



Pamela Hill
Makeda's Cookies
Memphis, Tennessee

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Accession Number: BAK-017

Date: August 29, 2022

Location: Makeda's Cookies

Interviewer: Kelly Spivey

Transcription: Sharp Copy Transcription, LLC

Length: 1 hour, Twenty-six minutes

Project: Southern Baking

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Kelly Spivey: This is Kelly Spivey. I'm here with Pamela Hill at Makeda's in Memphis, Tennessee, and it is August 29th, 2022. Can you just tell me who you are and what you do?

Pamela Hill: I am Pamela Hill, and I am the owner-- co-owner, I guess you could say-- of Makeda's Homemade Butter Cookies. My husband and I are the owners. So what do I do? I bake cookies, I make pies, and I try to run a business. I pay bills and all of that kind of stuff. Talk to people about where we're going to sell the cookies, different projects that we get into like franchising. That's one of the things on the table.

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What else is on the table? Putting the cookies in the Kroger Warehouse is another thing that's on the table. Opening back up our flagship store on Airways is also on the table, and we're hoping to get that back open next month, thank God, 'cause we miss that money. And of course we miss the customers, too. But yeah, it's been a tragedy that caused us not to be there and it's so unfortunate, and that's very sad. We've been through a lot as far as that goes.

Kelly Spivey: Sounds like you have a very full table. [Laughter]

Pamela Hill: I do. I do. Yes, I do.

Kelly Spivey: Where were you born?

Pamela Hill: Right here in Memphis. Memphis, Tennessee, yeah, I was born and raised.

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We went through a lot. My mom and dad did the best they could. I guess there was a poverty situation. We lived in the projects, in the Foote Homes Projects. So they did, they best they could. And we were born and raised and went to school here in Memphis, and been here all my life, really. I really want to get away, move. I want to experience some other countries, some other cities. But this is where I've been living all of my life.

Kelly Spivey: And when were you born?

Pamela Hill: I was born in July 27th, 1959.

Kelly Spivey: And tell me a little bit about your parents. What are their names?

Pamela Hill: Well my mom name was Geraldine Heard and my dad's name was John Heard.

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I'm one of seven, seven siblings. I have four sisters and I had two brothers. One passed away a couple of years ago. So I'm next to the baby girl. I was jealous of my baby sister who came and took over that position. Yeah, we were real close and we still are close to my family. We celebrate holidays and each other's birthdays and stuff like that every year.

Kelly Spivey: And what'd your parents do?

Pamela Hill: Well, my mom was a maid. She was a housekeeper at the Hotel Peabody downtown. That was most of her time.

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And she worked there-- I think it was the Holiday Inn or-- anyway, she was a maid the whole time. And of course she was a mom and a grandmother. Those were important positions for her. And my dad was a-- at first he worked at Plough, which I'm not sure exactly what he did but he made a pretty good living. And he was in the Air Force before he married my mom and then he ended up being a bellhop, I guess you would call it. He used to ride the elevators for the hotel. He lost his job at Plough, and he ended up being a bellhop, so he would ride the elevators up and down.

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So they never really just made a lot of money. We were really poor.

Kelly Spivey: What was it like growing up in a house with that many siblings? [Laughter]

Pamela Hill: Well, you know what? We were very close, like I said. We fought a lot. We fought over who was gonna eat the certain piece of chicken. My sister loved the chicken breast, and she loved chicken livers and stuff, and I didn't like liver and so that's what we fought over. She was my youngest sister, so when we had chicken she wanted the breast. I would try to make sure she didn't get a breast because she would try to fight me, try make sure-- when we had liver she used to meddle me, "Ha, ha, ha, we got liver today. You don't like liver."

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So little stuff like that. [Laughter] But otherwise my mother used to dress us the same because we fought a lot, I guess because she took my place as the baby. But she used to dress us alike. But now we're all close. We're all grown, and everybody is like two years apart. All of us are two years apart. Everybody I think is pretty much successful, work jobs. My oldest sister and brothers-- three of my sisters have retired, but one of them has come back to work for me, so she works for me, the one that's two years older than me. She works for me. And then, my baby sister still works as an X-ray tech at Methodist Hospital.

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Then I have a sister who retired from nursing though she's gone back. She says she's part time, but I tell her, "Every time I talk to you you're at work. How are you part time?" And then, my other sister and brother who are twins, they live together, and they're retired.

Kelly Spivey: Did your parents cook a lot when you were growing up?

Pamela Hill: My mom did. Of course, she had to with all the kids. The main thing that she liked to cook was beans, which, pinto beans my favorite dish and my husband's favorite dish, as well. But she cooked a lot because she had to. And beans were about the cheapest thing you could get. So we ate a lot of beans and cornbread.

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And I learned to cook a lot of things from watching her 'cause I used to hang out in the kitchen with her. I used to clean chitlins. You know about chitlins?

Kelly Spivey: I do. [Laughter]

Pamela Hill: Oh, my gosh. She taught me how to clean chitlins, and I remember she would always have me in the kitchen cleanin' chitlins. And the rest of my sisters, they never learned because they were smart. I'm not gonna learn 'cause they'll have me cleanin' the chitlins. So I remember one day crying, saying, "Mom, why didn't you teach somebody else how to clean chitlins? You got me in here cleanin' all these chitlins!" And she said, "I like the way you clean 'em. You clean 'em real good." [Laughter] But I used to watch her. She cooked some really good spaghetti. Everything she cooked-- she was a really good cook.

Kelly Spivey: Did she do any baking?

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Pamela Hill: A little bit. Cornbread mostly. Then when it was our birthdays she would always bake cakes for us. But they were just box cakes and stuff like that. She didn't do much from scratch. But she did biscuits, everything pretty much came from the can or whatever, like the canned biscuits, box cakes. So that was pretty much all she did as far as baking.

Kelly Spivey: So how did you get involved in-- let me back up. [Laughter] Where'd you go to high school?

Pamela Hill: I went to Central High.

Kelly Spivey: Central.

Pamela Hill: The Central High School. And I was just a student. I was a bad kid, hung out, cut class. I'm sorry, I was not a great student.

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But I consider myself smart pretty much to the point where I was able to pass the test if I studied. So I was pretty much I guess an average student, but I regret that because I really think I could've been more educated had I really applied myself. But I hung out with the bad girls and stuff. But yeah, I graduated in 1977 from Central High, and I was just a student. The only thing I did participate in was the pep rallies and stuff like that.

Kelly Spivey: The fun stuff. [Laughter]

Pamela Hill: Yeah, the fun stuff.

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Because I knew I wanted to be a majorette, but everybody was asking-- because I have big legs-- they were, like, "You ought to go out for the majorette." I was, like, no, I didn't want to-- but in actuality I knew that my mom couldn't afford the stuff. They talk about how expensive it was. You had to buy the uniforms and stuff. And then, I was really shy, as well, so I didn't think I could get out there in front of everybody and be a majorette. But they used to really, really bug me about it, my friends and some of the other classmates, "Damn, you got big legs. You'd make a good majorette." But they knew I was shy. I was very shy. Still is a little bit, kinda shy.

Kelly Spivey: What'd you do after high school?

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Pamela Hill: Well, I guess like everybody else I wanted a job, so I ended up working at a barbecue place, Royal King Bar-B-Q. I worked there. Then my mom was still in the housekeeping, so she used to be in housekeeping at the IRS out here on West Democrat. So her cousin was the supervisor so as soon as I-- I was nineteen years old, and I begged my mom to get me on there 'cause you just want to make some money. You didn't care about entering a profession. So she got me on when I was nineteen. And so I worked there for I guess about seven or eight years in housekeeping with my mom. But my mom used to always encourage me, "You need to find something else. I'm old. This is all I got but you can do better than me."

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So a friend of mine who worked with us, Mary, Mary encouraged me-- well, I guess inspired me, because Mary was ten years older than me, and Mary decided she's gonna go to Sea Isle Vo-Tech and take up surgical tech. And I said, "Well, Mary, you're not gonna leave me here." So I went for the medical lab technician, and that's what I went for. I think that was, like, in [19]88. So I graduated from medical lab technician in 1988 when I graduated from Sea Isle Vo-Tech, and I worked at the Regional Med right down the street here-- what is it called-- used to be The MED.

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And I worked there from [19]88 to 2004 as a medical lab technician. And then, when I left there, I went into baking. My husband had thought of this. I had gotten married and had kids or whatever-- this was my second marriage. So I had two daughters by my first husband when I was at the IRS. I had two daughters by my first husband. And after I divorced him I married my second husband who I met at The MED. I met him at The MED when I became a MLT. I met him and we got married in [19]96. And I had a son by him, and so those are my three children, two daughters and a son.

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So my husband, who is eleven years younger than me, wanted to open up a business. He and his brother and my sister's husband, they were the three guys that got together to open up Makeda's. And Makeda was my niece. She had leukemia. She passed away in [19]97. So in 1999 was when they decided to open up a business, a cookie business, which was my husband's idea because at the Memphis City Schools they had these butter cookies that everybody loved. And so he was, like, "We could sell those cookies!" And so he was the most serious one. Everybody else, I don't think they were really serious. They just-- "Okay. Yeah, let's open up a business."

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Neither one of us knew anything about business as far as the taxes and all of this stuff that you have to endure. But my husband, he was really adamant about us opening up the business so his brother and my sister's husband-- he just dragged them along, I guess you would say, because

they didn't really want to do it. [Laughter] But after about two to three years they gave up. So that's when he decided he gonna make me quit my job at The MED and come out here and help him. And I was, like, "Are you crazy?! How are we gonna pay the bills?" He said, "Well, you're always payin' your tithes and takin' all the money to the church. Don't you have any faith?"

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I said, "Yeah, but my faith is in God. It's not in you and these cookies." [Laughter] That's what I told him, and I meant it. So anyway, I did pray about it. I did. 'Cause I asked God, "Okay. This is my husband--" and my husband and I argued every day almost about me going to The MED and he needin' me to work at Makeda's on Airways to help him bake these cookies. And so I asked God, I said, "God, if you want me to help him, show me a sign." [Laughter] You know how we say, "Show me a sign." And so one day I was sittin' in the corner over there on Airways because I had gotten into nursing school and everything. I was getting' ready to do anything but bake cookies. Un-unh. I gotta do somethin' else because we don't make no money.

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We gotta make some money. And of course, I was ten years older than him so I'm, like, okay. But anyway, that day that I asked God to show me a sign I was sittin' there doin' my nursing homework and these people started coming into Makeda's when it was time for me to go to work. 'Cause I was still an MLT and so I'm gettin' ready to go to work. And I'm talking about he had a little line, maybe about five people. Nothing big. But I was, like, oh, Lord. I guess that's

my sign that he really needs me. So when I got to work I called him. I'll never forget this. I called him and I said, "Baby, you all right?" [Laughter] 'Cause I'm thinkin' I've left him busy and I'm going on to work, and he hung up on me.

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He hung up the phone in my face. And I'm at work so I didn't want my coworkers to know my husband just hung up the phone in my face. So I'm still trying to pretend like I'm talkin' to him, "Yeah, baby. Okay. Well, I'm gonna talk to you . . ." [Laughter] So then I realized, okay, so he's really serious about me quitting my job. So I said, "Okay, babe. I'm gonna quit my job." I quit my job and that must've been the hardest thing for me to do 'cause I'd been workin' there for sixteen years and I used to think I was like a doctor, even though I was an MLT, 'cause I dressed the part. [phone ringing] I dressed up real nice and we wore lab coats.

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So I would come to work with my lab coat dressed real nice, thinking I'm so very important. 'Cause I was analyzing specimens, I'm looking in the microscope, I'm doing all kind of-- I'm thinking I'm so important, which I was. But I had to make a decision, so I quit my job. And my son who we had together was maybe seven or something like that. So it was around the holidays so every time a commercial would come on and they had the toys or whatever, "Mama, I want this. Mama, can I get . . .?" He was asking me for everything. And I was so sad. I was, like, "We ain't makin' no money. How am I gonna be able to buy you anything?"

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So I'm saying this to myself. "Okay, baby. Mama gonna try to get it for you." I'm just tellin' him that. And I told my husband, I said, "I gotta go back to work 'cause we ain't makin' no money and it's about to be Christmastime and I'm not going to be able to buy my son . . ." But anyway, I went back. I called my supervisor, I said, "I gotta come back to work. Can you hire me back?" She said, "Yeah." She said they loved me, and I'm so glad they did. I always did my best. I always gave it everything that I had. I loved doing what I was doing. And my son, I guess you would say he was so important, too, that I had to make sure I did everything for him.

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But I went back. At first it was, like, I need to come back right away 'cause it's almost Christmas and I gotta make some money to get this son some stuff. My husband really didn't fight me about it at that time because even though I had did what he wanted me to do, quit the job, he saw the struggle that we was going through. So he said, "Well, all right. If you want to go back." He really had a ego, ego trip, and he knew that his plan wasn't working as far as he felt that we could make it off of cookies. And so I went back, and I was there I guess maybe about a week, and I hated it.

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As much as I loved it, I hated it because I had asked God to show me, and he showed me and then it was like I went against what he showed me like it wasn't real and I went back. So he took

away that desire that I had to be there. That's what I would say. 'Cause I did, I loved being there. I loved what I did. But that desire wasn't there anymore, so I left. I told my supervisor, I said, "I can't stay. I'm gonna give you two weeks and I gotta go." So she and the little assistant supervisor, they're, like, "Okay, Pam." They were so glad to have me back, but they were saying-- 'cause I feel like I ran the lab 'cause they could leave, and they knew things were taken care of because even though there was a lot of us there I would draw blood, I would do whatever I needed to do.

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And I'm just kinda bragging on myself like this right now, but I know I did the best I could, and I loved it there. And they said, "Okay. So we're gonna just let you stay on out there and get your blessing." That's what they told me. I said, "Okay." So I worked two weeks and I left. And even though I have thought about it-- I had thought about it; I ain't thought about it in a long time-- but I had thought about going back 'cause I left, but I didn't just let my license expire. I retired it 'cause I was still holding on to that crutch. I was, like, okay, well, I'm gonna retire this license and if I need to bring it back out of retirement I can. But I never did.

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So I've been doing this-- and I'm just gonna tell you, we have had so many trials and tribulations. We have been through so much. It has been so hard. At first it was so hard. It was cryin' hard. I cried a lot. Not a whole lot 'cause if I had've kept cryin' then I wouldn't have been

able to think of what we gonna do, but I would cry a little bit. But my husband and I, we'd sit down, "Okay. So what do we need to do? What can we do to make more money?" So we would always get together, sit down, and say, "What can we do to make more money?" And then we would do the stuff like festivals and just hustling, going different places, just getting into different things where we could sell the cookies.

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And then I finally got into the Kroger. And once I got into Kroger it's like I could get in any store. But we got to the point where we couldn't really-- I guess I was wanting to just make plenty of money, but it takes work. So right now we have these machines and packaging machines and stuff that really help us to make that money. And now it's to the point that you can make all this money and you put all these cookies out here and so you gotta advertise to make sure people know they're there. And you can get the cookies all over the world if you want 'em, but who gonna do all the work? [Laughter]

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Kelly Spivey: What's your husband's name?

Pamela Hill: His name is Maurice.

Kelly Spivey: Okay. And can you kind of tell me a little bit more about the early days, getting it all together? I don't think that people really appreciate how hard it is to run a business, especially when you're just starting out.

Pamela Hill: They don't 'cause I've had people say we make it look so easy because they didn't know what we were really going through 'cause we was always smilin'. 'Cause sometimes my husband and I would be arguing about bills or whatever in the kitchen and as soon as a customer come in we're, like, "Hey, how're you doin'?" like we were just great. Then as soon as they'd leave we'd get back to the argument. [Laughter]

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But yeah, we've had to even file Chapter 13. That's how hard it's been. We had to file Chapter 13 because me thinkin' I know so much about business and I didn't know anything, I had opened up two more stores, two more cookie bakeries, one out there on Raleigh Lagrange and one in the Hickory Ridge Mall, because I'm, like, we gotta make some more money. I'm gonna open up some more of these cookie shops. So when I opened them up we had to hire people and then you gotta pay people. And so in order for you to keep these people working you gotta pay 'em and you gotta keep paying your sales taxes and all this kinda stuff. I wasn't paying no sales taxes, and it got down to the point where my husband, he was so upset with me.

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"You got us out here raggedy. I wanted you to help me. I didn't tell you to take over." I said, "Well, this is the only way I know to do it. We need to make some more money." And we had all these businesses. We were stressed out. And we had these employees we had to pay, these taxes we had to pay, employee tax and all this-- it seemed like it's so many doggone taxes you got to

pay. That's the hardest part about being in business. You gotta pay the sales tax, the employees' tax. I can't really just name them all right now 'cause I'm not the one-- I got a CPA that handles them. [Laughter] But it seems like it's so many different taxes that you have to pay other than just thinking that you're getting ready to open up, all the money that comes through the door is your money to do what you want to do.

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It's not. And that was the main thing that they told me with the sales taxes, "This is our money. That's not your money." So they called me one day and they told me that if I didn't pay them their money they're gonna come and shut me down. And, matter of fact, we had been in business-- now, it's gonna be twenty-three years that we've been in business on the 18th of September-- but we had been in business for fourteen years. And that's the reason why I remember it because that's what I told the lady when she said she was gonna shut us down. I said, "You can't do that! How you gonna shut me down? I been in business fourteen years." She said, "Baby, I don't care how long you been in business. I'm gonna put a lien on your bank account." I think I might've owed about nine thousand dollars or something, I believe was the figure. "And if you don't have that when that lien come to your account I'm coming to put the lock on your door."

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She said, “Only thing I can tell you to do is to file bankruptcy.” That next morning me and my husband went to the lawyer. [Laughter] We went and filed Chapter 13. And he was, like, “You got us in this mess. I told you, you opening up all these businesses . . .” He put it all on me. I said, “But babe, you asked me to come and help you. You asked me to quit my job and so that’s all I’m trying to do is help ‘cause we need to make more money.” But yeah, that was so hard because we wasn’t making-- now, I’m gonna tell you, thinking back if I had’ve just stayed on Airways and let that place make that money and listened to my husband we probably would’ve been all right.

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I’m the one want to open up all these stores ‘cause I’m thinking this the way I guess you could get rich or whatever ‘cause you gotta have more than one. You gotta have three or four. But no, it seems like one pretty much, especially when you’re struggling like we were, is the way to go. Just go on and do that one. But Jennifer Biggs had put us in *The Commercial Appeal* and, oh, we were making good money. Money was just rolling. So that’s why I thought really that it was time to open up more stores and really just boom, boom, boom because we were boom, boom, booming on Airways after she put us in *The Commercial Appeal*.

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And my husband made the comment, like, “Oh, you would’ve thought we was in Germantown all these folk comin’ in here and all.” So we were making good money for a while, and I decided

this was the time for us to branch out. Wrong. [Laughter] It was time for us to put that money in the bank and try to stay open. But yeah, that's where I messed up. And I tell him, but I guess he forgave me for it. But when we were out there when I opened up at Raleigh Lagrange-- he told me this later, 'cause he said, "Babe, you need to close that store. You need to close Raleigh Lagrange. You need to come on out of that mall." Anyway, I said, "Okay, babe. I'm gonna close Raleigh Lagrange." We were there for five years but I decided to close it and it was, like, before the five years was up we had started making money. We had started doing okay.

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But we were behind in them taxes, so we still needed to close and just try to regroup and start over because we were making pretty much better money than we were making on Airways. But we had to keep the employees, all of that added to it. So he tells me, he says, "Okay. Close down Raleigh Lagrange and then you can just work over here on Airways, and I'm gonna tell you we're gonna be making good money. We're gonna be making a thousand dollars a day on Airways." So I said, "Okay," and close Raleigh Lagrange. He said, "Baby, go on close it now." I said, "Baby, we got about three or four more months." It was something like that. "I'm not gonna close it. We got to use Raleigh Lagrange to pay the Raleigh Lagrange bills. We don't want to use Airways money to pay Raleigh Lagrange."

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But he wanted me to close it right away, now. But I didn't, I didn't close it. I rode that lease on out for the five years and then when I got over there with him on Airways I think he just wanted me in there with him. He said, "Babe, I'm so glad you decided to close Raleigh Lagrange because I was trying to figure out where I was gonna sleep 'cause I was gonna leave you." [Laughter] That's what he told me! I said, "You mean you were gonna leave me and I done quit my job to come help you?" He said, "Yeah, 'cause you was wearing me down." He was making all the cookie dough for Raleigh Lagrange, the mall, my daughter, who done went and opened up another cookie shop.

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I don't even want to tell you about that right now unless you ask me. She had one on Madison. So we had four cookie shops going on and this little man, my husband, was making all the cookie dough for all these businesses. He said, "You about to kill me." And then I used to be bragging, "My husband makes all the cookie dough." [Laughter] He said he was trying to figure out how he was gonna leave me and where he was gonna sleep. He said he was just gonna sleep over there on Airways. That's what he had thought about. So I done got tough with him. I said, "I wish I had've known that's what you were thinking about. I would've let you gone on and moved out." [Laughter] I was talkin' all mean and tough, 'cause I had quit my job to help him. But I was the one that messed up.

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I had all these taxes that we were behind on, and we had to file Chapter 13 to catch up on them taxes. But one thing good about that, we didn't stay under Chapter 13 the whole time. So what we did was my attorney-- we wanted to get away from under there so my attorney said, "Well, Pam, what you do is just stop paying it. When you stop paying it your bills going to start rolling in again. And so then when the bills started rolling and the IRS, the Department of Revenue came, we went out there and made little appointments. Two of them give us some terms. And they was saying I give about three or four thousand dollars a month they wanted us to pay, 'cause it done grew with the interest and everything.

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And he said, "You can pay this every month for three months . . ." I think it was. Three of four months; might've been four. "But you have to stay current on your sales [tax] as you're paying this 'cause if you default and you get behind on your sales again you're just gonna have to give us all this money at one time." So thank God we were able to stay current with our sales and then pay him every month, and finally we came away from under there. Well, we came away from under there and then we were able to pay. So we haven't been back through that anymore, thank God. But yeah, it's real hard out here in the business world because the main thing is is to have the right kind of employees.

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We've done been through some people that didn't want to work. That's the main thing, they don't want to do-- they'll say, "Well, you ain't paying me enough money." "Well, this is what we said we could pay you when you started." So we have been through some employees because at first we were paying minimum wage. We're doing better now on the pay scale but it's still hard. It's still hard. But I can say we didn't really start, I guess you could say, being successful as far as-- but I guess that still isn't being successful because you just borrowing money. You know how at first you couldn't even borrow money. They wouldn't even let you borrow money because you wasn't making enough and all of these kind of things.

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I'm gonna tell you, the pandemic is what really . . . [Laughter] People be looking at, 'oh, Makeda's got cookies in the grocery store and Makeda did--' when the pandemic hit, and the folks decided they gonna give you some PPP money to help pay your payroll that was the best thing that could've happened. And a lot of people got millions and thousands. I think we got, like, fifty-nine thousand dollars and that was supposed to pay the payroll for five or six months or something. But that really helped us because then it was like the cookies were selling really well at the grocery store. We didn't close. They say if you're a essential business you ain't got to close. I said, "Baby, we're not essential." And my husband said, "How come? We gotta pay bills. We're essential." [Laughter]

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So we didn't close. When a lot of businesses closed we didn't close. I went to the post office, and they had this big clear three-dollar shower curtain hanging up. I'm, like, "Where y'all get that shower curtain?" [Laughter] The guy said, "Family Dollar." Shoot, I was at Family Dollar that same day. When I left the post office I stopped at Family Dollar, got me two of them shower curtains, went over there on Airways and hung them shower curtains up and we opened. We still opened. And ended up the air went out. Oh, my God! But we had that PPP money, so we got us a six-thousand dollar-- [inaudible 0:42:01] we called them, we need a new air conditioning unit.

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Even though we didn't own the building over there on Airways the man didn't-- he said that was our responsibility. "I gave y'all the air conditioning in good working condition." I said, "But that's been twenty years ago!" So we didn't want to argue with him because we gotta keep moving and we got that PPP money. So we then used six-thousand dollars of the PPP money and got us a air conditioning unit. The PPP money was for the payroll either way it goes. So how do you separate it? Is it money that we made by hustling or is it PPP money? But our bank account was up to the point where we could go and get this air conditioning. So I can't even say that it was the PPP money.

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It was the money that we were allowed to make because the PPP money paid the payroll. That's what it was. But because they paid that payroll we were able to-- let me just get that straight for

the record-- yeah, we were able to get that air conditioning unit because for a couple of days when the air conditioning went out and I had these plastic shower curtains-- oh, you should've seen us back there! Sweat was just . . . But anyway, that was the time that Makeda really-- I guess you could say thank God, it was the help of the PPP money and the government, and we were able to get a loan from the Small Business, SBA. We were also able to get help from Pinnacle Bank with all of this.

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They financed all this equipment which I'm still paying for. This equipment-- I think it was, like, two-hundred-thousand dollars' worth of equipment that we got, packaging machine, big oven, cookie machines and all of this stuff. And I guess we're just, what, two years into it. It's a five-year loan so money's still coming out of my account for this equipment. So as far as have we made it yet, my thing is until you're debt free-- which I guess you never will be long as you owe taxes.

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But until we're debt free as far as paying for these machines and stuff, paying Pinnacle Bank back, then we're still just hardworking individuals trying to . . . [Laughter] It's not like somebody who's just maybe fixing hair or using their brain or whatever for a living and they're making money. We had to have equipment so equipment have to be paid for, you see. So we're still paying bills for the machines that we use to make the money. So it's just like the money is

rolling over. So we make the money, pay the bills, make the money, buy the supplies, make the money, pay on the equipment.

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So all the money that we're working hard for-- and then you got to pay the people that work for you, pay their taxes. So it's called an entrepreneurial spirit for anybody who wants to go in business. If you ain't got that spirit you're doomed. Don't do it. Don't start a business. That's what I would tell people, don't do it! [Laughter] Because, see, we're at the point where ain't no turning back. So it's just, like, do you keep going and do you keep on just making the money, paying the employees, paying the bills, paying for the equipment, working every day? Do you do that, or do you say forget this?

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File bankruptcy or something. And I'm fixing to go back to The MED, the Regional Medical, and pull my MLT license out of retirement and just wait on the check to come that they're gonna pay me that I go in and work forty hours for them. So that's the option I have. So what do you think I want to do? Go back to The MED and just pay what they think I'm worth? But see, right now we are in a position to franchise, so we're still climbing the ladder of success trying to get where we want to be as entrepreneurs. We have a company that's setting up our franchise agreements and all the paperwork that we're gonna need.

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And it'll probably be another month before that-- and I had to pay them. That was some thousands. I won't even say how much. That was a lot, 'cause I decided to pay them on terms so much-- six thousand and some dollars a month to get them to get me franchise ready. So once I get franchise ready I got several people that want to do the franchise and they got a little lump of money to drop in my bank. And once that starts to rolling like that-- see, we're still entrepreneurs. We still have a desire to do what we do, and we're still out here trying to think of what should we do next. And franchise is-- I'm following my husband. I'm letting him guide me.

0:49:00

So that's what he wants to do, franchise. And so we have did some things to the business to make it franchise ready, franchisable.

Kelly Spivey: Before y'all got the newer equipment did you have to make everything by hand?

Pamela Hill: Um-hm, everything. Not only make everything by hand, we still pretty much make everything by hand, but we got bigger mixers. Where we had twenty-quart mixers now we got eighty-quart mixers, so you can make more dough at one time. And my son still makes the dough. I still have my family in here pretty much to do most of the stuff because they need me. They need a job, especially my son. He got three babies. I can't even fire him for being late or whatever because I have to take care of my grandbabies.

0:50:03

So I have my sister. She does a lot. My daughter, Raven, is my manager. I have my nephew, who is Makeda's brother. He's a manager, too, and he does a lot of setting up every morning so we can stay in the bed if we need to. We don't have to just run up in here. That's our only-- I guess when you want to say, why you want to be an entrepreneur? You got to come to work and do every-- just like I gotta go to work. Well, as long as we have him we don't have to be up in here at seven. We just got here. I knew you was coming so I got here at one-thirty. [Laughter] So I was at home. But guess what I was doing.

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Washing and folding towels that we use in here. I left my aprons, some of them, in the dryer at home, so I was still working for the business even though I wasn't here. But I was still able to sit back, watch the news, eat a bowl of Cheerios or something. My husband, his birthday is Wednesday so I'm hoping we'll get a chance to get away, go out and eat or something. But entrepreneurship, how hard is it was the question. [Laughter] Girl, it's enough to make you want to cry sometime, but if you really want it-- I really want it for my babies, for my grandbabies. So I kinda put myself almost in the position where Jesus was.

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He said he gave his life for us. I feel like I'm giving my life up for my babies, my grandbabies especially, because I don't want them-- and folks say this is crazy because going through some stuff in life made me who I am so if I let them go through some stuff maybe they'll be like me.

[Laughter] But I want them to be better than me, but I want them to have more opportunities. They don't really just have to do what I do as far as bake cookies. I hope they don't just be workin' as hard as me. But I just want them to have that same kind of spirit, that desire to have your own. And I kinda got that from my husband, 'cause I wanted to be a nurse.

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Then I wanted to be a practitioner. But that practitioner had pretty much kind of had my own, 'cause I said I was gonna open up me a little clinic. I had all these things in my head. The MLT, then to be a nurse, then go to nurse practitioner. Now, I would've made it with the nursing, but I failed right there at the final exam. I failed nursing. And I'm not gonna really just talk about why I failed but I think it was my fault that I failed. So I failed but, like I said, I was at the final exam when I failed. So that was my journey. I was gonna be the nurse, the nurse practitioner, then I was gonna have my own little clinic.

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But I didn't get there. So my husband said-- he had told me when I was going to nursing school, "You're beating your head in the wall trying to be a nurse." "Well, yeah. That's what I want to be." But then, I guess I'm nursing cookies right now. [Laughter] I didn't make it.

Kelly Spivey: Well, I was gonna say I think feeding people is another way of showing people that you care for them.

Pamela Hill: Yeah, 'cause we do our best. We give it everything we got. Everything. And that's another thing that I would like to say to anybody that wants to be an entrepreneur. Do your best no matter what, how hard it is, how hard it gets. Just do your best and I think you'll be successful.

Kelly Spivey: And you said your kids are involved in the business. What are their names and how old are they?

0:55:00

Pamela Hill: Well, Raven, she's thirty-nine. Raven Winton, she's thirty-nine. She's been in the business as a manager probably a little over a year, but she's been in and out of the-- you know how they do. They want more money, but you don't have more to pay 'em so they go get a job. She's done been at the post office and everywhere. She's done had probably about five jobs or whatever. And I was able to pay her as much as the post office pays her so she's here now. They want to make that money but she's not as, I guess-- well, she might be dedicated like she was at the post office. She works hard, too. Then I have my son, Maurice Jr. He makes all the cookie dough. But by him having those three kids and a wife, he comes and he makes that, and that's pretty much all he does.

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He has been able to give us eight hours but right now while his wife is working that interferes with his time here. So we just work with him because when he's not here he's babysitting. And

that's why I say I might want to keep the babies and let him just put his whole eight in.

[Laughter] That's what I said. But I love my grandbabies so much, and when I see 'em I just-- you know, you just love to see 'em. Then probably a couple of hours later, okay, well let's go on and take them on home. They're whining and . . . [Laughter] But anyway, they're sweet. But my son, Maurice Jr., he's twenty-seven.

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So those are the only two of my children that work for me. Tamika, she's forty-three but she has her own cookie shop down the street on 2nd Street. Do you know about it? Called Butterific.

Kelly Spivey: Yes. Okay. Yes.

Pamela Hill: That's my daughter, too. So she's doing her own thing. And she does the cookies. She doesn't do the exact same thing that we do but she does what we do. But we have different recipes. But she used to do exactly what I did because I used to give her all the dough when she was on Madison. But when she wanted to do her own thing as Butterific and change the name she has different stuff. She's not like a franchise because a franchise she wouldn't be able to do all the stuff that she does.

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And she's not going to do what I say do, so we have a issue with that, but she's still my daughter and we still meet together at family functions, and she still call me Mama, Ma this and Ma that. But yeah, she used to be my marketing expert, so she worked with us for a while. And I think it

was because I didn't pay-- well, I wasn't able to pay her the money that she wanted. And she wanted the money, so she wanted to do her own thing, so that's what she's doin', her own thing. And of course I want her to do well. I just wish she was here with us. I do. I do.

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And maybe she'll come back. I don't know. She said that she might come back. Anyway, let her go on and stay on out there like these other people that want to be entrepreneurs. She's learning the hard way what it's all about, being an entrepreneur. So maybe she'll come back. And then, I have my nephew. He's a manager, too. He does very well. They say don't hire your family, and if I were to give advice to the people that listen, don't hire 'em. [Laughter] But you can always find some members of your family that might do good. But then they always got little issues that you deal with where you would probably fire a stranger. And like my son and them three babies, I can't fire him.

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But he's my family, he's my son, and he's my grandbabies' dad, and he do really well with the cookie dough. He does a good job. So I just deal with the good and the bad, you see.

Kelly Spivey: So where does the cookie dough recipe come from?

Pamela Hill: Well, the original recipe came from my husband's grandmother. She used to work at the Memphis City School. That's where she worked. And she gave his brother the recipe. And we kinda changed it because we don't use eggs in there. So the school recipe used eggs and

whatever else they used. We just use butter, sugar, and flour in our recipe. We don't use any eggs.

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We don't use the extract or whatever else they used in their-- it's on the website, as a matter of fact. The City School butter cookie recipe. It's public information. But it's the amount of butter and the amount of flour. So it makes it our recipe because it's not theirs. But that's where he got it from. So his brother used to do it but now my son does it 'cause, just like I said, when we took out the eggs and we made it work for us, then my son-- it's like everybody doesn't know the recipe. I don't have a patent on the recipe and the reason why is because if I had a patent on the recipe they said I would have to give it out.

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I would have to make it public if I had a patent on it because I guess that's the only way they'll know if somebody is using my recipe. I don't know. But I feel like this, if I were to make my recipe public as well as how to-- 'cause there's more to the recipe than the ingredients. The way that I do it, if I were to do that, make it public, then I still don't think that people would really just be able to do. But if I were to make it public and you were to take a spoonful of flour out of it then it's your recipe and you'll probably have the same-- but you'd be able to argue that point. This is not her recipe because I got a teaspoonful of flour less than she had. [Laughter]

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So that's why I chose not to do the patent. I just did the trademark and that's for the name, Makeda. So you can't just use my name, but you can make butter cookies. People in the city make butter cookies. You know that? I know it's several people that I know that make butter cookies at home in the kitchen and they sell them out the trunk of their car or in other little restaurants and the corner stores. You've seen them? So they have other people that make butter cookies, but we make Makeda's. So it take a while to build that brand where people taste your cookies and they know your cookies or they know your mark on your cookies, the chocolate chip. The oatmeal raisin are my favorite.

1:04:06

But all of these cookies the only difference from the rest of these cookies that people might want to know about Makeda's recipe you could pretty much just take a pick as far as your chocolate chip on the internet. You can choose a chocolate chip recipe or on the back of the chocolate chip - you can choose one of those and you can make 'em and they'll be really pretty much just like Makeda's. But the only difference is that we use one-hundred percent pure butter and we put a lot of love in 'em. So if you ain't got no love to put 'em you just gonna do 'em just for the money they ain't gonna taste like Makeda's, you see. [Laughter]

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And then, you don't use that butter, you think you're gonna use some Crisco, Butter-Flavored Crisco, or some margarine, they ain't gonna taste like Makeda's. So that's why Makeda's done

built her name from that. And then, also that's her-- where I got Makeda? I got Makeda in here? My God. I ain't got Makeda in here nowhere. But she everywhere else in here. She's on all the bags and stuff, but she was my niece and she had leukemia. And she was a St. Jude patient, and she told her mother and me, "Why are these people bringing me all these presents?" That's when she was in the hospital sick. She said, "They think I'm gonna die, don't they?" Now, she was six years old. That's what she said to us. She said, "I ain't goin' nowhere." She said, "But don't tell 'em, hear." So her mother and me, we just laughed.

1:06:00

And I said this little ol' smart girl. She was so smart. She was her kindergarten MC. They said, "Makeda, go out there, introduce the next person." That Makeda, just whatever you say, she was just so smart. She could dance, sing, crack jokes and all kind of little stuff, but she was just six years old. She was almost seven, 'cause she passed in July of [19]90 and she would've been seven in October of [19]97. But she passed when she was six.

1:07:05

I ain't fixin' to make you cry, am I? 'Cause I know I'm deep with this stuff.

Kelly Spivey: [Laughter]

Pamela Hill: But it's real, though. And you know what? I'm sharing all of it with you. I have this guy who is waiting to just do a story of us, of how we met and all this kind of stuff. But my husband and I, we used to work together at The MED. He was the phlebotomist so he would

bring the blood and the specimens to the lab where I worked. And I was the MLT so I would receive the specimens. So we'd been working together before we even got married.

1:07:59

Kelly Spivey: Well, is there anything else that you would want to add or that you would want anyone to know about Makeda's and kind of your journey, having this business?

Pamela Hill: Well, it has really been an awesome ride. You know how you almost have to live your life before you can really just speak on how incredible your life is? While you're going through you can't see it 'cause you're, like, oh, we're going through this. Oh, we're catching hell with that. And you might be thinkin', oh, this is a terrible life. But after you've been through it-- and I'm sixty-three-- and after you've made it to that age where you can really just appreciate life. So I've been appreciating life for quite a bit of years, and I appreciate it even more now. And we lost a life in our business with Young Dolph.

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And that's pretty much the hardest thing that I've had to deal with in my life because he was murdered in my place buying cookies. And it really, really have taken a toll on us. It really has. And people don't realize that it didn't just stop us from making money-- which that's what it did, it was our livelihood over there on Airways. That's why we're opening back up. We got to open back up. It's almost like, hell, open back up or go back to The MED. [Laughter] That's what it's about. And this man done lost his life in my business-- it's like these people are still talking

about us. My daughter's sayin' that people are talking about boycotting us and stuff when we're opening back up.

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But I told her, "I wish they would bring their ass over there," talkin' about boycotting us. And I done spent a lot of money renovating Makeda's over there. We made the place look almost like new because, first of all, it's a landmark. I know I'm gonna have people from everywhere comin' to buy cookies. I just want it to look the best that I can make it look. And I am honored to pretty much do a memorial or something for Young Dolph and his family. It's really been hard. And how people could think that we were part of it.

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How can they think that? We've been out here hustling and selling cookies for twenty-three years, struggling, going through everything we've been through. And then you got these ignorant folks out here wanting to make it even harder for us. We're already having a hard time trying to deal with this man losing his life in my place. Now here you is gonna come with some mess.

Kelly Spivey: I just don't understand why take it out on y'all.

Pamela Hill: I don't know. I just think it's some sick-- even the people that took his life, it's some sick people in the world. Mental illness is really real. I don't know why.

1:11:59

And there's some hate goin' on, too. They hated him 'cause he was successful. I ain't even know what that man sang. When he came up in there in Makeda's he would be, like, "Hey, Ma." I couldn't even get his name right. Some days I'd be calling him Little Dolph and my children be sayin', "Mom, it's Young Dolph." I said, "Oh, okay." He'd just say, "Hey, Ma." And he was just so sweet. He was so pleasant. His smile was just-- I'm gonna tell you, I didn't even hardly know that man, Young Dolph, until I read about him after he died, after he was murdered. And I found out, though-- this is the killin' part right here-- he was born on my birthday, July the 27th.

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And so I'm, like, oh, my God. That really just took a toll because I know me and I just feel that people don't think that your zodiac sign or your birth-- they don't think that really matters but, baby, that matters. It's something about your birthday or your birth month or your zodiac sign. That stuff there is real. I know 'cause I know too many people that were born around my birthday or Leo or have that same kind of characteristic that I do. And then when they told me that he was a giver-- I be tellin' my husband, I said, "Baby, I think me and you, we really don't belong together 'cause both of us are givers. We ain't gonna have nothin' 'cause we give away everything." [Laughter] We do.

1:13:59

We are cold-blooded givers. We give away everything 'cause we just love givin'. It's just part of us. And that's why I know him. I don't know him, but I know him. You know what I mean?

They was tellin' me about how he was always giving and stuff. I said, oh, Lord, I know he was a giver. He was born on my birthday. But yeah, that's been the hardest thing. Being in business I don't think nothin' could get worse than that. I really don't. But if I didn't know him, if he didn't get gunned down at Makeda's-- they've had people gettin' gunned down everywhere. But he got gunned down in my shop, and that's what really just-- you just don't know what I be dealin' with on a everyday basis.

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I got his obituary. I didn't go to the funeral. They wouldn't allow us to come. His family had a private ceremony, and we didn't get to go. I would have loved to have went, but I think they said something about until the investigation and all this stuff. But they don't know us. They don't know us. But the thing that I love the most about the fact that they don't know us, they knew him, and they knew that he loved our cookies and that he brought 'em home to his family. So with that being said, hey, they haven't came to me with no mess, his family hasn't.

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It's just been these old crazy folks in different cities and stuff, just got the hatred in their hearts I guess. I don't know. I guess they may be mad that we got a chance to-- I didn't even touch his hand if that'll make 'em happy. I didn't know him like that. Now, my husband, they talked all the time. He talked to him all the time. And he told my husband, he said, "I'm gonna do something for y'all one day." He would just come in, get them cookies. And my husband said he

thought that he was gonna put us in some kind of video or something. He didn't think that it was gonna-- you know, words have power. Well, him gettin' murdered at our shop God knows wasn't the way that we wanted him to do somethin' for us.

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But because he got murdered in our shop we have benefitted from it because people come here. The fact that they order-- the website was flooded with orders. And I was lookin' in my email 'cause my website is hooked up to my email, and I'm lookin'. I'm, like, "Baby, look at all these orders we got." And then that's when I find out this man is famous. I didn't even know that he was that important to the world. I didn't. But I found out. 'Cause yeah, they loved him. They loved him. And I see why they loved him because when I would listen to his interviews and stuff, now I guess I did kinda honor him in a way.

1:18:06

Because they got this little ol' rap that people say is not really I guess clean rap. It's not clean, it's a lot of cussin' and all that kind of stuff. But I've had a little ten-year-old girl come in here and that was her favorite rapper. I'm, like, well, I guess if your mom and them let you listen to him it's all right with me. But he made money, and he did right with his money. Even though you might think, how can you be crazy about this dude? He's comin' up with all this negative rap or whatever or what people will say. But he ended up-- he was using that money to help people.

1:18:59

You know, they say that about my cookies. This little old lady that had that little place around the corner, she said, "You killin' people with your cookies." And I wanted to tell her, baby, they've had a cookie aisle in the grocery store forever. If they ain't killin' people why . . . Soon as Makeda's start makin' some cookies, man, she's killin' everybody. Well, I don't make sugar. Domino makes sugar. She says sugar will kill you, sugar is bad for you, all that kind of stuff. Tell Domino that. They make sugar. I don't make sugar, but I use it. Everything like they say in moderation. I think pork kills you. I don't eat pork 'cause they say it runs your blood pressure up. Well, tell Central Bar-B-Q then that he killin' folk with his pork. They had a whole hog on the grill.

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But anyway, I ain't got nothin' to say to Central Bar-B-Q about doin' no pork. I used to love pork, bacon, and everything, porkchops. I don't eat it now 'cause I feel like it would affect my blood pressure. Hold on a minute.

Kelly Spivey: Um-hm.

Pamela Hill: I cry almost every time I talk about Young Dolph. But when I get Airways back open-- my family is really afraid for me to open it. My sisters-- at first I said I wasn't gonna open it and they were so happy that I wasn't gonna open it. Then I'm like, shoot, that's where all the

people goin'. And downtown, it seems like these people ain't thinkin' about downtown. What's goin' on with downtown?

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I only come down here-- I'm going to see the O'Jays next week and if it's a show at the Orpheum. I don't go to Beale Street. I ain't got no desire to walk down Beale Street. What else is down here? I don't even go to the FedEx Forum to do the games. I'll be tellin' my husband, "We just kinda got a borin' life," I told him. But not really because we're doin' these cookies. But I don't like going to Beale Street. We have liquor at home from parties that lasts forever. My friends come over to drink it up or whatever, so I don't really just have a desire to be downtown. And now that I'm down here with Makeda's I'm looking for the people to come.

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And at first when that first week after Young Dolph was murdered, oh, girl, we was makin' five and six, seven thousand dollar a day. We were workin'. We were makin' some cookies. And then now it's like it's come to a screechin' halt. [Laughter] So I'm lookin' for the folks. But when I go back over there on Airways-- Airways was our flagship store. We didn't need this store, but we opened it up. We needed it just really for the grocery stores, but we decided to go on and make us a little front like what you saw when you came in our storefront. We decided to do that because if we're down here you may as well sell some cookies. But we really got this building for the grocery store cookies, the factory part, and that's what's in there.

1:23:00

That's what we really got this for. But now it seems like-- there are a lot of reasons why this store is-- there's some good days and some bad. And I think they were all good up until the weather-- a hundred and something degrees folks just didn't want to get out. And now it seems like it's kinda-- it's still all right. The weekends are always good. But I still think the main reason why-- it's just gotta be here a little while 'cause we just opened. We ain't been open a year down here. So we opened November the 6th, we had our grand opening to this building. And Young Dolph was gunned down November the 17th.

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So it was, like, soon as we got this open we were all excited about we got us a factory. And I'd been saying I wanted a factory for years. So he was gunned down on the 17th. So September the 18th, 1999, was when we opened up Airways. So we decided September the 17th, which is the day before the 18th, we're gonna open it back up. We're gonna have the reopening. Because the 18th is on a Sunday, but we don't open on Sunday. So we're gonna open up on the 17th, which will be like the reopening of that building. So we wouldn't dare open it on November the 17th.

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That would be crazy, I think, to do it then. And then October the 11th is Makeda's birthday. She would've been thirty-two. Yeah, 'cause she was born in [19]90, October of [19]90, October the 11th. And we've always had the butter cookies for a dollar on October the 11th. And I'm talkin'

about it seemed like we was really havin' Makeda's birthday party over there on Airways. Those people used to-- our customers would come, they'd be singing happy birthday, dancing and everything inside, "Give me fifty of them butter cookies." [Laughter] And my husband's gonna have the nerve to say, "Baby, you think we ought to make a limit on them butter cookies?" I said, "Unh-uh. If they want a thousand of 'em we need to be tryin' to make 'em for 'em."

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But yeah, that's what we do, October 11th, Makeda's birthday. So we try to have all the butter cookies. We have to make sure we specify butter cookies, not no strawberry with the icing on 'em. Not no lemon. Not no chocolate chip with pecans but butter cookies for a dollar on October the 11th.

Kelly Spivey: Well, thank you so much for sharing so much with me.

Pamela Hill: Well, thank you. I done got carried away. I done cried and everything. But yeah, I've probably got a lot more stuff in my head, but I think you got enough.

[End]