



Rosie Hawkins

Southern Sweets & More

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Interviewer: Sarah I. Rodriguez

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Sarah Rodriguez: This is Sarah Rodriguez with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is June 22nd, 2023. I am here in Oxford, Mississippi. Can you introduce yourself for the recorder?

Rosie Hawkins: Good evening. I'm Rosie Hawkins. Originally from Vardaman, Mississippi.

Sarah Rodriguez: When were you born?

Rosie Hawkins: Where was I born?

Sarah Rodriguez: When and where.

Rosie Hawkins: I was born in Yalobusha County, September 1st, 1949.

Sarah Rodriguez: Nice. And did you grow up in that area as well?

Rosie Hawkins: I went to school at Panola County.

Sarah Rodriguez: Okay. And who was in your family that you grew up around?

Rosie Hawkins: I got seven brothers and one sister. So we all grew up together.

Sarah Rodriguez: Where are you in the line?

Rosie Hawkins: I'm the oldest.

Sarah Rodriguez: You're the oldest?

Rosie Hawkins: Mhmm. One of my brothers is a professional artist.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, nice. Wow. And what did your parents do for work?

Rosie Hawkins: They was sharecroppers. Yeah, they were sharecroppers.

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We growed up and then we moved to Calhoun County. And then out there, we still worked, you know, with sweet potatoes, instead of cotton and stuff. And my brother went to art school in Michigan. He—he's a professional artist. And my sisters, they were just factory workers.

Sarah Rodriguez: In that area as well, in Yalobusha County? Or in Calhoun County?

Rosie Hawkins: Well, really—like over in Ecu, Chickasaw County. They worked at Franklin Manufacturing Company and different places like that.

Sarah Rodriguez: What were you like as a child? What kind of stuff were you interested in?

Rosie Hawkins: Cooking.

Sarah Rodriguez: You were into cookin'?

Rosie Hawkins: I cooked my first cake, I was six. I had to stand up in a chair, because I was short and fat. I had to stand up in a chair. Mama wasn't there. And I cooked a cake. And I made ice cream. I could do anything. Just—find what to put in it.

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Sarah Rodriguez: Do you remember what kind of cake?

Rosie Hawkins: A vanilla. Usually vanilla.

Sarah Rodriguez: Classic.

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm. Didn't put no icing. Just made a pretty cake. And when mama come in from the field, everybody ate it.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh yeah?

Rosie Hawkins: Uh-huh. I could cook at six. But I couldn't—I was so small I couldn't cut meat. You know how people used to have that old-fashioned ham and stuff? I never could cut that. But I could cook anything I want to cook.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's awesome. And what was food like kind of broadly in your home? What did y'all eat? Who was makin the food?

Rosie Hawkins: Like potatoes, and peas. Back then, you had a lot of peas, so we had a lot of dried peas. You know, they'd put it in a container and seal 'em up for the winter. And corn. I had learned to do all that. So.

Sarah Rodriguez: You learned to make all that?

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm.

Sarah Rodriguez: Who taught you how to cook?

Rosie Hawkins: Nobody! I watched people.

Sarah Rodriguez: Okay!

Rosie Hawkins: I can pick it up just from that.

Sarah Rodriguez: Who were you watching, in your family?

Rosie Hawkins: Mostly my mom. I'd usually watch her. Then I just said—well, me and my brother, we'd always—I'm two years older than him. I said, "We gonna try somethin different today."

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And we'd get in there and make it. She didn't care. [laughs] Cause she was gone. So we'd get in there and make ice cream, and make that cake. Then I said, "Well, I seen Mama make a pie." I said, "I believe I can make that pie." Then I'd make that pie she made. And it's gone like that.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

Rosie Hawkins: And I kinda—when I married and left home, I didn't cook as much. But then I started back to cookin. And I got bit by a spider, twenty-six years ago, and I was confined to nothing.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, wow.

Rosie Hawkins: And when I got over that, I went back to cookin again, and I've been cookin ever since.

Sarah Rodriguez: When did you get married? What year?

Rosie Hawkins: I got married when I was eighteen. And that's been a long time, cause I'm seventy-three now. Got married when I was eighteen. I married a guy from Yazoo City.

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We had three kids, two boys and one girl. And my second son, he's a computer specialist. He's a supervisor with Toyota. And my daughter is a Hospice nurse. And my other son work in a furniture factory.

Sarah Rodriguez: Nice. And how was it raising them up? You said you didn't cook for a little while.

Rosie Hawkins: And my oldest son, he used to do air conditioners. You know how you do the units outside and stuff? That's what he did.

Sarah Rodriguez: Those like big boxes outside?

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm. So I went—I moved up north, to Michigan, and I said, “Well, I'm going to try something different.”

Sarah Rodriguez: Were you married, at that time?

Rosie Hawkins: Mm-mm. We done separated. We didn't stay married too long, And I went up there, and I learned how to work in a dry cleaner. I went through that training and learned everything—furs, and different stuff. I could learn anything. I learned that, so I made good money back then, even though it was a long time ago.

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And Mama said, “I don't want the kids brought up in the city.” So I brought em back to Mississippi, went back to work in a dry cleaners, and the farm, at the same time. I always had two jobs, til they got out of school. And then that's when I really got interested in cooking—bake sales, church bake sales, stuff like that. I always have done that. We have raised thousands of dollars in the church with my cookin. Plate lunches, and bake sales, and just whatever. And

everybody enjoyed it. And right now, I still get a lot of calls from churches about—fix stuff, and pies, and cakes, and stuff like that. But we—I just enjoy it. Mmhmm.

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you remember what year you went up to Michigan?

Rosie Hawkins: I went to Michigan in '73.

Sarah Rodriguez: What was that like, that change from Mississippi to Michigan?

Rosie Hawkins: It was kind of rough, but I liked it in Michigan, because I don't like hot weather.

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But it wasn't good on the kids, because I worked, they went to school, when they'd get out of school, they'd go to the—you know, like a YMCA young kid thing. And they wouldn't come home when they're supposed to, and then I had to go get them, so it really wasn't good for the kids.

Sarah Rodriguez: What part of Michigan did you go to?

Rosie Hawkins: Pontiac. Pontiac, Michigan. Yeah. And I had my nephew. I kept my nephew til my sister decided she wanted him back. So it just—always [sp] was a house with childrens. And when I got married, two of my brothers went with me, and they still act like I'm their mom instead of their sister. And one that got cancer, he really think I ought to be there for him. But cookin is easy. Anybody can do it. You just gotta have the taste for it. And to want to.

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Sarah Rodriguez: Did you teach any of your kids cooking?

Rosie Hawkins: My son. My daughter don't wanna cook.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, really?

Rosie Hawkins: But now she done start cooking a little bit. But my son cook about anything I cook. My middle son. My older son, he cooks on the grill. My baby son don't cook nothin.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh yeah?

Rosie Hawkins: Mm-mm. But it's—it's fun. It's fun.

Sarah Rodriguez: What was it like coming back down to Mississippi?

Rosie Hawkins: It was different. You know, I didn't really want to stay at first. And then I said, "Well, I've got to look out for my kids." So they come back, and got on the football teams and different stuff, and they was happy. So they was happy to be back. So I went to work, at Houston, and then I worked at the dry cleaners at night. So that was two jobs. Then I cooked on the weekend. Bake sales, and cakes, and different stuff on the weekend.

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Then when I quit workin so much, I cooked all the time.

Sarah Rodriguez: What church were you part of, or where did you move back to, when you came back down?

Rosie Hawkins: Vardaman, Mississippi. Went to Kyle's Chapel Church there in Vardaman, which was in walking distance, thereabout. And, kids was in the choir. I was in the choir. We all was in the choir. So it was good.

Sarah Rodriguez: How long did you go there?

Rosie Hawkins: I still go there.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, you still go there?

Rosie Hawkins: Uh-huh, yeah, I still go there. The kids don't, but I do. I still go there. My mom goes sometimes there.

Sarah Rodriguez: Mmhmm.

Rosie Hawkins: But it's good.

Sarah Rodriguez: Did you know, kind of growing up, what you wanted to do? What did you want to be when you grew up?

Rosie Hawkins: When I grew up, I wanted to make—I wanted to be a seamstress.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh yeah?

Rosie Hawkins: Yeah. And I did that.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's awesome.

Rosie Hawkins: I made my own coats. Dresses. My brothers' suits, because Mama couldn't buy suits, so I made them. Yeah.

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She bought me a sewing machine, paid ten dollars a month. I never will forget that. When I was about sixteen, she bought me a sewing machine. Ten dollars a month, and I made everything

everybody wore, near about, with that machine. But I just—I like a challenge. Yeah. If I see somebody do it, by watching them I can do it. Everything but crochet. I cannot crochet. [laughs]

Sarah Rodriguez: That's fair. [laughs]

Rosie Hawkins: I *cannot* crochet. Boy, I have tried; I cannot.

Sarah Rodriguez: Could you tell me a bit about the process of you getting back into cooking?

Rosie Hawkins: Back into cookin'?

Sarah Rodriguez: Mmhmm.

Rosie Hawkins: Well, I needed money. And I wasn't able to work like I was.

Sarah Rodriguez: This was after the spider bite?

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm. I said, "Well, I can go back to cookin'."

Sarah Rodriguez: Around what year was this, or how old were you?

Rosie Hawkins: '95, '96, in that area.

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Sarah Rodriguez: And up to then, you had just kept working in the factory and then the dry cleaning?

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm. Yeah. And I just got where I cooked more and more. And I said, "I ain't gonna cook no more." I quit for about a month or two, and then I needed more money, so

I went back to cookin again [laughs], you know. It was a challenge. And like I have—my grandkids, two of em graduated from Ole Miss. One graduated in three years, Tamara [sp]—

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

Rosie Hawkins: Asha Hoggins [sp]. She graduated in three years. And my grandson, he graduated and now he in medical school.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, wow. Where's he in medical school?

Rosie Hawkins: Maryland somewhere, back up that way.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

Rosie Hawkins: But we have cooked and helped pay that tuition, me and my daughter. We have cooked to help. But you know, we did whatever we had to do to make it, and cookin was what I knew. So that's what I done.

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Sarah Rodriguez: When you first started kind of back to cooking, who were you cooking for, what organizations were you cooking for, to support yourself?

Rosie Hawkins: Well, I cooked for restaurants. They called and "I want 100 fried pies." "I want 50 fried pies." I'd cook em, deliver 'em. Then, "I want chocolate pies" or caramel cakes. And I just cooked for em all the time. And when somebody else find out about it, then it just went on and on, and I had a lot of people to cook for.

Sarah Rodriguez: So people were kind of passing it around—

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm.

Sarah Rodriguez: —word to mouth.

Rosie Hawkins: I cooked for some people in Memphis for years, up until I changed phone numbers. I cooked their Thanksgiving dinners, their Christmas dinners.

Sarah Rodriguez: This was a family?

Rosie Hawkins: Uh-huh. They come picked it up. From Memphis. I'm trying to think of what his name. But anyway, for years, he—dinner for about thirty people, or forty people, at a time. I did it every year. And whenever he in town, he come by and see me.

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So it's fun. And I used to cook for—you know the Raglands? Louise Ragland? I cooked for her, stayed with her til she died, as a live-in sitter. But I still had my cookin. That was the agreement; I was gonna still have my cookin thing. Miss Mira Sim [sp], she was a school teacher here. You know her?

Sarah Rodriguez: Mm-mm.

Rosie Hawkins: She retired. She taught for fifty years. So I'd cook for her. Sarah Phillips [sp] and Mary Kressman [sp]. I mean, just different people I cooked for.

Sarah Rodriguez: In this area and kind of surrounding areas?

Rosie Hawkins: Yeah. And I delivered to Holly Springs, Grenada, and different places, cause I had people that come down there and order stuff. She said, "I want it but I can't get back." So I said, "Well, we'll deliver it down there. We gotta go anyway." So we'd take whatever she wanted down there.

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Which they want me to quit this market and come to their market. And I hadn't thought about that. But that's what they wanted me to do. But I still cook for two markets, this one and the one over in Mid-Town. I cook for both markets. But it's fun. I have—400 pies a week. Fried pies. Not counting my meat pies, but my fried pies. So. It's—

Sarah Rodriguez: Keeps you busy.

Rosie Hawkins: Yeah, it's fun. And I make em pretty fast, so they don't take me that long.

Sarah Rodriguez: And this is all in your home kitchen?

Rosie Hawkins: Yeah. I got what you call a cottage food license. We got a little old building, it's like—it's a kitchen but it's not in my house.

Sarah Rodriguez: It's like a separate building?

Rosie Hawkins: Uh-huh. We do that. And, it works out good.

Sarah Rodriguez: When did you get that license, and when did you get all that set up?

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Rosie Hawkins: We've been had that license about—I want to say six years, maybe.

Sarah Rodriguez: So before that, you were just—

Rosie Hawkins: Just cookin.

Sarah Rodriguez: Just cookin?

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm. Yeah. See, cookin like that, see, you always can have your bake sales. There ain't nothing they gonna do about that, so we just—you could have bake sales. But we wanted to do it right, so we got the cottage food license. I went to class, up in Hernando, and got the license, through Mississippi State.

Sarah Rodriguez: Does that allow you then to be able to cook more, and—?

Rosie Hawkins: No, it just make it legal, because we can put on our—cottage food.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right.

Rosie Hawkins: A lot of people—“Where was this cooked at? What did you—what did you cook it in?” All of that. It's on my thing, a cottage food.

Sarah Rodriguez: Nice.

Rosie Hawkins: So that'll solve a lotta questions.

Sarah Rodriguez: I'm sure.

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm.

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But some people just set up and cook, and then they—“I cooked it at home.” Well, see, then they got—“I don't know what you did, I don't know what you cooked it with,” and this and that.

Sarah Rodriguez: That makes sense.

Rosie Hawkins: So we had to put on the label what we put in it, and everything, on that label.

Sarah Rodriguez: When you were kind of getting back into cooking, how were you learning? Because it sounds like you cooked all kinds of stuff for people.

Rosie Hawkins: I did—do the whole meal. Everything.

Sarah Rodriguez: How did you learn the recipes?

Rosie Hawkins: It just come—they my recipes. In my own head. You know, there's some—I can be cooking something, and I say, “Hmm, this don't taste right. I believe it'll taste better if I add onion, bell pepper and this here,” or whatever, to make it taste right.

Sarah Rodriguez: So you're like experimenting with it?

Rosie Hawkins: No, I just know how I think it should taste. And most people agree with me. But I have never cooked anything for anybody and they brought it back to me. Never happened. But I just—cook by taste.

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I go to a restaurant, I never—I can tell you what's in every dish I taste. I don't know how, but I can. But it's just by taste. And I don't cook nothing that I don't taste, whether I like it—I don't eat squash. But when I cook squash, I'm gonna taste it so I can tell you I did taste it. I don't cook and sell nothing I don't taste.

Sarah Rodriguez: Where do you get the ideas for the things that you cook, especially things for the Market?

Rosie Hawkins: Well, me and Tammy, we talk about it. She don't never put in no good ideas about nothin. I said, well, we gonna come up with different cookies than what already out

there. So I get me some fruits and nuts and different stuff and put butter in it, and change the flavors up. Like if I make vanilla this time and it don't taste right, I try something else next time.

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I use nutmeg, cinnamon a lot. And I got one called craisins. And everybody like that one. When you come back, I'll give you some of 'em.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yes, ma'am.

Rosie Hawkins: The craisin is good. It's pecan and craisin and butter and vanilla. You know, flour, on like that. It's good. I eat that. But that's about the way I do it. I do breads—zucchini bread, blueberry bread, banana nut bread, sweet potato bread. Any kind of bread you want, I do that.

Sarah Rodriguez: Kind of going back some, were you learning anything related to cooking in school when you were growin up?

Rosie Hawkins: No. I took Home Economics. [laughs] Learned how to sew. That's what I wanted to do. I already could sew, so when I went to school, I did—I got exempt from all my tests, cause I already knew how to do it.

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And she said, "I can't believe it, but you—[indistinct] you don't have to take no test this time." I said, "Okay," and I didn't. And I sewed for the teachers, do decorated pillowcases and stuff. You know how people used to have all that little stuff, do all that. But I never took a test. I was always exempt. And didn't finish high school. I didn't. I never got a chance to, cause we had to

work in the field, and we didn't get a chance to go to school but half-time, you know. But I always could make a grade, because I was smart. But I didn't finish.

Sarah Rodriguez: When did you leave high school?

Rosie Hawkins: '68, I think it was. But I just—had to work. So we wasn't going to school or nothing, doing nothing, so Mama said, "Y'all, you ain't gotta go, cause you ain't goin enough to make a grade." So that's where I was.

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Sarah Rodriguez: About how old were you?

Rosie Hawkins: I was about 16, 17. Because I wasn't really where I should have been, because I didn't go to school enough to be—until I got up there and was—we did a lot of reading. I could catch up some. Yeah, but it was nine of us. And back then, where we lived at, the women, like Mama and them didn't work on the farm, so didn't nobody make a livin but Daddy. And then, when we got old enough, we had to go to work. But Mama didn't work. But it's—

Sarah Rodriguez: So your mom wasn't workin or—? Just your dad?

Rosie Hawkins: My dad. It was hard on her. You know, it's a hard life, tryin to take care of nine kids. That's a lot of children. A set of twins in there, and some of them were sickly. You know what I'm sayin? It was a lot to it. But it was good.

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Sarah Rodriguez: So that was her full-time work, was taking care of y'all?

Rosie Hawkins: Uh-huh. And then we moved to Calhoun County, and then she started working in the potato fields. Because that's not really hard. She worked in the potato fields. And then she was better off, then. But it's—it was a hard life. I ain't gonna tell you no story; it was hard. Not havin proper clothin and stuff, it was just rough. So we made it, but—I can't say it was easy. Because we had to take some jobs you didn't want. And wasn't makin much money, but we had to take what we had, and make the best out of it. So that's—that's the way I grew up, hard. But I just—I thought—when I learned to cook, I told my mama, I said, “One day, I'm gonna cook and make the money I need.”

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She just kinda smiled. But I do. Whatever I gotta pay, I get out there and work. Get out there and work.

Sarah Rodriguez: Mmhmm. How did you end up coming across the Oxford Community Market? How did you learn about it and get involved?

Rosie Hawkins: A friend of mine, Bridgette Gordon [sp], she told me about it. I said, “I don't wanna fool with nothin like that.” She said, “Give it a try.” So I cooked about 50 pies—25 peach, 25 apple, something like that. Then made some bread and cookies, took it, and I just sold every bit of it. She said, “I told you you'd sell it.” So the next week, I cooked a little bit more, and a little bit more. So we cooked, and every time, I sold it all. And so we just kept cookin more, and more.

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And said, “Come on and go to Holly Springs.” So, we filled out the paper. I got accepted, she didn’t, so that wasn’t too good. So we went up there. I think I took 450 pies. We sold every pie. Every cookie. Every loaf of bread. We made like eight or nine hundred dollars that Saturday. I couldn’t believe it. [laughs] And everybody at first—because I don’t go up on my prices—I said, “I know what it’s like not to have.” I said, “Everybody don’t have—” This lady, she rich, I know she rich, she said, “You need to go up to \$3 on your pies.” I said, “No. Can’t do that.” I said, “‘Cause while you got it, that lady there might not have it.” I said, “This lady got three or four kids, and all of them want somethin.” I said, “And if I got my price is \$2 on a cookie, and—she can’t buy \$8 worth of cookies.” You know what I’m saying? She gotta stretch her money. And there’s one lady, and then she do have to stretch her money, and I know this, and when she come, I always make her a deal.

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She got all them kids, and nobody work but her. So I think about everybody, not just me. Cause now I’m by myself, but I still look at the people that’s in the spot where I have been. And it’s hard. It was hard on me, and I know it’s hard on them. So I take everybody in consideration when I’m making my prices. And when I cook—like if you order a casserole, I give you enough where you can make sure you go around through your whole family and stuff like that. I make sure I give you your money worth. But a lot of people just think about themselves. Another lady told me, she said, “If I were you, I’d run my cookies up to two dollars and my pies up to three dollars.” I said, “No, mm-mm, I don’t do that.” Just don’t agree with it. But she come every week. [laughs]

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She don't agree with it but she come every week.

Sarah Rodriguez: What was it like, you having those kind of early experiences in the Market? Had you gone to farmers markets before?

Rosie Hawkins: No.

Sarah Rodriguez: No? This was your first time?

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm.

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you remember about when you got involved with the Oxford and Holly Springs markets?

Rosie Hawkins: It was about six to seven years ago. But when I went, everybody just accepted me in, and glad for me to be there. I'm easy to get along with. I'm not a hard person to get along with. But they did, they welcomed me in. And the chairman of that Hernando Market, he made sure I got a good spot. And he said, "I'm gonna help you get started." But then I got sick again with my legs, and I had to drop out, so I ain't got back in there yet. But that Market, there, you can make some money.

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Sarah Rodriguez: How long were you at the Hernando Market?

Rosie Hawkins: I was there for, what was it, one year. I was there for one year and then I got sick. But I didn't miss. And we made about \$700 every Saturday. That's pretty good. And like I told you, we made that money, help my grandkids go to school. It didn't bother me, they had to have help with their rent, and different stuff, so we made the money for it. My daughter

always work with the sick people, and I always cooked to pick up the slack. So that's what we did.

Sarah Rodriguez: I see your daughter, Miss Tammy, around with you at the Oxford Market.

Rosie Hawkins: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Does she help out with the Holly Springs one as well? Does she help—

Rosie Hawkins: She did. She—

Sarah Rodriguez: You said she didn't like to cook.

Rosie Hawkins: She don't. She do better, but she never did wanna cook. I mean—she can't cook. [laughs] She can do better now, cause she use the recipe. But for her just wantin to cook, mm-mm.

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Her husband do the cookin. She don't know what they havin for supper or nothin because he do the cookin. She works, and she come in, he got supper ready. Cause she work long hours. She used to work the Sanctuary over in Tupelo. She did 12-hour shifts over there, sometimes double shifts. So when she come in, he always be done cooked [sp], bathed the kids. But now, she try to cook pies. Not fried pie, but just regular pie. She say, "I want to cook this," she get her recipe, and she'll make it. And it look pretty good. But I ain't never could get her to just—make a fried pie, or muffins and stuff. She don't wanna do that.

Sarah Rodriguez: So you do the cooking for the Market and stuff?

Rosie Hawkins: Uh-huh. Yeah. I'll cook tonight on some stuff I gotta have for Friday. Then Friday I cook what I gotta have for Saturday. That's the way I do it.

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And I got one lady now, she order everything she eat from us. Ribs, chicken, meatloaf, hamburger steaks, pulled pork. You name it, that's what she order. A hundred and twenty, twenty five, thirty dollars a week; that's what she spend. That's a lot of money on stuff like that. And this week, she ordered three pies—two chess, a chocolate. And some other—I think a banana pudding, she ordered. Every week, she want delivery by 12:00.

Sarah Rodriguez: So you're still making food for people in addition to the Market?

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Rosie Hawkins: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: People just reach out to you?

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm. Yeah. Yeah, they just come from Houston, Grenada, different places. They'll come and get it, you know. All I gotta do is cook it.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's pretty good!

Rosie Hawkins: Yeah. Yeah, I should have put more into it before I got sick and all. I'd be better established. But—my legs still give me problems. Like I told Tammy, I can't give up, because that's it. If I give up, it's over. So I keep tryin.

Sarah Rodriguez: Are you still mostly cooking by yourself? Or do you get some help sometimes?

Rosie Hawkins: Nobody but Tammy. If she ain't got time to help me, I do it by myself. And she gotta work tonight, so she won't do anything. I'll go in and get a—and I cook for the Exchange Club.

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You know what I'm talkin about?

Sarah Rodriguez: I don't know. Where are they?

Rosie Hawkins: Lemme see. That's in Chickasaw County. It ain't called the Exchange Club. I don't know what y'all call it. I cook for here, too, sometimes. Inside [sp] the Farm Bureau Insurance office where they meet at. I cook for them sometimes, too. And we been cookin for them I think ten years.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm. Cook lunch for them. And we're up to about 35 to 40 peoples, every Friday. And I've got to have a different menu every week. That's a lot of thinkin! [laughs] But anyhow, I do that. And I make my own menu. I give them two—I give them three vegetables, and meat, and cornbread, and dessert, and tea. That's what I do. And they pay me one set fee every week.

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So that's the way we do it. We paid for my grandson's truck like that. We did. Used that money and bought him a truck when he went to college. And he was just happy with that. It wasn't no new truck; it was a used truck. He was just as happy if it was brand new. But we did, we bought

his truck. He moved everybody on campus, I think, cause I think he was about the only somebody that had one. [laughs]

Sarah Rodriguez: That's a good friend to have.

Rosie Hawkins: Yeah. But he did. He enjoyed it.

Sarah Rodriguez: And could you tell me about what it has been like to interact with people both at the Oxford Community Market and Holly Springs, and I guess Hernando too? What's it been like meeting with everyone, the vendors and the people who come and buy stuff?

Rosie Hawkins: It's good, because I don't meet no stranger. If you talkin to me, we all right; I'm gonna talk. And you know, I never have been a stranger. Nobody I couldn't talk to.

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I mean, this is as long as I can remember. My mom said I talked too much. She always tell me that. "Oh, you talk too much. Askin all them question." So, what I do, I just—if I say hello, and you got a smile, then a person will talk to you. Some people waitin on you to talk to them. They can't start a conversation but they waitin on you to say something. And that's the way it is. This one old lady come to the Market, she come every Tuesday. She come, and I give her stuff, you know. And she expects that. But she's nearly ninety, you know, and I give her stuff every Tuesday. Her and her two grandchildren. And she just be just as happy. Don't care what I give her, she be happy. She said it last them all the week. She ration it out where they have some every day. [indistinct]

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She do. Sometimes she'll bring me some eggs. Sometimes she'll bring me a bag of flour, bag of sugar. You know, tryin to pay me for—I said, “It’s fine if you ain’t got nothin. Just go on and get what you gonna get.” I give her stuff every week. Then Betsy say, “Is she bothering you?” I say, “No, she ain’t botherin me.” But, somebody gotta help people, sometimes. I mean, I ain’t got no money, but what I’m sayin, I still can help people. But, people just—they just take to—they accept me, the way I am. Outspoken. Tell you what I think. Ain’t gonna lie to you. Just straight out what it is, it is. That’s what my mom don’t like. “You just say anything.” I said, “Mama, what’s the use of me sitting here telling her something that I don’t believe?” I’m gonna tell you just like it is.

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She don’t like it. But I enjoy it. The Market, meeting the people, the friends. I got people that call me. You just, just we meet, and we exchange numbers; they call me. We talk a lot. So I enjoy it. But I never met a stranger.

Sarah Rodriguez: That makes sense.

Rosie Hawkins: Never meet a stranger.

Sarah Rodriguez: Could you tell me about what maybe some of the challenges have been doin work with the Market, or in your experience bakin, what are some challenges that you remember experiencing?

Rosie Hawkins: Only thing that really gets me is the labels. See, I don’t do the labels. Tammy do the labels. Cause I’m not good with computers. I’m not good at typing. See, she do the labels all the time. That’s the only thing that bother me is the labels.

Sarah Rodriguez: Does she make em at home?

Rosie Hawkins: Yeah, she make em at home. And they want you to have the label. In cottage foods, you *got* to have the labels.

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That's one of the rules. So she keep the labels goin. And sometimes it's a lot of work. When the printer is down, she hand-writes the labels. So she have a good job. I have a lot to do. I just cook. She said, "Mama, you cookin. Me and Tamara [sp]"—that's my granddaughter—"we'll get the labels." I said, "Okay." So that's what I do. And another challenge is people's—it's a couple of people don't like me, for what I do. And you know, like sometimes people sitting by me have sweet potato. "Will you bring me a bushel of sweet potato next week?" I say, "Yeah, I'll bring it." So next week, I take the sweet potato. They go turn it into—like with Mid-Town, they turn it into Miss Bost—"She sellin sweet potato." Miss Bost coming out there and she say, "I know you ain't, but he just told me you sellin sweet potatoes."

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I said, "No, somebody asked me to bring them a bushel of sweet potatoes, and I brought em." She said, "Okay." But every time they think I'm doin somethin, they run and turn it in. Never turn in nothing. It don't make sense. But that's another thing that bother me sometimes. And then when they do that, then they gonna make me tell em what I think about it. And that's just it. I say, "I don't like it. I don't do stuff like that." I said, "Because you didn't even ask me, was I selling sweet potatoes?" Instead of just run and telling her that I was. But then it's three or four

people that I bring sweet potatoes for. When they get through digging and you have them back on the market. “Can you bring me a box of fresh sweet potato?” “Yeah.” And I bring em.

Sarah Rodriguez: And that’s for people who specifically you've talked with about it?

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm. And I have done that for years.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right.

Rosie Hawkins: Because I used to meet em at the grocery store and different things, but if it fall [sp], well, I ain’t got time. I said, “Well, I’ll have it at the Market.”

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That’s how they end up at the Market.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right, so you just meet with them at the Market.

Rosie Hawkins: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Where do you get the sweet potatoes?

Rosie Hawkins: A friend of mine was a big-time farmer. Craig Williams [sp], and his brother, they got a big—like hundreds of acres of stuff. So that’s—it’s licensed and everything, where I get mine. Inspected and everything. But I worked with his daddy 20 years, so if I want some sweet potatoes, he let me have em. It just—the people you think wouldn't do that way is the one you have to watch for. Like Yokna Bottoms, you know who I’m talking about? And he can’t stand me. He never have.

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And I don’t understand why. I don’t know what it is we arguing about, and he always got

something to say about you. And he don't take time to speak to me any. So, I don't know. How would you like to do what I do? Huh?

Sarah Rodriguez: Sounds wild.

Rosie Hawkins: You don't think you want to do it?

Sarah Rodriguez: Cookin'?

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm.

Sarah Rodriguez: Ummm, I don't have the—I cook better than I bake. So that's more of where my skill is.

Rosie Hawkins: Okay, that'll be good. I bet you got recipes I don't have.

Sarah Rodriguez: Maybe. Maybe. I get em from my mom.

Rosie Hawkins: One time, they talkin about me proposing [sp] a cookbook. And I never did put it together. But I do have enough recipes to make a cookbook.

Sarah Rodriguez: So you could, if you wanted to.

Rosie Hawkins: Could. Yeah.

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Sarah Rodriguez: Could you tell me a bit about how you've seen this area change since you were a little girl? Whether that is just the communities around, your experience? Like what are some of the changes that you look around and see?

Rosie Hawkins: When we grew up, we was outside of Batesville [laughs]. They never did change. It was bad and tough. And it still is. So, where I'm at, in Calhoun County, is different.

Sarah Rodriguez: Different than Yalobusha, or—?

Rosie Hawkins: Different than Panola.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh.

Rosie Hawkins: Yeah. And Lafayette is different—hey!—Lafayette is different than Batesville. All of them are different than Batesville. Batesville always—Black folk weren't nothin. You know, that's just the best way to put it.

Sarah Rodriguez: They weren't welcome there?

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Rosie Hawkins: Mm-mm. They'd put up with you, but you wasn't treated right, wasn't talked to right. You know, I can remember that. But see, in Vardaman, it ain't like that. I hear some people down there are prejudiced, but what makes it different down there is that the kids go to school together, okay? Like I might have a little boy, and you have a little boy, and they get to be buddies. They grow up like that. See, that's the way Sean [sp] was. He went to school; when he come home, four of his friends come with him. And they graduated together, and they went off together. See, the daddy [sp] didn't like it. So they got a—we all voted to get the community center down there.

Sarah Rodriguez: In Vardaman?

Rosie Hawkins: Mmhmm. When they got it built, Black—it was white only. We couldn't go. Even though we had signed a petition and stuff to help get it up there, we couldn't go, for the simple reason we was Black.

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And my grandson, his buddy had a birthday party, and he invited Sean [sp], and the daddy said, “Well, he can't go.” He said, “You told me to invite my friends.” He said, “Well, he can't be your friend.” He said, “Why?” He said, “He Black.” He said, “What difference do it make?” So, they didn't—he didn't agree with that. And they friends now today. And his mama called and asked Tammy to drop Sean [sp] off. So Tammy took Sean [sp] to Michigan [indistinct]. She took him up there. And the daddy come in, he got mad, at the community center. He didn't say nothin to Tammy or nobody. He just was—you could tell he was angry. He had turned red. He was just angry. And that little boy said, “I don't understand. You told me to invite my friends. And I got two”—they don't call them Black—“two little brown friends that you don't want here.”

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You know that put a lot of pressure on that man trying to answer that. You think about that. I understood the man point of view, cause he got people he got lookin—his buddies and stuff lookin at him—accepting a Black, you know what I'm sayin. And the rule is, you don't accept no Blacks. But now it ain't like that. It's a little different now. And up here in Oxford, I like the way Oxford is. They try to help everybody. You got people that help you even if they don't know you. They still will reach out to try to help. And that makes a big difference. So I like it. And I enjoy everybody at the Market. Even Yokna Bottoms. [laughs] But I do, I enjoy people. And I enjoy what I do.

Sarah Rodriguez: What do you see as kind of where the Market and where your work is going? What do you see as the future of it?

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Rosie Hawkins: If I put an effort in there, I believe the Market gonna go good. I really do. Because everybody tryin and everybody workin together. And you know, like some people still got that stuck-up attitude, but you—the other people, they down to earth. You know, you could might be sellin the same thing—like this man told this guy Nick—you know Nick? He sells fried pie, used to. When I first started goin there, he got so mad, I come in there selling fried—he went off. I mean, he went slap off [sp].

Sarah Rodriguez: Because you were sellin fried pies, too?

Rosie Hawkins: Uh-huh. He kicked coolers, and kicked over buckets, and he just cut up. And this guy went over, this white guy, he say, “We can’t have that. Cause you ain’t the only one who cook a fried pie.” That’s what he told him. And he said, “I sell watermelon. This man here sell watermelon too, and we not kickin and scrabblin goin on.” Nick was mad. And then, he went to Batesville; he did the same thing.

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So I ain’t go back to Batesville. I told Tammy, “It ain’t workin for me.” He went to Hernando. He did the same thing. They talkin about puttin him in jail.

Sarah Rodriguez: This is the same guy that went to Batesville and—?

Rosie Hawkins: Mhmm. He was kickin and stompin and cooler flyin across the street. And the head of that thing went over there and told him, “You got a problem. And the best thing

for you to do is leave, if you can't cooperate and get along with everybody." And I haven't seen him in a while so I don't know where he at. But he was just like he was crazy. And after Nick—because I don't have to copy nothing—I said, "You got a problem. Now, you need to sit down and get yourself together. Because you know, you ain't gonna make it like this." And it's true. You ain't not gonna make it with attitude. And you gotta sell to everybody. Whether you're Black, white, Mexican, or whatever, you gotta accept em.

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We're all here. And it's not about yours. It's what God wanted. And that's the way it is. And I don't fuss about that. But I think the Market gonna do good. And if she [Betsy Chapman] keep pushin it like she is, she can be just as good as Mid-Town. She can. Only reason Mid-Town is good, cause they have—Miss Bost have a lot of vegetables, and peoples come to get the vegetables.

Sarah Rodriguez: Who's bringin the vegetables?

Rosie Hawkins: Miss Bost, the woman that heads that Market.

Sarah Rodriguez: I see.

Rosie Hawkins: She got a big farm, and she got every kind of cabbage, corn, tomatoes, cucumbers. Quite everything, she sell it. And see, people come in sellin the same thing. And she have so much, and she sells so much, because hers looks pretty good. So she usually sell the most.

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She make so much money she only work in the summertime. A lot of money. But she watch everything you do over there. You gotta have everything in order, your labels, and your area. If you come every week, you get your same spot every week. She really particular about that. And see, like with us, we come every week and don't miss no days, so we get free spots sometimes. We get free stuff. Cause we always there. Never cause no problems. She look at all that. But we do good. But cookin—it is something—it's all I ever wanted to do was cook and sew. And I don't even hardly sew no more. I've got a sewing machine for blue jeans. I got a sewing machine for just regular soft [sp] material. I got that.

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Sarah Rodriguez: You still sew?

Rosie Hawkins: Sometimes.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sometimes?

Rosie Hawkins: I do a lot of hems for people. But I have seen the time, like when I get home from work, sew to about 12:00 at night. Trying to finish it up.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's how you used to be?

Rosie Hawkins: Uh-huh. I made curtains, bedspreads, whatever. But it's—it's easy. And that's something nobody didn't have to teach me; I just—looked at it, figured I could do it. And if I needed a dress and didn't have no pattern, I could make it. Or a coat; I could make it. And my daughter was the best-dressed little girl in school. [laughs] Because I made everything she wore! [laughs] But it's good.

Sarah Rodriguez: I want to be respectful of your time. Do you have anything that I didn't ask about that you want to talk about? Any stories?

0:47:01

Rosie Hawkins: No, not really. But I'll tell anybody, if you got something you really like doing, just don't give up on it. Keep tryin. Even if you have to ask somebody about it, sometimes, they help you, just keep tryin. And once you get the hang of it, you can go all the way with it. You won't fail. Depend on the good lord to help you through it. And you'll get there. Cause sometimes that'd be all I had. Even as a child, after I got grown, having times I didn't have nothin to eat. You know what I'm sayin? But, I made it. Just keep tryin.

Sarah Rodriguez: Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

[End]