: How do you create that recipe? What does that add or subtract from the actual mix?

00:11:15

MM: The leavening. It's adjustments in leavening and really it was trial and error to try to figure out the exact adjustments that we had to make in order to get the cake to rise but to prevent it from over-baking and then continuing to rise in the middle. So yeah; it was just a—it was a long process of trial and error when we first bought the bakery.

00:11:42

RF: Yeah; that sounds tough. Do you know any other details of Louis Campbell's life?

00:11:46

MM: The only thing that I know is that he was married and one of his great-nieces came in here one day and she told me what his wife's name was. I have since forgotten it. And he sold the bakery in '82 and so he had it in this location he had it for twenty years and then of course it was in a different location before that. But in this location for twenty years and he created this tea cake, what we sell today, the same recipe, same ingredients, everything and he—but he only sold them once a year on Valentine's. He made these big red hearts and that was kind of—that is what everybody tells me about. That and then another product of his was a—have you see the movie *The Help*? There's a cake in there; they don't talk about it at all. It's just sitting cut on a counter and it has like six layers and it's a caramel cake with like six layers. He made those. That was his—that was another thing, only he did it in a loaf size. And but it was sliced very thin and then he had a big, big kettle, like literally you and I could fit into it size, in the back that he would make homemade caramel in and use that as his icing. And so the—you know, but everything that I know about him is involved in what he made. I don't know personal-wise, personal-life; I just know about products that customers have told me about, so—.

00:13:27

And a very, very sweet lady, she's probably in her nineties, she came in one time and she said that she used to come in in the '60s and get her daughters these—she called them Easter Bonnet Cakes. I had a hard time getting the description from her but apparently what it sounds like excuse me, is a little round cake that has been iced and that has a kind of ruffle around one—around the back edge of it so that it looks like an Easter bonnet. And then he would put like—he would decorate it with little flowers and whatnot and it would be on a silver or gold board. And you could buy those and they were really small so they were perfect for like—I think it was basically the size of a large cupcake these days, because she was saying it was just enough for

her daughter to eat, but kind of by herself. And so, you know, but that's—so it was all of these really old-fashioned super-cute things that he was making that people just gravitated towards.

00:14:34

You know, I mean that's the only reason that we're still going is because he created this place with these certain things that people have—I literally have somebody come in once a month and ask for those loaf caramel cakes.

00:14:49

RF: And you can make them?

00:14:50

MM: I can't, no, no; uh-uh. I don't know what he did to his cake. So, I know he didn't use cake mix. The gentleman that bought it after him started to use cake mix. But when he bought the bakery cake mix was not, you know, very good. It wasn't a thing that bakeries did. And so he was able to make a cake that he sliced super thin, but I can show you my cake and my cake we make—we bake it from scratch and we make it from scratch here in house and it has a different texture on the inside. And we cannot slice it thin; it just would crumble into bits if we did. So I don't know what cake he made that allowed him to slice it so thin that he could get six layers out of a single loaf. It amazes me, so I don't know. I'm—I've tried. I'm working on it, but, yeah, because I'd love to bring it back.

00:15:43

RF: But you do your own caramel cake?

00:15:44

MM: Well right; right. We do our own everything, so—. The buttercream that we use that's homemade buttercream; the cake that we have it's homemade cake. The caramel that we make that's homemade caramel, so yeah, we do our own everything and we do a caramel cake, but it's just not that multi-layered—.

00:16:00

RF: Okay; but you said the tea cake is the same recipe as his. Did he leave those recipes behind? Are they—they've been kind of—?

00:16:06

MM: Yes.

00:16:06

RF: Kind of transferred?

00:16:07

MM: Right.

00:16:08

RF: Owner to owner?

00:16:08

MM: We have—I have a recipe book and when I first got it I was very excited because it's very thick, but only the last eight pages are his. Everything else is kind of a mish-mash compilation throughout the years that people have put together. And some of it's literally just printed off the

internet, you know. It says *foodtv.com* or whatever and or *southernliving.com* and, but yeah. I've got handwritten—and it's—they're so difficult, his recipes to decipher, because he knew exactly what he was doing, so he would just write sugar—two pounds; shortening—eight pounds; butter—six pounds, you know, salt—four ounces. He would just write like that but then that's it. It's just a list of ingredients. There's no instructions. There's no mixing. There's no method. It's just here's my recipe for whatever. But it literally—it's just the ingredients and the amount. And then some of the ingredients like ammonia we don't use anymore. He had a granulated ammonia that they used back then that we don't use nowadays, so some of the things I couldn't even make if I wanted to, so—.

00:17:11

RF: What would he have been using granulated ammonia for?

00:17:14

MM: I've done a little research into it and I'm—I think it reacted with like the baking soda, baking powder, so I think it created something, you know. Think of putting ammonia and then you sprinkle the baking soda in and it makes the volcano, that type of thing. So I think that's what it—what that was used for. But I don't think that we're—I don't think they make it anymore for one, but I think they don't make it because I don't think that it's considered healthy to consume anymore, so yeah.

00:17:45

RF: Have you gone—besides the tea cakes have you been able to go back and recreate any of those recipes from those last eight pages?

00:17:52

MM: Yes; I recreated his coconut macaroons, which were not very good. They were—they kind of tasted like a bakery would have made them in the '50s, which—and that's not to put them down but tastes change as—throughout history and you can kind of when you taste it you can kind of think, “Yeah, I can imagine that this is what they would have made in the '50s for a coconut macaroon.” Nowadays you can even go into a kind of a bad bakery and their coconut macaroons are probably better than those just because they more closely match what our modern tastes want and are looking for. And then he's got a lemon cookie that I made as well but it's a lot like his tea cake, and we have found that if we just make a lemon icing and ice this plain tea cake it kind of matches that in flavor, without all the extra effort of making an entire new batch of dough. But other than those three, I've got some that I can't make any sense of. There's probably a couple that I just can't understand. There's one that calls for—it's called something like a Chocolate Roll Cake or something like that, so I assumed that it was some type of rolled cake but yet it doesn't bake up like a sponge cake that you can roll. It doesn't bake like that so I don't actually know what it was. I don't know—without knowing what the final product was and without having anything other than a list of ingredients it's really, really tough. But it's also fun.

00:19:25

It's kind of fun to try to figure it out and kind of piece those things back together. I dig that.

00:19:30

RF: I mean you're talking like to this guy almost through his recipes?

00:19:33

MM: Yeah; yeah, it's kind of like a half forensic baker and half historian. And I really dig that; that's my, you know, that's something that gets me—that's something that I'm interested in. I'm very interested in those old recipes and trying to recreate them and the puzzle aspect of it as well, yeah. It—I dig it.

00:19:59

RF: When did he pass away?

00:20:02

MM: In the '80s sometime. So, you know, in his—you know, if he was twenty in '45, then he was pretty up there. And I'm unsure of what he died of but—

00:20:18

RF: You don't know where he's buried?

00:20:20

MM: No; and I don't have a single photograph of him. And I've put out—I've got 6,000 people on our Facebook page and I've put out more than once a call for, "Does anyone have a picture of Mr. Campbell?" Including his relatives, his great-niece that came in here, and other people on the website that have said, "Oh, Mr. Campbell was my," you know, "my dad's best friend or Mr. Campbell was my grandfather's baker or Mr. Campbell and my dad used to hang out together." Whatever it is nobody can find a photograph of him. So it's very frustrating for me because I would love to put it up you know in a place of honor right up here in the bakery and have it framed forever and ever but I cannot find a single one. I've even hired my brother, literally paid

him to go and—because he used to be a paralegal so he's used to doing research. And I said, "I will pay you your hourly fee if you will find me a picture of Louis Campbell," and he came back and he said, "I can't find one. I've looked through the *Clarion Ledger*. I've looked through the newspaper archives. I just can't find anything." So—

00:21:27

RF: Bizarre, huh; do you know which storefront now used to hold the bakery in the old—?

00:21:32

MM: I don't know; it's changed so drastically since back then that I don't even think that storefront exists, that the whole thing has been redone, new shops, new walls, so yeah.

00:21:43

RF: So it was purchased in '82. Who was the—that gentleman's name?

00:21:49

MM: Franklin Aldridge; he went by Frank. And at the time you can kind of see this wall, this was the wall of the bakery. This—

00:21:59

RF: It was half the size of where we are?

00:22:01

MM: Half the size of where we are now. And then this was a little flower shop that made baskets and things like that. So, and this was actually their door that we have since closed in and

turned into a window. But yeah; this was a different store than this. And Frank Aldridge bought it in '82 and it really—the '80s were a bad time for Fondren. The Pix Capri Theatre down the sidewalk here was an adult theater at the time, and so this was not necessarily a good area. But all credit to Frank, man, he kept this joint going through some really rough times. How do you keep a family-friendly local neighborhood bakery existing literally 100-feet down the sidewalk from an adult theater? How does that happen? But he did it.

00:22:55

And so he had it for the next twenty years, '82 to 2002, and he kept it going and really, really all credit to him, Mr. Campbell did it during a different time when it was, you know, the area was different, more traffic whatnot. But the '80s in Fondren and the early '90s were a bad, bad time before this place really started to become revived and—or to get revived. And so Frank did a great job of just keeping it open and not letting it die.

00:23:29

RF: And I'm guessing he was seeing a lot of other businesses on this kind of strip close and shuttered storefronts?

00:23:34

MM: Yeah; right, oh yeah, yeah. The—yeah, you just can't imagine how—. I remember it, I remember coming down here, you know, and it was—this was a scary part of town in those days. And, you know, it was not a place that you came unless there was a store here that only had one thing that you had to get. Otherwise, everything was different, just bad. *[Laughs]*

00:24:06

RF: And so you didn't buy it from Mr. Aldridge but there was a series of owners or was there one owner in between you and him?

00:24:12

MM: No, a series of owners and it was kind of the down the drain, just slowly—each person that bought it from the person before knew less than the person before. They cleaned less than the person before, and they in fact—. So Frank sold it in 2002 to [NAME REDACTED FROM TRANSCRIPT] and when she came in, I have heard stories, and a guy actually came in here the other day who had helped clean up after Frank. Frank was a hoarder and so we now know what that looks like because of television, but back then you would come into the bakery and upfront you would see it and it would look like a bakery. But if you stepped behind that wall you would see stacked to the ceiling, which the ceiling in the back is higher than this, so stacked to the ceiling everything from tables and like chairs from a school so like desks, the old type—the old kind with the chair and the desk attached; those he had for whatever reason. He bought some and put them back there. And it's just piled all the way to the ceiling of stuff. And so [NAME REDACTED FROM TRANSCRIPT] had to hire a guy to get in here, excuse me, and they, you know, took care of it and cleaned it all out and got it back down to the walls. And so but [NAME REDACTED FROM TRANSCRIPT], she—the tea cakes have always been the business. Frank took the tea cakes from a once-a-year special thing to that's kind of what we make here is iced tea cakes. And—

00:25:49

RF: And just and he also made them individual and not the heart-shaped size and—?

00:25:54

MM: Yeah; he made different shapes as well. So and that really kind of started the ball rolling for these tea cakes because then people could get them at different times of the year. And so [NAME REDACTED FROM TRANSCRIPT] continued that and she worked really hard, but she worked a little too hard. There are theories in business that you can work—you've heard this before—you can work on your business or you can work in your business. She worked in her business and she worked a lot. She literally had a cot in the back. And she would make the tea cakes—because they're rolled by hand; you literally have a rolling pin and a ball of dough that you're rolling out trying to get them to the same somewhat consistent thickness and then you're cutting them by hand and you put that onto a tray and you bake that tray. Then that has to cool down. Then you make the icing. Then you have to ice each cookie by hand and then that has to dry for twenty-four hours. That's [*Laughs*] a long involved process.

00:26:50

So she would make them until midnight, 1:00, 2:00 in the morning; sleep on a cot. When she got up the next morning, I don't know what, 5:00, 6:00, 7:00, she would start making the tea cakes again and just, you know, she was making them in the back and she had a bell up here that people would ring whenever they came in so that she could come out front to help people. That's how much she was working in the business. But she had it for less than two years. And she sold it to Margaret Prine and her husband Robert. And Margaret and Robert had it for less than two years. And then they sold it to Sedrick and Melinda Lilly and they had it for less than two years, before I finally bought it.

00:27:33

RF: And it was during all these owners that you said that you came in and you didn't really like it.

00:27:37

MM: Right. Yeah; it was—at one point they were making—the Saints had a really good year one year.

00:27:44

RF: The New Orleans Saints?

00:27:44

MM: Yeah; yeah, the New Orleans Saints, you know, the Saints. [*Laughs*]

00:27:47

RF: Well, sometimes I forget that Jackson also roots for New Orleans.

00:27:50

MM: Exactly; who else are we going to root for? And so the Saints were having a great year; this would have been well, this was pre-Super Bowl. This was another season, maybe four seasons before that. They had—something happened. They had a good season and we were all kind of like, “Hey, what is that? The Saints—” you know, so—. And we'd root for them through good and through bad; that's not what it's about. But so whoever was here at the time was making fleur-de-lis cookies and they would ice them in gold and black. And so my mom came—sent me down here to get some of those iced cookies and I came in and I just left. It was so dirty.

I couldn't—I didn't want to eat anything that was here. Well, so the next day she said she was mad because I didn't get the cookies and I told her, "You don't want these cookies, Mom. I'm telling you; they are—that place is dirty. You don't want anything from there." And she said, "No, let's go by."

00:28:48

So we came by; it was 12:30. The place was locked up. Nobody was here. The lights were off. We don't know; was somebody back there? Did they—we don't know. But here it is in the middle of the day and their hours are posted on the wall and it said 7:00 a.m. to, you know, 4:00 p.m. but nobody is here. And the doors are locked. And so what, you know, so it was kind of like how can you run a business like that? And so that further cemented in my head that, "That place is for the dogs man; that is just no good." So yeah; those were my most recent memories of it.

00:29:26

RF: So when did you purchase the business?

00:29:31

MM: February of 2011, we bought the joint. And Robert Lewis who was Margaret's husband, who is Margaret's husband, when they sold the business he kept the lease on all of the equipment. And he leased it to the next owner, to Sedrick. And so when I came into—when I was approached actually to buy the business, Robert said, "I still own all of the equipment so if you want to buy the business let's form a business together and you and I can run it." And I said, "Yeah; that's fine," you know. And so because I can't afford to—I couldn't afford to buy the business and buy all of the equipment. And I'm a cash kind of guy so I don't want to have an ongoing lease for equipment. I don't lease anything. Everything that you see here we own. We

bought it outright so I didn't want to do that. So I would much rather have a business partner and plus Robert has got his MBA. He's more of a business kind of guy. You know, I come from the world of acting and I've cooked for the past twenty years, so I didn't know anything about that. I know restaurants. I know how restaurants work, but I don't know how QuickBooks works. I don't know how to, you know, do all of that. And so how to form an LLC; I would have just used whatever the online thing is to form it.

00:30:56

So Robert and I formed a business together and which actually has worked out really, really well.

00:31:03

RF: Did you know each other before? Were you—?

00:31:04

MM: Never met; never laid eyes on the guy. And but we had kind of this arranged marriage where we both wanted to be in the business and if that meant the other person had to be there then that's what it meant. And we've made it work. He's—we've got very, very different jobs, very delineated in what we do—what I do and what he does. They never cross so we meet together and we discuss the strategy and the future]but, yeah, it works out really well.

00:31:33

RF: So where were you—he found you it sounded like, right?

00:31:37

MM: Actually the landlord found me. The former owner was—and I hate to say this especially since this is for posterity, but the former owner was quite behind in the rent. And so the landlord decided, “Hey, it’s time to find somebody who can actually pay the rent.” And so they put out the word and at the time I was the pastry chef at the Mermaid Café in Madison and which is a great restaurant. And the desserts especially back then were fantastic.

00:32:07

RF: Well what kind of restaurant is it or was it? Has it—is it a high-end; is it—?

00:32:12

MM: No; it’s kind of—it’s a casual restaurant but it’s kind of like a New England fish house, but done in a Southern style. So their menu is very seafood-heavy but very Southern as well and really, really good food. It’s kind of a—what I like the most about it is the quality—for the quality of food I would actually expect to pay more, but yet they keep it so casual and that they charge less, their price point is lower. And it really works really well. That joint is hopping man; that—it’s packed. It’s really kind of a groovy local fish house, without it being just hey we sell fried catfish. If you’re in Mississippi and you’ve got a seafood place—quote-unquote *seafood place*—that’s what you expect: “Oh, they’re going to have fried catfish.” Well yeah; they do but they’ve got kind of their own fried catfish and then they also have all of this other stuff that isn’t fried and isn’t catfish so I really like it.

00:33:10

RF: And what kind of—how long were you there and what kinds of desserts were you doing?

00:33:13

MM: I was there from the beginning when, from when it opened, which was two years prior, so 2009. And we did a kind of a Cool Whip whipped cream pie with a homemade pecan shortbread crust. We did my cheesecake. I started wholesaling cheesecakes one year before the Mermaid opened. And at the time I was doing them out of my house but the owner of the Mermaid and I were old friends from way back. And he said, “Hey, if you’ll come make my desserts you can cook your cheesecakes as well.” Symbiotic; everybody wins. And I said, “Yeah.” So I was making my cheesecakes out of his kitchen. I had to be there at four o'clock in the morning to get everything made and get his kitchen cleaned and back to normal before the first guys came in, because that was our rule. As long as they don’t know that you were here and—then—and they don’t have to clean up after you then you can use the kitchen. I’ll pay the electric bill. You don’t even have to pay me anything for that, just keep it clean and make it as if you were never here. And I said, “Yeah; that’s great.”

00:34:21

So I did that for two years. I worked in his kitchen and made my cheesecakes, wholesaled them to local restaurants. I had about twenty-three restaurants so that was actually starting to pay my living at that time. And so I started to look, “Hey, where am I going to have my cheesecake store and my own version of a cheesecake shop?” And so Campbell’s became available and I jumped at it. And at—I mean the original idea being, “Oh, I’m going to sell my cheesecake here.” I was very wrong about that, but—

00:34:54

RF: Why; why—do you do the cheesecake?

00:34:56

MM: We do; yeah, we sell my cheesecake here. I no longer wholesale it. We're a retail bakery and I don't want to do the wholesale thing but, you know, but we do sell our cheesecake here. We sell it every day. It's fantastic still. But the customers tell you what you should sell. If you listen; if you listen to the customers they'll tell you what to sell. And so, you know, last week—well I can give you an average week because I just finished doing my pars last night. So on an average week I sell 200 chocolate chip cookies, and on an average week I sell 950 tea cakes. Those are the numbers that I'm talking. It's not—they're not anywhere close. Nothing else even compares.

00:35:43

RF: So you have to do tea cakes?

00:35:44

MM: I have to do tea cakes, tea cakes and petit fours. I sell 600 petit fours in an average week, you know, or over the past three weeks on average, that's what I've sold; so yeah, it's—. Those are the two items that I have to sell: tea cakes and petit fours.

00:35:58

RF: Can you—you described the icing of the tea cake and you called it a cookie. Can you describe the baked part? Is it a crunchy cookie? Is it soft? What is it?

00:36:08

MM: No; it's very tender. It is a slightly salty, not overly sweet, very buttery, very tender, almost reminiscent of a shortbread, cookie. So that's what the tea cake underneath is. The icing on top is a poured fondant. It's a very simple fondant. But it has a—just a touch of almond in it. And so the cookie has a touch of vanilla. The icing has just a hint of almond. But the cookie is a little salty, not overly sweet. The icing is overly sweet but that balances out really, really well, so—.

00:36:49

RF: Is it a Jackson thing, a Mississippi thing, or is it a Campbell's thing? Have you run across that recipe or similar pastry cookie anywhere else?

00:36:57

MM: No; it's—I think it's a Campbell's thing. Every bakery in town has their own version of our cookie. They are really bad. And I don't—and I joke with the other owners, because we're all friends, you know, and they say they don't—they have what they do and they don't want to do what we do, and we have what we do and we don't want to do what they do. But they have their version of an iced cookie but they are just not even in the same league, not even in the same ballpark as us. They're so night and day. Now they have products that we aren't in the same league. I'm not trying to say that we're the greatest at everything but those tea cakes just nothing else like them, nothing else in the town, nothing else that I've tasted anywhere. It's just, you know, it's fifty years-worth of working on a single recipe. And whatever tweaks he made over the past twenty years that, he did it for the first twenty years I mean, those really paid dividends. They are just—it's just—it's not like anything else.

00:38:03

RF: And who eats them? Who orders them?

00:38:05

MM: Everybody [*Laughs*]—

00:38:09

RF: Young, people who have been here since the '50s, or I mean since the '60s?

00:38:12

MM: Yeah; so the local universities they order them to give out to their students. Dentists order them to give out to their patients. Doctors order them or pharmacy, what are they called—pharmacy reps order them to give out to doctors. Ladies order them for birthdays, anniversaries, baby showers, wedding showers. Baby and wedding showers, those two are huge for us. People order them with their logo on it for their business because we can do logo cookies now. People order them for I mean—any holiday is kind of our—that's when we really shine because, you know, well we—I put on Facebook if I can remember the number, Valentine's Day, just that day, which was on a Friday, not including the Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday leading up to it, just that day we sold out by two o'clock and we sold 619 dozen.

00:39:15

RF: Whoa.

00:39:18

MM: Yeah.

00:39:18

RF: And do you—did you bring back the heart-shaped ones or do you do the heart-shaped ones?

00:39:22

MM: Yeah; we do the heart-shaped ones at Valentine's and then we do crosses and eggs and bunnies for Easter. We do flowers for Mother's Day, roses for Mother's Day, you know. We've got Zippity Doo Dah coming up, so we do pink crowns for them. That's their symbol is a pink crown. So every holiday we do different tea cakes for each one and then as the year goes on, you know, when it comes fall we do leaves and acorns and during Christmas we do snowflakes and snowmen and whatnot, so yeah. We always have it seasonal and, so yeah, but that's—those are the—that's what we do.

00:40:01

RF: Well how do you prepare for 600-plus dozen cookies? What do you—do you take on more staff? Do you work for—?

00:40:12

MM: Yeah; yeah we take on more staff weeks ahead. And we're able to cut and bake and freeze the cookie. So but it has to be cut and baked and frozen. We've tried baking it, which is very weird; I will tell you from a baker, from a pastry chef standpoint, that is not right.

00:40:32

RF: Baking before freezing.

00:40:33

MM: Baking before freezing, right; it's never done. You cut the dough, but then you freeze it in that form, and then you can take it out and bake it. We—I don't know what the difference is, although I think it's moisture content to be completely honest with you, but that cookie, once it's baked, I can freeze it and we wrap it up super-tight and we freeze it. If it's frozen for about a month and I take it out and thaw it and then ice it, I can tell no difference, no difference in taste, no difference in texture, and no difference in anything from one that was made three days ago versus one that was made and frozen. So, you know, so that's how we do it. We cut, bake, and freeze weeks leading up to it, four weeks leading up to it. We're always working a month ahead for any major holiday. So and we take on extra staff during Christmas and Valentine's. Those are our two kind of big areas.

00:41:30

RF: And the other pastry you mentioned the petit fours is it—are they traditional kind of what we recognize?

00:41:35

MM: Yeah; very old Southern, you know, product. It's a little square of white cake that's also enrobed in the same poured almond icing. And so and it traditionally has a tiny little rose bud on top of it. Some petit fours, it's really more of a European tradition, they slice it and they fill it with a fruit, so raspberry or lemon in the middle, and then they ice it. We don't do that. Nobody in town does that. Nobody in the South does that. So it's something we've gotten away from but that is even more traditional and a little bit older. But, you know, ours is a homemade white cake. We slice it by hand. We make the icing. We ice it. And that's the other big mover for us.

00:42:22

RF: Can you tell me a bit about your trajectory from—you said you were an actor originally to owning a bakery?

00:42:31

MM: Yeah; it's about a woman. Isn't it always about a woman? So, I was in Los Angeles and I was an actor and doing commercials. And met a girl, met a girl in Cincinnati at my best friend's wedding and it was his sister. And it was magic. And we knew—I knew that was the woman for me. And so I went back to Los Angeles and my day job at the time was I played poker for a living and I worked at Starbuck's. I know: the life of an actor. **[Aside:]** Hey there.

00:43:13

And—

00:43:13

RF: So you were a professional poker player; you were making money playing poker?

00:43:15

MM: Yeah.

00:43:16

RF: And you were going to Vegas I'm guessing on—?

00:43:17

MM: No; no they have card rooms in Los Angeles so I just headed south on the 405 and went to, you know, card rooms down there. So they had—gambling is illegal in California but poker is considered a game of skill so they have card rooms. And so yeah; and so that's what I did. I did that every day. And but I had for the insurance, I had a job at Starbucks. And so I went back to Jackson and I put in my notice at Starbucks. I told all of my friends that I was moving back to Mississippi, because the girl that I was going to marry lived in Memphis and so that's what I did. I moved back here. And she and I got married in '06 and I worked as a server, as a bartender, as, you know, I've always been in kind of the restaurant industry. And then in '07, I guess, I started making cheesecakes, not very many, you know, one here and there, two here and there, for friends, for bartender regulars, who would order it for their birthday or whatnot. And that's how I got started making cheesecakes.

00:44:27

And then it got to the point where I was making seven a week and I was doing no type of advertising. I'm still working at the bar. But I'm making seven cheesecakes a week, kind of

selling them on the side. And so I thought, “Hey, this might be you know something that I could do.” And so I started to actively work on the cheesecake business instead of being a bartender. And at the time I moved from bartender into restaurant management so I was managing that same restaurant and doing cheesecakes on the side. And so I got a couple of clients, local restaurants, and then I got a couple more and then that grew and that grew and I did that from '07 to '09.

00:45:13

Well, late '07 so really just for about a year I did that working out of my home. And at the time I only had probably three clients. And then Nick approached me about the Mermaid opening and I—so then I was able to really grow that business. And so I worked for him for two years and like I said, I thought this was going to be my entrance into, you know, my cheesecakes taking over the world, but the customers had different ideas.

00:45:42

RF: And just to get—what was Nick's—what is Nick's name, his last name?

00:45:46

MM: Oh, Nick Apostle; he owns Nick's, which is right down the hill, a fine dining restaurant. And then he owns the Mermaid Café which is in Madison, casual, New England type seafood house.

00:45:59

RF: So and the cheesecake recipe was it an old family recipe? Was it a riff on another recipe? Did you just trial and error?

00:46:04

MM: No; it was a riff on my mom's recipe. My mom took a—like I said, she's always cooked my entire life and she's amazing. She's incredible in the kitchen, the things that woman can do just will blow your mind. And but she always took kind of, you know, cooking classes here and there. And she took this cheesecake class one time at a local cooking class place called the Everyday Gourmet. And it was just fantastic. We loved that cheesecake, everybody in my family. And so that was always the one that I made whenever I had to make cheesecake. But it was a flavored cheesecake. It was an orange cheesecake with a sour cream icing and—or a sour cream glaze really. And so when I made cheesecake for the first time that's how I made it. And but people would then ask, "That was great but can you make one without the orange?" And I said, "Oh yeah; of course."

00:46:58

Well I couldn't because I had only ever made hers. And so I started kind of experimenting and I came up with a different method for making the cheesecake, which I think works better than the way that ninety-nine-percent of the recipes are out there. And then I adjusted my flavorings and I adjusted my amounts of things, adjusted the ratios, until I came up with what I thought was fantastic. And then I adjusted the baking method as well. And, but all of that combined make for a—just an amazing product, so—.

00:47:35

RF: And do you do plain and flavored cheesecakes here?

00:47:39

MM: Yes; we do probably about twenty different flavors. Yeah; we don't have all of that in stock every day but, yeah, we have about twenty different flavors all total.

00:47:46

RF: That customers can order and—?

00:47:48

MM: Right, exactly; yeah.

00:47:49

RF: Is there a most popular flavor?

00:47:51

MM: Banana pudding, banana pudding cheesecake. It actually won one of the top fifty menu items in the state, which I'm very, very proud of as well but, yeah, banana pudding cheesecake. It's—because we're in the South that's, you know, what Mississippi guy doesn't like banana pudding? And so you combine that with cheesecake; it's just—it's a match made in heaven.

00:48:13

RF: It sounds awesome. Does it still have that texture of banana pudding? Does it have Nilla Wafers?

00:48:18

MM: No; it's got—it is cheesecake, and when you taste it you're like, "Yeah, yeah that's cheesecake." But it's also banana pudding. It's all of that in together and so it's got a graham cracker crust but it has vanilla wafers around the edge, so yeah. Yeah; it's just my own kind of creation. *[Laughs]*

00:48:40

RF: So you've—just a few more questions. You've been here for three years now. What are your future plans? What is your five-year plan? What are you—if you want to talk about it; what do you see as happening, because you seem to be always moving? I think from what I've heard in the past hour.

00:48:58

MM: Right; and literally will be moving very soon. We have a food truck. So that's our next step. It is at the restorers right now. We bought a 1951 Ford Van—Vanette, which is kind of the size of a bread truck. And we're having that retrofitted and turned into a bakery food truck. Now, we won't be baking in the truck. We'll still be baking here. But it will then be our delivery vehicle and we can rent it out for parties and take it to all of the food truck things and park it right next to them and let them sell their burgers and grilled cheese and we'll be selling the dessert. And, so yeah, that's our next thing. And then after that we have definite plans. We don't—but we're going to let the food truck kind of help us decide what those plans are going to be, or do they involve opening up another bakery in a different location? That's a possibility.

00:50:01

More likely is that we would open a complimentary business in another location so, you know, we don't do a lunch here, you know, but we might open up something that—where we could offer lunch and that type of thing. So yeah; but we want to maintain the identity of Campbell's. It's a bakery. It's not a lunch counter, you know, so—.

00:50:28

RF: Is there a vibrant food truck community in Jackson and is there any problems? I know in other cities, where I'm from in New Orleans, there's problems with City Council regulations, fights with restaurants, brick and mortar places? Are you seeing that here if you want to talk about it?

00:50:46

MM: Yeah; yeah, we did. We did. However it has changed. So, a few years ago brick and mortar restaurants banded together: "Let's keep food trucks out. We don't want the competition. They're, you know, it's not fair. They don't have to spend all the money that we spent." Blah, blah, blah, you know the whole story. If it's—if you're having that same problem in your town you've heard all of the arguments.

00:51:09

Somehow, I don't know who did it and I don't know how it happened, but that changed. Something on the City Council changed and so they now allowed food trucks, and in a year we've gone from one to four. So it's definitely growing. And well, one to three and ours will be fourth. It's coming online in about a month so, you know, we're about a month away from having four food trucks in town. And that's kind of the trajectory that it looks like it's going to take. Give us three more years and we'll probably have twelve maybe more and so, yeah, we

want to be a part of that, you know. That's where my interests lie is in getting our product out to more people. If a food trucks helps me to do that then I am all for it.

00:52:02

RF: What are you calling the food truck?

00:52:03

MM: The Campbell's Careavan—it's C-a-r-e-a-v-a-n, Careavan because it has a—I have ulterior motives. We donate a lot. We donate because we bake from scratch; some of our goods they don't—most of our stuff doesn't last more than a day. Some of it lasts for a couple of days but nothing lasts beyond that. so when it gets to be a couple of days old we freeze it and then at the end of the week we might have you know hundreds of dollars-worth of baked goods that we then donate. We donate to the local Homeless Shelter. We donate to Grace House for Kids. We donate to Salvation Army. We donate to the Community Stew Pot. We donate to, you know, twenty different places that will accept our goods.

00:52:50

And so but with the Careavan we'll be able to take it to them and so that's what I really want to do. Every Saturday or honestly we'll probably end up doing it every other Saturday, because we are wanting to rent the truck out, so any Saturday that we don't have it rented we're going to load it up with our goods, take it to the Salvation Army, and literally just pass out free goodies to people, you know. So that's where my interests lie as much as in having a really good business I am as much interested in being a part of the community and, you know, being a conscientious business owner that people can look to and say, "Oh, yeah, that's how you're supposed to do it." You're not supposed to be a greedy, you know, kind of guy who doesn't help anybody. That—so I just want to pass out free goodies to kids, so—.

00:53:42

RF: Where does that come from that desire to do that?

00:53:45

MM: I'm a Christian. My, you know, my wife and I use this as our kind of mission. Now we don't say, "Have a cookie. Can I tell you about Jesus," you know. We don't do any of that. We're more into the way of saying, you know, this area needs—we believe this area needs the influence of good, honest, loving people. This area is filled with homeless people. This area is filled with a huge diversity of—well it's like a microcosm of any big city, right here in Fondren. Not in Jackson per se, just in Fondren; that doesn't exist outside of Fondren, that diversity. And so we wanted to bring that what we consider to be a great influence to this area and to say, you know, we've got some crosses on the wall. We love on all of our customers. We give away a ton of goods to the local community. We donate everything from gift cards to cakes to, you know, anything else, to all of the different, you know, people that come to us looking for help, looking for donations. We try to donate as much as we can, you know. But all of that comes from our background and our—I don't like the word *religion* but, you know, our belief system, so—

00:55:14

RF: Yeah; and speaking about Fondren, you've—over the past three years, you know, just knowing the little I know about this city and reading about this area of Jackson I know this neighborhood has seen a lot of rejuvenation or gentrification whatever you want to term it, how would you describe it and what you have seen from the ground over the past three years?

00:55:40

MM: Both; you know, rejuvenation, gentrification. Those are—that has happened. Some is good; some is bad. But I think that's how anything is. You can't have, you know, you can't have new businesses come to the area which then need more parking, which then might end up—now this hasn't happened but as an example, which then might end up taking away three or four homes for parking structures, that's bad for those people. I understand that. But there's also a greater good to be served by kind of rejuvenating the area. And so yeah; that's what we've seen. We've seen the mixture that any growing kind of city deals with especially growing inner-cities. That's a really—it's a real balancing act that I don't know that anybody has figured out. I can't point to Austin and I can't point to Atlanta and I can't point to anyplace really that has it figured out that has said, this is how you revive an inner-city and yet keep everybody happy and yet serve all of your—it's just, you know, we're dealing with that same thing. But I—maybe it's because I'm a business owner, I'm always going to lean towards maybe rejuvenation is better at the cost of whatever that costs, you know. It's a tough balancing act, so—.

00:57:08

RF: Yeah; well, what is the—the bakery's role in that?

00:57:13

MM: We are here to bring back traditions. We are here to revive tradition. We are the people that come in here and that say, "I've gotten every birthday cake I've ever had from this bakery, even when I was in college my mom would come here and then when I would come here she would have a birthday cake from here." Or the eighty year-old women that say, "I can remember Mr. Campbell in the other location and he used to sell these certain whatever." And, you know,

that type of tradition is going away. And that bothers me, so I want to save that in our little corner. And so that means that every Friday, when the kids get off from school, we fill up and that's what I love. They're creating that tradition as well.

00:58:12

Now I'm not trying to make it about us and about Campbell's, you know. If you every Christmas you make gingerbread cookies at your house with your mom that's a tradition. That's what I want. I want those traditions to remain or to be revived. And so that's our role is to help revive those traditions.

00:58:30

Now take it one step beyond: what would that cause? What happens with that? Once you've revived those traditions or even created new traditions with your family you are then able to—that brings your family closer together. That—and then if you're a part of this community and you share in that tradition with other people that now has brought that community a little bit closer together. And so the people that come here and get their cookies and then they all go to the park down the street and their kids all play while they have the Campbell's cookies out on the picnic table, that's, you know, that all happened because there's a place that they can walk to that's close enough that they can get stuff, that then they can take to the park and open up their boxes and have their cookies.

00:59:17

So, it's that to me it's a ripple effect that, you know, it starts here, ripples out into the greater community and then into the city hopefully, that obviously takes longer, but that's the essence of a ripple, so—.

00:59:33

RF: I think that's beautifully said. Just one more question or just kind of narrowing the focus even more, what do you think is so important or vital or however we want to phrase it about baked goods? Why are baked goods important to either maybe in a community or what place does have a bakery have in a community or just a cookie in someone's hand, a kid's hand? Like why are sweet baked things I think important to humans, really?

01:00:00

MM: Sure; sure. I am almost positive that if you were to ask a biologist this there is something that they can explain that happens chemically with the brain, with something sweet, and how that does whatever. And so that's kind of my—that's my guess is that there is something, intangible as it may be, but there is something about being able to go through your day, your drinking water, or and I guess these days we have soda, but, you know, to have that one thing that is—first of all it has taken time. A sandwich doesn't take time. A steak really doesn't take time; it takes you know eight minutes depending on how you're going to cook it.

01:01:12

You know back in the—in older cultures the things that they ate didn't take time. Baking takes time. There's an investment. There's an investment of energy and usually love and I don't mean that in our version but I'm really thinking about 1800s, you know. There's an investment of time and energy and love that you're putting into whatever it is that you're making whether it's for hamantashen for Purim, which just came, or, you know, any culture that has their pierogis, their, you know, all of these different things throughout all different cultures it—there's an investment of time into that product, whatever that product may be.

01:01:56

And so that product means a little bit more than the sandwich that they're eating for lunch or even in the pasta, although in Italian culture I would argue that pasta probably takes that same, you know, fills that same area because that is what they spend their time on. They make it from scratch. They roll it out. They cut it. They then boil it. They then mix it with the sauce. Then they eat it. That takes that same thing. It's whatever in the culture that takes an investment of time and energy to create that you then gain joy from consuming and I think in most cultures that's baked goods, you know, not all cultures obviously but in most cultures that takes the form of a baked good.

01:02:43

And that's something that when you take that cookie and you eat it maybe you're not thinking about the fact that it took time but I think you can see the difference if you imagine tasting and just do a thought experiment. Imagine opening up a box of Chips Ahoy and eating that cookie and it tastes kind of, you know, exactly how it tastes and it might even be something that you love, like Oreos. You love Oreos. But then you taste something from your local bakery. It tastes totally different, but there's something about that local baked good, I can't even explain it, but it means more just because you know without a doubt that it took time. Somebody put effort into it; it didn't come off a machine. It was made by hand.

01:03:31

You know, and I think the made-by-hand nature of it also helps. If you look at knives, you know, there are guys out there that are creating these beautiful works of art that were made by hand. And you can look at it and really appreciate it versus your, you know, everyday pocket knife. You look at that and you say, "Yeah, it looks like a knife." But you don't have—you don't look at it and say that is beautiful. But you can do that with certain baked goods. You can do that

with handmade items. So I don't know; I—it's something I haven't thought about it but something that I really like thinking about now that you've asked.

01:04:08

RF: Well, I'm glad I asked because I think your response was wonderful and totally well-said, so I want to thank you.

01:04:13

MM: Yeah; yeah, of course.

01:04:15

RF: This was great; thank you.

01:04:16

MM: No problem.

01:04:18

[End Mitchell Moore — Campbell's Bakery]